

REPORT ON WOMEN'S ECUMENICAL CONFERENCE HELD AT TAIZÉ, FRANCE
19th - 24th June, 1967

One hundred women attended the Conference. They represented the Catholic International Organisation, members of the Department of Co-operation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society, set up by the World Council of Churches, and members of the Young Women's Christian Association.

Two earlier smaller conferences which Dr. Madelaine Barot had helped to convene, had prepared a questionnaire which was widely distributed during 1966 and the earlier part of 1967. The Conference studied the answers given to these questions. There were also study groups to consider:

- (a) The dimensions and necessities of the ecumenical dialogue.
- (b) What can be done in common to make this a meaningful dialogue for all.

The Conference divided into four groups for these discussions and for consideration of a number of other questions, each workshop group taking one of the following problems:

1. The different forms of women's professional life outside their home:
 - (a) Those who work through economic necessity,
 - (b) Those for whom a choice is possible.
2. Remedies to overcome the wastage of women's energies and capacities on the different social levels:
 - (a) The independent professions,
 - (b) The working class women,
 - (c) The rural women.
3. How to foster a better and more active participation of women in public life.
4. How to promote better co-operation of men and women in the life of society.

Dr. Joan Brothers, a sociologist and a Research Officer in The University of London spoke about the tensions between the home and outside responsibilities.

Dr. Lydia Simons, Professor of Theology in the Netherlands, and the Revd. André Dumas, Professor of Ethics at the College of Protestant Theology in Paris, spoke on the subject of attempting a theological answer to the socio-ethical problems posed by the changing role of women.

Few of the things they said were really new to us but the thought of unity - within - difference was constantly stressed; that the easy solutions are - losing our identity in others or isolating ourselves to retain our identity. "We need to be able to maintain a relationship with each other that is uneasy, yet flexible and consistent." This flexibility as Christians and as men and women should be carried over into dialogue with the unbelieving, with the atheist world and the world of other faiths. The theologians and the laity should have opportunities to work together in an attempt to find more ways of breaking down the barriers and to make reconciliation and unity a reality.

This working, thinking and speaking of the things we have in common, rather than those which divide us, together with education, the deepening of our faith and the goodwill shown in our lives to all men, we hope and pray will bring us unity.

It is one thing for one hundred women to attend a conference

held in two languages concerned with greater co-operation and understanding of even that small number of people. It is quite another matter for millions of human beings to share these concerns. What, then, can we do?

WHAT CAN WE DO TOGETHER

- i) Meet each other.
Let us find ways of meeting each other, especially by inviting each other to our meetings and conferences.
- ii) Learn to know each other.
Let us seek every opportunity to strengthen our desire to get to know each other better and to exchange our ideas and thoughts freely. Let us ask each other frankly and objectively to explain our faith. Let us join in collecting information, written and printed material making use of such occasions as the Week of Unity and the World Day of Prayer.
- iii) Joint Studies on the origins of our faith.
We can discover together in a wholly new way, the message and face of Christ, particularly through bible studies in depth, undertaken jointly, calling on all the resources of modern scientific exegesis.
- iv) Rethinking the Catechism.
It is essential that in each church and at all levels, we should engage in a rethinking of the catechism in the light of ecumenism.
- v) Praying together.
We can seize opportunities of praying together, such as the Week of Unity and the World Day of Prayer, but taking care to avoid sentimentality and euphoria. Liturgies planned for these occasions must be adapted to local circumstances. Richness can come from making these adaptations in co-operation.
Let us be ready too, to accept what life can bring to our praying together and what we may contribute. If some special event draws us to pray together, if life itself calls us to pray together, then a true and profound dialogue becomes possible. But for this, surely do not let us wait for a catastrophe; let our intuition and sensitivity discern the suffering of the world and translate it into common prayer.
- vi) Engaging in service together.
We are not entering into dialogue in a kind of Christian Ghetto. Our dialogue has to be nourished by the thought of those who are without belief and by our apostolic vocation. There are opportunities for dialogue and dialogue in positive action undertaken together.
- vii) Organisation of meetings and encounters.
Seminars, meetings, conferences and ecumenical year at local, regional, national and international levels can be precious ways of fostering ecumenical dialogue.
- viii) Living together.
It is essential that we live together; that we live the dialogue and through the dialogue, our daily life and Christian service. The ecumenical dialogue is truly a labour; a hard task, demanding of us time, courage, fortitude, perseverance and realism. It has to be lived step by step as the Holy Spirit guides us, with unity as its goal.
It bears in itself at the same time, its suffering and its joy, in liveliness of hope and in confidence in God Who calls us to unity and Who Himself gives it.

Perhaps most of all we want to see the Church in the forefront, leading us along the path of change, not lagging behind the world.