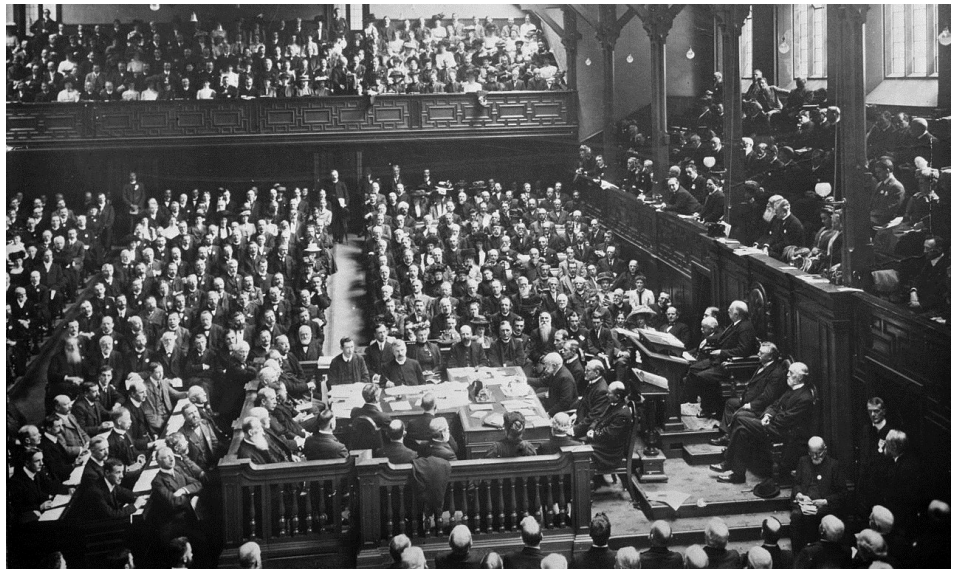


ECUMENISM & THE SERVANTS OF JESUS COMMUNITY

Ecumenism is a core value of our life in the Servants of Jesus Community. When Community started in 1981 its members were mainly members of Catholic Charismatic prayer groups who felt a call from God to live a community life empowered by the Holy Spirit. Very quickly some Protestant brothers and sisters were also attracted to the call of community life but not feeling led to leave their denominations. Doctrinal differences were found to have little impact on the harmony and fruitfulness of Community life.

Since the start of the 20th Century the Christian Church has experienced a great move toward unity in several dimensions. On the institutional level the Ecumenical Movement started as discussions in the late 19th century between different Evangelical Protestant missionary organizations who were seeking to cooperate to preach the Gospel more effectively.

In 1910 the World Missionary Confer-



Above: The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh – (14 -23 June, 1910)

ence in Edinburgh became a concrete expression of this move toward unity. In 1921, an International Missionary Council was formed and in 1927 the World Conference on Faith and Order (focusing on issues of doctrine) took place. From this the World Council of Churches came into existence in 1948, consist-

ing mainly of Evangelical Protestant Churches until the early 1960's when Eastern Orthodox Churches joined the organization. The Catholic Church has never been a member but since Vatican II she has sent observers to every session of the WCC.

In 1965, the mutual anathemas that marked the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches were revoked by the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople. In 1998, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation produced the document "The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification". It stated that there was a joint understanding

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In addition to these international organizations and agreements there has been a significant amount of ecumenical activity on a national level. In the Australian context, there is a body called the National Council of Churches in Australia with each state having its own ecumenical organization. These bodies focus on discussions around doctrine, social justice, and various other contemporary issues and produce documents to guide and shape Christian ecumenical thinking and involvement.

In Australia, every Christian denomination has a department that has responsibility to coordinate ecumenical (as well as interfaith) activities. In the Catholic Church, for instance, each diocese has a department responsible for ecumenism called the Commission for Ecumenism and Interfaith Dialogue.

These organizations mainly host discussion around conceptual issues to do with

doctrine, the environment, social action etc. The most frequent action in terms of "grass roots" activities are joint worship events (usually Taizé' prayer/song gatherings).

The less institutional trajectory of ecumenism has been through the Pentecostal /Charismatic movement that commenced at the dawn of the 20th century. There had of course always been manifestations of the power of God; healing, speaking in tongues etc. since the early church up until that time. The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement however signaled the start of a worldwide phenomenon that has come to affect every Christian denomination on every continent.

An initial experience or encounter through the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' resulting in speaking in tongues began in 1901 in the ministry of Charles Parham. In 1906, William Seymour (a black disciple of Parham) started to meet with people seeking this Baptism in the Holy Spirit in Azusa Street Los Angeles. People from many different denominations attended these meetings and the full range of phenomena associated with the power of God was poured out on them. It could be said that every Pentecostal denomination had its roots in the Azusa Street experience.



Above: Pope of Rome Paul VI and the Patriarch of Constantinople (1965)



Above: Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation document (1988)



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The Baptism in the Holy Spirit as an "ecumenical grace" right from the beginning. The people who experienced this outpouring at Azusa St were unfortunately often asked to leave their denominations or simply felt rejected by them. It was because of this rejection that the various Pentecostal denominations started. Pentecostalism however spread throughout the western world and Pentecostal churches were active from the start in terms of missionary activity to the developing world.

David Du Plessis, a South African Pentecostal pastor, was instrumental in connecting "mainline" Churches with the move of the Holy Spirit. He assisted the establishment of the Full Gospel Businessman's Fellowship (an interdenominational group) and was a member of the world Council of Churches and an observer at the second Vatican Council in the 60's.

In 1960, in St Mark's Church Van Nuys California overseen by Fr. Denis Bennett, the modern charismatic movement to traditional churches began with praying in tongues and other manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the more liturgical Episcopalian/Anglicanism in North America. In the 1980's, John Wimber was instrumental in connecting the move of the Holy Spirit with the more evangelical Anglican Churches and the other Evangelical Protestant denominations around the world. (The Alpha Course is one fruit of this as it was founded from Holy Trinity Brompton, an Anglican congregation influenced by Wimber's ministry.)



Above: David Du Plessis -Mr Pentecost

At Vatican II Pope John XXIII instructed the Catholic Church to pray "Lord renew your wonders in this our day as by a new Pentecost." In the mid 1960's, the Holy Spirit fell on a prayer group at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh USA. By 1975 10,000 Catholic Charismatics attended an international conference at St Peter's in Rome.

In the 70's and 80's, the charismatic renewal was a powerful movement in all the "mainline" Churches. Since the phenomena occurring in all the different denominations were exactly the same it was natural for groups to pray, fellowship, evangelize and work together to build the Kingdom of God. However, between the early 80's and second decade of the 21st century this move and its ecumenical impetus has waned.

Where ecumenism has survived and flourished has been in the context of movements like Taizé' (a non-charismatic movement) and in covenant communities around the world. The Servants of Jesus Community is one such place where this ecumenical focus has endured. Our members are encouraged to remain (and continue to become) the best Anglicans, Catholics, Pentecostals, Orthodox Christians they can be. Each member is encouraged to attend their



Above: Pope John XXIII instructed the Catholic Church to pray "Lord renew your wonders in this our day as by a new Pentecost"



Above: Duquesne University students retreat in Pittsburgh 1967 which marked the beginnings of Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church.



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Top left: Bread of Life Fellowship Mass with Bishop Long **Top Right:** Joseph and Julie Chircop—The founders of The Servants of Jesus Community in Sydney **Bottom :** Combined Ecumenical Charismatic gathering for praise and worship at The Servants of Jesus Centre.

own liturgical celebrations, specific to their denomination. As a Community, we then come together to take part in Charismatic praise and worship each Sunday (and at various times throughout the week in our local areas). This ecumenical fellowship, praise and worship enriches our engagement with our denominations and results in significant fruit in terms of preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The teaching of the Catholic Church since Vatican II has repeatedly pointed out the necessity of Christian unity to credibly preach the Gospel. The Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis have all repeatedly identified Church unity as an essential aspect of their

call for a "New Evangelization" in the previously evangelized western world. Our experience in the Servants of Jesus has confirmed this insight.

Some of the fruit of our ecumenical worship and fellowship is a thriving and growing youth and young adult culture. There is also increasing involvement with missionary outreaches around the world, providing for the poor and refugees locally with food services and a medical clinic, youth mission teams that outreach to schools and facilitate evangelistic weekends.

The Australian Church culture has been dramatically declining (particularly with regard to youth) for

some years now. However we have found that through an experience of the move of the Holy Spirit and the ecumenical connection the Spirit initiates, the testimony of Jesus is received by people and bears fruit in personal conversion and corporate manifestation of all the aspects of the work of the Kingdom of God.

Written by Mark Tynan



SERVANTS OF JESUS
An Ecumenical Covenant Community