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FOR ACTION

### Moderator's Address

“We intend to stay together”<sup>1</sup>  
PERSEVERANCE IN SEEKING THE UNITY

#### Introductory remarks

1. Let me begin this address by saying that it will be somewhat different from the customary reports of previous years. At the evaluation done at our first full central committee meeting in August/September 2006 comments were made suggesting more time be allocated for discussion with each other following the presentation. I agree fully with this desire. The central committee does not meet that often, and when it does, there is always a very heavy agenda. And we are expected to jointly build up our programme, including the visions and hopes that give meaning to it. So this address, shorter than usual, is to be understood as an invitation to sharing and dialogue.

2. This is the second full meeting of this central committee. Two years have elapsed since our last assembly, and we are already taking steps towards the next one. At our last meeting I recognized and called for “a common journey of gratitude for God’s marvellous gift of unity”, in our responsibilities as central committee members. I also mentioned that our common journey derives from “a beautiful, though difficult, ecumenical commitment” which brings us together, with all “the many differences that exist among us”. I grounded our passionate ecumenical commitment in the hope which strengthens our faith and love on the basis of Christ’s resurrection.

#### Our constitutional mandate

3. At this meeting we are celebrating the *WCC’s 60th anniversary*. Celebrations are occasions for remembrance and the revival of good memories. But we certainly do not celebrate to applaud the existence of the WCC but rather to remember the legacy which those who have come before us left unto us. We do this in order to move forward with a greater sense of commitment, in a world situation remarkably different from the one faced by the delegates who gathered in Amsterdam in 1948 to constitute a World Council of Churches.

4. As is well known but always meaningful to recall, our *Constitution* states as its basis: “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” (I) Under III, Purposes and Functions, we find first of all that “the World Council of Churches is constituted by the churches to serve the one

<sup>1</sup> Message of the First Assembly of the WCC, Amsterdam, 1948. The famous phrase was suggested by Kathleen Bliss, the only woman among the assembly’s main speakers. (Michael Kinnamon, *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement and How it has been Impoverished by its Friends*, St. Louis, Missouri, 2003, p. 139. There also the text of the message.

ecumenical movement.” That is, on one side the WCC does not identify itself with *the* ecumenical movement, but understands itself as part of a wider ecumenical movement. On the other hand, it does not understand its task as serving itself, but as being an instrument to serve the ecumenical movement, which is, as said, wider than the WCC and of which it is a part. So if we look back into our history and look forward into the future, the main question to be raised is by no means how strong the WCC may have become, but rather how well it has served and continues to serve the ecumenical movement. Of course it is assumed that this service has been and remains highly significant. So if I emphasize the dimension of service to the ecumenical movement, it is not because of doubts which might be raised to that effect, but because it is crucial to constantly remind ourselves of what the WCC was created for and of what it must always remain.

5. The same section of the Constitution also states that “the *primary purpose* of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to *visible unity* in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in *worship* and common life in Christ, through *witness and service* to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.” The emphases were added by me to underline the holistic approach given by the WCC as an instrument of service to the one ecumenical movement. Accordingly, the text proceeds to break down how the WCC will give expression to its effort of “seeking *koinonia* in faith and life, witness and service”, namely through:

- “the prayerful search for forgiveness and reconciliation”,
- “common witness in each place and in all places”,
- “commitment to diakonia in serving human need”,
- processes of education leading to “the growth of an ecumenical consciousness”,
- mutual assistance among the churches “in their relationships to and with people of other faith communities”,
- fostering “renewal and growth in unity, worship, mission and service”.

6. On this occasion I have quoted at length the Constitution of the WCC for various reasons. First of all, it adequately expresses the convictions and the commitment of *all* the churches and organizations which constitute the WCC, since every church has “to express agreement with the basis on which the Council is founded and confirm their commitment to the purposes and functions of the Council as defined in articles I and III of the constitution” (Rule I.3), in order to become a member of the Council.” Thus, these articles express a fundamental and full agreement among the WCC member churches, and I would dare to say, this agreement even goes beyond the WCC constituency. Secondly, these formulations reflect with precision the history of the ecumenical movement which led to the creation of the WCC, in their various streams: mission, life and work, faith and order, and Christian education. Thirdly, all these are fundamental and integral to how we envisage the *oikoumene*. In combining all these streams in its formulation, the Constitution recognizes them as specific dimensions of the one ecumenical journey. It wishes to give all of them the due importance in a holistic understanding of salvation and discipleship. Any controversy about which dimension is more important or which should be given preference is therefore ruled out constitutionally from the outset. It might be that occasionally, due to contextual circumstances for potential opportunities, one or the other may have received greater attention outside or perhaps even inside the WCC, but conceptually all of them are interrelated and should be understood and dealt with in an “integrated” manner, as we have become accustomed to say.

7. I would like to add one comment at this point: although there are different dimensions to the ecumenical commitment, all of them have a living centre in common, which is precisely the call to *visible unity*. This may also be expressed in a variety of ways, such as “common calling”, “common life in Christ”, “common witness” to the “one faith” and seeking to be able to share in “one Eucharistic fellowship”. In short, to receive the gift of unity from God and to respond to it in the *koinonia* of brothers and sisters in the one church is our calling and the primary purpose of the WCC. So when we celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the WCC it is an occasion to discern anew our calling, while reaffirming this purpose and this commitment. We live in a deeply changed world and with a profoundly changed religious setting today – but there is no need to change this basic commitment

which has gathered the churches in the WCC fellowship throughout these 60 years. That has been our calling throughout those years and will continue to be our calling in the years ahead.

### **The call to unity in the major ecumenical assemblies**

8. When the delegates met in *Amsterdam in 1948* they were very conscious of the brokenness of the world order. Three years after World War II they recognized a situation of “disillusionment and despair”. “There are millions who are hungry, millions who have no home, no country and no hope.” (From the message of the first WCC assembly, Amsterdam 1948). But they did not state it simply as a denunciation; rather they recognized the need for repentance: “Often we have tried to serve God and mammon, put other loyalties before loyalty to Christ, confused the Gospel with our own economic or national or racial interest, and feared war more than we have hated it.”

9. Yet the assembly was held under the conviction that the “world is in the hands of the living God”, that in Christ Jesus “God has broken the power of evil once for all, and opened for everyone the gate into freedom and joy in the Holy Spirit.” The mission perspective was clear: “We pray God to stir up His whole Church to make this Gospel known to the whole world, and to call on all men<sup>2</sup> to believe in Christ, to live in His love and to hope for His coming.” Just as clear was the diaconal and prophetic dimension: “We have to learn afresh together to speak boldly in Christ’s name both to those in power and to the people, to oppose terror, cruelty and race discrimination, to stand by the outcast, the prisoner and the refugee. We have to make of the Church in every place a voice for those who have no voice, and a home where every man will be at home.”

10. The experience of the gift of unity and the joint commitment towards unity served as foundation and gave strength to the mission and diakonal convocation: “We are one in acknowledging Him [Christ] as our God and Saviour. We are divided from one another not only in matters of faith, order and tradition, but also by pride of nation, class and race. But Christ has made us His own, and he is not divided. In seeking Him we find one another. Here at Amsterdam we have committed ourselves afresh to Him, and have covenanted with one another in constituting this World Council of Churches. *We intend to stay together.* We call upon Christian congregations everywhere to endorse and fulfil this covenant in their relations one with another. In thankfulness to God we commit the future to Him.” We take these words as our own today, sixty years after they were proclaimed.

11. The WCC’s understanding of the church, the churches and their relation to the World Council of Churches was then deepened in the famous central committee statement in Toronto, 1950. It states what the WCC is not, namely: a superchurch, an instrument to negotiate unions between churches, an organization which adopts any one particular conception of the church. Neither does it imply that churches should treat their own conception of the church as relative or that a specific doctrine concerning the nature of Church unity be accepted. And it then proceeds stating the positive assumptions underlying the WCC: that “conversation, cooperation and common witness of the churches must be based on the common recognition that Christ is the Divine Head of the Body”<sup>3</sup>; the belief that “the Church of Christ is one”; that “the membership of the Church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body;” a forum for mutual consideration of the relationship of the churches to “the Holy Catholic Church which the Creeds profess”, without implying “that each church must regard the other member churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word”; but that the member churches “recognize in other churches elements of the true Church”; and practical implications of mutual consultation, solidarity with each other, spiritual relationships to learn from each other and help each other. These are fundamental definitions, but perhaps even more important is the spiritual discernment concerning unity which underlies the whole document: “Unity

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<sup>2</sup> Inclusive language became customary only in the last decades.

<sup>3</sup> The text makes explicit reference to the manifestation of the Orthodox delegates in Edinburgh 1937 (Second World Conference on Faith and Order): “In spite of all our differences, our common Master and Lord is *one-Jesus Christ* who will lead us to a more and more close collaboration for the edifying of the Body of Christ.”

arises out of the love of God in Jesus Christ, which, binding the constituent churches to him, binds them to one another. It is the earnest desire of the Council that the churches may be bound closer to Christ and therefore closer to one another. In the bond of God's love, they will desire continually to pray for one another and to strengthen one another, in worship and in witness, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ."

12. The conviction that in Christ we are one and the earnest desire for unity among Christians and the churches was also the driving force at the great ecumenical events which led to the foundation of the World Council of Churches: the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910, the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work in Stockholm 1925, and the First World Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne 1927.

13. Quite differently from the situation in 1948, when the WCC was founded, the mood in *Edinburgh*, at the *World Missionary Conference*, was one of optimism and confidence in a positive development of relations among nations and about the future perspective of humankind. World War I was actually not far away, but was not discernible to the delegates. In its message, which was split in two parts, one to "the members of the Church in Christian lands", the other to "the members of the Christian Church in non-Christian lands", the expectation was expressed in relation to the following ten years that, "if they are rightly used they may be among the most glorious in Christian history." And a strong appeal was made in favour of evangelization of all peoples and nations, "committed to all and each within the Christian family...we need supremely a deeper sense of responsibility to Almighty God for the great trust which He has committed to us in the evangelization of the world." In addressing the Christians in "non-Christian lands" it was said that "Nothing has caused more joy than the witness borne from all quarters as to the steady growth in numbers, zeal, and power of the rising Christian Church in newly-awakening lands." We may have good reasons to be reticent towards the rather triumphalistic tone of this sentence (and in other passages of the messages), but that does not have to diminish our own joy over the unity the delegates were experiencing and seeking, in order to proclaim the gospel with credibility: "We have reached a greater unity of common action than has been attained in the Christian Church for centuries" and "We thank God for the longing after unity which is so prominent among you and is one of our own deepest longings to-day". This deep longing also summons us as central committee of the WCC.

14. The *Stockholm Conference on Life and Work* (1925) turned its attention to a very concrete, yet huge challenge: "Responding to His call 'Follow Me,' we have in the presence of the Cross accepted the urgent duty of applying His Gospel in all realms of human life – industrial, social, political and international." It declared that "the soul is the supreme value" and therefore "first right the right of salvation". Then it moved on to advocate a "Christian internationalism", to recognize the "pressing need of education" to express "our sense of the horror of war, and of its futility as a means of settling international disputes". Among others that conference also specifically addressed the youth and the "workers": "We share their aspirations after a just and fraternal social order." "Unity" was once more a key concept. While recognizing the conference itself as "the most signal instance of fellowship and co-operation, across the boundaries of nations and confessions, which the world has yet seen", the delegates stated their aim as being "to secure united practical action in Christian Life and Work", and added: "The Conference itself is a conspicuous fact. But it is only a beginning." Once more, unity was not only a longing, not simply a practical goal, but also a spiritual experience: "As we repeated the Lord's Prayer together, each in the speech his mother taught him, we realized afresh our common faith, and experienced as never before the unity of the Church of Christ." On this basis and establishing a continuation committee the conference expressed its hope towards the future: "May we not hope that through the work of this body, and through the increasing fellowship and co-operation of the Christians of all nations in the one Spirit, our oneness in Christ may be more and more revealed to the world in Life and Work? Only as we become inwardly one shall we attain real unity of mind and spirit. The nearer we draw to the Crucified, the nearer we come to one another, in however varied colours the Light of the World may be reflected in our faith. Under the Cross of Jesus Christ we reach out hands to

one another. The Good Shepherd had to die in order that He might gather together the scattered children of God. In the Crucified and Risen Lord alone lies the world's hope."

15. Unity or the call to unity was most strongly and explicitly dealt with at the *First World Conference on Faith and Order* (Lausanne, 1927). The very first sentence in the preamble to the documents received by the conference for "transmission to the churches" states: "We, representatives of many Christian Communion throughout the world, *united* in the common confession of faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour, believing that the Spirit of God is with us, are assembled to consider the things wherein we agree and the things wherein we differ." (emphasis added) And then: "We thank God and rejoice over agreements reached; upon our agreements we build. Where the reports record differences, we call upon the Christian world to an earnest reconsideration of the conflicting opinions now held, and a strenuous endeavour to reach the truth as it is in God's mind, which should be the foundation of the Church's unity."

16. One of the documents adopted was precisely devoted to "the call to unity".<sup>4</sup> It declares: "God wills unity. Our presence in this Conference bears testimony to our desire to bend our wills to His. However we may justify the beginnings of disunion, we lament its continuance and henceforth must labour, in penitence and faith, to build up our broken walls. God's Spirit has been in the midst of us. It was He who called us hither. His presence has been manifest in our worship, our deliberations and our whole fellowship. He has discovered us to one another. He has enlarged our horizons, quickened our understanding, and enlivened our hope. We have dared and God has justified our daring. We can never be the same again. Our deep thankfulness must find expression in sustained endeavour to share the visions vouchsafed us here with those smaller home groups where our lot is cast."<sup>5</sup> But the mission perspective was present as well when defining the nature of the Gospel: "The Gospel is the prophetic call to sinful man to turn to God, the joyful tidings of justification and of sanctification to those who believe in Christ. It is the comfort of those who suffer; to those who are bound, it is the assurance of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. The Gospel brings peace and joy to the heart, and produces in men a self-denial, readiness for brotherly service, and compassionate love."<sup>6</sup>

17. Allow me to remind ourselves in this context how clearly the strong desire for unity has also been expressed by the Orthodox family and the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, for example, the *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, issued as early as the year 1920, drafted by the holy synod, an encyclical "Unto the Churches of Christ everywhere", calling for a "highly desirable and necessary" "rapprochement between the various Christian churches and fellowship between them", and to overcome "antiquated prejudices, practices or pretensions". "Love should be rekindled and strengthened among the churches, so that they should [...] consider one another [...] as being a part of the household of Christ and 'fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise of God in Christ' (Eph. 3:6)." Among the concrete proposals there was also the one of "convoking pan-Christian conferences in order to examine questions of common interest to all the churches."

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<sup>4</sup> Other documents were devoted to additional key-issues with which we continue to wrestle today: The Church's message to the world – the gospel; The nature of the Church; The Church's common confession of faith; The Ministry of the Church; The Sacraments; The unity of Christendom in relation to existing Churches.

<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note the self-critical assessment concerning the lack of inclusivity precisely by a conference which was dealing with doctrinal issues: "Some of us, pioneers in this undertaking, have grown old in our search for unity. It is to youth that we look to lift the torch on high. We men have carried it too much alone through many years. The women henceforth should be accorded their share of responsibility. And so the whole Church will be enabled to do that which no section can hope to perform."

<sup>6</sup> At the Second World Conference on Faith and Order, in Edinburgh, 1937 "unity" again was at the heart of the deliberations. While acknowledging that "our divisions are contrary to the will of Christ", the delegates declared their unity to be "of heart and spirit", and stated furthermore: "This unity does not consist in the agreement of our minds or the consent of our wills. It is founded in Jesus Christ Himself, Who lived, died and rose again to bring us to the Father, and Who through the Holy Spirit dwells in His Church. We are one because we are all the objects of the love and grace of God, and called by Him to witness in all the world to His glorious gospel."

18. In the year 1965 the Roman Catholic Church, at the Second Vatican Council, approved its Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, giving the highest and clear support to the ecumenical endeavours towards unity. It recognized the members of other churches as brothers and sisters in Christ, and emphasizes the Holy Spirit's action creating unity: "It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that He is the principle of the Church's unity." (UR, 2) It also declares that "the concern for restoring unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the talent of each, whether it be exercised in daily Christian living or in theological and historical studies." (UR, 5) At the conclusion, the council expressed the "urgent wish" that "no obstacle be put in the ways of divine Providence and no preconceived judgments impair the future inspirations of the Holy Spirit." (UR, 24)

19. Coming back to the WCC, it is not necessary now (nor possible) to go into details of the many texts which have dealt with the "unity we seek" throughout the 60 years of the existence of the WCC. The important statement "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches", most commonly known as CUV document, adopted by the WCC central committee in 1997, summarizes *various assemblies* this way (CUV, 1.13 and 1.14): "The New Delhi Assembly (1961) [...] accepted the first formal statement on "the church's unity": 'We believe that the 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 a fully committed fellowship...' "The assemblies in Uppsala (1968), Nairobi (1975), Vancouver (1983) and Canberra (1991) continued to deepen this common understanding by unfolding the quest for unity in its universal dimension, embracing the human community as well as the church. They explored such concepts as conciliarity and conciliar fellowship (Uppsala and Nairobi), a Eucharistic vision (Vancouver) and "The Unity of the Church as *Koinonia*: Gift and Calling" (Canberra). In this latter statement of the *Seventh Assembly of the WCC* we can find also this important definition: "The unity of the church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one Eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled: and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation."

20. The *Eighth Assembly of the WCC*, held in Harare, in 1998, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the WCC, held a recommitment service, where the ecumenical vision was reaffirmed. This vision was stated with the following words: "We long for the visible oneness of the body of Christ, affirming the gifts of all, young and old, women and men, lay and ordained. We expect the healing of human community, the wholeness of God's entire creation. We trust in the liberating power of forgiveness, transforming enmity into friendship and breaking the spiral of violence. We open ourselves for a culture of dialogue and solidarity, sharing life with strangers and seeking encounter with those of other faiths." In pledging "to stay together" and in being "restless to grow together in unity", the delegates also declared that "neither failures nor uncertainties, neither fears nor threats will weaken our intention to continue to walk together on the way to unity."

21. Finally the *Ninth Assembly* in Porto Alegre, 2006, adopted a statement entitled "Called to be one Church", as "An invitation to the Churches to renew their commitment to the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue". It stresses the commitment towards "full visible unity", the "oneness in rich diversity", the importance of the proclamation of the gospel, that through baptism "we belong to one another", that "mission is integral to the life of the Church", then proceeds raising questions to which the churches are invited to give answers, and finalizes this way: "Our churches *journey together* in conversation and common action, confident that the risen Christ will continue to disclose himself as he did in the breaking of bread at Emmaus, and that he will unveil the deeper meaning of fellowship and communion (Luke 24:13-35). Noting the progress made in the ecumenical movement, we encourage our churches to continue on this arduous yet joyous path, trusting in God the Father, Son and Holy

Spirit, whose grace transforms our struggles for unity into the fruits of communion. *Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches?* (emphases in the original text)

### **Conclusion: The challenge of perseverance**

22. Why have I recalled at such length referential texts of our history, vision and commitments? Well, there have been many, many questions raised and doubts expressed, both from outside and also from inside our circles, about our common journey. How much of a *common* journey has it really been? To what extent have we entrenched ourselves into our confessional or institutional boundaries, not really being open to the contribution of the other? Do we not pile up declaration after declaration, at the same time being timid or resistant to give concrete shape to what we have declared again and again? Do we not tame the anxious and holy desire of the laity to move on? Are we able to convey to people less theologically trained the sometimes subtle theological distinctions we make? Are we not too often concerned about ourselves, and thus incapable of rendering the service of witness and love to others? Has our prophetic voice not become rather weak? Have we not “professionalized” the ecumenical commitment at the risk of losing its original passion? Are we really listening to what the Holy Spirit is testifying and revealing or are we just repeating our own old discourse?

23. Many, many questions. Then there is today’s religious scenery, profoundly changed and constantly changing worldwide. Secularization spreads continuously in countries which were formerly called “Christian lands”. Other, “non-ecumenical” churches and movements are spreading and growing. Do they have a vitality we have lost? Is their missionary zeal deeper than ours? Do they link their diaconal efforts better to the core of their faith? Have they grasped the signs of the time and are responding to them, and we can’t see? Radical questions. It has even been suggested that the ecumenical movement has failed, and that it is dying.

24. Brothers and sisters, before you get too much disturbed with the moderator of the WCC central committee raising this kind of questions, let me clarify that they are not really my own, at least not in this radical form. But I am sure you also have heard them more than once. They are too many questions, raised too often, to be simply dismissed as reflecting prejudices others would hold. There is some truth in them. And we should listen attentively and take them up as a challenge to us.

25. In this context, looking into our history and recommitting ourselves to the ecumenical vision and the common journey seeking unity is helpful. Looking into this history we might, in a spirit of repentance, acknowledge that, in spite of clearly discernible advancements in the ecumenical journey, we also have failed again and again, at least in not being able to discern with greater clarity the way the Holy Spirit is leading us. But our response cannot be one of giving up. That would be a betrayal of our vocation.

26. We reaffirm that theological dialogue, mission and *diakonia* are an integral part to the being of the church. The fact that a “holistic” approach is affirmed today by all churches, even by Evangelical and Pentecostal churches which are not WCC members, is in itself a major achievement of the ecumenical movement. We reaffirm the search for visible unity as the core of our journey, which we cannot lay aside. Again, the importance of reaching unity is today recognized by not only our churches but also by Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, as the Global Christian Forum, held in Limuru, Kenya, November 2007, made evident. This is a second significant achievement of the wider ecumenical movement. I therefore consider this development as a promising one, led by the Spirit. In fact, at the first Global Christian Forum, participants shared their faith experiences and got to know each other better and to recognize the faith and spiritual values of one another. Perhaps a future forum could be devoted to sharing how we, each from our own confessional tradition, and within our particular context, understand the Holy Spirit and how the Holy Spirit works in our lives, in our churches and in our world.

27. In preparing this address I also looked into relevant passages of the Bible for our subject matter. They are many, as you all know. They inspire, comfort and challenge us. Let me refer to just one, describing the first church in Jerusalem: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42) The text goes on to describe how they lived out that fellowship in meeting the needs of everybody and sharing their resources with the poor. This is a description of a community which had a holistic understanding of what the Church is and what discipleship is about. From the same book of Acts we also know that this was not always a full reality among them, but it was the kind of unity in faith and love they were earnestly seeking, to which calling they devoted themselves. The text could also be translated "they *persevered* in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers." We need the gift of perseverance, of endurance in the ecumenical journey. "We intend to stay together."

28. There are those who consider that the ecumenical movement has become irrelevant. They must be respected. There are those who raise radical and critical questions. They must be listened to, and their criticisms received as challenges. But the ecumenical movement most needs those who are able to persevere. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to grant us that gift of perseverance, and the willingness to move ahead.

### **A final remark**

This actually completes my address. But let me add a final brief remark. This is only our second full session. We are therefore still somewhat in the initial stages of everybody getting acquainted with each other and building up the fellowship among ourselves. We will have to take important decisions, both in open and closed sessions. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to grant us in all sessions the spirit of fellowship which inspired the first Christians.

Walter Altmann