

Walter Cardinal Kasper
Chicago
Morning Prayer
ELCA Chapel
Saturday, 2 October 2004
9:00 a.m.

Jesus Christ – our common foundation

1 Cor 3:10-11

Often we ask about the future of ecumenism. Since the beginning of this movement in the early 20th century so many things have changed – in the world and in our churches – and ecumenism itself is often in the danger of becoming sleepy. Signs of resignation and frustration are visible. So we cannot go on with the simple slogan “business as usual.” But what can we do and what should we do? There is no lack of proposals to revise the methods, to change the structures, to integrate new and other members, to ask what are the questions of the world, and even to reflect anew about our objective, our aims and our agenda.

These proposals to some degree may be reasonable and important. But in the scripture reading of today Paul makes us a different proposal. He calls himself an architect and, like every other architect, he has to make a plan how to construct the house, in his case the house and temple of God that is the Church. A good architect – he tells us – does not start with the roof or with the inner architecture and inner equipment of the house; he starts with the foundation. Only a solid foundation, not built on sand but on a rocky ground, as Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount, ensures that the house will remain firm and will not collapse when the storm comes.

The same is also true for us. We cannot at all be sure that no stormy times are ahead. On the contrary! Good weather with pleasant sunshine is not the normal situation and condition of the Church. Jesus prophesized persecutions. They may not be always bloody ones; today they are much more cunning and as such much more dangerous.

So Paul invites and urges us to reflect anew about the foundation of our work. His answer is absolutely clear: “No one could lay a foundation other than the one which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

The confession to Jesus Christ, true God and true human, is the foundation of baptism, by which we become Christians and members within the Church. The Christological confession to Jesus Christ as the one saviour of all humankind belongs to the basis formula of the WCC and constitutes the fundamental agreement, the common denominator of all who participate in the ecumenical movement. The common missionary witness for Jesus Christ to a world which does not yet or no longer knows him is the very aim of the ecumenical endeavour. And finally, Jesus Christ is not only the foundation, he is also the very goal of our ecumenical endeavour, in him we shall be one. “All under the one head Jesus Christ” said the Lutheran foundational Fathers in their

Confessional Writings. But is this still clear to all of us? Do we bear it in mind in our normal discussions and reflections?

Are we not in the situation where our main task and main challenge has become to remember and to strengthen our common foundation and to not allow it to be emptied by liberal interpretations, which may call themselves progressive but in reality are subversive? Even today, where in our post-modern situation all becomes relative and arbitrary, where everybody makes his own religion a la carte, we need a firm foundation and a reliable common point of reference for our personal life and for our ecumenical work. And who could it be other than Jesus Christ? Who gives us better guidance? Where is there more light and who gives us more hope? Where else can we find such words of life?