
HANS-RUEDI WEBER

**The Story of Bossey: A Laboratory
for Ecumenical Life**

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THE *STORY of Bossey*, written by Hans-Ruedi Weber, a former director for Biblical Studies at the World Council of Churches and a professor at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, is a book that can be considered both a historical and a theological text. Published first in 1996, it was reprinted in a new version updated by Robert K. Welsh in 2016. These two years are meaningful for the ecumenical teaching institution, founded in 1946 at Bossey, in the vicinity of Geneva.

The book, with a foreword by Reverend Dagmar Heller, the academic dean of Bossey Ecumenical Institute (pp. VII–VIII), presents the history of a place seen as a laboratory of ecumenism, where important personalities like Hendrik Kraemer, Nikos Nissiotis, Paul Evdokimov and the current patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Daniel Ciobotea, taught for several years.

The volume, which contains an introduction (pp. 1–10), a chapter about the origins of Bossey (pp. 11–34), and seven long chapters, each presenting a certain period, followed by a long appendix that offers a list of Graduate School Themes (pp. 169–172) and staff (pp. 173–178), a bibliographical list (pp. 179–188) and an index of persons (pp. 188–191), speaks not only about the history of the institute as a school of ecumenism, but also about the idea of such an institution, about its surrounding environ-

ment and its importance, about the way in which international events and the relationships with the World Council of Churches influenced its history, its development, and the changes in its structure.

In some situations, where this is useful for the understanding of the context, the author speaks about important events in world history, connecting them with the history of Bossey. Thus, for example, before speaking about the evolution of the institution in the sixth decade of the 20th century, Hans-Ruedi Weber presents the international situation of the world and of Europe, highlighting the most important events that took place: “The time was marked by a mood of unrest and confrontation. In the East, de-Stalinization began in 1956, the year that saw the popular uprising and its ruthless suppression in Hungary. The uprising in Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1968 raised the hope that socialism with a human face would emerge—a hope crushed by Soviet tanks. In the West, the European Common Market was evolving and a West European parliament met for the first time in 1957” (p. 66).

On other occasions, the author speaks about the way in which the institute built bridges between different spiritualities and confessions. The following is such an example: “The major contribution of Bossey towards East-West reconciliation was a series of conferences prepared by Nissiotis. The first meeting introduced key people from the West to East European Culture and Church life, in order to prepare them for the encounter with Christians from there. The series continued with conferences on Eastern and Western spirituality, on God’s reconciling work among nations, and finally with a meeting on reconciliation and on international justice” (p. 86).

Romanian theology and some of its representatives are also present in the book. More than once, the author speaks about the work of Father Ioan Sauca (pp. 153–156), director of the institute from 2001 until today, who has the idea of “opening Bossey to the world” (p. 153), also seeking to develop the place and to bring in new facilities, but also about Daniel Ciobotea, whose presence there was special from many points of view: “In 1980 Dan-Ilie Ciobotea from Romania joined the Bossey staff. He had just completed studies in Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic theological faculties and his main research was on the relationships between theology and spirituality. Nissiotis and Panagopoulos were lay theologians and thinkers. During his time at Bossey, Ciobotea became a monk and was ordained as a priest. He not only taught but lived Orthodox spirituality. In 1988 he was called back to Romania for higher ecclesiastical duties, and became Metropolitan Daniel” (p. 106).

Therefore, the detailed presentation of each moment in Bossey’s history, with more than seven decades of ecumenical theological teaching for young theologians and scholars, is done in an interesting and synesthetic manner (also due to the pictures inserted in the book). The book shows that, at Bossey, despite difficult moments, the wish of dedicated people to bring together different confessions and cultures and to help them discover our common values was accomplished. It also demonstrates that these people were not afraid to face danger, unbelievable or even hostile attitudes, and they were not ashamed to present even the unpleasant moments in the history of the institution. For these reasons, the book is a model historiographical monograph. For all the others, Bossey is an existential model and the core of ecumenical laboratories.

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