

DEVELOPMENT OF ECUMENICAL CO-OPERATION IN KENYATHE EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

There has been very little Ecumenical co-operation between the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches in Kenya. The most important achievement in the past has been the preparation of joint Syllabus and teaching material of the Christian Religious Education in the Primary and Secondary Schools in Kenya. There was an attempt to have joint meetings of Anglican and Roman Catholic Bishops in 1976/77 but no other meetings have been held since that time. The Roman Catholic Bishops have been rather reluctant to join in Ecumenical Church Services. Before the Eucharistic Congress, the only important Ecumenical Service where both Roman Catholic and other Churches participated was the burial of Jomo Kenyatta in August 1978.

When Pope John Paul II chose Nairobi to be the venue of the 43rd Eucharistic Congress, the Vatican also requested the Kenya Episcopal Conference to ensure that there would be Ecumenical activities during the Eucharistic Congress. Cardinal Maurice Otunga invited various member churches of the National Council of Churches of Kenya to a meeting to plan the Ecumenical activities. The meeting was virtually boycotted as only three out of forty invited members attended the meeting. The main ground of boycott was that the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy had been invited many times to participate in the activities of the Council and had always ignored such invitations. I attended that meeting and challenged the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy on its past apathy on ecumenical activities and my challenge was accepted and indeed I was appointed to be the vice-chairman of the Committee to plan the ecumenical activities during the Congress.

The Committee met about five times and this enabled committee members of various churches to get to know one another. We were very excited to see the good response of the Ecumenical gatherings including a Pre-Congress Ecumenical Rally on 28th July, 1985, addressed by the Archbishop of the Anglican Church in Kenya and the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, among others.

During the week of the Eucharistic Congress (11th to 18th August 1985) a number of Ecumenical Seminars on Churches' understanding of the Eucharist were held. On Wednesday, 14th August, we held an Ecumenical Service attended by about 5,000 people. I gave an address on "Aspects of Common Witness in Kenya" which is hereby attached. Other speakers included the Greek Orthodox Bishop of East Africa (Bishop Anastasio Yannatolas) who is also the Chairman of the W.C.C. Commission on Mission and Evangelism. On Sunday, 18th August, eight Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant leaders had an audience with His Holiness the Pope. We had a valuable 45 minutes' audience with the Pope. I had the privilege of being the spokesman of the delegation to the Holy Father.

The holding of the Eucharistic Congress in Nairobi has opened new channels of Ecumenical Co-Operation and it is my hope and prayer that this is a new beginning of Common Witness in Kenya.

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