

**FAITH AND ORDER  
PLENARY MEETING  
Crete, 6-14 October 2009**

**REPORT**

Metropolitan of Constantia – Ammochostos  
Moderator

1. On behalf of the Officers, Secretariat and Staff of the Faith and Order Commission, I welcome you all to this meeting of the Plenary of Faith and Order, which follows the meeting of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2004. I also wish to express my appreciation for your participation as members of the Plenary Commission of Faith and Order. Your participation is evidence of the lively interest and commitment of the Churches you represent, both for the work of the Commission, and for our commonly pursued goal of unity of the Churches, which is the first and paramount aim for which the Faith and Order Commission was established. It is worth underlining the fact that approximately 80% of the members of this Plenary Commission are participating for the first time. I trust that this meeting will prove to be creative and productive and will bring new thoughts and perspectives to Faith and Order.

2. In addition to the thanks we expressed yesterday to His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and to the Church and Civil authorities and other institutions, who contributed in many ways for the organisation of this Assembly, let me say thanks also to the members of the Standing Commission for the excellent co-operation we have had since our election at the last General Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Porto Alegre in Brazil, as well as for their dedication to the Commission's mission, and for the work performed so far, both by the Standing Commission itself and by the Sub-Committees, whose work will be discussed at this meeting. It would of course be an omission not to thank the Director of the Faith and Order Commission, the Reverend Canon Dr John Gibaut, who took office just under two years ago. We welcome him to the Faith and Order family and wish him success in his work. We also thank the members of staff who, with their experience and theological training, contribute greatly to the conduct of theological studies.

3. Last, but not least, my thanks go to the Planning Committee of the Plenary Commission Meeting, chaired by his Eminence the Metropolitan of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Sasima, Dr. Professor Gennadios. His Eminence and the members of the Planning Committee undertook the difficult task of preparing this meeting, with the dual aim of ensuring the smooth conduct of the proceedings of the Plenary, and of creating a new dynamic for the Faith and Order Commission, through the topics and discussions, which will respond to the expectations of the member-Churches and the conditions prevailing in contemporary societies. Within this context, naturally we thank the speakers, who, out of their love for the Commission so willingly accepted our proposal to speak on the topics assigned to them. We also thank the chairpersons of the meetings of the Plenary and the Working Groups.

## **Faith and Order: Seeking for the unity of the Churches. Hopes and reality**

4. Following the expression of thanks, it is now my duty as Moderator of the Faith and Order Commission to express certain thoughts concerning the work done by Faith and Order on the matter upon which it is called upon to contribute, namely the unity of Church, which is indeed the subject of this Plenary: “Call to be one Church”. It is well known that since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the modern ecumenical movement has revolved around three areas: Life and Work, Mission and Evangelism, and Faith and Order. The ecumenical movement was thus able to lead the Churches out of isolation and open the way for dialogue. It could be said that this has transformed the history of the life of the Churches. Dialogue, in both theory and practice, is now carried out on the basis of the relationships between individual Churches or all the Churches with each other. Consequently, further to the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948, another important step in church unity was the commencement of bilateral or multilateral theological dialogue within the framework of Mission and Evangelism, and particularly Faith and Order. The establishment of the various regional Ecclesiastical Councils should also be seen in this context.

5. In particular, the contribution of the Faith and Order can be classified in the following categories, to which brief reference will be made.

- a) *World Meetings of the Faith and Order*
- b) *Co-operation with the World Council of Churches*
- c) *Theological studies and publication of texts by the Commission*

6. It is my belief that this meeting of the Plenary Commission of Faith and Order is important for a number of different reasons. Since its first meeting in Lausanne in 1927, Faith and Order has been in active existence for over 80 years and the results of its theological dialogue have been judged successful by all. I have stated repeatedly that from its earliest beginnings Faith and Order has been a powerful movement, stemming directly from the Churches, with the sole and paramount goal of the unity of the Churches. The two corresponding and parallel movements: Mission and Evangelism, which is celebrating one hundred years of life since its first meeting in Edinburgh in 1910, and Faith and Order, formed the foundations for the establishment of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the movements themselves became Commissions of the council. I maintain the view that since joining the WCC, Faith and Order has lost its dynamic as a movement for Church unity and has been consumed in the machinery and functions of an institutional body. Nonetheless, it is a fact that the Faith and Order could not have maintained its independent existence and activity without joining the institutional organs of the WCC, nor could the WCC’s mission be complete without the activities and mission of the Faith and Order Commission.

7. Thus, as a WCC Commission, Faith and Order has performed worthy theological work, whether through organising important meetings which defined the subject matter of theological dialogue among the Churches, or by elaborating theological studies and producing important texts concerning theology, doctrine, the life of the Churches and their relations. These include *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the paper we have here before us for examination: *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, as well as other documents which strengthen dialogue and contribute to the effort to secure a basis for Christian unity. It is important to recall also the broader contribution of Faith and Order on theological issues that have, from time to time, concerned the WCC and in particular the Council’s General Assemblies. These include the Ecclesiological Statement of the previous General Assembly at Porto Alegre in Brazil (2006),

entitled “Call to be one Church”, that of the General Assembly at Canberra (1991) and other previous General Assemblies. In addition, the work of Faith and Order has had a catalytic effect on the achieving of unity agreements among Churches, including the agreement between the Anglicans and Lutherans of Northern Europe, known as the Porvoo Agreement, and many other agreements between the United and Uniting Churches, who continue to accord a prominent place to Faith and Order.

***a) World Conferences of Faith and Order***

8. So far, five World Conferences of the Faith and Order have been convened. A specific topic focusing on Church unity was chosen at each of these meetings. The agenda and Declarations of the Conferences show clearly the theological deliberations and the methodology that was applied during the proceedings of these Conferences. It is interesting to take a brief look at how the unity of the Church has been perceived at different phases and on various levels throughout the historical course of the World Conferences of Faith and Order and at other related meetings, since this has a strong impact on the Commission’s current agenda and methodology.

9. The first two World Conferences of Faith and Order—in Lausanne in 1927 and Edinburgh in 1937—focused their work on the presentation, comparison and analysis of the positions of the Churches represented at the Conferences on the various theological issues. The representatives also made some cautious evaluations in order to see whether any similarities existed between the theological positions of the various Churches. In particular, the Lausanne conference dealt mainly with issues of unity of faith as well as ecclesiological matters and issues related to the life of the Churches. The issues which were discussed in Lausanne and which we still recognise today in the various programmes of the Faith and Order Commission were as follows: 1. the call to unity, 2. the church’s message to the world: the gospel, 3. the nature of the church, 4. the church’s common confession of faith, 5. the church’s ministry, 6. the sacraments, 7. the unity of Christendom and the relation thereto of existing churches. Regarding some of these topics special theological studies have already been conducted by Faith and Order over time.

10. The Edinburgh Conference focused its attention on the relationship between Ecclesiology and Christology and on Church unity. The four topics of the Edinburgh Conference were: 1. the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, 2. the Church of Christ and the word of God, 3. the Church of Christ: ministry and sacraments, 4. the church’s unity in life and worship. It can be seen from the subject matter of the two first World Conferences, and indeed from subsequent conferences, that the topics chosen were those which divide the Churches. The aim of the meetings was to reveal the possibilities offered by dialogue of overcoming the theological, doctrinal, and ecclesiological differences and other problems related to the life of the church, with the ultimate aim of achieving unity of faith.

11. The Third World Conference, which was held after the end of World War II, in 1952 at Lund in Sweden, moved away from the methodology of comparative theology and ecclesiology of the two previous Conferences and towards the methodology of dialogue. The subject matter of the Conference led to a discussion on important issues, such as the relationship between the Holy Scriptures and tradition and to a broadening of the discussion not only to Christology but to Trinitarian theology as well. For the first time, the concept of Church unity was linked to non-theological factors, including social, cultural, political and racial aspects which impact either on division or unity in the Church. In its message the Conference asked the following question of the Churches, which became known as the Lund principle: “*Should not our churches ask themselves*

*whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other churches, and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?"* The four topics of the Lund Conference were: 1. Christ and his church, 2. continuity and unity, 3. ways of worship, 4. intercommunion. In other words, the meeting explored the relationship between Christology and Ecclesiology, the notion of apostolic succession, and of course the diversity of ways of worship and the equally important issue of the use of the common cup for the Eucharist.

12. The Fourth World Conference of Faith and Order in Montreal, Canada 1963, presented an innovation in the effort to define unity and in the practices and theological solutions proposed<sup>1</sup>. The Conference revolved around three topics: 1. Christ and the church; 2. Worship; 3. Tradition and traditions. As these topics clearly show, the Conference touched upon the essence of the ecclesiological differences regarding Apostolic Tradition, the meaning of Tradition in relation to the Holy Scriptures as well as the subject of the Sacraments and the concept of the presence of Christ at the Eucharist. The innovation of the Conference lay mainly in the solution proposed regarding the relationship between the Scriptures and Tradition. In order to solve the problem a distinction was made between Tradition with a capital 'T' and tradition with a lower case 't'. Thus, the final report of the conference states that *"By Tradition is meant the gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the church. By tradition is meant the traditionary process. The term tradition is used in two senses, to indicate both the diversity of forms of expression and also what we call confessional traditions, for instance the Lutheran tradition or the Reformed tradition"*. For many of the Churches, however, these issues remain yet open.

13. The Fifth World Conference of Faith and Order was held on 3-14 August 1993 in Santiago de Compostela in Spain and its subject was "Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness". Despite the fact that the Conference had been preceded by the General Assembly of the WCC at Canberra (1991), where 'koinonia' was placed at the centre of the discussion on church unity, with the title "The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling", from its very beginnings Faith and Order has discussed the notion of 'koinonia' in a number of forms: as an ecclesiological term describing the unity and communion among the Churches, and in the Trinitarian sense of unity as communion. Of course 'koinonia' has been understood in various forms and meanings, particularly in the sense that it is the best way to experience unity through diversity. However, the Orthodox, who had proposed the term 'koinonia' at Canberra, did not consider this sense to be the main meaning of the term<sup>2</sup>. This is made clear in paragraph 10 of the Conference's Message:

14. *"Concrete challenges stand before the churches. In relation to faith, the churches must continue to explore how to confess our common faith in the context of the many cultures and religions, the many social and national conflicts in which we live. Such confession emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of the church and its apostolic character in the light of the Holy Scriptures. In relation to life, the churches must dare to take concrete steps toward fuller koinonia, in particular doing all that is possible to achieve a common recognition of baptism, agreement on a common participation in the Eucharist, and a mutually recognized ministry. In relation to witness, the churches must consider the implications of koinonia for a responsible care for creation, for a just sharing of the world's resources, for a special concern for the poor and outcast, and for a common and mutually respectful evangelism that invites everyone into communion with God in Christ. But beyond all particular*

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<sup>1</sup> See: **Gunther Gassmann**. "What is Faith and Order?" Paper presented to a Faith and Order consultation with Younger Theologians. Turku, Finland, 3-11 August 1955.

<sup>2</sup> For the ecclesiological meaning of the term 'Koinonia' from the Orthodox point of view see the important analysis by the Metropolitan of Pergamon **John D. Zizioulas**, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*. ST VLADIMIR'S SEMINARY PRESS. Crestwood, New York, 1985. By the same author: *Communion and Otherness. Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Edited by Paul McPartlan. T & T CLARK, 2006.

*challenges, the churches and the ecumenical movement itself are called to the conversion to Christ that true koinonia in our time demands.”*

15. This meeting attempted to break the barrier of the ‘Lund principle’ by proposing to the Churches to move beyond this. *“But they must go further. Unity today calls for structures of mutual accountability”*. This describes the concept and content of koinonia, from which of course the concept of koinonia according to the Trinitarian model is absent, main point of the contribution of the orthodox theology and ecclesiology.

### ***b) Faith and Order as a Commission of the World Council of Churches***

16. Faith and Order became a part of the WCC after its establishment in 1948, as did Mission and Evangelism later in 1961, as Council Commissions with special privileges as defined by the Faith and Order Constitution and its By-Laws.

17. The long co-operation of Faith and Order with the WCC has been fruitful. It is not our intention to go into detail here regarding the extent of this co-operation, but we will refer to those matters that are of direct concern to this meeting, namely how Faith and Order inspired the theological efforts of the WCC for unity. We can repeat and state with certainty that the WCC would have been unable to respond to its calling and mission for Church unity without the Faith and Order Commission. The WCC would have had to set unity as one of its highest priorities or establish a commission similar to Faith and Order; otherwise it would have remained an organisation with only a social mission. It would be a grave omission not to acknowledge that a similar role, albeit with a completely different orientation, is also played by the Mission and Evangelism Commission and that is why, in the restructuring of the WCC Commissions, Mission and Evangelism and Faith and Order belong to the same section.

18. The co-operation between Faith and Order and the WCC on issues of unity, ecclesiological and broader theological matters has led to the formulation of a number of proposals and models of unity. We will cite very briefly the main models of unity put forward by Faith and Order. The aim is not to present a complete picture of the history and course followed by the Ecumenical Movement towards unity, but just to give a small taste of the progress towards unity of the Churches. From its earliest beginnings, Faith and Order has pondered deeply about what elements should be included in the unity we seek. To what degree is diversity acceptable? In what form is it possible to experience and express unity? Through the deliberations and theological discussions various models emerged for the proposed unity among the Churches.

19. ***Organic union/unity*** – Two general Assemblies of the WCC proposed the so-called *organic union/unity* of the Churches (New Delhi 1961, Uppsala 1968). The New Delhi Assembly formulated the proposal for unity as follows: *“We believe that unity which is both God’s will and his gift to his church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all, and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people”*<sup>3</sup>. We will not discuss the style of the text, which presents organic visible unity as an already existing reality – as indeed is true of many texts of the WCC and Faith and Order – or the basic ecclesiology on unity, regarding which a number of comments can be made. We note only that this type of organic unity, on the one

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<sup>3</sup> Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, p. 1040, column 1.

hand, is based on the ecclesiology of St Paul on one body and many members, and, on the other, it enumerates the elements judged necessary for unity.

20. The second form of unity proposed by the Nairobi General Assembly (1975) was **conciliar fellowship**. This proposal was preceded by a discussion on the concept of conciliarity by the Faith and Order Standing Commission in Salamanca in 1973, with the wish that the day would come when a council would take place that would reveal the unity of the church. Thus, the Nairobi General Assembly defined conciliar fellowship as follows: “*The one church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united. In this conciliar fellowship each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witness to the apostolic faith, and therefore recognizes the others as belonging to the same church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit... Each church aims at maintaining sustaining relationships with her sister churches, expressed in conciliar gatherings whenever required for the fulfilment of their common calling*”. It is important to point out here too the different understanding and practice of conciliarity by each Church, something which would make this form of unity difficult to achieve.

21. Besides these two proposed models of unity, the World Lutheran Federation proposed the model of **“reconciled diversity”**, based on which existing denominational differences can be recognised not as a final form of unity but as a vehicle for the acquisition of a general Christian identity. This of course brings to light the difficulty of overcoming denominational identities and proposes their integration into the more general notion of diversity.

22. Finally, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal Willebrands proposed the ecclesiological framework and model of unity of **“communion of communions”**. Based on this proposal, the denominations will continue to exist within a broader ecclesiastical framework, with a common doctrine, common sacraments and the basic ordained ministry, while at the same time maintaining the particular denominational characteristics of liturgical life, spirituality, etc, and the Bishop of Rome would continue to exercise within the Church the sole office of the mission for unity.

23. The discussions around the issue of unity and the various proposals regarding the models of unity reveal on the one hand the difficulties that present themselves in connection with this aim and on the other the different ways in which unity has been perceived from time to time by the Churches and by theology. It is evident that many proposals and views have been discussed on numerous occasions throughout the history of both Faith and Order and the Ecumenical Movement in general. It is equally evident that the difficulties are a result of the many and diverse ecclesiologies, either of the so-called historical churches or the new and liberal churches and various ecclesiastical groups<sup>4</sup>. This is not the time to present or enumerate them; in any case the composition of this Plenary Commission of Faith and Order is a living example of the large number and diversity of ecclesiological and denominational identities. The United and Uniting Churches have adopted so-called *‘kenotic ecclesiology’*, according to which the Churches with the different denominational faiths must ‘die’ in order for a new, single ecclesiology to be born.

24. **Visible unity**: In order to describe the desired unity, both the WCC and Faith and Order have adopted the term *‘visible unity’* in the texts of their Constitutions and in their documents as a whole. The use of this term suggests the effort that is being made to answer the basic question: ‘what kind of unity are we seeking?’ Thus, the term ‘visible unity’ has its history

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<sup>4</sup> See the important study and presentation of the various ecclesiologies in the work of **Veli-Matti Karkkainen**. *An Introduction to Ecclesiology; Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives*. IVP Academic, 2002.

and own course in the quest for unity, with Faith and Order as the main body in the discussions. Indeed, although it did not succeed in answering the question as to what is the nature of the sought-after unity, the first World Conference of Faith and Order (Lausanne 1927), made the earliest distinction between the invisible Church—the real Church—to which all the faithful of the world belong, whether or not they are members of an ecclesiastical organisation, and the visible Church, which became visible and was revealed by the Christological event<sup>5</sup>. This distinction has given rise to numerous significant reactions and is rejected by many Churches on the basis of their different ecclesiologies.

25. The term '*visible unity*' was later adopted by the WCC General Assemblies of New Delhi (1961) and Uppsala (1968). The first linked the concept of visible unity to the unity of "all in each place", while the second moved from the visible unity of "all in each place" to visible unity "in all places" and "in all ages". "*We must continue to seek the unity of all Christians in a common profession of the faith, in the observance of baptism and the Eucharist, and in recognition of a ministry for the whole church ... This calls for churches in all places to realize that they belong together and are called to act together. In a time when human interdependence is so evident, it is the more imperative to make visible the bonds which unite Christians in a universal fellowship*". Today the term '*visible unity*' is used widely in all documents of the WCC, Faith and Order and elsewhere.

26. This brief overview of the background to the term '*visible unity*' leads to what I consider as fundamental questions, which we should attempt to tackle. What is the understanding of the term today, following years of use, misused and abuse of the term? How do Churches today perceive and define the nature of church unity? What is the current situation which affects the life of the Churches and which at times is supportive of their efforts for unity and at others presents obstacles to these efforts? Another question which could also be asked is the following: do the Churches today really want unity, and is church unity feasible in the face of the current diversity of contrasting and opposing ecclesiologies, or the existence of Christian groups without any ecclesiological basis? For which unity do we speak and for what Christians when the biggest number of Christians are refusing to take part to the process and the way of unity, rejecting the Ecumenical movement as a whole? These are crucial questions we are called to give answers in our responsibility as church representatives in the context of the post-modern society of our world.

### ***c) Theological studies and publications of documents by Faith and Order***

27. Faith and Order has gone to the root of the matter through its examination of important issues which either divide the Churches or form the foundation for their unity. Regarding the issue of visible unity, long and arduous discussions have taken place in both the Plenary and Standing Commission of the Faith and Order, as well as at the World Conferences. These discussions have led to the production of significant theological studies.

28. Such studies include the most widely disseminated documents on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM). We will not comment on this text except to say that the Churches' responses to it revealed the need for further study of the ecclesiology. The result of the effort that was undertaken was the ecclesiological document we have before us today: *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, and we are now called upon to give answers to the questions it raises.

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<sup>5</sup> See: **Peter Neunser**. *Théologie Œcuménique. La quête de l'unité des Églises chrétiennes*. Les Editions du CERF, Paris 2005, p. 56.

29. For a long time, ecclesiology, with its aim of defining the nature and criteria of visible unity, contained purely ecclesiological issues stemming from the theology and the life of the Churches. Such issues include the Scripture, Tradition and traditions, the common expression of apostolic faith, the Church and the sacraments, etc. Subsequently, efforts were made to discuss the so-called non-theological factors which divide the Churches. Thus, the discussion on the visible unity of the Churches now included social issues such as peace, justice, racial discrimination, the position of women in the Church, etc. Based on this perspective of non-theological factors, visible unity is possible only by restoring unity in human society. As long a human society remains divided church unity is impossible.

30. It could be said that ecclesiology on the various levels evolved with the contribution of the previous meeting of the Plenary Commission of Faith and Order at Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, and the new parameter of Christian ecclesiology within a pluralistic environment and chiefly in relation to other religions and faiths worldwide<sup>6</sup>. The aforementioned previous inter-religious dialogues raised concerns and discussions about harmonious cooperation among world religions and peaceful coexistence, and efforts were made towards a comparative theological approach. The Plenary Commission meeting at Kuala Lumpur tried to go beyond this stage and examine, through the Christology and anthropology of St Paul, “*wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God*” (Romans 15:7), the possibility of developing an ecclesiology which is not exclusive and rejecting of other religions. In other words, what is the position and relationship of the non-Christian religions of the world with the revelation of God of the Old and New Testaments? Where and how is salvation offered? Is the revelation of God limited only to a biblical revelation? The Christological question as well as the above and other questions are important to contemporary ecclesiology in the context of the modern pluralistic societies<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, the other theological studies under preparation by Faith and Order, such as “Moral Discernment in the Churches” and “Sources of Authority: Tradition and tradition” are indicative of the broader ecclesiological discussion and examination of issues which currently divide the Churches.

#### ***d) Faith and Order: Past, Present and Future***

31. As can be ascertained from previous statements, Faith and Order has performed important work and has made great strides in assisting the Churches in their quest for unity. Whether as a movement or as a commission of the WCC, it has contributed greatly to the development of bilateral and multilateral theological dialogue.

32. I stated at the outset that this meeting of the Plenary Commission of Faith and Order is important for a number of reasons. These concern the Commission itself in its relations both with the WCC and the member Churches. I am firmly convinced that the work of Faith and Order is appreciated both by the Churches and the WCC itself.

33. The subject of this Plenary meeting, “Called to be one Church,” touches on the work of Faith and Order in its entirety, from its earliest beginnings as a movement for church unity

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<sup>6</sup> See: **Faith and Order at the Crossroads. Kuala Lumpur 2004.** The Plenary Commission Meeting. Edited by Thomas F. Best. Faith and Order Paper No. 196. WCC Publications, Geneva 2005. Dr **Vasilios (KARAYIANNIS) Metropolitan of Constantia-Ammochostos.** Church from Nations – Church of Nations. Orthodox Ecclesiology and Pluralism. A Paradigm for Interpreting Modern Pluralism. Acts of the International Political Conference NATION, RELIGIONS – ORTHODOXY AND THE NEW EUROPEAN SITUATION 17-19 April, 2005. Athens, Greece.

<sup>7</sup> See: Rev. Prof. S. Mark Heim. Sharing Our Differences. Koinonia and the Theology of Religious Plurality. In: *Faith and Order at the Crossroads. Kuala Lumpur 2004.* op. cit. pp. 309-332.



and later as a WCC Commission. This Plenary is called upon to define the will of the Churches on the issue of unity and to redefine the nature of the unity we seek. In other words, we are called upon to open new horizons, trace new perspectives and specify our new visions in this call for unity, in order to emerge from the stalemates and crises of the Ecumenical Movement in the life and relations of our Churches in a constantly changing society. In the final analysis, that which is being judged is the ability and credibility of the Churches to spread the message of Christ's Gospel in the world.

34. The work of the Plenary will define the future and help the further course of Faith and Order. It must be admitted that in the recent past, owing to internal and external factors, the Commission has suffered reductions in a number of areas, whether for constitutional reasons which define its relationship to the WCC, resulting, for example, in the abolition of the previous authoritative role of the Plenary Commission, or in as a result of reductions in the Commission's staff, and financial cutbacks which have led to a reduction of programmes and theological studies. There has also been criticism that our engagement with so-called 'traditional' theological matters does not respond to the WCC agenda and we should therefore broaden the horizons of the Commission's studies to include contemporary social concerns.

35. It is evident that the modern challenges are many and cannot but impact on the life of our Churches. I do believe that Faith and Order does not turn a blind eye to these challenges. I feel that the history and purpose of Faith and Order should not be underestimated. The quest for church unity must always be at the epicentre of the activities of Faith and Order<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, it has been stated repeatedly that Faith and Order is the most important forum for multilateral theological dialogue and this privilege cannot and must not be abandoned, given also the fact that the Roman Catholic Church participates in Faith and Order as a full member and has contributed significantly to the Commission's theological studies, as have some Pentecostals. The stereotyped distinctions between 'traditional' and 'contemporary' theological issues can only create confusion. If issues that caused division of the Churches continue to do so, they are equally topical and important for the Churches. We cite the words of Metropolitan of Pergamon, Professor John Zizioulas, on this matter:

36. *"The unity of the Church must remain at the centre of Faith and Order's work and it must continue to concern visible unity in all its fundamental aspects (structure, ministry, sacraments, etc.). But this should not be a unity irrelevant to the lives of human beings - Christians as well as non-Christians. It should be a unity that would offer the world eschatological, i.e. ultimately hope and meaning; a unity that would have an impact on human existence and culture. We should, therefore, never be satisfied until our agreements on traditional questions dividing us reveal also their broader significance for the life of the world. The balancing of the "unity of the Church" with the "unity of humankind" in the work of Faith and Order has been very important in this respect. It must be now, however, extended to include concern also for the non-human world, as the presence of the ecological crisis makes it more and more clear"* (Paper op. cit.).

37. Lukas Vischer asks what are the important directions of the Church in the third Christian Millennium and concludes that the transition from one millennium to the next has not opened new horizons despite the many changes that have come about whether in the internal life of the Churches, or in the relations between them, or as a result of the social, political, moral and economic changes in the shape of the modern world. Consequently, the factors that defined the

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<sup>8</sup> See: Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon. Faith and Order yesterday, today and tomorrow. Günther Gassmann. What is Faith and Order? Mary Tanner. What is Faith and Order? (Papers prepared for a Faith and Order consultation with Younger Theologians held at Turku, Finland, 3-11 August 1995.

history of the Churches during previous decades continue to have an effect in the present day. The divisions among the Churches remain the most important problem to be solved<sup>9</sup>.

38. Of course, in the context of the above critiques by important personalities of the Ecumenical Movement, it could be said that the Ecumenical Movement in general and Faith and Order in particular have laid the foundations for overcoming divisions in the third millennium. The existence and continuation of the work of Faith and Order are inextricably linked to the will of the member churches. Despite the constitutional abolition of the Plenary Commission's authoritative role, it is still able to contribute substantively to the theological and ecclesiological work of Faith and Order. The participation of representatives of churches from all Christian denominations conveys firstly the will of the member churches for unity and secondly the thoughts and concerns of contemporary societies worldwide. It is for this reason that the Standing Commission has repeatedly discussed the possibility of participation of the members of the Plenary in the various current theological programmes.

39. Within this framework, what this Plenary could possibly make as a recommendation to the competent bodies of WCC (General Secretariat, Executive and Central Committees) is for more visibility of the Commission of Faith and Order in the current internal structures of the World Council of Churches. Because in the actual program planning of WCC, Faith and Order—as well as CWME—is a sub-unit within the programs of the P2, where its visibility is not obvious. This proposal is based, on the one hand, on the historical nature and background of the Faith and Order Movement, as mentioned earlier, and, on the other, on the participation of the Roman Catholic Church as a full member as well as other Churches that are not members of the WCC. It is also a fact that all the Plenary commissioners' member-churches display lively interest in the work of Faith and Order.

#### ***e) Concluding words***

40. Here, I am going to repeat what I was saying in my report to the last meeting of the Standing Commission in Cairo last year (17-21 June 2008): *St John Chrysostom, commenting on the words of St Paul in Ephesians: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13). He continues: "To the unity, says he, of the faith. That is, until we shall be shown to have all one faith, when we shall all alike acknowledge the common bond. Till then you must labour to this end. Now, when we shall all believe alike, then shall there be unity"*<sup>10</sup>.

41. *Unity of the Church is a diachronic quest. Its earliest references are found in the New Testament itself. Jesus Christ in his High Priestly Prayer, shortly before the Passion of the Cross, prayed for his disciples and the whole of humanity, "That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee that they also may be one in us..." (John 17:21). St Paul also makes his own references to unity and develops the ecclesiological image of the "body and its limbs" in order to make clear the meaning and necessity of unity in the Church*<sup>11</sup>.

42. In closing, we repeat this very prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ *"That they all may be one; as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me"* (John 17:21), words which represent a supreme call to us all that we may be one indivisible Church.

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<sup>9</sup> See: **Lukas Fischer**. Major Trends in the Life of the Churches. In: A. History of the Ecumenical Movement. Volume 3, 1968-2000. Edited by John Briggs, Mercy Anba Oduyoye and Georges Tssetsis. World Council of Churches, Geneva 2004, pp. 23-50.

<sup>10</sup> Homily on Ephesians 11, PG 62, 83.

<sup>11</sup> **Minutes of the Standing Commission on Faith and Order meeting in Cairo**, Arab Republic of Egypt. Faith and Order Paper No 208, pp. 44-45.