

ECEC - Second Statement on European Issues - 20 July 1951

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ECUMENICAL COMMISSION ON EUROPEAN COOPERATION

Second Statement on European Issues

Introductory Note:

The Ecumenical Commission on European Cooperation recently held its second meeting, to consider replies to its statement on "European Issues" published last January. Members present at the meeting were André Philip (France), chairman, C.L. Patijn (Holland), vice-chairman, René Courtin (France), James Dickson (Sweden), Gustav Heinemann (Germany), Robert Kerber (Austria), Max Kohnstamm (Holland), Heinrich Kopf (Germany), Pierre Mahillon (Belgium), Roger Mehl (France), Jean Rey (Belgium), Mario Rollier (Italy), and Martin Wight (Great Britain).⁽¹⁾

After reviewing the comments received on its January statement, including answers to the questionnaires addressed to the countries and Churches of Europe, the Commission discussed the problems of cooperation in the light of recent developments. The following report on this meeting has been prepared by the secretary on the basis of the discussion, and incorporates several brief statements produced by the members and approved by them for publication.

Review of Reactions to the Statement "European Issues"

The statement and questions of the Commission have been published extensively both in Europe and America, and have stimulated a frank discussion of the fundamental problems of social policy confronting Europeans today. It has been reprinted in full in well-known church periodicals in all of the major Protestant areas of Europe except Great Britain (where a summary of the document has appeared in several church papers), and also in the United States. In Germany especially it has been very widely published in the religious press, and aroused considerable discussion. It has also been reprinted in many of the Student

(1) The members of the Commission are:-

André Philip (France), chairman, C.L. Patijn (Holland), vice-chairman, René Courtin (France), James Dickson (Sweden), Eric Fletcher M.P. (Great Britain), Kenneth G. Grubb (Great Britain), Gustav Heinemann (Germany), Werner Kägi (Switzerland), Robert Kerber (Austria), Max Kohnstamm (Holland), H.W. Kopf (Germany), Ole Bjorn Kraft (Denmark), Ernst Lemmer (Germany), Pierre Mahillon (Belgium), Roger Mehl (France), Christian S. Oftedal (Norway), Jean Rey (Belgium), Mario Rollier (Italy), Denis de Rougemont (Switzerland), I. Svernilson (Sweden), Martin Wight (Great Britain) and Erling Wikborg (Norway).

Christian Movement publications of these countries, and the World Student Christian Federation has circulated it in study materials for discussion groups in Europe and America. It will also be used as the basis for a discussion of the responsibility of the laity for European problems at the World Council of Churches European Laymen's Conference, meeting this month at Bad Boll. In several countries, Christian study groups have been formed to discuss the questions raised at the end of the statement.

There has not been time to receive a representative sample of answers to the points raised in the statement. Most of the comments received thus far are favourable to the purpose of the Commission and to its analysis of the European situation. At the same time we have received various criticisms which deserve an answer. Some of these are based on a fundamental disagreement with the point of view of the Commission regarding questions of Christian ethics and political analysis, while others indicate a serious misunderstanding or misreading of our statement and of the purpose of the Commission.

In an editorial commenting on the purpose of the Commission - to help build a foundation of common conviction and principle on which the idea of European cooperation can be based - the "Guardian" (an unofficial Church of England weekly newspaper) wrote: "There will be many Christians who feel that the establishment of the principles in question by Christians should not be aimed at any particular group of states or area of land, but should relate to the world at large. There is a danger that the Churches of one region may be invited to buttress the political development of that particular region in a way which is not easily compatible with the Christian vocation to unite all men of good will everywhere and to preach the Gospel in all lands". (February 9th). To this objection "The Frontier" (monthly of the Christian Frontier Council in Britain) replied: "The inhibitions about European cooperation that are actually felt in the countries concerned are of a less heavenly origin". But it is characteristic that many people do not see why Christians as such should be concerned with the problems of Europe, while others frankly fear that the Church may be used to support specifically political purposes.

Despite the note to the contrary many people have assumed from the word "ecumenical" in the title of the Commission that it is an official Commission of the World Council of Churches. In Germany, the report received strong criticism because it seemed to represent official ecumenical sponsorship of the idea of a Western European union. In what was described in the "Evangelische Welt" of April 16th as "a particularly animated discussion" of the working group on politics of the Berlin-Brandenburg Lay Assembly, various speakers professed to see in our work the concept of a "Catholic French Western Europe masked beneath a veneer of Christian pathos". The silence of the statement about the situation in Eastern Europe was construed by some as the "writing-off" of Eastern Europe in general and of Eastern Germany in particular.

Some criticisms of the statement were based on the view that it too easily sanctions the rearmament campaign in Europe. These critics argued that large-scale rearmament is making it impossible to carry out the social reforms which are the only way of creating in Europe the

healthy society which the mass of the people will be willing to defend. Also many argued that the rearmament actually increases the likelihood of war, because it increases the Soviet fear of aggression. It is argued that the Churches should not encourage the sterile policy of rearmament, but should promote new efforts for peaceful solutions of existing fears and tensions.

Some asked, What is meant by European unification? It was felt that to suggest political unification at the moment is defeatist because most conceivable forms of political unity are impossible to realise in the near future. If we do not mean some form of political unity, then what do we mean? Clarification of this point would, it is argued, do much to establish the realism of our work.

It is apparent from many remarks received that there is a considerable confusion about the goal of military and political policy in Europe today, and about the meaning of European union in relation to this policy. Some of the criticisms of European unity are based on the belief that it is a means to pull the countries of Western Europe into the Atlantic orbit, while others feel that emphasis on European union creates obstacles to the formation of a strong Atlantic community. Thus some favour union because they feel it will help Europe to be neutral in the struggle between East and West; others favour it as the only means of creating a strong and healthy European component in the Atlantic union.

These and other comments were considered by the Commission at its meeting, and the following is a record of their reactions and decisions.

(1) The Basis and the Purpose of the Commission

In order to clarify its position and to clear up some obvious misunderstandings about the purpose of its work the Commission agreed upon the following statement:-

"We want to reiterate that the Ecumenical Commission on European Cooperation is an independent Commission of Christians drawn from various European countries and from different fields of social and political life who desire to help the European Churches in the spirit of the Ecumenical Movement to explore the specific responsibility of Christians with regard to the problems of European cooperation.

"The Commission has been organised in cooperation with the Study Department of the World Council of Churches in relation to its studies of Christian Action in Society, but its findings are in no sense an official expression of the point of view of the World Council, or of one of its departments, or of any of its member churches. The Commission does not have a single point of view regarding the problems of European cooperation, but represents a variety of opinions which are held today among Christians about European unity and the difficult questions which that involves. The main task of the Commission is, through a discussion of these different attitudes and in the light of Christian convictions, to help find new and creative solutions for these problems of the European community, and to stimulate the Churches to act constructively in this realm".

(2) The Christian Concern for European Cooperation

"The first and the greatest task of the Christian Church, always and everywhere, is to preach the Gospel. But this involves proclaiming man's duty to his neighbour, which is the Christian basis of ordered liberty and social justice. Moreover, the preaching of the Gospel must always be topical, calling Christians to those responsibilities which confront them in their immediate situation. The situation of Europe today confronts Christians with certain clear demands for responsible action.

"Europe is a spiritual, traditional and historical unity, moulded by Christian influences. While there is a difference of opinion among us as to whether the creation of common European political and social institutions could mean the fulfilment of a profound historical and cultural need, we are agreed that the most obvious reasons for European integration are pragmatic: European problems can no longer be solved on a national scale. The implications of this for Christian action in relation to the situation of Europe must be made clear.

"The essence of the present European situation as a result of the last two wars, is that Europe has outgrown its political and economic institutions, and the field of Christian social responsibility has correspondingly widened. The Christian conception of "my neighbour" now has a wider range than ever before. In the past three or four centuries the nation-state has been the predominant political and cultural entity, so that Christians have been tempted to regard it as an order of creation. But they are now brought to realise that the nation-state has fulfilled its rôle, and that Christians have the freedom under God to adopt solutions for their problems on a wider basis.

"In the economic and social sphere it is no longer possible to effect anything constructive on an adequate scale within the confines of national frontiers. Investments, full employment, the growth of production, the raising of the standard of life, require a larger market than that of a single European country. Social justice today depends on finding a solution for these problems; and it requires a new kind of political structure on a European scale. Since the national states of Europe are no longer in a position to assure their subjects of real protection, the question arises of whether they are still able to fulfil all the duties which the Bible assigns to the authorities for the well-being of mankind. The European nations are therefore called to seek together for new, supra-national political forms."

(3) The Rôle of Europe between East and West

The Commission considered at some length the problem of Europe between East and West, and the various views which are held about its rôle in the present world struggle.

In a statement which found considerable support in the Commission, M. André Philip outlined and commented on three views which are widely held about the rôle of a united Europe between East and West. His remarks may be summarised as follows:-

a) A disarmed, neutral Europe

The view of a disarmed, neutral Europe standing between the two great blocs has no reality, because economically Europe is a part of the Western bloc. Europe of necessity receives most of its raw materials from the United States or the British Commonwealth, and lives by processing these goods in its industries.

Furthermore, it is useless to say that in Europe we could do more to improve social conditions if we were not burdened by the cost of rearmament, because if Europe refuses to rearm (leaving aside the question of German rearmament) it would get no raw materials from the U.S. for civilian production, and would be worse off than at present. Moreover, if war did break out, Russia would immediately occupy a neutral and disarmed Europe in order to double her coal and steel production.

b) An armed, neutral Europe

This view not only presupposes that Europe is already united, but overlooks the fact that it would require a military effort many times greater than that which Europe is making at present, because it could not expect help from the United States if it aimed to follow a policy of absolute neutrality. Also it might be put in the position of the United States before the last war, and of Great Britain before the first world war, of helping to precipitate a war by temporising policies of neutrality. Even today, though Europe is not united, it does have some influence on American public opinion which would not be possible had Europe declared her intention to become isolationist.

c) Independence of Europe within the Atlantic Union

Europe ought to be able to influence the decisions taken by the Americans, and otherwise to act as an influential part of the community of nations forming the Atlantic group. It is evident from recent developments in American foreign policy that Europe already plays an important rôle. Moreover, it is not only for economic reasons that Europe sides with the nations of the Atlantic bloc. A moral choice is involved. On the one side we have a dictatorship, and on the other a democracy, with all its faults, but still a democracy in which Europe can play the part of the opposition in the context of the Atlantic community. But in order to do that, Europe must be an economic and political power.

Following the discussion on these points, the Commission agreed upon the following statement as briefly defining its own position regarding the meaning of European unity in relation to the East-West struggle:-

"A Europe constituted as a single organ, endowed with its own political institutions, would give the states of Europe a much more effective influence on the decisions of world policy.

"Since the war, Western Europe has been turning towards the United States, with which it has many economic and political links. This choice is explained and conditioned by different circumstances: the need for rebuilding the ruins and reconstructing the economy of war-ravaged Europe; Russia's refusal to cooperate in shaping a common economic policy; the establishment in the countries behind the Iron Curtain of régimes which have no respect for national independence, and

which do not allow the individual those basic political and social freedoms which are considered indispensable in Western Europe; the necessity for the military defence of Europe against the menace of Soviet policy without sacrificing the standard of living.

"Action is needed, that within the Atlantic Union a common European policy may be expressed and invested with the necessary authority. The constitution of a united Europe would enable Europe to play a decisive rôle in establishing a modus vivendi between East and West, which would also contribute to the peaceful settlement of the differences which divide the continents today. The organisation of Europe would therefore meet basic needs. While realising that the union of Europe would present special considerations and difficulties for certain countries, and although the Churches cannot make decisions on each of the detailed problems that arise, or recommend this or that precise method of procedure, we are convinced that it is the duty of the Christian Churches of Europe, and of every individual Christian, to work for the establishment of a European political and economic community, as a step forward toward the organisation of the world for peace and progress".

The Commission also discussed the rôle of Germany in the future of Europe. The members were, with one exception, agreed upon the following statement:-

"It is, of course, important that the largest possible number of European countries should join the community which is in the process of formation. But it must be clearly stated that the participation of the German people constitutes an absolutely indispensable condition for the creation of this community, which (regardless of any preconceived ideas on problems of rearmament) implies the fusion of the German economy in that of Western Europe".

One member from Germany felt that in view of the possibility of an agreement between the Four Powers regarding the unification of Germany, he was not prepared to vote for this statement at the present moment.

(4) Statement from the Commission addressed to the Churches of Europe

The Commission concluded its meeting with a discussion of the special responsibility of the Churches of Europe, and prepared a statement to be submitted to these Churches, as follows:-

1. "We believe that at a time when the vital problems of Europe are becoming increasingly supra-national, and can only be solved through the cooperation of the various countries, the European Churches should enter into closer relationships with each other, and cooperate to a far greater extent than they have ever done hitherto.
2. The purpose of such cooperation between European Churches should not be to defend their interests against, nor to isolate themselves in any way from, other sister Churches in the Ecumenical Movement. It is rather to enable them to meet together the challenge and the opportunities which are inherent in the new situation of Europe, and to render effective witness concerning the many problems of a general European character which arise today.

3. Europe has a great Christian tradition, but this tradition has largely lost its meaning for the great mass of the people. The Christian task is not to restore the old order but to lay the foundations for a new order. This implies the discovery of new forms of Christian obedience and of community life.
4. The Western European Churches have a common as well as an individual responsibility to the Churches in Eastern Europe. They should make a special effort to understand and explain the lessons which these Eastern European Churches are learning, and the spiritual discoveries which they are making. They should seize every opportunity for fellowship with these Churches, and on no account to allow a political separation (imposed from the outside) to develop into a spiritual separation.
5. The European Churches have furthermore the common task of helping European Christians to change their attitude towards the peoples of Asia and Africa. They must make it clear that the colonial period is definitely past, and that Europeans, Asians and Africans can only arrive at a truly Christian relationship with each other if all sentiments of superiority or of revenge make way for a conscious acceptance of human solidarity.
6. The European Churches have the common task of entering into a fraternal conversation with the American Churches concerning the relationship of America and Europe to each other. The purpose of this conversation is to arrive at a mutual understanding with regard to the specific relationship between their continents and the independence and autonomy without which this relationship cannot be mutually helpful.
7. The European Churches have also a common task in the social realm. They should speak out together concerning fundamental weaknesses and injustices in the present European economy, and prepare their members to make such sacrifices as are necessary for the building up of a responsible and just society on a European scale.
8. The European Churches should ask themselves whether the purely national form of organisation which they have at present is adequate to the new situation, and whether they should not begin to create organs of common life which will manifest more clearly the supra-national character of the Church, and thus enable it to speak to the condition of European man of our day.
9. Steps can be taken immediately to collaborate in such practical realms as interchurch aid, theological education, training of missionaries, exchange of pastors, and youth work."

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