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WORKING FOR UNITY: FAITH AND ORDER

The holding of the Fifth World Conference of Faith and Order provides an opportunity to assess the contribution of this movement to the churches' search for unity, especially in a context in which, arguably, the concerns of the ecumenical movement have mushroomed into many other aspects of Christian discipleship, especially those concerning the justice, peace and creation implications of Christian mission, which, of course, always have had a place in the ecumenical movement under the Life and Work banner.

In *From Lausanne to Santiago de Compostela (1927-1993)* [Faith and Order Paper No 160, WCC, Geneva, 31pp, £1.95, 1993] Paul Crow and Gunther Gassmann sketch in the history of the movement over the last sixty years, primarily from analysis of its official actions, spelling out both undeniable achievements in securing wide consensus but also a number of extremely important unfulfilled hopes,

especially in the area of shared communion. Paul Crow, writing of the pre-1963 period, points out how the protestant churches of Europe have tended to focus on the great Reformation issues of faith and grace, upon which a wide measure of agreement has been secured. By contrast, American Christians have been more interested in non-theological issues of culture, psychological fears and apprehensions, sociological differences, and denominational memories, issues which change with the generations; whereas British churches have shown greatest interest in the intractable issues of church order, ministry and the sharing of the sacraments, in which much less progress has been made, at least between the principal traditions of Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox, so that for all the talk of participation in a common koinonia, there is the ongoing ecumenical scandal of the churches, when seeking to be close to their Lord at his table, separating from one another. This has, of course, been part of our own tradition as much as any other - the concerns of Robert Hall and Joseph Kinghorn are still with us, albeit on a larger canvass.

Faith and Order may not interest the editors of the *Readers' Digest* in the way that relations with Eastern Europe and the Programme to Combat Racism have done, but improved relationships between the churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, which, not a member of the WCC, is a full member of Faith and Order, owe much to the patient exploration of issues of church, creed and confession, here carefully identified.

Much of the evidence that has to be assessed for such judgment to be made is carefully assembled in G. Gassmann (ed.), *Documentary History of Faith and Order, 1963-1993* [Faith and Order Paper No.159, WCC, Geneva, 325pp, £12.90, 1993], a sequel to Lukas Vischer's companion volume which provides the documentation for the period prior to 1963. Most, but not all, of the significant documents are here, especially those which are hardest to locate. In addition to the relevant sections from WCC Assembly reports and from Faith and Order World Conferences, there are papers relating to major Faith and Order concerns such as 'The Inter-relationship of Scripture', 'Tradition and Traditions', 'The Visible Unity of the Church', 'The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of the Whole Human Community', 'Confessing the One Faith', 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry', and many more, which, characterized by irenic thoughtfulness, are well worth continued study. Introductions by the editor carefully set the documents in their historical context and demonstrate the steady development of ecumenical concern. This is an essential tool, competitively priced, for those wanting to explore the Faith and Order dimension of the ecumenical movement in the contemporary world, as indeed for those looking for authoritative contemporary restatements of major Christian doctrines and concerns. More than that, it is a vital tool for mission, for the scandal of a divided Christendom still offers a non-Christian world too easy an escape from the challenge of the gospel.