

The Federation seeks to iron out theological differences and polity emphases among Lutherans.

5. If Our list were to become exhaustive, we would need to look at the Mennonite World Conference and a few others. But we are just noticing a few of the ecumenically oriented world bodies and passing from the scene.

D. The Roman Church: Vatican II

It is not right to say that Rome has been involved in ecumenics although in practice there has been something of this. Rome has been simply watching the protestant chickens flutter in her direction (Taylor's concept) and waiting to pluck them at an appropriate time. Until recently Rome had nothing to do with the ecumenical aspirations of international bodies..taking the position that she was the true church and dialog with anotherbody would cheapen her stance. But in the last twenty five years there has been an expressiveness that has seen Rome in a number of dialoging situations. Most of this is the result of Vatican II. Something of it is necessary for one to understand the present Roman position and activity.

One of the things that had kept the Roman church aloof from Protestantism was the matter of theological liberalism and/or modernism. Pius X in 1907 had given a Syllabus (Lamentabelli) condemning modernism as a mode of theological thought and had followed this with an encyclical blasting much of the modern biblical teaching as unbelief. Following 1910 Catholics (priests) were required to affirm an anti-modernist stand that tended to separate them from the protestant educative elite. The Pontifical Biblical commission had likewise viewed the higher critical teachings and condemned them...all Catholic theologians were forbidden to think or react this way.

If Rome has put some evangelical doctrine into this academic void it would have proved a good move. But Catholic scholars were suddenly cut off from the world of academic research and direction. It was inevitable that the liberal ideas would begin to spread in their circles. The encyclical of Pius XII (1943) "Divino Afflante Spiritu" while not altering the earlier decretals, did put a stress on the love and study of the Scriptures and this allowed, tacitly, an opening of the Roman mind to the theological schools of protestantism. Pius seems to have acted against this tendency with the encyclical Humani Generis (1950) but the oaths disappeared. Finally John XXIII came to the papal chair (1958) and issued in a different tone of voice. Using the term aggiornamento, he began to talk of a wholeness of the church that had not been heard in Rome in centuries and he made overtures of peace to protestants and orthodox calling them "separated brethren." Under his aegis Vatican II was called in 1962 beginning in October. John XXIII died the following June and the council was completed by PaulVI.

To Vatican II came Orthodox and Protestant observers. John had set the stage for this with the encyclicals "Mater et Magister" (1961) and Pacem in Terris (1963). In the latter of these John expressed the idea of freedom of conscience in worship...a view utterly contradictory to the teachings of many of his successors. From the two encyclicals