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Oscar Cullmann: In the Service of Biblical Theology and Ecumenism

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In the years following the Second Vatican Council, Oscar Cullmann, a Protestant theologian coming out of the Lutheran tradition, was a co-founder of the Ecumenical Institute of Tantur in Jerusalem, which this year celebrates its fortieth anniversary. It was the personal wish of Pope Paul the Sixth to found this Institute together with Cullmann.

The present rector of this Institute, Timothy Lowe, asked me to commemorate Cullmann, as I was a former student of Cullmann's in Basel, a researcher in this Institute in the winter of nineteen seventy-eight / seventy-nine, and a theologian who in the last forty years has been involved in a great number of ecumenical activities. It is for me both an honor and a joy to fulfill this request today.

I will proceed in three steps. First I'd like to say something about the person of Oscar Cullmann and his basic theological concerns. Then I'll talk about his contribution to the Second Vatican Council, and finally I will present Cullmann's ecumenical vision.

1. The person and theology of Oscar Cullmann

1.1. Biographical information

Cullmann was born in Strasbourg on the twenty-fifth of February, nineteen-o-two, into a family of nine children. He was raised in Alsatian Lutheranism. After his elementary education in the Protestant Gymnasium of Strasbourg, he decided to pursue theological studies in Strasbourg and Paris. He was especially shaped by his professors of biblical exegesis, Maurice Goguel and Alfred Loisy. His exceptional talents were quickly recognized and so already in nineteen-twenty-seven he became a lecturer in Greek, and in nineteen-thirty a docent for New Testament exegesis and the history of early Christianity at the theological faculty in Strasbourg. In nineteen-thirty-eight, he followed a call to be New Testament professor at the theological faculty of the University of Basel, a position he held until nineteen-seventy-two. From nineteen-forty-eight on, he was also professor at the Sorbonne and at the Protestant theological faculty in Paris while continuing as professor in Basel. He taught regularly at important theological faculties around the world, such as Rome and Munich, at Harvard in Boston, and so on.

Cullmann was a personal guest of Popes John the Twenty-Third and Paul the Sixth at the Second Vatican Council. In nineteen-seventy-two, he became a member of the French Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, which is a special honor that only very few scholars receive. He received honorary doctorates from many universities, including Lausanne, Manchester, Edinburgh, Lund, and Debreczen. In the final part of his research career, his special interest was ecumenism. In nineteen-ninety-three he received the international Paul the Sixth International Award for his ecumenical efforts. His close

relationships with his theology students should also be mentioned. From nineteen-twenty-six to nineteen-thirty he was director of the Protestant Stift in Strasbourg, and from nineteen-forty-one to his retirement he was the director of the Alumneum, the house for theology students in Basel. He died several days before his ninety-seventh birthday on January sixteenth, nineteen-ninety-nine.¹

1.2. Early church history

Cullmann's first interests were in early church history and especially the apocryphal writings; he wrote his habilitation on Pseudo-Clement's Epistle to the Romans. He demonstrated the meaning of this letter for the relationship between Gnosticism and Jewish Christians in contrast to Pauline theology.² Then he turned to the wider context of the church in the first century and published various studies about the first creeds, worship, the figure of the Apostle Peter, and church-state relations—a series of studies that led to the publication of a christology of the New Testament in nineteen-fifty-eight.³ An especial emphasis of his exegetical research was the Johannine corpus. In his later work on the Johannine milieu,⁴ he highlighted the meaning of the Samaritan tradition as a heterodox branch of Judaism. In all these works, Cullmann sought to show that early Christianity was an esoteric movement within Judaism and not so very indebted to Hellenism, as people commonly assumed at the time. He was of this opinion long before the discovery of the Qumran scrolls—a discovery that, when it took place, excited and interested him greatly.

1.3. Cullmann's basic theological insights

A point of departure for the whole of Cullmann's theology is his exegetical work on the New Testament. He was an advocate of historical-critical Bible research and knew himself to be indebted to form criticism. From this vantage point arose his systematic insights and also his ecumenical engagement, which for us here today, in the framework of the Taur anniversary, is of particular significance.

Cullmann's assorted exegetical and historical work led him to the systematic insight that Christian witness is to be understood as salvation history. The Bible thinks in historical categories, in distinction from paganism, which operates in spatial categories. Already in the Old Testament everything is oriented to a salvation-historical goal. The history of Israel has a departure point and a direction, which the people of Israel distinguished from every cyclical thought-pattern of their environment. Israel waited for the Day of the Lord,

¹ Zum Leben O. Cullmann siehe insbesondere die Beiträge von Matthieu Arnold in: *Positions Luthériennes* 47/1999 S. 1-6 und 7-21 und in *Positions Luthériennes* 48/2000 S. 99-166.

² *Le problème littéraire et historique du roman pseudo-clémentin. Etude sur le rapport entre le gnosticisme et le judéo-christianisme.* Paris, Alcan, 1930.

³ *Les premières confessions de foi chrétienne*, Paris, PUF, 1943 ; *Le culte dans l'Eglise primitive*, Neuchâtel, Delachaux, 1944 ; *Saint Pierre, disciple, apôtre et martyr. Histoire et théologie*, Neuchâtel, 1952 ; *Dieu et César. Le procès de Jésus, saint Paul et l'autorité, l'apocalypse et l'état totalitaire*, Neuchâtel, 1956 ; *Christologie du Nouveau Testament*, Neuchâtel, 1958

⁴ *Le milieu johannique, sa place dans le judaïsme tardif, dans le cercle des disciples de Jésus et dans le christianisme primitif. Etude sur l'origine de l'Évangile de Jean*, Neuchâtel, 1976.

for the entry into the Promised Land and then for the coming of the Messiah. In the New Testament, the decisive event is the resurrection of Jesus, but the Day of the Lord is still to come in its consummation. Early Christianity waited for the return of the Lord. From this arose the tension between the *already* and the *not yet*. The life of Christ stands in tension between anamnesis and the expectation of a new world. Christians are already saved, but their salvation awaits its consummation. Through the resurrection, Jesus has begun this new world. It requires, however, its full unfolding and the final revelation of the day of the return of Christ. Cullmann came to this conclusion already in the early years of his research.⁵ This approach always accompanied him and came to final expression at the end of his time as professor in Basel.

Such an understanding may appear to be self-evident to contemporary theology. The work of the Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad, of the New Testament scholar Hans Conzelmann, of systematicians Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg—to name just a few names—have confirmed this insight. This view was, however, in no way self-evident during the first half of the twentieth century. That it prevailed, and through extensive exegetical and systematic insights was substantiated, is a clear reception of Cullmann's work.

With this approach, at that time, Cullmann stood not only in tension with his Basel colleague Karl Barth, for whom this historical dimension had not such a great significance, but above all with Rudolf Bultmann, whose more existential construction did not, for Cullmann, conform to the message of the New Testament. Cullmann saw in Bultmann's theology a reduction of eschatology to the present, to the *already*, and a disregard for the *not yet*, which, for Cullmann, was central to the New Testament and not merely a timebound notion to be discarded. The emphasis upon the expected return of Christ, and the eschatological dimension in contemporary theology stemming from it, distinguished Cullmann also from other theologians such as Albert Schweitzer, who stressed the eschatology of the New Testament without its having any decisive meaning for later Christianity.

In his 1966 book, *Christ and Time*, Cullmann assembled his insights together and developed a radically christocentric theology. All epochs of salvation history are oriented to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is in this way that the New Testament understands the history of Israel. The salvation-history message of the New Testament has its point of departure from here, as does the future of the Christian community and the world. In this event, everything is given and accomplished. Cullmann's interest in the person of Jesus meant therefore not only the historical Jesus but also the Christ known as Lord, as he was already known in the early church. To know this Lord better, exact exegetical research is required, to which Cullmann was committed. Nevertheless, exegetical results cannot have the last word. They merely open the way to the believed-in Christ.

2. Cullmann at the Second Vatican Council

⁵ *Christ et le temps. Temps et histoire dans le christianisme primitif*, Neuchâtel, 1947

2.1. A personal guest of Popes John the Twenty-Third and Paul the Sixth

An important *novum* of Vatican Two was the fact that non-Roman Christian churches were invited to send observers to the proceedings. They were regularly called together and asked for their reactions by the Secretariat for Unity, which already before and then during the Council was led by Augustin Cardinal Bea. This was a significant development, since up until that point the Roman Catholic church had refused to participate in the ecumenical movement.

Oscar Cullmann did not belong to this group. He was not a delegated observer sent by one of the Christian churches. His status was rather as a guest, in fact a personal guest of both of the popes who presided over the Council. There were only very few guests, and Cullmann was the only one to be invited to four of the Council's sessions. It was important to him always to emphasize that he was invited only as a private person and was not obliged to give an account of the proceedings to any particular church. For this reason, the Roman hierarchy took a more open attitude toward him. He was counted among those often invited to private engagements to offer his theological and personal advice.

About the reasons that led to this invitation as guest we can speculate a bit. Cullmann first of all had attracted attention as an exegete. His work on the developments in the church of the first century and especially on the petrine office and the early Christian tradition was highly valued in Rome. Of vital importance was his close cooperation with many Catholic exegetes, not least of all in the *Ecole Biblique* of Jerusalem and the Bible Institute in Rome. Even more essential were his personal relationships and friendships, not only with Cardinal Bea but also with John the Twenty-Third, who before his election as pope was papal nuncio in Paris for a time. We can add to these his relationship with Yves Congar, who knew him well in Paris and later in Strasbourg. In Rome itself he fostered a close relationship with Cardinal Montini, the later Paul the Sixth.

Did Cullmann have a direct influence on the writing of conciliar texts? It is difficult to answer this question. In distinction from many cardinals, bishops, and theologians who after the Council never tired of claiming that they had decisively influenced this or that text, Cullmann was very discreet. It was not about his own person but the theological insights that led to true knowledge of the gospel. Thus he never made any personal claim of influence. In the run-up to the Council, many conversations were held with Cullmann, and he probably offered his advice on many texts of the Council, even though he always took care never to appear in the foreground. Without succumbing to false speculations, one can at least name three areas where Cullmann's influence is recognizable.

2.2. The Council's biblical hermeneutic

In his opening speech to the Council, on October eleventh, nineteen-sixty-two, Pope John the Twenty-Third suggested an important distinction. He distinguished between the truth of the gospel, and the formulations of this truth by the later church. Dogmas of church history can and must be tested, and they can also give the occasion to make new

formulations. This entirely new orientation right at the beginning of the Council had far-reaching consequences, not least of all for the ecumenical vision of the Council, to which we will return later. It is also not surprising that conservative Catholic circles were more than happy to ignore this approach, and in later years they did everything they could to relativize its importance.

Cullmann took this reference in the pope's opening speech, as well as the first debates about divine revelation that were closely connected to it, to indicate a new way to appeal to the biblical texts, a new biblical hermeneutic, one that Cullmann himself was completely and totally committed to.⁶ His conclusion went much farther than the usual summaries of the Council: he in fact argued that the Council had discovered a new biblical witness.

Cullmann highlighted the fact that the pope did not assume that only external forms are alterable but rather that, in salvation-historical thinking, even the substance can come under discussion. It is valid to distinguish between the kernel of the gospel—Christ's death and resurrection for humanity, which is *not* itself under discussion—and many other elements of doctrine that absolutely must be tested afresh. Some such doctrines have come along in the course of church history but have lost their original meaning in the process. Others it is appropriate to accent again today and formulate anew.

This accords beautifully with Cullmann's salvation-history theological understanding. He saw in this approach already at the beginning of the Council a return to the biblical foundations of the church.⁷ The Council was returning to salvation history and to a proper understanding of the place of the church that results from it. The merit of the Council was to replace static theological formulations that, in the course of church history, were paralyzing to a theology with the salvation-history vision.⁸ Cullmann saw immediately the new openness that came from this change. He saw the possibility for a dynamic understanding of the church. Now the church can be understood as the wandering people of God, in which the laity also play a decisive function, a people that rediscover their missionary task. This also opens up a new understanding of the liturgy as the address of God. God turns Himself to the believing community through Word and Sacrament. The mass can now be understood in a way that, in essence, no longer stands in opposition to the understanding of the sixteenth-century Reformation.⁹

Cullmann stated this already after the first Council session, still long before it became clear in all the other developments that took place during the course of the Council.

⁶ O. Cullmann Was bedeutet das zweite vatikanische Konzil für uns Protestanten ? in: Ed. W. Schatz: *Was bedeutet das zweite vatikanische Konzil für uns Protestanten ?* Reinhardt Verlag, Bâle, (sans date ! Il s'agit d'une série de conférences données en hiver 1966).p.15-53 et du même auteur : Bible et second Concile du Vatican in : O. Cullmann et al., *Le dialogue est ouvert* Neuchâtel 1965 (Edition allemande : G.A.Lindbeck (Ed.), *Dialog unterwegs*, Göttingen 1965 ; édition anglaise : G.A.Lindbeck (Ed.), *Dialogue on the Way*, Minneapolis 1965) p.133-146

⁷ O. Cullmann et L. Vischer : *Zwischen zwei Konzilssessionen*.Polis 15. Zurich 1963, p.24

⁸ Ibidem p.25

⁹ Ibidem p.29

Whether Cullmann already at the beginning of the Council had a decisive influence cannot be ascertained with any certainty. We have no information about any possible briefings with John the Twenty-Third. The facts are merely that Cullmann foresaw very early on, in a nearly visionary way, the possibilities that later would come about and find their home in various conciliar texts. One could at least put it this way: Cullmann found his Council. What he thought theologically and exegetically was realized here ecclesially. One should not overstate Cullmann's influence. Many theologians, cardinals, and bishops had been thinking in this direction for a longer time. But one can speak of a more certain reception of Cullmann's approach too.

2.3. Scripture and tradition

Closely bound up with this point is the new apprehension of the problematic of Scripture and tradition. In his exegetical work, Cullmann had always insisted that the opposition between Scripture and tradition is false, for the Scripture itself is a part of the tradition, and even church developments, especially the tradition of the first century, belong to all churches as a treasure and as such must be taken seriously. Decisive is the constant reference to the gospel, which constitutes the Scripture as much as the tradition of the church.

The initial Council debate led already in the first session to a hard opposition between the reforming and the conservative Council fathers. The conservative group presented a first draft of the relationship between Scripture and tradition. This draft was a hardening of the old „two sources“ theory: alongside the source of Scripture was the source of tradition, both of which had the same significance. This draft was, on November twentieth, nineteen-sixty-two, rejected by a majority, but not by a two-thirds majority, which was necessary according to Council order. On the next day, though, the Pope made it known that in this case an absolute majority sufficed and that the draft was therefore to be rejected. Cullmann approved the decision and saw therein a historical turning point in the Council.¹⁰ This difficult question of the relationship between Scripture and tradition remained open, and the Constitution on the Word of God (*Dei Verbum*) was only accepted in the last conciliar session of nineteen-sixty-five. This document finally left behind the traditional two-source theory and spoke of Scripture and tradition as two dimensions that issue from one single source, the gospel (DV 9).

On precisely this point Cullmann offered critique nevertheless. He saw in this development evidence of significant progress.¹¹ But he regretted the fact that a more exact distinction between the kernel (that is, the gospel) and the traditions legitimately resulting from it was not made. The relationship of gospel-Scripture-tradition-magisterium remained undefined. He obviously saw that this was not possible, given the tension between the reform-friendly and the conservative wings of the Council, but he was still of the opinion that the Council in the end did not take the decisive step it needed to. Later he criticized this point again in the Decree on Ecumenism regarding the

¹⁰ Ibidem p.17ss. und 28ss.

¹¹ Ibidem p.40

expression „hierarchy of truths,“¹² which remained undefined. It was his conviction that the Council’s main Constitutions thought not only of the revelation of God but also of the church in very christocentric fashion—but this was never stated explicitly. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was ultimately not put forth as the chief theological key.

2.4. The understanding of the church

Like most other commentators, Cullmann saw in the church constitution *Lumen Gentium* the crowning achievement of the Council. As mentioned above, in Cullmann’s eyes, the Council’s salvation-history approach led to a dynamic understanding of the church. The result exceeded his expectations. A pneumatological and eschatological understanding of the church replaced a more juridical and static approach. Cullmann welcomed in particular the now-clarified distinction between Christ, on the one hand, and the church, on the other.

This allowed for the assertion that the one church of Jesus Christ can find expression in various forms. In this sense did Cullmann interpret the *subsistit in* of *Lumen Gentium* Eight. It was certainly emphasized in the Decree on Ecumenism that the Roman church is the church of Christ in its fullness (UR 3), but this is tightly bound up with the statement that many dimensions of the mystery of salvation exist also in other ecclesial forms.

At this point, one must think back to the actual situation of the Council. The two points here noted, namely the relationship of Christ to the church and the understanding of the Roman church as a form of the church of Christ, were the correct interpretation of the conciliar texts for many of those Council fathers who strove for reform. The conservative wing has always contested that. It seems today, however, that the conservatives are prevailing, as the newer debates about the church and the sacraments and chiefly over the *subsistit in* are surfacing once again. This was not the case fifty years ago, and Cullmann was of the opinion that the more open understanding of these two questions had officially become Catholic doctrine.

Many Protestant observers at the council were critical of the approaches of *Lumen Gentium* and regretted the one-sided stress on the episcopal office, the validation of a hierarchical understanding of office, and especially the lack of any critique of the statements about the papal office from the First Vatican Council. Cullmann rebuffed these criticisms and emphasized that one ought not be amazed that the Catholic church remained true to itself and stressed some of its foundational convictions anew.¹³ Cullmann would also have called many things into question. In his eyes the breakthrough in the Constitution on the Church consisted in the fact that one could place old dogmas and new insights alongside each other. This is still not fully satisfactory, but it did mean that new ways were being opened; and this development, it seemed to Cullmann, was irreversible.¹⁴ Thus, for example, the opening up of a synod of bishops was a decisive step to relativize the solitary power of the pope.

¹² Ökumenismusdekret : *Unitatis Redintegratio* 11.

¹³ O.Cullmann : *Zwischen zwei Konzilssessionen* op. cit. p.28

¹⁴ O. Cullmann : *Vrai et faux œcuménisme*. Cahiers théologiques 62, Neuchâtel 1971 p.16s.

Was Cullmann too optimistic? Some things point in that direction. He was, however, also very critical and indicated several points in the Council that were inconsistent. Thus in Cullmann's eyes it should have been necessary to, for example, revisit the marian dogmas. But he was pleased that mariology got no constitution of its own and was only appended as the last chapter of the Constitution on the Church.¹⁵

3. Cullmann's ecumenical vision

That striving toward the unity of the church was always one of Cullmann's concerns was clear already before Vatican Two. Already in nineteen-fifty-seven, he delivered a lecture in Zürich in which he suggested that the Protestant churches, in the framework of the week of prayer for Christian unity, should take up a collection in support of the poor within the Catholic church and vice versa.¹⁶ He appealed to the example of the New Testament congregations. This example led him also to understand the various confessions as an expression of the various charisms within the one church, as Paul had written in First Corinthians regarding individual Christians. He asked for patience and discernment and suggested that the churches bear with other communities of faith, just as Paul had called upon the first Christians to accept the „weak in faith“ (Romans fourteen). The unity of the church can only be a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is unity in diversity. Recognizing others in all their variety as true Christians requires some sacrifices, but these sacrifices are an answer to Christ's prayer for unity.

Decisive for Cullmann's later vision of unity was, however, his involvement in the Council, the most important event in his life, as Cullmann himself would later say. For this reason it was important to dig more deeply into Cullmann's involvement in the Council, since it is only from this vantage point that his later, more systematic thoughts about the unity of the church can be understood.

3.1. The complementarity of Christian confessions

Already just a few years after the Council, Cullmann formulated his vision in various articles, which were published in French in 1971 in the volume *True and False Ecumenism*¹⁷ and in which he drew out the ecumenical consequences of the Council. Decisive, in his eyes, was the new biblical hermeneutic that was acquired by the Council and of which we have already identified. The Council had overcome so many traditional Catholic doctrines through a new interpretation of the Scripture. It always did so with a concern for universality—catholicity—of the church. Here Cullmann saw the remaining task of Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Conversely, he regretted that the concept of the „hierarchy of truths“ had not been indisputably clarified at the Council. For him the remaining task of the Reformation of the sixteenth century was to concentrate on the center of the Scripture, namely the gospel which revolves around the cross and

¹⁵ O. Cullmann : *Was bedeutet das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil für uns Protestanten?* op. cit. p.38.

¹⁶ O. Cullmann : *Catholiques et protestants un projet de solidarité chrétienne*, Neuchâtel 1958.

¹⁷ Wir haben diesen Band bereits erwähnt : O. Cullmann : *Vrai et faux œcuménisme*. Cahiers théologiques 62, Neuchâtel 1971.

resurrection of Christ. He certainly noted that, in the pope's opening speech at the Council as much as in the official conciliar results, not all Catholic doctrines occupied the same level of importance anymore. But in the final analysis the center of the Scripture was not identified.

Against this background, Cullmann understood the large Christian communions as necessary expressions that mutually correct one another. Each confession is a necessary correction of the imbalances of other Christian confessions. Drawing nearer to one another is absolutely to be desired, but a fusion or merger would be disastrous. On this point, Cullmann went back to the history of the early church. The distinction between Jewish-Christian congregations and the congregations of those who, before Paul, were pagan, was in his mind. But that did not prevent these congregations from being one church, as the Jerusalem Council proved.

In the years directly following Vatican Two, Cullmann campaigned for a federation of churches that equally cherished and cultivated the Catholic concern for universality and the Protestant concern to concentrate on the center of the Scripture. This fit with his own salvation-historical vision of the New Testament. Each church needed the charisma of the other churches in order to fulfill the mission of the one church of Christ. The ecumenical task is to maintain this tension and to cultivate community amidst diversity.

3.2. Unity through diversity

Twenty years after the Council and at the age of eighty, Cullmann published a systematic summary of his understanding of unity in his book *Unity through Diversity*.¹⁸ He took up elements of his previous writings: the image of charisms in the New Testament, which he transferred to present-day Christian churches; and the emphasis on the fact that unity can only be a gift of the Holy Spirit. He returned to the problem of the hierarchy of truths, underlining the development within the Roman church. He asserted that the hierarchy of truths is different in the various churches and also will remain so. But this did not disturb him unduly, for it fit with the New Testament message. The Holy Spirit always unites, not through uniformity but always in diversity. The salvation history of the New Testament is one of unity through diversity. This diversity was, however, seen to be wealth and abundance in the time of the apostles, not a reason for division. Cullmann suggested the New Testament model and especially the Jerusalem Council as an example to be taken up today. The principle of tolerance, which Cullmann had already stressed in nineteen-fifty-seven in connection with Paul's attitude toward the „weak in faith,“ should also be the basic ecumenical principle today. Thus he invited the churches to take up a salvation-historical approach to the New Testament. Even more than that, Cullmann understood church history itself to be an updating and continuation of salvation history.

Cullmann deliberately laid the emphasis on diversity, though diversity in no way meant that anything goes where the church is concerned. It must always be about a true communion among the churches. Therefore a common foundation is required. That

¹⁸ O. Cullmann : *L'unité par la diversité*. Cerf, Paris, 1986, Deutsche Fassung : *Einheit durch Vielfalt* Mohr, Tübingen, 1986.

foundation is given in the common appeal to the creeds of the first centuries, namely the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds. Cullmann knew well that a common celebration of the eucharist would be difficult, but it seemed to him that this should not be so upsetting, since it allowed the individual churches to conserve their own identities. Likewise a common structure did not seem desirable to him, since it would in any event founder on the question of the bishop of Rome.

Cullmann sought for a realization of this model and ultimately saw it in the World Council of Churches, which in his eyes followed this approach, even if there still remained much to be done. Here it must be noted that Cullmann wrote at a time in which a certain ecumenical optimism prevailed. His vision of the World Council of Churches has been refuted by its subsequent development and the fight for unity has become much more difficult than it was twenty-five years ago. The worldwide common council, which Cullmann advocated and which was at the time strongly striven for, is today farther away than ever.

Cullmann's book caused quite a sensation. Alongside much agreement there were also very critical voices. These pertained, first, to his use of the New Testament situation and its transferral to present-day churches, for example in his understanding of charisms and the weak in faith. The chief criticism concerned his suggested model of unity and his emphasis on unity *through* diversity as an apology for plurality... which was understood as thus preserving the divisions.

Cullmann answered his critics by publishing, at nearly ninety years of age, a new and improved edition in which he not only removed misunderstandings but also corrected his own opinion in certain ways.¹⁹ But he energetically defended his positive evaluation of diversity. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the New Testament concept of *koinonia* forbids understanding unity as uniformity.²⁰ Today, twenty years later, this is always emphasized in ecumenism, and the understanding of *unity in reconciled diversity* has prevailed in a far-reaching way. Still, it is always stressed that diversity is not to be prized in itself; its intention is to bring to expression the various forms of the commonly held faith. In nineteen-ninety, Cullmann argued that he did not think any differently than he had in the first version of his book, but he admitted that the expression *unity through diversity* can be replaced with *unity in diversity*.²¹ With this he shifted his previous emphasis and could thus defuse many criticisms.

In the first version of his book, Cullmann underlined his agreement with then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, today Benedict the Sixteenth. The church is not a sociological object but the body of Christ. It is not only the sum of the faithful but the temple of the Holy Spirit. We do not create the church; it is given by God.²² But Cullmann knew also about the distinction and wished for a Catholic Church that did not understand itself as already

¹⁹ O. Cullmann : *Les voies de l'unité chrétienne*. Cerf Paris 1992. Deutsche Fassung: *Einheit durch Vielfalt*, Mohr, Tübingen, 1990.

²⁰ Ibid p.33-37.

²¹ Ibid p.36.

²² *L'unité par la diversité* Op. cit. p. 118.

the ultimate. The tension between *already* and *not yet* applies to churches, too. Only in this tension does the present form of the church correspond to the various confessional forms that are represented in the salvation history of the New Testament.