

NUMBER I IN THE SERIES

Contributions to a Theology of Anti–Ecumenism



THE WORLD COUNCIL OF
CHURCHES AND THE
INTERFAITH MOVEMENT

† Metropolitan Cyprian
of Oropos and Fili

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The World Council of Churches and the Interfaith Movement

by
Metropolitan Cyprian
of Oropos and Fili

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Translated by
Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna
and Hieromonk Patapios



CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST
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The World Council of Churches and the Interfaith Movement

On the eve of the sixth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Vancouver, in Canada (July 24–August 10, 1983), the following revealing comments were appended to the official “Guide” to this great ecumenical gathering:

In the end, the great religious communities will not disappear. No one will have the upper hand. Jews will remain Jews; Muslims will remain Muslims; and those belonging to the great Oriental religions will remain Hindus, Buddhists, and Taoists. Africa will express its own view of the world; China will retain her heritage. As before, people will continue to travel from the East to the West, from the North to the South, and to *abide in the Kingdom of God without, in consequence, having first become Christians like us* [!].¹

It was thus, in brief, that the pan-religious vision of the WCC was described some ten years ago.

How is it, however, that this Geneva-based organization reached such a point?

§ 1. The Prime Vision of the WCC

The prime vision of the ecumenical movement has always been pan-Christian: the union of divided Christians worldwide.

From about the middle of the seventeenth century and thereafter, there began among the Protestant confessions a movement towards coöperation in many spheres, a turn towards unity.²

This union effort among various Christian communions has taken on a more organized form in the twentieth century, within the context of the so-called ecumenical movement and, of late, through its institutional organ, the WCC.

Relations, contacts, common efforts in social and political matters took on the character of preparation for union, aimed at the gradual overcoming of Christian divisions.

From the very beginning, unfortunately, these union efforts included Orthodox, too; we say “unfortunately” because in a clearly Protestant attempt to search for Christian unity, the basic presuppositions of this quest being the heretical doctrines of the “invisible church” and the “branch theory,” the Orthodox Church has no place, since she identifies her very being with the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

The unity of the Church is not some ideal, ‘which, even if it was once a reality, does not exist today, save as the object of our efforts’;³ *viz.*, the object of ecumenical efforts.

The unity of the Church, according to that staunch teacher of our Orthodox Faith, the ever-memorable Father Justin (Popovich), has never been broken:

‘There has never been a division in the Church, but only separation from the Church,’ from which, ‘at different times, heretics and schismatics have broken away and been cut off and, as a consequence, ceased being members of the Church and ceased being incorporated into her Theanthropic body.’⁴

* * *

Notwithstanding the erroneous notions of the Protestants regarding union, their vision was nonetheless that of *pan-Christian* unity.

- Moreover, the Orthodox ecumenists emphasized this, too, when in 1991, filled with uneasiness, they witnessed the interfaith broadening of the aims of the WCC at Canberra; they wrote:

The Orthodox Churches wish to stress emphatically that, for them, the basic goal of the World Council of Churches should be the restoration of the unity of the Church.⁵

What is the ecclesiological character of the ecumenical movement?

The founding charter of the WCC and the “Encyclical” on ecumenism issued by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1920 provide rudimentary evidence, not only for the ecclesiological character of the Geneva-based WCC and, on a larger scale, of the ecumenical movement itself, but should be interpreted fully and clearly only within the general context of the pre-history, inception, growth, and evolution of ecumenism.

This is precisely the focus of the series at hand: to present the “unexplored” boundaries of the WCC and the ecumenical movement and to understand ecumenism from within its “essential core,” wherein there clearly holds forth a dogmatic, canonical, and ethical “minimalism” that is antithetical to Orthodoxy.

The aim of this series is to show, by God’s Grace and in a sober and responsible manner, that the Hesychastic and Eucharistic presuppositions underlying our critical Orthodox stand before the ecumenical movement make it most profoundly clear that ecumenism constitutes a wholly new “ecclesiological position” and that, since 1920, we face an “ecclesiology of innovation” that has prompted a radical change in the theological outlook and consciousness of Orthodox ecumenists, as regards their acceptance of non-Orthodox [Christian] communions (as well as those of other religions).

Front cover photo: The Director of the Division of Interfaith Dialogue of the WCC, Dr. Wesley Ariarajah, with a Buddhist monk.