



ECUMENISM SUNDAY (DIFFERENT FAITHS WORSHIPPING TOGETHER)

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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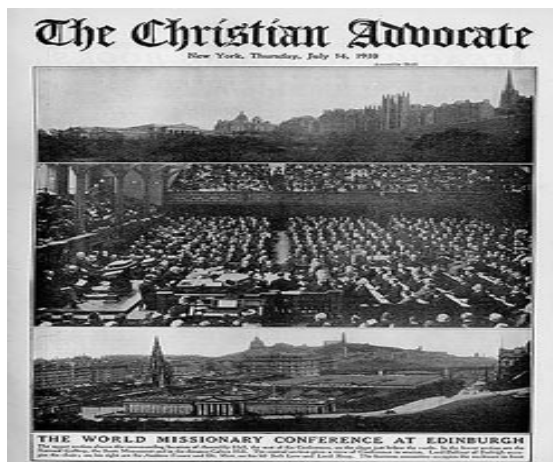
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I. Introduction: Historical Background

Until the Second Vatican Council, the twentieth-century ecumenical movement was principally the work of Protestants, beginning at the world Missionary conference of Edinburg in 1910.¹ The Edinburg conference was not the first world conference or even the largest missionary conference the world had seen. It was really the third in a series. The Centenary Conference, held in 1888, took place in Exeter Hall, London, and was by most accounts the largest of the three. In 1900, the Ecumenical Conference, another large gathering of Christians, convened in New York.²



What was remarkable about the Edinburg conference was the variety of Christians who were in attendance. Of the 1200 official delegates sent by churches, 500 were from the United States, and 500 were from Great Britain. European countries other than Great Britain sent 170; 26 delegates were from Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa; and four delegates came from a large contingent of the “new churches” of Asia (House). The picture below is an actual photo of The World Missionary Conference of Edinburg that was published in *The Christian Advocate*.



The World Missionary Conference of Edinburg produced eight commissions:³
Commission I: Carrying the Gospel to the Non-Christian World
Commission II: The Church in the Mission Field and Its Workers
Commission III: Education in Relation to Non-Christian Religions
Commission IV: The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions
Commission V: The Preparation of Missionaries

Commission VI: The Home Base of Missionaries

Commission VII: Missions and Government

Commission VIII: Cooperation and Unity

(Click any commission number and follow the link to obtain more information.)

The main theological differences in the Catholic faith tradition that suppressed the Catholic Church's involvement with efforts to promote unity involved the relationship of Scripture to tradition, the role of Mary in man's salvation, the true meaning of the Lord's supper, the nature of the ordained ministry, and papal primacy and infallibility.⁴

Vatican II modified the longstanding exclusivist approach whereby there was no salvation outside the Church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) to a more inclusive theology.⁵ The Council recognized the merits and salvation potential of the other churches and even other religions. In doing so, it broke down the boundaries defining the Catholic faith experience and opted for a strategy of openness and dialogue.⁶

II. Defining Ecumenism

Ecumenism is best defined as a movement within Christianity that aims to restore unity amongst the various Christian cultures (denominations) to present a united universal Christian body to the world.⁷

Etymology of Ecumenism

Ecumenism is derived from the Greek term *oikoumene*, which is used 15 times in the New Testament (Mathew 24:14; Luke 2:1; 4:5; 21, 26; Acts 11:28; 17:6, 31; 19:27; 24:5; Romans 10:18; Hebrews 1:6; 2:5; Revelation 3:10; 12:9; 16:14). In every instance of usage, the term meant either the inhabitants of earth or the inhabitants of the world. Therefore, any efforts to unite or reconcile humanity that would cover in its scope the whole world or all the inhabitants of the world could be described as ecumenical in nature.⁸

III. Images of Ecumenical Worship at Drew University





IV. Personal Testimony of Ecumenism

God has a unique way of revealing God's self through divine messages. The Lord blessed me with clarity of what it means to be a part of a movement that embraced both unity and fellowship despite cultural and dogmatic differences. Being an African American Baptist pastor in the South, who attended seminary at an HBCU (Historically Black College or University), I have recently discovered how prejudiced my thoughts were towards different religious cultures and ideologies.

The day I dawned the campus of Drew University to pursue my Doctorate of Ministry was the day the Lord showed me what John 17:20-23 was all about. It wasn't about drawing racial lines of separation as if blacks serve one God and whites serve another. It wasn't about if the preacher could fine-tune his or her closing or eloquently proclaim their homily. What mattered was whether I abided in Christ and Christ abided in me. Regardless of denominational affiliation—Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Orthodox, Presbyterian, Church of God in Christ, Christian Disciples, AME, CME, or AME Zion—abiding in Christ was the ultimate revelation.

Twenty-four students entered with me into the halls of Drew Theological Seminary with one goal in mind: to one day become a graduate of the Doctor of Ministry program. The first day of class, we introduced ourselves to each other and shared our narrative of ministry. We were a very diverse group coming from a variety of denominations—Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Catholics, Non-denominational, Orthodox Christian, Lutherans, and Pentecostal. It appeared that my cohort was comprised with John 17:20-23 in mind. Twenty-five students, each carrying his or her own religious beliefs, cultures, and praxis, are traveling down the same path to achieve the same goal. Despite our ignorance of each other's core beliefs, for three years they did not matter. This is what the Johannine text is conveying to its readers: the ultimate goal of salvation in Christ Jesus should outweigh any cultural differences, religious dogma, or other differences that perpetuate division amongst believers.

My educational journey at Drew afforded me the opportunity to be exposed to new thoughts and ideas about the gospel. I sat under the tutelage of a Catholic nun who taught me how to embrace contemplation and meditation to hear clearly from God. I learned from a United Methodist pastor who brought out in me the ability of hymn writing that I never knew existed. Without these experiences, I would still be trapped looking at what it means to be a child of God through the narrow scope of my Baptist faith tradition. But God is much bigger than my Baptist tradition. Jesus prayed to God that the world, with its variety of nuances, would be reconciled through Him, so that the world would become one. It is not that the world could reconcile itself to God, but God reconciled God's creation to God's self through Jesus Christ. Therefore, I have grown to realize that in Christ I am viewed by God as a joint heir with Jesus Christ and not a Baptist.

When we gather together as a group, we become one in Christ. As we sing songs of Zion and meditate on the goodness of the Lord, we forget about the former things that separated us, and we focus on the things that really matter as Christians—being in the right relationship with God. Our genuine love for the Triune God produced an ecumenical movement in the lives of Christian leaders seeking to fulfill their individual missions and purposes in ministry. Although each of us came with our own presuppositions concerning what it means to be a Christian, we transformed into a new community of authentic worshippers. Ecumenism speaks to the heart of God moving in God's creation intractably connecting humanity together through Jesus Christ. It was through my experience at Drew University that I have grown to understand the importance of celebrating what God is doing through the different cultures and praxis of the Christian faith. The one thing that binds us together outweighs any differences that used to divide us.

V. Songs That Encourage Ecumenism

I Need You to Survive

by Hezekiah Walker

I need you, you need me.
We're all a part of God's body.
Stand with me, agree with me.
We're all a part of God's body.

It is his will, that every need be supplied.
You are important to me, I need you to survive.
You are important to me, I need you to survive.
(Repeat 3x)

I pray for you, You pray for me.
I love you, I need you to survive.
I won't harm you with words from my mouth.
I love you, I need you to survive.
(Repeat 8x)

It is his will, that every need be supplied.
You are important to me; I need you to survive.⁹

The Love of God

by Frederick Lehman

The love of God is greater far
than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
and reaches to the lowest hell.
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
and pardoned from his sin.

Chorus:

Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—
the saints' and angels' song.

When hoary time shall pass away,
and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall;
when men who here refuse to pray,
on rocks and hills and mountains call;

God's love so sure, shall still endure,
all measureless and strong;
redeeming grace to Adam's race—
the saints' and angels' song.

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
and were the skies of parchment made;
were every stalk on earth a quill,
and every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
would drain the ocean dry;
nor could the scroll contain the whole,
though stretched from sky to sky.¹⁰

Wounded for Me

by Gilbert Owens and Gladys Roberts

Wounded for me, wounded for me,
There on the cross He was wounded for me;
Gone my transgressions, and now I am free,
All because Jesus was wounded for me.

Dying for me, dying for me,
There on the cross He was dying for me;
Now in His death my redemption I see,
All because Jesus was dying for me.

Risen for me, risen for me,
Up from the grave He has risen for me;
Now evermore from death's sting I am free,
All because Jesus has risen for me.

Living for me, living for me,
Up in the skies He is living for me;
Daily He's pleading and praying for me,
All because Jesus is living for me.

Coming for me, coming for me,
Soon in the air He is coming for me;
Then with what joy His dear face I shall see,
Oh, how I praise Him! He's coming for me.¹¹

Notes

1. Bokenkotter, Thomas S. A Concise History of the Catholic Church, Rev. and expanded ed.

(New York: Doubleday, 2004).

2. House, Christie R. "The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, 1910." *Global Ministries: The United Methodist Church*. Online location: http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news/full_article.cfm?articleid=5620 (accessed 29 July 2103).

3. Ibid.

4. Bokenkotter, Thomas S. *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, 422–23.

5. Ibid., 474.

6. Ibid., 429.

7. "What is 'ecumenism'?" Online location: <http://www.worldslastchance.com/ecumenism/what-is-qecumenismq.html> (accessed 20 May 2013).

8. Ibid.

9. *I Need You to Survive*. By Hezekiah Walker. *Hezekiah Walker & The Love Fellowship Choir Family Affair II—Live At Radio City Music Hall*. New York, NY: Verity, 2002.

10. *The Love of God*. By Frederick Lehman. Online location: http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/The_Love_of_God/.

11. *Wounded for Me*. Words and music by Gilbert Owens and Gladys Roberts. Online location: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_U_mYB42rM. This online version is sung by the late Albertina Walker and the late Reverend James Cleveland.