

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Canadian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_canadian-journal.php

Editorial

AFTERTHOUGHTS ON "MONTREAL, 1963"

FEELINGS ABOUT THE Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order at Montreal seem to be anything but neutral. As one who shared in the happy experience of Section IV, the writer hardly feels qualified to speak for others who found the whole occasion full of frustration. In contrast with what happened in some of the other Sections, Terence Tice, Theological Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (who himself contributed not a little to the success of Section IV), says, "The extremely positive results of Section IV's work (*Worship and the Oneness of Christ's Church*) come as rather a shock by comparison." If indifference is the worst effect that can be produced, at least it may be claimed that Montreal has stirred the opposite—a great worry about the whole Faith and Order arm of the ecumenical movement.

Some hoped-for results have—at least so far—not accrued. Montreal did not produce any considered judgment upon the question whether the post-Lund method of study had penetrated or circumvented the impasse brought about by comparative ecclesiology. Comparison and contrast of agreements and disagreements had seemingly not enabled the churches to resolve their disunity, and at Lund it was hoped that an examination in biblical depth of the relation between Christ and his Church and a study of the relation of *the* Tradition to diverse church traditions might lead to a new break-through. The work of commissions on these and kindred topics was before the delegates at Montreal, but no evaluation of the new methods was made or even attempted. While many suggestions for further study were put forward, the Conference formed no mind upon this urgent question. Perhaps it was not fair to expect much in this regard, on the ground that only the members of the commissions, who had been through the mill of discussion in depth, could be in a position to evaluate realistically the promise or lack of it in the new methods. Yet we might justifiably have expected those who received the reports as aids in their task of squaring up to the problem of disunity to say whether they found them firing or dampening.

Another purpose of the Conference seems to have been but poorly served. This was to throw before the delegates questions drawn from different regions of the world showing how the shoe of disunity pinches in those regions, and have the pundits from the commissions hammer out the answers in conference. One did not hear any effort of this kind being made. Not even the many references to indigenization touched it.

Yet one is persuaded that a vast amount was positively achieved, assuming that achievement is not to be measured by the discovery of answers.

Montreal threw so much upon the Faith and Order plate that we are at the moment staggering at the size of the meal that has to be digested. It now rests with the Geneva staff, concerned friends, and the meeting of the Faith and Order Commission next summer to divide the mountain of fare into assimilable courses. It surely is a great achievement that so much is now open the plate that we cannot fall into the shocking error of making Faith and Order decisions that do not keep the whole Church Catholic in view. As the Montreal *A Word to the Churches* says, "Our task in Faith and Order today is more complex than ever it was. More churches now take part in the conversation, so that new and costly efforts of understanding and imagination are necessary." The Orthodox are now with us in telling weight; Rome has invaded all our discussions with a refreshing openness; and from the opposite end of the spectrum the Pentecostals, though not yet heard with strength, are lifting their banners within the gates of the World Council itself. Montreal marks the time in ecumenical history when the fascinating kaleidoscope of the Church's diversity has thrust itself in full range upon Christians, but as brothers, not as enemies. It is all highly embarrassing, but it is an embarrassment of riches.

"The man in the street is not interested in Faith and Order because Faith and Order is not interested in the man in the street," said a designedly provoking Anglican layman to a plenary session. It would be fitting to retort that all the best things in human culture, spiritual and secular, have come from ivory towers, but in actual fact never has a Faith and Order Conference been so acutely aware of the world or, in effect, of the man in the street. To quote once more *A Word to the Churches*,

At Montreal . . . we have been shown that the Lord of all the world is at work, whatever we may do. He is shaping a world which cannot deny that it is one world, except by self-destruction. In that world we Christians find ourselves being drawn and driven together. This is what we mean when we speak of an "ecumenical reality" which takes shape faster than we can understand or express it. . . . It is increasingly clear that many of our long-defended positions are irrelevant to God's purpose.

Criticisms of the irrelevance, archaism, and incomprehensibility of the Church's theological language, of liturgical customs and symbols, and of ministerial and organizational structures were thrust up in all the Sections. This stronger awareness of "the world" is taking effect in two ways. Man's crying need for unity is forcing the Church to take more seriously her mission to reveal the divine sources of unity and also to manifest it more visibly in her own being. The ecumenical awakening within the Church has its counterpart in an ecumenical need in the world, and both are the work of the Holy Spirit. Montreal marks a new access of awareness of the identity of unity and mission, of one Church and one world in travail to be born.

Again, Montreal fruitfully cut across inherited denominational barriers by increasing the number of problems that cannot be answered along

denominational lines. We must now expect increased division of opinion within denominations and further discoveries of kinship across denominational loyalties. As the old issue between modernism and fundamentalism caused divisions within churches and united sections across churches, so now further issues will increase these cross-affiliations. Montreal called for new studies of "the world"; of the question whether Christ reigns in the world apart from the Church or through the suffering Servant Church; of the doctrine of creation; of Scripture and tradition (now significantly referred to as Tradition and Scripture); of the whole process of "traditioning" and indigenization; of Church History as an ecumenical discipline; of the relation between the apostolical ministry and the ministry of the laity; of the eucharistic sacrifice; of the creative and interpretative role of liturgy; of organizational structures. These subjects all contain issues that are not denominational, but which are yet determinative for the nature of the One Church. While attention to them will not solve problems of church order, it is bound to put them in new perspectives and bring about new alignments within and among the churches. The fact is that all theologians and church historians are working more and more in an ecumenical way upon a recognizably ecumenical enterprise. Montreal marks a new realization of this fact and of the almost physical impossibility of failing to stay and work together. In short, even less now can there be any danger of conceiving the Faith and Order movement as a matter of occasional world conferences or of the activity of a Commission and its sub-commissions. It is only the delusion that Montreal should have contained or controlled this vast enterprise that makes it appear a failure. If we went there with that delusion it is a great achievement that our eyes have been opened. We saw there that Faith and Order is an ongoing task of all the churches all the time, much too big to be handled by *ad hoc* meetings. But such meetings and a Faith and Order Commission will still be needed to precipitate issues, steer some of the discussion, register some of the findings, and compel the churches to confront their disunity in official dialogue.

D. W. H.

During the absence of the Editor, Professor E. R. Fairweather, on sabbatical leave, the four issues of the *Journal* for 1964 will be cared for by the Acting Editor, Professor David W. Hay, and the Associate Editor, Professor W. O. Fennell. Communications during this period should be sent to the Acting Editor at Knox College, 59 St. George Street, Toronto 5, Ontario.