



# **CONTINUATION COMMITTEE ON ECUMENISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

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**PAPERS FOR AND A REPORT ON THE  
FIRST MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE**

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Ecumenical Institute, Château de Bossey, Switzerland  
18-20 November 2007

# CONTINUATION COMMITTEE ON ECUMENISM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

**Papers for and a report on the first meeting of the committee held 18–20 November  
2007 at the Ecumenical Institute, Château de Bossey, Switzerland**

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## FOREWORD

The Policy Reference Committee of the ninth assembly of the World Council of Churches made it clear that:

*The process of reconfiguring the ecumenical movement is in large part an effort to “choreograph” the intricate relationships among the various ecumenical instruments and new ecumenical partners, so that clarity, transparency, communication and cooperative efforts mark those relationships, and allow the ecumenical movement as a whole to offer to the world, and to the regions and local churches the coherent grace-filled spiritual message of Christianity.*

*... The process that has been called “reconfiguration” should be understood not as a patching up of the existing ecumenical structures, but as a dynamic process to deepen the relationships of the ecumenical movement to its spiritual roots and missionary identity, reaffirm the relationship of the ecumenical instruments to the churches, clarify the relationships among the various ecumenical instruments, and ensure that the message and the effort be coordinated and coherent.*

The WCC constitution, under “Purposes and Functions of the WCC”, plainly states, “The WCC is constituted by the churches to serve the one ecumenical movement.” It is the role of the WCC to engage the wider ecumenical movement in constructive collaboration, and to provide leadership for the present and future development of the ecumenical movement.

There are three dimensions to the role of the WCC regarding its member churches and the wider ecumenical movement. First, there is the deepening of fellowship among the member churches. Then, there is the broadening of participation in the ecumenical movement, and, finally, the facilitating of greater coherence. These three dimensions reflect the relational reality of the triune God, and the *koinonia* at the heart of the fellowship of member churches. This *koinonia* is not our own property but a gift of God, who wants the churches to participate in God’s reconciling and healing mission. We can never limit this *koinonia* to ourselves; it compels us always to go beyond ourselves and to build new relationships, and to do so trusting in the mystery of God’s presence among the other. Furthermore, it is this trust that makes possible the building of the new relationships we seek.

I hope and pray that the work of the continuation committee on ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which has just begun, may help to foster relationships and build a vital and viable ecumenical movement for our times.

*The Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia  
General Secretary,  
World Council of Churches*



## FROM ECUMENICAL RECONFIGURATION TO ECUMENISM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

*By The Rev. Dr Robina Marie Winbush*

### ANTELIAS CONSULTATION

Responding to former WCC general secretary Konrad Raiser's invitation to "explore a new ecumenical configuration, which can respond effectively to the challenges that lie ahead in the 21<sup>st</sup> century"<sup>1</sup>, the World Council of Churches convened a gathering of theologians, church leaders, social scientists, ecumenists and others in Antelias, Lebanon from 17-20 November 2003. This relatively small group of people began a discussion about the changing global and ecclesial landscapes, and their implications for the ecumenical movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Antelias consultation on ecumenical reconfiguration was called to:

- analyse the main challenges presented by the changing world situation, and their implications for the configuration of the ecumenical movement;
- identify the key areas of change and renewal necessary for a reconfiguration;
- design a process of consultation and study that would lead to a report being made on the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement to the WCC central committee in 2005, and eventually to the WCC ninth assembly in 2006.<sup>2</sup>

As participants in the Antelias consultation noted, there are at least three ways to interpret the "reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement". The first relates to the question of the broadening of the ecumenical movement. It was noted that the Global Christian Forum is one mechanism that is attempting to address this question. The forum is an effort to increase the participation of Roman Catholics and Pentecostals in the global ecumenical movement.

The second interpretation relates to deepening the relationships between churches. Antelias acknowledged that this is primarily being addressed through bilateral dialogues and in other arenas.

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<sup>1</sup> General secretary's report to the August 2003 WCC central committee.

<sup>2</sup> *From Antelias with Love, Report of Consultation on the Reconfiguration of the Ecumenical Movement, November, 2003.*

In Antelias, a third interpretation seemed to capture most interest. This relates to the question of “how relationships can be strengthened between existing ecumenical actors to ensure greater coherence and effectiveness in our work”. This issue of greater coherence and effectiveness is directly related to the increase in ecumenical expressions over the past 50 years, and the multiplicity of relationships that churches must honour in their ecumenical commitments.

The participants in Antelias identified the following reasons for addressing the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement:

- to ensure that our structures are agile, and able to respond rapidly to changes in the world;
- to develop new methodologies, and to renew the confidence of churches to confront the forces of globalization and hegemony;
- to strengthen opportunities for all churches, including those that are not active participants in conciliar bodies, to work together more effectively;
- to ensure that ecumenical structures reflect the realities of the world and the churches by becoming less Euro-centric and more reflective of the churches in the South;
- to respond to the frustration of churches who are asked to participate in many ecumenical structures at many levels;
- to strengthen coherence in our programmes, and to avoid duplication in our activities;
- to respond to the fact that we operate in a market place characterized by competition for money, media, delivery of aid, and partners;
- to affirm the contributions of agencies/specialised ministries as an integral part of the ecumenical family, and to recognize that some agencies/specialized ministries yearn for closer cooperation with each other in order to respond to the pressures of a competitive environment and to be more effective in fulfilling their mandates;
- to strengthen the base of the ecumenical movement and to reach out to the grassroots;
- to increase the coherence of our common work by recognizing our mutual vulnerability, and by increasing mutual accountability, self-constraint, and the mutual nurturing of each other.<sup>3</sup>

It was agreed that a broader process of consultation was needed that would include the formal voices of churches, ecumenical partners and potential partners, in order to respond to the question of reconfiguring the ecumenical movement. The Antelias participants completed an analysis of current ecumenical structures and relationships. In response to the issues the Antelias consultation identified, the World Council of Churches initiated a process of inviting churches, individuals and ecumenical partners to meet together.

### CHAVANNES-DE-BOGIS 2004 CONSULTATION

A second and broader consultation took place from 30 November to 3 December 2004 in Chavannes-de-Bogis, Switzerland. This gathering brought together representatives from churches, agencies/specialized ministries, regional and national council of churches, Christian world communions, and international ecumenical organizations. Roman Catholic representatives and Pentecostal leaders also attended. In addition to this gathering being significantly larger than the earlier event in Antelias, participants this time clearly represented their entities and brought to the consultation the wisdom of dialogue within their organizations. The Chavannes consultation considered an analysis of changing geo-political and ecclesial realities, and there was a very helpful presentation on the mapping of the ecumenical movement, which highlighted the multiplicity of ecumenical relationships as well as the absence of coordination and coherence between organizations.

The theme of the second consultation indicated a change from what the first consultation had considered. The Antelias gathering had dealt with the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement, whereas the Chavannes-de-Bogis topic was that of envisioning ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The shift in description suggested also a shift in focus from a reconfiguration of what is, to an openness to what may become. It also indicated a movement from the survival of existing institutions to a more process-oriented exploration of new possibilities. The second consultation also brought significant participation and ownership in the process by agencies/specialized ministries and other ecumenical organizations. A major issue both directly on the table and indirectly in the discussions, was the proposal for a new table to bring together agencies and churches working in the area of development.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This issue was resolved with the establishment of ACT-Development in 2006. See [www.actdevelopment.org](http://www.actdevelopment.org).

The Chavannes-de-Bogis 2004 consultation offered the following vision for any discussion on structures and organizations:

The ecumenical movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be a special space:

- where increasing numbers of Christians are involved in the work of Christian unity, and the fellowship among the churches is strengthened;
- where an open and ecumenically minded culture is fostered in the everyday lives of people in their own contexts, and where ecumenical formation is a central focus at all levels of church life, from the local to the global;
- where spirituality is the basis of life of Christians together, and where, as individuals, churches and organizations, Christians can pray together and encourage each other to discern God's will for their lives;
- where all, including the marginalized and excluded, are welcomed into inclusive and loving communities;
- where relationships, built on mutual trust, are strengthened between all parts of the ecumenical family;
- where each Christian can be supported in practising responsible stewardship, and where churches and Christian organizations can be mutually accountable to each other;
- where the diversity of cultures and traditions is recognized as a source of creativity;
- where hospitality is shown towards those of different faiths, and where dialogue is encouraged;
- where women's visions of being church are shared;
- where young people are encouraged to join in and lead; .
- where the ministry of healing is carried out in shared actions;
- where the healing of memories leads to reconciliation;
- where, together, we are able to be prophetic in confronting the injustices and violence of the world, and to take risks in our commitment to justice and peace when Christ calls us to do so.<sup>5</sup>

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5 *Final statement from the consultation on ecumenism in the 21st century, December, 2004.*

Several recommendations directed toward the different constituent partners came out of the Chavannes-de-Bogis consultation. However, there was a strong affirmation of the need for the renewal and refreshing of the ecumenical movement in a way that would facilitate a greater sense of collaboration.

The 2006 ninth assembly of the WCC affirmed the process for continuing the discussion on ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both by encouraging member churches to engage in the process and the appointment of a continuation committee, together with requested reports from it to the WCC central committee.

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

As an ecumenical officer of a church that has sought to be faithful in its ecumenical commitments in an era of growing and at times competing expectations, I welcome this discussion as a timely dialogue for our church. We appreciate the WCC's invitational role in supporting the gathering of ecumenical partners that will make possible the exploring together of the shape of our future.

Of particular note is the vision/value statement that Chavannes-de-Bogis 2004 developed. The statement articulates clearly the values that have emerged in our continuing ecumenical relationships, and opens the door for us to discover new such values.

While this process pays particular attention to the question of facilitating greater coherence among ecumenical partners, the issues of broadening and deepening the ecumenical movement must not be forgotten. The Global Christian Forum, recently held in Nairobi, was an historic gathering. The values and vision of the Chavannes-de-Bogis 2004 consultation must find a place in the discussions, energy and passion of the GCF, which must itself infuse the ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century process. In addition, the challenges and changes in several of the Christian world communions must also inform this process.

There is still a need for further tracking (mapping) of programmatic work, and financial resources to support this work. As noted in the Chavannes-de-Bogis 2004 recommendation, this will serve as a tool to avoid duplication and foster greater cooperation

I remain prayerfully optimistic that the work of the continuation committee will facilitate a process that will enable us both to envision an ecumenism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and live with one another in new and transformative ways.

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: SIX CENTRAL QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

*By Georges Lemopoulos, Deputy General Secretary, World Council of Churches*

I have the great honour to welcome you warmly on behalf of the general secretary of the WCC.

The Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia has particularly entrusted me with the task of ensuring that you know the WCC is committed to participate actively in this new and common exploratory journey. The council is indeed determined to work, in close cooperation with all its partners, for the continuation of the process inaugurated some time ago and being reactivated today.

The policy statement called the *Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC*, adopted in 1998, highlighted the importance of relationships within the one ecumenical movement. These relationships are those between the WCC and regional, national and local councils of churches, and those with Christian world communions, international ecumenical organizations, and churches that are not members of the WCC, particularly the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical and Pentecostal churches. The statement clearly affirmed that a spirit of mutuality and cooperation should characterize these relationships, and do so by a practice of shared tasks and resources, and by a common policy of avoiding competition and ensuring the demarcation of areas of influence.

We come together now for the first meeting of the continuation committee that is one of the new instruments the council's consultative bodies have fully embodied. We are deeply aware that we are moving from the dynamics of a statement that defines the institutional policy, to a common journey during which shared ownership will have to prevail on any individual institutional interests.

In this spirit, our general secretary reaffirms the WCC's commitment to addressing today, together with ecumenical partners, the question of how relationships can be strengthened between ecumenical actors and partners in order to ensure a greater coherence of the ecumenical movement, and greater effectiveness in common Christian witness and service to the world.

## THE DELAY IN CONVENING THIS MEETING

We may begin with a few comments about the timing of our encounter. One could, rightly, regret the delay in organizing this first encounter of the continuation committee. There might be a number of explanations (the complexity of the nomination process, at least for some of the participants; pre- and post-assembly work loads for the WCC, etc.) but it is true that we could have dealt with this matter in a better way.

However, we could also look at the period from the Chavannes-de-Bogis 2004 consultation until now from a positive perspective. Indeed, since 2005, there have been significant developments that will undoubtedly inform the work of the continuation committee. These include general assemblies, the central place given to ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the council's programmatic activities, some advance in discussions with specialized ministries, the discussion on "expanded assemblies", and the first meeting of the Global Christian Forum.

A few of these developments are already included in the agenda of our meeting. Therefore, we should consider the moment of our encounter an appropriate moment, a *kairos* that can mark the whole process.

## SIX QUESTIONS

I do not intend to develop any comprehensive analysis here; that will be your task. Rather, I wish to offer a discussion starter. For that, I will simply invite us to consider the six questions the WCC general secretary proposed to the consultation on ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,<sup>6</sup> when he made his opening remarks.

Here, after a restatement of each of Dr Kobia's original questions, I offer some thoughts that my colleagues and I developed as we prepared ourselves for this meeting:

### 1. What Is the Vision of the Ecumenical Movement (its marks and core values)?

Fragmentation today is not just a consequence of the proliferation of ecumenical organizations; it is also a consequence of the fact that centrifugal forces are, at this stage, not being countered by the vision of unity and common witness that the WCC embodied in the past. Fragmentation has become a mark not only of the ecumenical movement but also of ecclesial life. "While people say that Christianity is growing in Africa, Christianity is being fractured in Africa", says South African Bishop Mvume Dandala<sup>7</sup>.

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6 *Ecumenism in the 21st Century, Report of the Consultation Convened by the WCC, Chavannes-de-Bogis, 30 November-3 December 2004, WCC, Geneva, 2005, pp. 33-37.*

7 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

The basis for the old threefold vision of unity, witness and service (*koinonia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*) seems increasingly not understood. The concept of unity has become opaque and is challenged in various ways. An expression of this is the prevalence given to clarity (truth) in issues of personal ethics and morality, and to traditional life styles that are to be defended against new relativizing influences. These things are being done at the expense of common, multilateral efforts towards greater unity.

Under the impact of the changing context (globalization, shifts in social organization, the changing ecclesial landscape, and religious plurality and tensions), the broader ecumenical movement has lost its common vision and structure. There are claims for the ecumenical movement's renewal and its radical redefinition, including the search for alternatives to the terms "ecumenical" and "ecumenism". There are also different entry points to and ways of looking at the vision. The question, then, is a matter of how we can go beyond our own "internal" ways of articulating the vision and begin to discern and embrace other points of emphasis and interpretations of the vision. We must consider what it is that we value together and how we can support it.

## 2. How Can We Balance the Broadening and Deepening of the Fellowship (emphasis on accountability)?

Pursuing the deepening of the fellowship and broadening participation in the ecumenical movement are two tasks not without tensions and possible conflicts between them.

In the light of recent developments (the Global Christian Forum; the formation of new ecumenical organizations, following the model of "Christian Churches Together", that include in their membership Pentecostals, evangelicals, etc.), we may need to ask, "Are the ways in which we describe the tension (i.e. membership versus participation, accountability versus opting in, etc.) really adequate?" and, "Do we need to review the underlying perceptions, assumptions?"



### 3. How Far are we Willing to Change (who? just the WCC?)

When the process of considering ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century began, the emphasis was on the institutional aspect of the ecumenical movement. Therefore, the tentative terminology used included concepts such as “architecture” and “configuration”. There has since been a shift in the thinking, and it is becoming increasingly clear that at this early stage of the process we must respond with clarity and determination to a fundamental question.

The question is, “Do we seek incremental change, i.e. mere institutional, managerial solutions/arrangements, or a deep change, a radical conversion, i.e. new ways of thinking and behaving, and new ways of relating to one another?” What would each option mean for individual actors in the ecumenical movement? What would be the role, or the expected contribution, of the WCC? We are aware that this last question is already high on our agenda, particularly when we are challenged to conceive and prepare for the next WCC assembly in a different way.

### 4. Who Sets the Agenda (youth/marginalized/new voices)?

Our efforts to re-articulate the vision and fundamental values of the ecumenical movement should be coupled with an effort to explore the best possibilities for an inclusive agenda. Some questions may help us in this task:

- Whose voices are marginalized, and how would it be possible to listen together to these voices?
- Is there a newly emerging common agenda beyond the old dividing lines of Pentecostals, evangelicals, “ecumenicals”, etc. in Africa, Asia and Latin America? If so, how could challenges from the local/regional contexts influence reflection and efforts at the global level?
- To what extent do different ecumenical organizations respond to the realities of the churches in terms of the crises and blessings the churches experience, and to their hopes? Would there be greater synergy if the reality of the churches more clearly informed the agenda?

### 5. How Can we Ensure That Spirituality is at the Centre?

The late Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios spelled out some elements of an alternative vision for churches and ecumenical organizations that would ensure a spiritual vision and attitude was at the centre of all of our work. “In this alternative perception of reality, the centrality of humanity will not, as in the secular perception, be of a domineering nature but will be entirely mediatorial, i.e. manifesting wisdom, power, glory, beauty, goodness and love, not humanity’s own but wholly dependent upon and derived from the transcendent, as well as embodying in ourselves the whole universe as we offer it up along with our own

living selves to the transcendent in loving adoration.”<sup>8</sup> The question that we have seriously to consider here is, “Are we driven fundamentally by a spiritual vision and theological insights, or by mere organizational momentum?”

6. How Do we Ensure Constant Renewal (youth, ecumenical formation?)

This is probably an area where we observe a wide consensus. Ecumenical formation is high on the agenda of many ecumenical players. It constitutes an area where a significant exchange of resources is already taking place. Ecumenical formation is considered one of the most important ways of bringing about the renewal of both churches and ecumenical organizations. A look at the Ecumenical Institute that hosts our consultation today will certainly confirm this perception. In addition, we have a significant indicator in that the need for ecumenical formation is surfacing not only in all visits to member churches but also in common agendas with ecumenical partners, e.g. the joint working group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC, and the relationships that exist between the WCC and specialized ministries.

A question we may have to tackle here would relate to how we might become more intentional and strategic in this area.

## A WORD OF CONCLUSION

As we look at the lives of our respective churches and the work of our respective ecumenical organizations, there is no doubt that changes are taking place on practically every front. Most of these changes are the natural consequence of the immense challenges humankind is facing today. The times, therefore, call for discernment and courageous visions of hope.

We are called to “read the signs of the times” together, and to discern the best ways of sharing the good news with the world so that “the world may believe”. It will not be easy but we trust each other and count on each other. More than this, we trust the Holy Spirit, and prayerfully ask the Paraclete to guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Mar Gregorios, *Towards a New Enlightenment*, quoted by Fr K.M. George in “*The Orthodox Tradition and Transfigurative Ethics*”, in *Grace in Abundance: Orthodox Reflections on the Way to Porto Alegre*, WCC, Geneva, 2005, p. 62.

## ECUMENISM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: 12 THESES FOR DISCUSSION

*By The Rev. Dr Rudolf von Sinner<sup>9</sup>*

In my ecumenism class, I have begun to ask students to do a short research project on a church other than their own. Such churches are not difficult to find; as you may know, churches of all sorts and names abound in Brazil.<sup>10</sup> Among a number of the aspects of a church's profile (worship, parish life, doctrine, mission, service, etc.) at which I ask students to look, I include the church's position on ecumenism. The response of a Baptist minister to a student's question was particularly interesting. He said he was in favour of dialogue between the churches but strongly rejected ecumenism! I have often found such an attitude while teaching courses for ministers from a variety of churches. The ministers know little about ecumenism and, if anything, have a very negative view of it. This applies within the historic Protestant churches of Brazil, among which Baptists form the majority (over three million members), and for Pentecostals, who are by far the largest and fastest growing group in Brazil not only through attracting non-Catholics but also many Roman Catholics. Among Catholics, indifference or a sense of superiority to ecumenism may be stronger than outright rejection of it, but there are still those who go for combat and continue to call most Protestant churches sects.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in the context in which I have been living for nearly seven years, and with which I have been interacting for more than eleven years, ecumenism is either a non-existent or dirty word.<sup>12</sup> However, in a course I gave recently for 52 theology professor-teachers, mainly Baptists and Pentecostals, and with some Methodists, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics, it was clear how, after one year of regular meetings for intensive classes, the participants had learnt to live and work together. Whilst they did not necessarily all agree, they had grown to respect each other and recognize they were all believers and followers of Christ. No

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9 *The Rev. Dr Rudolf von Sinner is Swiss, and professor of systematic theology, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue at the Lutheran School of Theology (EST) in São Leopoldo/Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, as well as the school's dean for postgraduate studies and research. Ordained in the Reformed Church of the Canton of Basel-Stadt, Switzerland, von Sinner now serves as a minister of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, where he is also a member of the church presidency's advisory group on ecumenism. He has served on various committees and delegations of and to the WCC, including the Commission on Faith and Order (1999-2006), and now thanks Prof. Christine Lienemann-Perrin (Basel) and Prof. Nelson Kilpp (EST) for having gone through a first draft of this paper and giving very helpful comments.*

10 Cf. Gerd-Uwe Kliewer, "Effervescent Diversity: Religions and Churches in Brazil Today", in *The Ecumenical Review*, 57/3, 2005, pp. 314-321.

11 Cf. Pe. Flaviano Amatulli Valente, *A Igreja Católica e as seitas. Perguntas e Respostas. S.I. (Niterói: Arquidiocese de Niterói)*, 1998, who affirms on p. 4, "Hopefully, (this book) will be able to favour this authentic vaccination against the virus of the sects, which are causing so much harm to the unity wanted by Christ." Controversially, a moderate and well informed panorama of Christian plurality is Jesus Hortal, *Guia Eumênico: Informações, Normas e Diretrizes sobre Ecumenismo*, 3rd revised ed., São Paulo, Paulus, 2003.

12 See, for example and among others, the following quote from the Apologetic Christian Centre for Research (CACR), which affirms, "Never can a genuinely Protestant and/or Evangelical church hold on to the biblical doctrines in one hand, and with the other hold hands with the Roman Catholic Church and their heretical doctrines. This is confusion of the gravest kind!", at <http://www.cacr.org.br/cat-ecumefacha.htm> (viewed 14/08/2004).

longer did prejudice prevail; relationships and a good degree of trust had been established, not least through an academic and, thus, reasonably objective course of study accompanied by the authentic personal faith and sensitivity that the teachers showed. One of the group's main worries had been whether Lutherans were really believers or just abstract academics; they were pleased and relieved to discover that Lutherans also know how to pray and live as Christians. They were astonished to find out so much about an ecumenism so different from what they had been taught, and wanted to know more, try more, and do more. They wrote excellent ecumenical projects on topics such as celebrating Christian festivals together, joining choirs for musical events and training, and cooperating in social projects. Whilst all acknowledged that, doctrinally, approximation was and remained difficult, the theologians saw possibilities at the local level, especially in concrete cooperation for the common good or in doctrinally less central matters.

I tell this story not only for you to be able to locate me in my present context but also to underline one of the main arguments that runs through my reflections. This is that grass-roots ecumenism has to be fostered wherever possible, and mediated with formal, institutional ecumenism; thus, the mediating agents are particularly important.<sup>13</sup> Among such agents, I believe that ecumenical officers and teachers of ecumenism have a crucial role to play.

On reading the preparatory material for this consultation, I noted that there has been a certain shift in the focus of our work. We have moved from what has been termed “a reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement”, and one seemingly focused on more technical matters like dates and modalities of assemblies, to “ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” that takes a broader view on what ecumenism could and should be in this new era. Although I believe that the rationalization of ecumenical events and institutions is important, it should be accompanied by a wide reflection on the nature and mission of the ecumenical movement as a whole, in its various facets, and with its diverse agents. Indeed, in what follows I will try to combine concrete proposals with that wider horizon as I see it.

Knowing that such a sizeable theme is far too heavy for any individual to bear, I was reminded of Jeremiah, who, when God called him, said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly, I do not know how to speak” (Jer. 1:6). Still, given that I was called to speak, I opted for presenting a number of theses that, of course, reflect the priorities I see from my own experience and reflection, and which I hope will facilitate a discussion with all of you on the issues and visions for ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although I am presenting my theses in good Lutheran company, I can assure you that I will be shorter than Luther and cite only twelve theses, not 95. Twelve is a good number, and biblically meaningful.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. on “base ecumenism”, Gerhard Tiel, *Ecumenismo e Reino de Deus, São Leopoldo, Sinodal, 1998*; Julio de Santa Ana, *Ecumenismo e Libertação, Petrópolis, Vozes, 1987*; Elias Wolff, *Caminhos do Ecumenismo no Brasil, São Paulo, Paulus, 2001*.

I had been asked to give a “creative contribution on the contextual challenges of the ecumenical movement and its organizations that have to be born in mind by the continuation committee”.<sup>14</sup> I have contemplated this task. However, I have opted not to present yet another broad analysis of the present moment because I feel they already abound.

I take it for granted that all of us have noted various pertinent things:

- the centre of gravity of Christianity has moved to the South;<sup>15</sup>
- the globalization and opening up of the world brings with it also fragmentation and fundamentalism;<sup>16</sup>
- ecumenism is in crisis or transition,<sup>17</sup> and these two elements are usually intertwined (one can ask whether ecumenism has ever not been in crisis, which positively speaking can be a time of discernment and creativity);
- religions can foster war or peace and, therefore, for peace to exist among nations, peace among religions is necessary.<sup>18</sup>

What I intend to do is to formulate a number of affirmations and proposals that I hope will be able to lead us into a fruitful discussion.

**Thesis 1. There can be no ecumenical movement other than one built on trust, and firstly on trust in God, who in Christ became human and is present through the Holy Spirit. Based on this trust, we can risk trusting each other. This makes us vulnerable but it is the only way to build meaningful relationships. In many instances, however, it is precisely trust that is lacking, with even outright competition reigning and trust consciously being destroyed.**

Twenty years ago, Júlio de Santa Ana stated rightly that, “It is exactly the lack of trust in faith itself (that) leads to isolationist attitudes that, beyond being expressions of religious narcissism, do not correspond with the dynamics of the Christian faith”.<sup>19</sup> What lack of trust leads to, at least in the Brazilian context, is fierce competition between different churches in which all invoke the name of Christ and the triune God, but do not give any thought to what it could mean that a neighbouring church does the same. A survey carried

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<sup>14</sup> E-mail from Martin Robra, 4 September, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002; Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Carmichael, Touchstone, 1998; Ulrich Menzel, *Globalisierung versus Fragmentierung*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1998; Sérgio Costa, *Vom Nordatlantik zum “Black Atlantic”*: Postkoloniale Konfigurationen und Paradoxien transnationaler Politik, Bielefeld, Transcript, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition*, Geneva, WCC, 1994; David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, New York, Continuum, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Santa Ana, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

out in the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area in the early 1990s found that six new churches were being founded every single week.<sup>20</sup> Some of these churches meet in buildings the size of a garage, with maybe fifty members; others have expanded and have hundreds or thousands of adherents. Church names are becoming increasingly creative: the Evangelical Church of the Abomination of Awry Life, Church Explosion of Faith, the Evangelical Pentecostal Church of the Last Embarkation to Christ, the Automotive Church of the Holy Fire, the Evangelical Association Faithful, even the Below Water, Baptist Church Blast of Blessings, the Evangelical Crusade of Pastor Waldevino Coelho the Supreme, the Church of the Seven Trumpets of the Apocalypse, Igreja I.A.W.B. (I Also Want the Blessing), the Evangelical Pentecostal Church Spirit of Christ.<sup>21</sup> There are a number of sociological, spiritual and theological reasons why this is taking place, which we have no time here to examine.<sup>22</sup> It is clear, though, that mistrust rather than trust is being fostered. The “others”, even if Christians, are to various degrees considered enemies.

However, living together both as humans and, more specifically, as Christians, presupposes trust.<sup>23</sup> The ecumenical movement cannot work without trust, which is built up slowly through personal interaction. Ecumenism begins with and is sustained by personal relationships. Of course, nobody can be forced to trust. Trust involves risk and vulnerability. It is a kind of bet in that we offer our trust to another, who we do not yet know well but from whom we expect that he or she will honour our trust, given that we all believe in the same Christ and trinity. Although we know that we are all *iusti et peccatores*, saints and sinners, at one and the same time, our trust in God liberates us to trust our brothers and sisters. A “hermeneutics of trust”, as outlined in the Faith and Order study on ecumenical hermeneutics, implies the we “reckon with the possibility that the Spirit speaks within and through the others,” and that “those who interpret the Christian tradition differently each have a “right intention of faith”.<sup>24</sup> It is possible that Christian groups and churches become partners and invest trust in each other because, in the words of Dietrich Ritschl, “it is ultimately God whom they trust to be able to comprehend the differences between them, intellectually heavy or nearly unbridgeable as they may be”.<sup>25</sup>

20 Rubem César Fernandes et al, *Novo Nascimento: Os evangélicos na Igreja, em Casa e na Política, Rio de Janeiro, Mauad, 1998.*

21 Carlos Fernandes, Luciana Mazzarelli, “Igrejas para todos os gostos”, in *Eclésia*, 8/91, 2003, pp. 44-49.

22 Cf. the attempt to understand the phenomenon of Pentecostalism and Neopentecostalism sociologically and theologically, Richard Shaull and Waldo César, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches: Promises, Limitations, Challenges*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000. While sociological studies on the issue abound, theological reflections are still scarce.

23 Cf. Rudolf von Sinner, “Trust and ‘convivência’: Contributions to a Hermeneutics of Trust in Communal Interaction”, in *The Ecumenical Review*, 57/3, 2005, pp. 322-341.

24 Commission on Faith and Order, *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels. Faith and Order Commission Paper, No. 182*, Geneva, WCC, 1998, paragraphs 8 and 30.

25 Dietrich Ritschl, *Theorie und Konkrektion in der Ökumenischen Theologie: Kann es eine Hermeneutik des Vertrauens inmitten differierender semiötscher Systeme geben? Münster, LIT, 2003*, p. 57.

**Thesis 2. To be able to relate meaningfully and with trust to others, it is necessary that we, as Christians and churches, adopt attitudes marked by honesty, humility and mutual accountability. Any criticism of another has to begin with self-criticism (Matt. 7:3-5). Confession of our sins against God and each other, and God's and our mutual forgiveness are central. Before we judge, we should seek to understand. Ecumenical space should provide a roundtable where Christians can dream together rather than have a nightmare.<sup>26</sup>**

Dialogue, be it between Christians and their churches, or between religions, is not an easy task; much patience is needed to be able to overcome the inevitable disagreements and conflicts that come up in the process. Mutual respect and openness, as well as a common search for truth, cooperation, and *convivência* (conviviality, i.e., per Theo Sundermeier, living together meaningfully as a learning, helping and celebrating community<sup>27</sup>) are crucial in order to survive and sustain dialogue. Between churches, “mutual accountability” has become a central term, and one that Olav Fykse Tveit interprets as an “ethical attitude” towards each other.<sup>28</sup> This implies the seeking of an ecumenical hermeneutics in reading and interpreting together the gospel in its tradition, and in reading and interpreting each other as to our being the Church.<sup>29</sup> It also implies the setting up, as a minimum, of rules of conduct between the churches, as does the *Charta Oecumenica* that seeks to “promote an ecumenical culture of dialogue and co-operation at all levels of church life”.<sup>30</sup> Recent moves to create a code of conduct in terms of conversion and proselytism are also significant. One such ancient code that is combined with a strong call to unity, is in Ephesians 4:1-3: “I, therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love, and making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

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26 Cf. Musimbi Kanyoro, “Dreams and Visions: Living the Deepening Contradictions of Ecumenism in the 21st Century”, in *Ecumenism in the 21st Century: Report of the Consultation Convened by the World Council of Churches, Chavannes-de-Bogis, Switzerland, 30 November to 3 December 2004*, pp. 58-65.

27 Theo Sundermeier, “Konvivenz als Grundstruktur ökumenischer Existenz”, in Wolfgang Huber, Dietrich Ritschl, Theo Sundermeier, *Ökumenische Existenz heute, München, Chr. Kaiser, 1986*, pp. 49-100.

28 Olav Fykse Tveit, *Mutual Accountability as Ecumenical Attitude: A Study in Ecumenical Ecclesiology Based on Faith and Order Texts 1948-1998*, doctoral dissertation, Oslo, Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology, 2001.

29 *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, op. cit.

30 CEC/CCEE, *Charta Oecumenica: Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe*, Geneva, CEC, St Gallen, CCEE, 2001, p. 4.

**Thesis 3. Our relationships are meaningful only if they become concrete and have visible consequences. If I am being ecumenical at a WCC meeting, I should be even more so at home in my church. Such visible consequences can include prayer for each other in our common services, mutual offerings, and the providing of space for the celebrations of churches that have no buildings available.**

This can be very difficult, especially if a church resists ecumenism. In this case, trustful relationships with fellow Christians from other churches can help strengthen our commitment. Ideally, the legitimate diversity of churches, while we still acknowledge they are churches, and even if their precise ecclesial status and character might be questioned, would be recognized through praying for them in the normal worship services of any individual church. Some years ago, the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches in Hamburg decided to include a prayer for each other in every liturgical celebration. I have no information as to whether and how this works but I find it a very significant initiative, which I hope will find other followers. Further, as money is a carrier of many messages, including that of inter-church solidarity, I still find Oscar Cullmann's desire for mutual offerings relevant. In 1958, he called for such an offering between Catholics and Protestants on the basis of Galatians 2: 9-10, where Paul wrote, "... when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do."<sup>31</sup> Another example of mutual offering is when a local church makes its buildings available for use by churches that do not have their own spaces for worship. It is by such actions that ecumenism becomes concrete and visible to all, and does so far beyond what may be achieved by meetings of experts or occasional common celebrations.

<sup>31</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Katholiken und Protestanten: Ein Vorschlag zur Verwirklichung christlicher Solidarität*, Basel, Friedrich Reinhardt, 1958.



**Thesis 4. The ecumenical movement is primarily a network of relationships between Christians, churches, agencies and ecumenical bodies. Within this network, the WCC has a unique role to play because of its historical importance and its regional, confessional and thematic inclusiveness. To maintain, widen and deepen this network, to foster relationships, and guarantee coherence is a noble task for the WCC.**

The WCC has been able to count on experienced staff, many of whom have been or have become important leaders in their own traditions and the ecumenical movement. Most of these people have not only been well trained academically, but also trained through exposure and relating to very different people, churches and contexts. The *homo oecumenicus* and *femina oecumenica* are important facilitators for the processes of encounter, the creation of relationships, and reflection, as outlined above. To widen and deepen the ecumenical network seems a difficult, even contradictory task, because investing in one might reduce the possibility of achieving the other. Still, both are necessary and relevant for our times. Too narrow an ecumenical movement will not represent the width and diversity of today's Christianity; too shallow a movement will result in something merely fashionable and unsustainable.

**Thesis 5. The ecumenical movement makes best sense when it is gathered around a common goal. This is traditionally defined as “the unity we seek”. However, this aim tends to be abstract and, even more, subject to very different interpretations. Thus, more concrete goals, from practical cooperation to strengthening relationships between congregations, and participation in the struggle for a more just, democratic and peaceful world, can gather Christians and churches, as well as other groups, and facilitate relationships.**

This is not simply to advocate a “Life and Work” agenda over against a “Faith and Order” one. Such a dichotomy should be overcome very quickly, as practical and ethical issues are based on theological options, and vice versa. Thus, if unity is not lived concretely, any conceptual reflections on it will be in vain. On the other hand, a mere activism that does not seek to ground itself in faith, or to reflect theologically on what it means to be, live and work together, will eventually burn itself out and not be able to sustain the togetherness that is reached through lived fellowship. In any case, the clearer the motivations and concrete goals, the more plausible ecumenism will be for congregations and churches.

**Thesis 6. The churches' identities are best expressed in their mission. How a church describes itself also defines its missionary and ecumenical identity. The classical dimensions of martyrria, diakonia, leitourgia and kerygma in building koinonia show the various facets of mission as they define the Church. The sending of the 70 (or 72) in Luke 10, as well as the encounter of Philip with the eunuch (Acts 8) clearly show these various facets.**

The two stories just mentioned are, to me, among the most intriguing for discovering the purpose and mission of the Church. In the eunuch's story, Philip draws near (martyria) and explains the scriptures (kerygma); the result is the eunuch's baptism (leitourgia) and inclusion into the Church (koinonia). In the sending out of the 70 in Luke 10, Jesus stresses the risk of mission as he describes the disciples being sent like "lambs into the midst of wolves" (martyria), and being forbidden to take anything with them. They are to wish peace to any house they enter, share any food they will be served (koinonia), cure the sick (diakonia), and only then proclaim that "the kingdom of God has come near" (kerygma). Whatever defines the Church defines its mission, and whatever defines mission defines the Church. Thus, a church is missionary not as something additional to its nature but because being missionary is intrinsic to it. As the Faith and Order document on *The Nature and Mission of the Church* says, "The mission of the Church is to serve the purpose of God as a gift given to the world in order that all may believe," (cf. John 17:21) and "mission ... belongs to the very being of the Church".<sup>32</sup>

Dialogue on doctrinal issues can be very difficult but when it comes to pastoral issues, all of a sudden the Orthodox priest and the Lutheran minister feel very close to each other. Reflecting together on the way we prepare a sermon and the concerns we hold while doing this, as we did in a working group during the 2002 Faith and Order consultation on ecumenical hermeneutics in Strasbourg, can lead, as it did then in Strasbourg, to a similar result among the ministers present from various churches. Thank God there are a good number of examples where pastoral care, preaching the gospel, and even sacramental hospitality are extended beyond one's confession or denomination in cases of need. Now, if what we do in pastoral care and preaching are so similar, how can we say we have nothing in common doctrinally? This would seem only to be possible where doctrine and pastoral practice are disconnected, and attempts are made to prevent the latter informing the former.

<sup>32</sup> Commission on Faith and Order, *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement* (Geneva: WCC, 2005), Faith and Order Commission Paper, No. 198, paragraphs 34f.

**Thesis 7. One of the central problems for the ecumenical movement is the lack or malfunctioning of communication between its different actors. Even more seriously, large numbers of lay people and clergy have no knowledge about ecumenism, or have a highly distorted image. Thus, mediators are urgently needed to link up local, national, regional and global ecumenism. Ecumenical officers and teachers of ecumenism have an important role to play in this, and should be better organized into networks. A “mobile Bossey” would also be a helpful instrument.**

It has become customary to hold ecumenical formation courses parallel to large ecumenical and confessional meetings, such as the 2004 WARC 24<sup>th</sup> general council in Accra, Ghana. Another example is the ecumenical congress that ran parallel to the 2006 WCC ninth assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil.<sup>33</sup> These events were excellent and even relatively cheap ways of extending the dynamics of such large gatherings. The same has been true regarding the presence at global gatherings of ecumenists from all over the world, who have then at the venues been available to students of theology and young persons in general. An added feature has been that the experienced ecumenists have themselves been exposed to local contexts. The problem is that such initiatives, important as they are, are isolated events and reach a limited number of people. Furthermore, we will not be able to provide a continuous and widely accessible ecumenical formation around the world unless we establish a structure for providing it. I believe that Bossey should become more mobile and hold ecumenical summer schools around the globe in partnership with local churches and seminaries.<sup>34</sup> Not least, those who are mediators of ecumenism by profession, viz. ecumenical officers and teachers of ecumenism, should be members of networks that provide exchange opportunities, training and, not least, encouragement and mutual strengthening.

**Thesis 8. By building up a network of ecumenical facilitators, the organizations, churches and faculties to which they belong could contribute by providing personnel and the infrastructure for meetings, resources for study and prayer, translation services, and in-depth contextual and theological analyses. These contributions towards the ecumenical movement would, therefore, be not only in content and methodology, but also of a material kind.**

What I mean here by ecumenical facilitators goes beyond the already mentioned ecumenical officers and teachers of ecumenism to include people with strong communication abilities, who are able to mediate grassroots ecumenism to more formal and institutional ways of living and reflecting upon ecumenism. As churches make such people available to the

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<sup>33</sup> See, Rudolf von Sinner, “Report of the Ecumenical Congress 2006: Mission and Ecumenism in Latin America, São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, 12-25 February, 2006”, in *Ministerial Formation* 107, 2006, pp. 53-57; “A Time of Challenge and Sharing: The Ecumenical Congress on Mission and Ecumenism in Latin America”, in *The Ecumenical Review* 58/3-4, 2006, pp. 280-286.

<sup>34</sup> Talking to the director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Fr Dr Ioan Sauca, during this consultation, I realized that this is being planned in collaboration with partners from various regions, as a “Bossey by extension” both for students of theology and lay people.

ecumenical movement, and churches and related institutions contribute with infrastructure or respond to specific requests (e.g. a seminary or faculty being asked to elaborate a specific study or comment on an existing one), ownership and commitment will be enhanced. In any event, local communities should be included as much as possible through visits from and interacting with ecumenical gatherings.

**Thesis 9. Thorough theological work remains central to the ecumenical movement. Although theological reflection is by no means restricted to the Faith and Order commission, it is in that most inclusive of all theological bodies that traditionally the most concentrated theological work has been done, and a number of important documents have been produced. However, it is questionable whether the current functioning of Faith and Order is adequate for today. Faith and Order could possibly work better in creating theological networks, funding small regional and theme-oriented consultations, and circulating and inviting work done by a variety of people and institutions around the globe.**

This thesis is based on my experience of over a decade of interaction with Faith and Order during which I also served for a period as a member of the plenary commission, where I represented the Swiss Protestant churches. What I can say from this very rich experience, I say out of critical solidarity. Thus, as I see it, Faith and Order's work is too centralized on a few people, and politicized as to whom is nominated to serve on it. This is something, of course, not unknown in other sectors in the WCC and beyond. For a wider public, Faith and Order texts are virtually unintelligible; for academic theologians, they are often weak and bland; for church leaders, they are either too radical or too shallow, and are either rejected or adapted to what churches already believe and practice. On the other hand, many excellent theologians and theological institutions are and feel left out, as I have been told many times in many places. These teachers and schools are dissatisfied either with the meagre academic quality or, conversely, the too abstract style of ecumenical theological work and documents. This is a problem for all ecumenical documents that come out of a long drafting process. Indeed, an ecumenical statement belongs to a very specific literary genre, and only in limited cases has a publication created a wide discussion; the best known example is, of course, the so-called Lima document on baptism, the eucharist and ministry.<sup>35</sup>

Realistically speaking, it is practically impossible to have a meaningful dialogue at one meeting in seven years with 120 persons present, many of whom have not, or have not much, interacted previously with their peers. As I said in public during the Kuala Lumpur Faith and Order plenary commission meeting in 2004, I believe a standing commission of 30 people would be enough to steer the work of Faith and Order (as in fact it already does).

<sup>35</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Geneva, WCC, 1983, Commission on Faith and Order Commission Paper, No.111.*

The plenary commission could then function through small consultations and commissioned studies and contributions, and do so as a network of theologians invited for their competence, together with others who might not formally be members of the commission but have a contribution to make on specific issues.<sup>36</sup> A specific challenge seems to me to be the present overstating of moral issues, especially the discussion on the status of homosexuals in the Church and their possible ordination, and blessings of same sex marriages, which is all built up by many to be the most divisive issue for the churches, and more important than any doctrinal issues such as baptism, the eucharist and ministry. The discussion on sexuality and homosexuality is important and legitimate but I see an urgent need to put it in its due and relatively inferior place within a kind of hierarchy of truths.<sup>37</sup>

**Thesis 10. There is the great danger of a continuous “clericalization” of the ecumenical movement. Although it is important that church leaders, usually clergy, own and participate in the ecumenical movement, it is lay people who form the majority of those active in the oikoumene. It is also among the laity that women are much more widely represented than among clergy in general and church leaders in particular. Thus, the strong lay participation and leadership that gave rise to the organization of the ecumenical movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and marked the efforts of the 1950s and 1960s, should be renewed in appropriate ways.**

I am aware that in many contexts lay people have little time to spend in and for the church. This applies not only to men but increasingly also to women, who are the grassroots backbone of all churches of which I know. Women are the bearers of faith and ecumenism in their congregations and places of work, and thus deserve to be heard and to hear about the ecumenical movement. On the other hand, clergy and church leaders are predominantly male and, by this fact, represent only partially the people (*laos*) of God.<sup>38</sup> The roots of the modern ecumenical movement lie strongly in lay movements such as the World Student Christian Federation and its affiliates.<sup>39</sup> It is crucial, I believe, to retrieve the enormous contribution the *laos theou* (1 Peter 2:10) can make toward ecumenism. Not least, in mixed marriages people testify to ecumenism through their lives, and this can be of great “ecumenical importance” rather than just a problem for the churches involved.<sup>40</sup> It is urgent that churches, all of whom uphold family values, help rather than complicate such relationships.

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36 For a summary of the plenary discussion on the future of Faith and Order in Kuala Lumpur, see Thomas F. Best, ed., *Faith and Order at the Crossroads: Kuala Lumpur 2004, The Plenary Commission Meeting*. Geneva, WCC, 2005, *Faith and Order Commission Paper*, No. 196, pp. 383-385. Speakers generally seemed to maintain the importance of having a proper plenary commission meeting but recognized the various problems this implied, and pressed for more than one meeting, or at least one meeting, early in the commission's mandate. The standing commission has taken up the latter suggestion and is planning to hold a plenary commission meeting in 2009, in Buenos Aires.

37 The new Faith and Order study on moral discernment might be an important contribution here.

38 Cf. Jill Hawkey, “Mapping the Oikoumene: A Study of Current Ecumenical Structures and Relationships”, in *Ecumenism in the 21st Century: Report of the Consultation Convened by the World Council of Churches* Geneva, WCC, 2005, pp. 66-80, p. 73.

39 Cf. Elisabeth Adler and Jonah Katoneene, “Laity”, in Nicholas Lossky et al, eds, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. 2nd ed., Geneva, WCC, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2002, pp. 658-664.

40 John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation “Familiaris Consortio”: On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, 22 November, 1981, No. 78: “Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons ... contain numerous elements that could well be made good

**Thesis 11. There is a continuous and possibly growing importance of an “assembly of the people of God”, i.e. a gathering of Christians along the lines of the padare held in 1998 at the WCC eighth assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, and the mutirão that took place at the 2006 ninth assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Both these events happened as the assemblies went about their normal business. Special events for young people and students of theology are also important factors that could give local and global visibility to such gatherings of Christians, and make possible interaction between delegates and engaged Christians. Open participation at such “assemblies of the people of God” would be extremely important and meaningful, with the participants or their churches often paying the cost of attending.**

I have heard criticisms that WCC assemblies tend to be inefficient, and that the doing of the “real” business is distorted because of the celebrational and participative character of the events, which are not only gatherings of delegates but of all who wish to participate in order to get to know others, present themselves to others, and get to know the ecumenical movement in a kind of world *Kirchentag*. Although I understand the worries about the efficiency with which an assembly does its business, I have always seen the celebrations and opportunities for participation as important for the ownership and transparency of the ecumenical movement. Not least, this is true for delegates, who are able to get a taste of the local context with its hopes and worries and ways of being the church. It is important that ecumenical institutions and events have open fringes, without losing their ability to do proper, concentrated work. WCC assemblies already contain the two layers of a business assembly, viz. an organized listening and sharing process, as happened in the ecumenical conversations and mutirão in Porto Alegre, and a wide participation, but probably development is needed to provide better interaction between the two layers.

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*use of and developed, both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution that they can make to the ecumenical movement ... Their common baptism and the dynamism of grace provide the spouses in these marriages with the basis and motivation for expressing their unity in the sphere of moral and spiritual values.”* [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/bf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/bf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html).

**Thesis 12. Within such a gathering of the people of God, the WCC could hold its assembly, as also could Christian world communions and international ecumenical organizations. This would free up funds and energy, and concentrate rather than disperse the churches' attention and funding.**

I support those who are concerned about how best to integrate the diverse ecumenical engagements and institutions in order for the churches to be able to participate meaningfully in new-style assemblies. This is not my field of expertise but it seems plain that synergies, both thematic and methodological, have to be facilitated wherever possible. From my own church, which is an active member in many confessional and ecumenical institutions, I can see how difficult it is to keep track of what is happening, and relating through it. The meagre amount of responses to the many questions sent out to the churches is a clear sign of their inability to keep up with all the demands made on them, besides the daily challenges they face within themselves and their societies. Ecumenical space and ecumenical business need to be combined in the most fruitful, participative and efficient way. New ways of representation need to be explored. Why, for instance, are all German churches members of the WCC, rather than being represented through the EKD? Why are Reformed, Lutheran and Anglican churches worldwide not represented through their respective world communions? Why is there no bottom-up system of representation through national council of churches and regional ecumenical organizations to the WCC? I am aware that all these possible alternatives are not necessarily compatible, and that choices have to be made. However, creative and daring solutions are needed now.

I end where I began: trust is essential in all of these plans and aspects. As we are both sinners and saints at the same time, theologically we have to be trustful and distrustful of ourselves and others but trust in God. It is this trust, which is faith (*pistis*), that nurtures us as Christians, as churches and as the ecumenical movement. As we read in Peter's first letter, "Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God. Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' That word is the good news that was announced to you" (1 Peter 1:21-25).

## **TOWARD AN EXPANDED WCC ASSEMBLY: ECUMENISM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

*By Douglas Chial, WCC Programme Executive for Church and Ecumenical Relations*

### **WHERE ARE WE?**

The World Council of Churches is engaged in a listening process to explore the feasibility of a WCC assembly to gather all churches, and offer expanded space for Christian world communions and ecumenical partners. Opportunities for listening:

- February 2007, WCC executive committee;
- April 2007, letter requesting feedback from member churches, associate councils, Christian world communions (CWCs), international ecumenical organizations and specialized ministries;
- May 2007, ecumenical officers' network;
- May 2007, joint consultative commission between the WCC and CWCs;
- September 2007, WCC executive committee;
- October 2007, WARC executive committee;
- November 2007, WCC permanent committee on collaboration and consensus;
- November 2007, Global Christian Forum;
- November 2007, Christian world communions' conference of secretaries;
- November 2007, continuation committee on ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
- January 2008, joint working group between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church;
- February 2008, WCC central committee; initial decision expected.



## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The WCC ninth assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, had a vision of an “ecumenical assembly that would assemble all churches to celebrate their fellowship in Jesus Christ, and to address common challenges facing the church and humanity,” and the specific mandate “to explore the feasibility of a structure for WCC assemblies that would provide expanded space for Christian world communions and confessional families to meet for the purpose of deliberation and/or overall agenda” (policy reference committee report).

## WHY DID THE LANGUAGE CHANGE?

The WCC executive committee considered the term “ecumenical assembly” a problem, and affirmed that all WCC assemblies are ecumenical by nature. The committee also affirmed the need to consider potential cooperation not only with Christian world communions but also with national councils, regional councils, international ecumenical organizations and specialized ministries, i.e. the full WCC constituency, who are all stake holders in an assembly, and the affiliated partners who send official representation as per the WCC constitution and rules.

Hence, the WCC general secretary requested feedback on the feasibility of a WCC assembly that would gather all churches and offer expanded space to partner ecumenical organizations (what has been commonly referred to as an “expanded assembly”) to bring together the churches, councils, communions, agencies and ministries serving the ecumenical movement.

## WHAT HAVE WE HEARD SO FAR?

Member churches that have responded consider it important to pursue an expanded assembly, and generally agree with the directions outlined in the April 2007 letter requesting feedback. Some critiqued the number of world, regional and confessional assemblies as a financial burden; more critiqued as ecumenical fragmentation the multiplicity of unrelated processes of preparation and follow up. Concern was expressed concerning small churches and minority confessions not being overshadowed by the interests of large churches or institutionally organized church families. Many respondents highlighted the question of how partner ecumenical organizations would be encouraged to prepare for an expanded assembly.

A principle concern raised by many churches was the desire to preserve the integrity of a WCC assembly as the principal gathering, through which the member churches deepen their mutual accountability in the search for visible unity and set the agenda for the work of the WCC.

In May 2007, the WCC and CWCs joint consultative commission considered it necessary for the WCC to retain ownership and leadership of an expanded or ecumenical assembly as a WCC event, and to do so not to pursue institutional interests but to nurture the ecumenical movement. The communions suggested that the minimal criteria for the event should be:

- to enhance the role of the WCC as a fellowship of churches;
- to enhance the role of the WCC in nurturing the one ecumenical movement;
- to rely on the basis of the WCC to determine participation (affirmation of Christ as Lord and Saviour, belief in the Trinity, authority of scripture: article I of the WCC constitution).

Some communions expressed the desire for the WCC to be more open to significant change, and to transform the status quo, in order to do something new and not simply restructure the existing model of a WCC assembly.

In October 2007, the permanent committee on consensus and collaboration discussed the issue, and recognized the value of an expanded assembly in working towards the coherence of the ecumenical movement. The committee was concerned that such a space could marginalize Orthodox and other churches that are not part of the CWCs. The committee expressed the concern that any expanded assembly should not put at risk the ethos of the WCC, and the fruits of the special commission on Orthodox participation in the WCC.

Also in October 2007, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches executive committee responded with support, though also concern that offering space after an expanded assembly would be unsatisfactory, and create more fragmentation.

In November 2007, the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions (CWC CS), which met directly after participating in the Global Christian Forum, expressed wide-ranging interest, with some questioning the focus on space for “doing business”. The Reformed and Lutherans expressed concern that the WCC might be moving away from the Porto Alegre vision. The Orthodox expressed concern that the business agendas of other communions could unduly influence the agenda of the WCC. The Anglicans expressed concern that space for doing business would not engage their communion.

The following was heard as a CWCs contribution to the listening the process:

- the value of WCC ownership versus WCC leadership in such an event is not commonly agreed;
- the Global Christian Forum is the best space to encounter church families that have difficulty in associating with the WCC;

- various models should be elaborated to identify the one model that is most capable of engaging the widest number of communions;
- any wider assembly should be planned with the communions most interested, and not with the CWC CS;
- for a wider assembly to foster coherence, a greater understanding of the value of complementarity is needed in terms of the complementarity of different models and instruments in promoting unity;
- the WCC should exercise caution in preparing a wider assembly, and recognize that gains in one direction may present risks in another.

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The WCC hopes to receive a green light from its central committee to begin planning the next assembly under the direction of a committee that will represent all WCC constituents. In the past, WCC assemblies were planned by committees representing member churches, and did not significantly involve other constituent representatives. Is it possible to envision the appointment of a planning committee that includes representatives of member churches, Christian world communions, associate councils and other affiliated bodies?

A worship committee plans the prayer life of an assembly in close collaboration with the planning committee. Perhaps it would also be helpful to form a business committee that would prepare the WCC assembly business agenda, while the planning committee focused more on preparing an ecumenical event.

Some of the creative ideas and questions to have emerged during the initial listening period:

- An expanded assembly is not necessarily limited in time and space; it could be developed as a process of ecumenical dialogue in which different assemblies, synods and conferences are encouraged to listen to and respond to one another.
- Can the WCC, Christian world communions and other partners agree to a limited number of common ecumenical themes on which to focus concerns and prayers in an attempt to develop more synergies and greater programmatic complementarity? If the themes for discussion are agreed three years in advance, can we foresee a coordinated process of responding ecumenically to these themes through different events?
- Can we open the space that already exists within WCC assemblies for more confessional and regional discussions (for example, a full day of confessional discussions planned with the support of Christian world communions, and a full day of regional discussions planned with the support of regional and national councils)?

- If an expanded assembly is able to offer space for common prayer and Bible study, a common space for discussion, and common opportunities for celebration, can the infrastructure, timetable and planning process also be shared to allow ecumenical partners to conduct their own business sessions, should they wish to do so?

More Questions?

In response to the vision of an assembly that offers expanded space to ecumenical partners, the following fundamental questions have emerged:

- How can a WCC-led collaborative approach to preparing the next assembly facilitate a more coherent ecumenical movement?
- How can the assembly itself become an expression of greater coherence of the one ecumenical movement?
- How can the assembly become an incarnational event through which the churches and ecumenical partners forge a more coherent vision, and lay the foundations for more programmatic cooperation?

## **REPORT ON THE FIRST MEETING OF THE CONTINUATION COMMITTEE ON ECUMENISM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY COMMITTEE,**

**HELD ON 18–20 NOVEMBER 2007 AT THE ECUMENICAL  
INSTITUTE, CHÂTEAU DE BOSSEY, SWITZERLAND**

*By Martin Robra,*

*Director of the WCC Programme on the Ecumenical Movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

*Holy Spirit, advocate and comforter,*

*Purify us, carry us beyond our narrow personal and institutional concerns;*

*Let us discern what God calls us to be and to do in this world.*

(from the opening prayer)

### 1. Background, Terms of Reference and Objectives

In recent years, discussions about the effects of the changing world on the ecumenical movement and its vision for the future have taken place in different fora, including a consultation on ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that the World Council of Churches convened in 2004. Ecumenical activities today are carried out at various levels by churches acting through conciliar bodies; such bodies include the WCC, regional ecumenical organizations, sub-regional fellowships and national councils of churches. Also involved are Christian world communions, specialized ministries, international ecumenical organizations, ecumenical communities, mission agencies, theological colleges and associations, ecumenical academies, lay training centres, and many other ecumenical bodies. The number of ecumenical organizations constitutes a challenge for churches and funding partners, who are expected to participate in these bodies and support them. While it is obvious that the ecumenical movement is far broader than any one institution, the WCC has a privileged role in ensuring the coherence of the movement.

The 2004 consultation urged that the process on ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should revitalize the ecumenical movement, articulate more clearly the common vision, and ensure greater coherence of the ecumenical movement in response to changing global realities. It called for the formation of a continuation committee composed of 15 representatives of different constituencies, including member churches, the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostal churches, ecumenical youth organizations, regional ecumenical organizations, Christian world communions, national council of churches, specialized ministries, international ecumenical organizations, and ecumenical renewal communities.

The consultation also agreed on the following terms of reference for the continuation committee:

- review the recommendations from the 2004 meeting, establish timelines and monitor their implementation to determine which can be implemented in the short and long term;
- set priorities among the recommendations;
- decide and accompany the process of working towards a new configuration of the ecumenical movement (this may include another consultation).

The 2004 consultation asked the WCC to facilitate the formation and work of the continuation committee. Due to the demands of the preparations and the follow up to the WCC assembly at Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006, and in order to ensure maximum participation, the first meeting of the continuation committee could not be convened until November 2007.

## 2. Objectives, Agenda and Moderator

The main objectives of the November 2007 meeting were:

- to constitute the continuation committee;
- to review the recommendations made by the 2004 Chavannes-de-Bogis consultation on ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the light of reflections on previous steps in the process, the changing context and recent developments;
- to establish a work plan for the continuation committee until the next meeting.

A quartet of alpine horns welcomed the committee to the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, and featured in opening prayers, thus emphasizing the Swiss context for the gathering of Christian leaders from six regions of the world. The moderator, Archbishop Michael Kehinde Stephen, led the opening and closing prayers, with Bossey students plus faculty member Prof. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus leading morning worship. The director of the Ecumenical Institute and the WCC's programme area on education and faith formation, Fr Dr Ioan Sauca, had the opportunity to introduce the work of the institute to participants at a reception on the first evening.

The WCC deputy general secretary, Mr Georges Lemopoulos, welcomed the participants on behalf of the general secretary, the Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, who was visiting the Philippines. Mr Lemopoulos presented six questions for the process in his introductory remarks. As quite a number of the continuation committee's members had not participated in the consultations in 2003 (Antelias) and 2004 (Chavannes-de-Bogis), the Rev. Dr Robina Winbush recalled the preceding steps in the process. Prof. Dr Rudolf von Sinner presented 12 challenging theses on ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The consultation combined a review of the recommendations made by the 2004 consultation with reflections on the Global Christian Forum that had gathered in Limuru, Kenya, a week beforehand (6-9 November 2007), and a discussion on the proposal for an expanded WCC assembly in 2013, which the policy reference committee of the WCC 2006 assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil had initiated.

The main outcome of the first meeting of the continuation committee was a series of revised recommendations plus an agreement on the steps to be taken in preparation for the next meeting of the committee 10-17 January 2009 in Brazil.

A sign of trust and confidence among the members of the continuation committee was the proposal not to vote for two co-moderators, as proposed by the WCC, but rather to affirm Archbishop Stephen as the sole moderator, and request him to share the responsibility of leading individual sessions of the meeting with other committee members. The Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi made this suggestion at the beginning of the meeting, and the practice was tested during the subsequent sessions with the Rev. Dr Cheryl Dudley, Ms Nienke Preuksma, the Rev. Dr Randolph Naylor, the Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi, and the Rev. Dr Herman Shastri each moderating in turn. At the end of the meeting, all participants confirmed this arrangement.

### 3. Six Challenging Questions

Mr Georges Lemopoulos built his introductory remarks to the continuation committee on six questions that the WCC general secretary, the Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, had raised during the 2004 consultation in Chavannes-de-Bogis. Beginning with the original set of questions, Mr Lemopoulos added reflections from himself and fellow staff colleagues, and deepened the challenge posed to the committee. The text of this presentation can be found on pp. 13-17.

### 4. From Reconfiguration to Ecumenism in The 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The Rev. Dr Robina Winbush helped participants recall the preceding steps in the process, and lessons learned on the journey. She said that the shift in name since 2003, from the “reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement” to “ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, suggested a shift in focus from a reconfiguration of what the ecumenical movement currently is, to an opening to what ecumenism may become. The shift also indicated a movement from the survival of existing institutions to a more process-oriented exploration of new possibilities.

Dr Winbush strongly affirmed the 2004 Chavannes-de-Bogis vision for any discussion on structures and organizations. This vision was outlined in the final statement of the 2004 consultation:

We hope that the ecumenical movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be a special space:

- where more and more Christians are involved in the work of Christian unity, and fellowship among the churches is strengthened;
- where an open and ecumenically minded culture is fostered in the everyday lives of people in their own contexts, and where ecumenical formation is a central focus at all levels of church life from the local to the global;
- where spirituality is the basis of the life of Christians together, and where, as individuals, churches and organizations, Christians can pray together and encourage each other to discern God's will for their lives;
- where all, including the marginalized and excluded, are welcomed into inclusive and loving communities;
- where relationships built on mutual trust are strengthened between all parts of the ecumenical family;
- where each Christian can be supported in practising responsible stewardship, and where churches and Christian organizations can be mutually accountable to each other;
- where diversity of cultures and traditions is recognized as a source of creativity;
- where hospitality is manifest towards those of different faiths, and where dialogue is encouraged;
- where young people are encouraged to join in and to lead;
- where women's visions of being church are shared;
- where the ministry of healing is carried out in shared actions;
- where the healing of memories leads to reconciliation;
- where, together, we are enabled to be prophetic in confronting the injustices and violence of the world, and to take risks in our commitment to justice and peace when Christ calls us to do so.

In subsequent discussion, Dr Winbush underlined the importance of these values. While she stated that the energy and passion of the Global Christian Forum must infuse ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, she also criticized the disproportionate presence of U.S. American leaders in the forum, and its lack of inclusiveness, especially regarding women and Indigenous Peoples.



## 5. Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: 12 Theses for Discussion

The Rev. Dr Rudolf von Sinner presented 12 theses for discussion. The text of these can be found on pp. 18-30.

Dr Sinner's presentation sparked a lively discussion. A reflection of the points made is contained in the following paragraphs.

The ecumenical movement should never be understood to equal particular ecumenical institutions. The movement must be seen in a much more flexible way, beginning from the grassroots and mediated by ecumenical institutions dedicated to serving initiatives at the grassroots. The gap between ecumenical representatives and realities at the grassroots level is, in many cases, unsupportable. Unless the ecumenical movement deals with issues that matter for churches and people who live the faith in the diversity of local situations, it will be meaningless. There is much creativity, fire and passion on the ground.

The separation between life and work, and faith and order has to disappear; the one has to inform the other. A new generation of leaders must call for change. At times, ecumenical organizations seem to function within the realm of the institutionalized churches like the Security Council does within the U.N. system. It is embarrassing if, in certain conflict situations, the WCC bypasses NCCs or REOs, even if this emphasises the WCC's direct relationship with its member churches. Such lack of recognition of ecumenical partners betrays the very spirit of working together. Holding mutual accountability as a central ecumenical ethical value must be practised at all levels.

The ecumenical movement can only be built on trust. This emphasis on trust is very different from the usual focus of institutions. In fact, trust is the distinctive mark of the ecumenical movement in contrast to the more competitive attitude of institutional actors (and many churches) that has become so prevalent. If we speak of the WCC's unique role within the ecumenical movement, we affirm that there has to be one actor with a responsibility to focus on the commitment towards Christian unity. This, in turn, challenges the WCC to point constantly beyond itself. It will be refreshing if the WCC gives birth to something and says it does not need to own or control it; one example of such a product is this continuation committee. This also applies to new ways of conducting assemblies. The WCC should dare to go forward in providing leadership that gives everyone the feeling of being at home at the table, rather than jealously guarding his or her own interests. The WCC should be a leader of something larger than itself. The mapping exercise that is mentioned in the recommendations will not establish what is being done in competitive terms. Rather, it will focus on those cases where resources are already shared in complementary ways, and explore how institutions can complement each other in contributing their own resources to the one ecumenical movement.

We can draw closer more by having deeper trust in each other than living side by side, and by recognizing that one church or ecumenical organization can act on behalf of us all. Yet, there is a clear preference for bilateral relationships. It seems that the movement has for some become a competing force rather than a complementary one. This is mirrored by the impression that ecumenical instruments seem to carry out their work on behalf of themselves, and not with clear ownership of what they do by their members. This is also a matter of trust: how do churches and ecumenical organizations see or identify themselves in work carried out by others? Building trust and encouraging the different actors to listen to each other are principally matters of attitude, values and behaviour rather than of structures.

## 6. Global Christian Forum

In discussion, various members of the continuation committee made a number of comments about the November 2007 meeting of the Global Christian Forum in Limuru, Kenya: It had been a meaningful step in the spirit of broadening participation at the ecumenical table. It was an event that had included in one gathering representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox churches, Protestants, Pentecostals, Evangelicals and African Independent churches. That the main speakers at the November meeting came from only one part of the family was a concern. If the churches wished to move forward together, they needed to be mindful of different voices. The smaller home groups (of thirty members) at the forum meeting had offered good opportunities to share in very personal ways. The texts from the letter to the Ephesians for the Bible studies had been an excellent choice.

Positive assessments of the Limuru gathering were accompanied by more critical voices: There was still a long way to go before the values the 2004 Chavannes-de-Bogis consultation had identified as part of ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century could be lived out in the Global Christian Forum, which offers a good opportunity for groups who have been suspicious of each other to overcome their prejudice. Though many of the participants at the forum had dared to step out of their comfort zones for the first time, there had been little opportunity for real dialogue in a more structured and intentional way. There should have been a chance to correct some statements made by the two main speakers; they did not always take into consideration the complexities of the ecumenical movement. Of course, this is to be expected after decades of mistrust and lack of recognition.

It was even more embarrassing that at the forum's meeting the shift of the centre of Christianity from the North to the South had been analyzed from a predominantly North American point of view. In the African regional meeting at the forum, several people had said that the time had come to reshape the ecumenical movement without any new patterns being imposed upon the South; it was necessary to move beyond politeness. It had been helpful that Bishop Brian Farrell had said the Global Christian Forum would have been impossible without the work of the ecumenical movement over many years.

Other comments included: The forum had come up with two products, viz. a message, and a blueprint to carry the process forward. The forum will give more attention in future to the national and regional levels. There are already a number of new federations with the Roman Catholic Church and Evangelicals and Pentecostals at national levels in, for instance, Malaysia, Nigeria and Norway. It is generally accepted that the global level the forum represents should reflect such local, national and regional developments. The forum should not be an event that takes place from time to time at the global level; it should rather have a light structure stimulating different players to engage one another at different levels. If people begin meeting in various places, unafraid of the other, the Global Christian Forum will have been a success.

### 7. Expanded Assembly

Mr Douglas Chial, WCC programme executive for church and ecumenical relations, shared highlights from the listening process on the proposal for an expanded WCC assembly. His presentation drew on contributions made by member churches and ecumenical partners in response to a letter sent by the WCC general secretary, the Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia.

Mr Chial reported that the listening process had taken advantage of discussions at various ecumenical gatherings between representatives of Christian world communions (CWCs) and other partners. The Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions, which met directly after participating in the Global Christian Forum in Limuru, had contributed new and important insights concerning different approaches and opinions among CWCs.

He added that, recognizing their own differences, secretaries of the CWCs had recommended the exploration of various models to identify the best way of engaging the widest number of communions. The CWCs had said that for a wider assembly to foster coherence, a greater understanding of the value of complementarity would be needed, viz. the complementarity of different models and instruments in promoting unity. The CWCs added that the WCC should exercise caution in preparing a wider assembly, and recognize that gains in one direction may present risks in another.

Mr Chial said that responses received to Dr Kobia's letter had affirmed a clear distinction between an expanded space for common celebration and deliberation (together with CWCs, REOs and NCCs, and other ecumenical partners that the WCC already constitutionally recognizes) and the business of a WCC assembly. It had been suggested that this distinction could be reflected in the interplay between three different committees (a preparatory committee for the event, a worship committee, and a WCC business committee).

The continuation committee emphasized the rapidly changing ecumenical context, and the need for an expanded assembly to be planned in harmony with these dynamics. The value that would be added by an expanded assembly needed to be thoroughly articulated. A key

requirement will be to confront the fears concerning broadening the space. There is fear of losing control over the agenda, fear of losing out, fear of the presence of “others”, etc. What are the fears that hold us back? Trust, humility, honesty and accountability are central values of working in relationships. There is a certain floor of common values that was built in the past and will continue to be relevant as an agreed basis for dialogue and trust in each other. Yet, the issue is that these values will have to be affirmed by all who wish to gather at the table, and not just by those who have occupied the seats for a long time. What kind of relationships and spaces are needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

The continuation committee expressed appreciation that, despite the lack of responses from REOs, the WCC had taken care to include them in its own considerations concerning the form the next assembly would take. The CWCs had affirmed the role of the WCC as a leader of the ecumenical movement, and responsible for an assembly bigger than itself but that it does not own. The continuation committee believed that any expanded space should be a generous space that could also be used by others, while the WCC clearly would have its own space for constitutionally mandated business. CWCs, particularly those that need to transact formal business on their own, should see any expanded space they might occupy as “home space” and not “guest space”. During moments when CWCs are conducting business, others who do not have the need or the structures to do the same, could use the expanded space for discussion and other needs. Still, there is a diversity of views among CWCs concerning their individual needs regarding an expanded assembly.

The committee thought that international ecumenical organizations welcomed the proposal for an expanded space. It is seen to be good to include others who are part of the ecumenical movement, including those that have a global mandate but are only small organizations. An expanded space would create an opportunity for many to participate, and for all those that do so to experience each other as part of the ecumenical fellowship. The continuation committee found the listening process and the report about CWCs really encouraging, and expressed confidence in the ability of the WCC to provide leadership, and for all partners to be effective in a common space at an expanded assembly. The proposal to have three committees to plan such a space seems critical to achieving the goals of the event, with one group planning the event, one group devoted to common prayer life, and another group working on the business of the assembly.

Mr Chial reported that youth would like to see a space at an expanded assembly for ecumenical formation, such as the global institute for theology, which took place at the WARC general council. This space would equip young people to participate in the expanded assembly in a more effective way than the usual pre-assembly event for youth currently does.

He added that clarity was needed concerning the use of terms such as “expanded space”, “inclusive space”, etc. What are the parameters? What are the boundaries? Another concern

that needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that many CWCs do not send the same group of delegates to different events, such as world communion gatherings, regional ecumenical assemblies and WCC assemblies. This can lead to or emphasize existing tensions within certain communions. Lack of co-ordination in and between member churches is also one of the reasons for the lack of coherence among different ecumenical organizations.

Another important matter is the selection of relevant common themes that bring the community together and build a shared vision. Identifying common themes early enough is key for a better preparatory process and for the follow-up by different actors. Relevant themes will be shared themes, in that many others who are concerned about the future of life on planet earth will identify with them.

The committee agreed that ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should have the courage to question the paradigm of an assembly in the first place. It believed there was a propensity of meetings with unclear purpose and aims; the ecumenical movement moves from event to event without questioning the quality of the outcome and the lack of transformative power. New communication technologies offer new ways to achieve common goals, and every available media should be used to communicate the ecumenical message. “How do we use 21<sup>st</sup> century communication tools to make a difference?” is a question that must be asked.

Another pertinent question is, “What are the hallmarks of global community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?” The committee noted that the term “21<sup>st</sup> century” does not have the same meaning for every part of the world, and that while ecumenical values are a gift of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they should not to be seen as static or to be fossilized. God may give us new ways to touch the hearts of all.

The continuation committee further noted that a clear sense of complementarity is needed. Many actors can gather in a big place and in big numbers, but unless the focus is on unity in diversity they will not enrich each other. The question must be one that concerns what gifts people bring to the assembly, and which of them they want to share. If they are ready to bring something to the table, they are also ready to celebrate these gifts with each other. However, celebrating diversity and celebrating confessional differences are two very different things. The concept of gifting one another is encouraging.

In summary, the continuation committee suggested that coherence may also be described as a process of “gifting”, by which each church and ecumenical partner understands its particular gift to the ecumenical movement, and how it is enriched by the gifts of other churches. Committee members suggested that complementarity is best achieved by constructing links between churches and partners, not simply by expecting them to emerge in a common time and place.

Other insights of committee members:

- fears about pursuing an expanded assembly should not be seen as barriers keeping us from moving forward but as challenges we are called to overcome;
- an expanded assembly should be an event that brings the ecumenical family together, and any space offered to recognized partners should not be “guest” space, but “family” space;
- preparing and implementing an expanded assembly with recognized ecumenical partners will necessarily help to articulate a common vision about the churches’ search for unity and common witness;
- though different communions would use the space provided to them in different ways, an expanded assembly should challenge all church families to recognize the diversity that exists within their own communion or confessional grouping of churches;
- an expanded assembly should provide significant opportunity for ecumenical formation, and not repeat the pre-assembly model, especially concerning youth;
- it is necessary to ask how the post-expanded assembly process will help to facilitate outcomes, promote coherence, and more deeply engage the churches as the primary agents of their ecumenical instruments;
- another question concerns how an expanded assembly can also be a more inclusive assembly.

## 8. The Continuation Committee’s Revision of the 2004 Chavannes-De-Bogis Consultation’s Recommendations and Work Plan

### a. A Re-affirmation of the Theological Basis of the Ecumenical Movement<sup>41</sup>

We affirm that theological dialogue about the nature of unity and the church is a priority for all ecumenical work, and should be revitalized. The WCC’s Faith and Order Commission has a central role to play in shaping the multilateral dialogue on issues, both theological and social, uniting and dividing the churches today, and in monitoring and mapping the many bilateral dialogues on church unity. A statement on the church as local/universal, living in unity/diversity is now being prepared for the 2006 WCC assembly. We strongly recommend that the WCC and its member churches continue theological reflection on the nature of the church, particularly on the biblical understandings and different theological interpretations of the church.

<sup>41</sup> Here and in the nine other points that follow, the original 2004 recommendations are first quoted, and italicised. A brief summary of the continuation committee’s discussion follows each recommendation, and then comes the committee’s own recommendation for the work plan.

Reflection on unity is not only done through Faith and Order and bilateral dialogues; there is also a need for new inner-confessional discussions on unity and ecumenical dialogue. Further, there are other actors that need to be more actively involved in the future; for example, there is the work CLAI (the Latin American Council of Churches) is doing with Pentecostals.

**Continuing committee's recommendation:** The new Faith and Order director should be invited to participate in the next meeting of the continuation committee to share reflections on the methods of work employed within the Faith and Order Commission and how Faith and Order reflections on the church we are called to be respond to the situations the churches face in their respective contexts. If the next meeting of the continuation committee takes place in Brazil, CLAI and representatives of Pentecostal churches should be invited to share their reflections on the call to unity.

#### b. Mapping of Programmatic Work

The WCC is asked to facilitate a mapping study of existing programmatic work of ecumenical and denominational bodies, identifying who is doing what in which area of work and the financial resources which support these programmes. This is intended to serve as a tool for avoiding duplication and fostering cooperation, and could build on the annual WCC Ecumenical Partner Survey. Such a mapping exercise could also provide opportunities for mutual learning. As this is a substantial task, it may be necessary to limit the scope of the study. This mapping could be supplemented by case studies by appropriate bodies, in which a small group of people analyze and learn from specific examples of programmatic collaboration or overlap.

It is important to have more reliable data on the programmatic co-operation that is already happening between various ecumenical organizations. It is not enough to focus only on the financial resources that support these programmes; a clearer picture is required of the financial flows and relationships within the ecumenical movement, and there is also a need to identify strategic partners who could be commissioned to do work for the WCC, where it can best be done locally.

**Continuing committee's recommendation:** The WCC is asked to provide these data for the next meeting by building on existing mapping and scoping studies or partner surveys, and updating them, plus, if needed, soliciting further research.

#### c. Clarifying the Respective Roles of the Wcc, Reos and Nccs

We see a need for the WCC, regional ecumenical organizations (REOs) and national councils of churches (NCCs) to clarify their programmatic roles, to discuss and formulate a common agenda, and to stimulate collaborative action in order to achieve greater ecumenical coherence. The WCC is asked to work with REOs and NCCs to develop an appro-

priate process for furthering these discussions by building on work carried out through the Common Understanding and Vision process. The principle of subsidiarity - ensuring that decisions are made closest to the people affected - may be helpful in delineating roles. Greater coherence could also be fostered by:

- linking governing bodies (for example, the REOs could organize joint meetings in each region);
- clearer accountability of representatives participating in ecumenical bodies to the churches they represent;
- clearly formulated agendas for regular meetings between the WCC, REOs and NCCs;
- organizing meetings between REOs and Christian world communions.

REOs and NCCs also have a responsibility to encourage ecumenical formation among their constituencies, and they are asked to work with theological institutions in their regions to organize seminars on ecumenical formation.

It is an urgent task to clarify the roles of the WCC, REOs and NCCs. The WCC general secretary has encouraged this to happen, and made sure that the task is on the agenda of WCC Programme Area 1 on the Ecumenical Movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The continuation committee would also like to receive more information on relationships and existing co-operation between REOs and regional bodies of CWCs.

**Continuation committee's recommendation:** The WCC secretariat should present a report on steps taken and progress made to the next meeting of the continuation committee.

#### d. Clarifying the Role and Space of Agencies/Specialized Ministries within the Ecumenical Movement

As diakonia is an essential part of being church, and as agencies/specialized ministries are recognized as an integral and indispensable part of the ecumenical movement, the consultation agreed to ask:

- the WCC to invite the agencies/specialized ministries to discuss together the shape and form of their institutional space;
- the WCC to include agencies/specialized ministries in its strategic planning and on-going work in the field of diakonia and development, plus relief and advocacy;
- *agencies/specialized ministries similarly to share their plans with the WCC, which in turn will seek to share them more broadly with ecumenical partners.*

In the meantime, ACT Development was established and is moving rapidly towards a merger with ACT International. Members of the committee need to follow these developments. They would also like to receive more information on the WCC round table process. It should



be noted that the term “specialized ministries” refers to agencies; international ecumenical organizations and youth movements are not included in these recommendations.

**Continuing committee’s recommendation:** Information on the ACT process should be shared with committee members. International ecumenical organizations and youth movements must be included when clarifying specific roles and space within the ecumenical movement, and, as much as possible, also included in the mapping study.

e. Towards Enhanced Collaboration with Christian World Communions

The WCC is asked to facilitate a consultative process to explore the nature and form of a common assembly or process that will draw the Christian world communions, international ecumenical organizations, REOs and the WCC into a common ecumenical agenda. The possibility can also be explored of working with the WCC’s Faith and Order Plenary Commission and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism in planning future meetings. Further work is also needed to discuss ways in which Christian world communions can more effectively participate in the work and life of the WCC.

Major upcoming events for international ecumenical organizations include the Faith and Order plenary in 2009 in Buenos Aires, the 2010 Edinburgh mission event, and the international ecumenical peace convocation in 2011. A number of CWCs are open to closer co-operation; some do it enthusiastically but others do not want to be associated with ecumenical organizations in this way. There are two basic categories of CWCs, viz. umbrella organizations of particular families, and others that can be called global churches, e.g. the Roman Catholic Church and the Seventh Day Adventists. Orthodoxy has its own dynamics with different Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. Syndesmos (The World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth) is the only pan-Orthodox organization worldwide. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation are both based in Geneva because of the opportunity for close co-operation with the WCC.

The programme reference committee of the WCC 2006 Porto Alegre assembly did respond to this recommendation, and the WCC has engaged in a listening process (see the discussion on an expanded assembly in section 7 above).

**Continuing committee’s recommendation:** The continuing committee should receive updates on the discussion regarding the expanded assembly, and decisions taken by the WCC central committee and executive committee.

f. Exploring Possibilities for Greater Financial Stability

*In light of the financial difficulties being faced by many ecumenical organizations, the WCC is asked to facilitate a task force in which representatives from different ecumenical bodies, including agencies/specialized ministries, can explore together additional and new ways of funding ecumen-*

ical work. Collaboration between churches, NCCs, REOs and the WCC is needed in the regions to increase possibilities of raising funds for the common ecumenical movement. The consultation stressed that building relationships is essential to efforts to increase financial support for ecumenical work.

The consultation's recommendation (ii) provides necessary data for such a task force. This is a long-term agenda for the group. The text concentrates on conciliar bodies and does not include CWCs. The issue is wider than these bodies. The WCC will revisit its fundraising strategies. It is important that such a wider perspective should inform this process.

**Continuing committee recommendation:** The continuing committee should look at this recommendation again at its next meeting. It would like to encourage the WCC to include the wider perspective of the greater financial stability of ecumenical organizations in its own efforts to further develop fundraising strategies.

#### g. The Role of the WCC

*Participants affirmed that the WCC is a privileged instrument, entrusted with ensuring the coherence of the ecumenical movement. As a fellowship of churches, it has an important prophetic role. All organizations within the ecumenical movement, including the WCC, need to change to address the challenges of today. The consultation recommends that in setting its priorities, the WCC shall include:*

- providing space for the ecumenical movement to formulate a common ecumenical vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
- considering comprehensively the results and significance of bilateral theological dialogue at national, regional and international levels;
- facilitating a common theological understanding of diakonia among churches and agencies/specialized ministries;
- providing a forum for exchange of information and common advocacy against injustice, perhaps through coordinating advocacy vis-à-vis the U.N.;
- facilitating constructive cooperation and accountability between different partners in the ecumenical movement;
- facilitating a process of bringing the specialised staff of ecumenical organizations into regular and systematic conversation and information-sharing in order to develop common work plans.

This list does not refer to the tasks of working for visible unity and greater coherence. In addition, the notion of spirituality is lacking. Committee members stressed that most of the reflections cannot be loaded just on to the WCC. Nevertheless, the WCC remains

a privileged instrument. Is it possible that every meeting of the continuation committee could include an update on how the WCC is setting its priorities as it takes these tasks into account. Such updates would facilitate the continuation committee in supporting the WCC in its role.

**Continuation committee's recommendation:** The continuation committee will monitor how recommendation (vii) is implemented. It encourages the WCC to share its work on spirituality intentionally with different ecumenical partners (for example, in the way resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are prepared), and to be more intentional and inter-contextual in such sharing; these are practices that could lead to better use of such resources.

h. Establishment of a Continuation Group

*In order to continue this process, a continuation group will be established as soon as possible, and will be composed of 15 representatives of different constituencies, as follows:*

- 5 representatives of member churches (to be selected by the WCC executive committee);
- 1 representative of the Roman Catholic Church;
- 1 representative of Pentecostal churches;
- 2 representatives from ecumenical youth organizations;
- 1 each from REOs, CWCs, NCCs, agencies/specialized ministries, international ecumenical organizations and ecumenical renewal communities.

*Each of these constituencies will name its own representatives by 14 February 2005, and the names will be shared with the WCC central committee for information. The WCC will convene this group and a first meeting will take place in the first half of 2005.*

*Terms of reference for the continuation group:*

- review the recommendations from this meeting, establish timelines and monitor their implementation to determine which can be implemented in the short and long term;
- set priorities among the recommendations;
- decide and accompany the process of working towards a new configuration of the ecumenical movement (this may include another consultation).

This recommendation was implemented.

## i. The Need for Inclusive Participation

*The continuing process of developing a new configuration of the ecumenical movement must include the increased participation by women and youth, and priority should be given to participation from the South.*

The way in which this recommendation addresses the value and criteria of inclusive participation is very unfortunate. While it is laudable that women and youth are especially mentioned, other important minorities are left out. The summary reference to participation from the South sounds patronizing to some.

It is to be welcomed that six young theologians from the participants in the WCC's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary essay contest will be invited to the next meeting of the continuation committee. The recommendation does not only refer to the composition of the group but also to the churches and the ecumenical movement as a whole. It is about people who represent a different reality than those the institutionalized churches represent.

There is also a lack of representation of evangelicals (for instance, the World Evangelical Alliance).

**Recommendation:** A reference to persons of disabilities and Indigenous Peoples should be included in recommendation (ix). The continuation committee should consider co-opting representatives of marginalized groups.

## j. Going Forth

*As only 106 representatives participated in this consultation on ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, participants agreed to discuss the issue of a new ecumenical configuration with their churches and constituencies, and to refer relevant measures to their respective governing bodies. The continuation group is asked to provide regular updates on this process to participants in this consultation, as well as to the broader ecumenical constituency.*

**Continuation committee's recommendation:** The list of participants and this report of the continuation committee should be shared with participants of the 2004 consultation.

## 9. Date and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of the consultation committee is scheduled for 10 (arrival) – 17 (departure) January 2009 in Brazil, preferably in the north or northeast of the country (Belém do Pará or Salvador de Bahia). Other choices are São Paulo or São Leopoldo. Brazil was chosen because of its vital ecclesial and ecumenical landscape, which should feature in the meeting. Furthermore, Belém will be the venue for the World Forum on Theology and Liberation, and the World Social Forum, probably around the same time, and the city is the birthplace of the Assemblies of God in Brazil.

10. Deadline for the Report, Evaluation and Closing

The draft report on this meeting of the continuation committee will be sent to participants by 15 December 2007, with feedback requested by the end of 2007.

Participants completed an evaluation form, and then the moderator thanked all participants and staff, and closed the meeting with prayer.

11. Affirmation of Faith (from the closing worship)

**Jesus, you go with us on our journey. In the midst of confusion and doubt, we believe that you are present among us and help us to discern the direction to go.**

**Jesus, you go with us on our journey. In the midst of conflict and war, we believe that you are present among those who are committed to work for peace and reconciliation.**

**Jesus, you go with us on our journey. In the midst of oppression and greed, we believe that you are present among those who are committed to share power and work for alternatives.**