

## Conference: The World is my neighbour: Bossey and a New Ecumenism

### What I have heard today

#### Mary Tanner

##### An overall impression of the day

There was much energy in the room and much engagement with the question of the ecumenical task in front of the churches today and the place of Bossey as an invaluable 'ecumenical laboratory'. This seemed to give the lie to what someone referred to as a tired, depressed, ecumenical movement of our times, 'a winter of ecumenism'. As we gathered in Lambeth Palace for this conference all passion for unity it seemed was not spent even if the question of whether there is such a thing as a 'new ecumenism' was often raised.

##### Two stimulating lectures

We heard two stimulating lectures. First from Ioan Sauca, the Director of the Bossey Institute, speaking about new developments and refurbishment of the Chateau, of Bossey opening its facilities for the use of others, of the courses and the relationship established with the University of Geneva. He spoke too about the new trends in ecumenism today. The second lecture, a profound introduction by Susan Durber to ecumenical spirituality, was based in her personal experience of worship and the way different traditions of prayer were enriching one another. She spoke of a new ecumenical spirituality in the broadest sense- 'a whole life spirituality' - where what we do on our knees and how we live the totality of our lives hangs together in a single spirituality of being. This led her to make a critical comment of a trend in the ecumenical movement to retreat back into worship only as inviting one another to experience our own traditions. She spoke too out of her experience of Faith and Order for the need for keeping life and work together with the continuing faith and order theological conversations.

##### Bossey as a Place of Encounter: four testimonies

The testimonies of four past students from Bossey, coming from a period of half a century, testified to Bossey as an 'ecumenical laboratory', a place where people learn about other ecclesial traditions and other cultural contexts taking them beyond the narrow landscapes of their own ecclesial tradition and cultural context into a broader and more inclusive place, where the world is experienced as the neighbour. Bossey is a place where people learn from the gifts others bring as they offer their gifts and receive gifts from others in a form of gift exchange, a form of 'receptive ecumenism'. Without exception, speakers, in plenary and around the tables, spoke of the lasting influence that the life of prayer, study and living together at Bossey had had on their future ministries in this country. Many of the ecumenical leaders in the British scene have been those formed in the ecumenical laboratory of Bossey. The phrase most used was: 'Bossey was for me a life changing experience'!

**Bossey as a place on the cutting edge of ecumenism**

Bossey is a place where it is possible to learn about what Ioan Sauca called 'a paradigm shift' or 'paradigm shifts' in the ecumenical movement. Many asked questions about what a paradigm shift meant. In writings elsewhere Ioan Sauca had spoken about the different emphases. After the first Assembly at Amsterdam the ecumenical community declared – 'We intend to stay together'. After the last Assembly in Busan the participants declared – 'we intend to move together', to move together on a pilgrimage of justice and peace. The pilgrimage of justice and peace is oriented to the values of the Kingdom, the justice and peace of which the prophets spoke and which Jesus proclaimed and which was inaugurated through his life, death and resurrection and sending to the Spirit, the kingdom which is the end of all things brought to fulfilment in Christ. The emphasis on a pilgrimage to justice and peace, identified by some as a new paradigm, is not so much a new ecumenism but rather a reinvigorated ecumenism, a refreshed ecumenism. The emphasis on doing justice and peace together now in the context of the tragedies of our times speaks especially to the younger generation in the same way as life and work movement spoke to the generation after the horrors and devastation of the First World War. To be on a pilgrimage of justice and peace together places the emphasis on the Kingdom and the world and on the Church as the bearer of the message of the Kingdom, the Church as the foretaste of the Kingdom, the Church as the sign of the kingdom.

On pilgrimage together, witnessing to and acting for the vision and values of the kingdom making common cause with those of other faiths or no faith, we begin to sense that however good our Christian relations are we are not one people witnessing to one God and living a reconciled and reconciling life, eating and drinking around the one table and helping each other discern a common response and mind when new issues threaten to divide us further. There remains the scandal of our disunity on the pilgrimage, a wound in our life. We see again that there is an inextricable relation between Christian unity sustained by common faith, eating and drinking around a single table and facing new issues together and being actively caught up in struggles for justice and peace. We are a broken sign of God's intention for all. The empty plate and the over-turned chalice on the altar at our morning prayer was a symbol of the continuing division at the centre of our Christian life together. Each new group at Bossey is faced with how to live with the pain of brokenness at the Eucharist. Both speakers emphasised, in their different ways, the need to continue the work for the visible unity of the Church, the central purpose of the World Council of Churches according to its Constitution, and the work together for justice and peace. Susan Durber spoke of the way the insights of life and work and faith and order were brought together in the Unity Statement from the Busan Assembly. Although it wasn't said, it is true that without the work of both streams of the ecumenical movement and the missionary endeavour, the ecumenical landscape in these islands would be very different today. New energy is needed to move us on.

To take part in the ecumenical laboratory of Bossey, with its proximity to the WCC and the programmes of the WCC, is to be opened to a renewed and reinvigorated ecumenism in which it is possible to explore how we can live together more committed to the pilgrimage of justice and peace and also committed to the search for what the visible unity of the Church just might entail. As Ioan Sauca said there is no way round the search for the unity of the Church as part of Christian obedience. John 17 remains at the heart of the ecumenical calling. To be part of the community at Bossey is to enter on a deeper search for what this might just mean in this generation, in a multicultural context. Mission and unity and service hang together in an integrated agenda. A

community working for reconciliation in its own life can be a powerful witness to and agent of reconciliation in the world forming in us a people of reconciliation.

The conversation around the tables engaged with this ecumenical question about a re-invigorated, refreshed, expanded ecumenical way in a second ecumenical century in continuity with the vision and way of the first ecumenical century. There is nowhere better to engage with these questions and the new possibilities opening up than in the ecumenical laboratory at Bossey.

### **The need for new leaders**

Many spoke of the need for a new generation of young ecumenists to lead the way in this country. Many of our leaders in the past were formed in the ecumenical laboratory of Bossey. Bishop David Tustin was an obvious example. We need leaders whose understanding of Christian unity in today's world has been formed in the most inclusive ecumenical context of ecclesial traditions and cultures, out of which renewed vision, conviction and energy come, leaders who know there is no split between activism and the work of the theologians and know that a bigger family means a bigger voice in our globalised world. Christians minister to human need better together.

### **Challenges**

There is a challenge to those responsible for training women and men for ministry, both residentially and non-residentially, to invite students to consider time at Bossey. The presence of staff from theological colleges and courses and Hilary Ison from the Church of England's Board of Ministry was encouraging. There is a challenge too to church leaders to put before clergy contemplating a sabbatical time to consider spending it in Bossey. There could hardly be a more beautiful place to be, or a place where such a microcosm of the world-wide Christian family can better be experienced than in the ecumenical laboratory of Bossey – a place of prayer and spirituality in the sense of spirituality described by Susan Durber.