



## Moderator's Address

### ECUMENICAL OWNERSHIP

#### What does our ecumenical commitment mean?

1. In chapter 6 of John's gospel we have an account of a series of episodes and dialogues between Jesus and his followers which have particular significance for the core of our faith and, therefore, also for the essence of our ecumenical commitment. At the beginning of this chapter we find the well known story of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish to feed the multitude gathered to meet Jesus. The following day, Jesus having left the crowd and gone to the other side of the lake, the multitude goes after him. Jesus then says to them that he is the bread that has come down from heaven, the bread of life. "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6: 35) To those who believe in him and that he was sent by the Father he promises resurrection and eternal life (v. 40). Rather than expressing their joy, the multitude starts complaining. Jesus underlines his message once more: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (v.51) This message was a scandal even for many of his disciples and they complained about it. Jesus asks: "Does this [message] offend you?" (v. 61) And: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe." (v 63)

2. Let us interrupt the account here for the time being. Jesus addresses the multitude, and thus also the wider circle of his disciples as well as the twelve, as we shall see later, in a very particular way. He draws attention to that which is of the utmost importance, namely the relation they may have with him, Jesus. What kind of relation will that be? Just looking for food to nourish their bodies? Of course, Jesus does not dismiss food as unnecessary. After all, he had fed the multitude. And in the Lord's Prayer he taught us to ask God for our daily bread. So when he does stress the spirit as the fundamental dimension of our relation with him and the Father, he is not advocating that type of spiritualization that forgets the material needs of human beings. He had resisted that temptation himself, quoting Deuteronomy (8:3) and declaring: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4)

3. So, many had followed Jesus only for physical and material help: a rather superficial relation with Jesus, looking only for the satisfaction of their immediate needs. As long as they could have their daily needs met, they would quite willingly forget about the spirit. Then there were also a number of disciples who got scandalized with the consequences of discipleship. They had followed Jesus and listened to his teachings. They had come to know on the whole that the meaning of life goes beyond the satisfaction of our immediate needs. They followed Jesus for a while. However, once confronted with the consequences of discipleship, reminded that Jesus would ascend to heaven, to the Father who had sent him and that this would also mean Jesus going through pain and death, they were willing to give up eternal hope and life, and they turned their backs on Jesus.

4. Does this episode have relevance also for our ecumenical commitment? Some might feel it inappropriate to use a passage referring to the very personal and spiritual relation with Jesus to reflect on the ecumenical relations and challenges we face today. However, our commitment to the ecclesial efforts towards unity among God's people is not simply an endeavour to meet together as churches, learn from each other and cooperate with each other. It has not to do with how we as persons feel towards the churches and relate to them. It has to do with the ultimate meaning of the church as body of Christ, "that they may all be one [...], so that the world may believe." (John 17:21) Because of that ultimate missiological goal, we have committed ourselves to seeking unity. We are dealing not only with an ecclesiological issue, rather with salvation of humankind.

5. Keeping this foundation in mind, let us highlight a few challenges to our ecumenical commitment today.

### ***The "ownership" of the ecumenical commitment***

6. More and more in recent years I have come across the term of "ownership" related to ecumenical commitment or even to the ecumenical movement. I have often heard the question who has "ownership" of it? It has been stressed that we need to encourage "ownership" of the ecumenical movement. Coming from a country that uses languages other than English, I have struggled with this term. It is a difficult concept to translate into at least some other languages. In Portuguese, for instance, a literal translation would give the idea that somebody takes "possession" of the ecumenical movement. You own something which is your property. In a modern "individualistic" view you can then do with it as you please. Obviously nothing of that kind is intended when we refer to the "ownership" of the ecumenical movement.

7. However, I also find a double positive nuance in the term "ownership". Fundamentally, it has to do with belonging to, participating in, being a part of. Thus, it has to be understood first in a passive sense. You do not create and develop the ecumenical movement, rather you get involved in it. In this sense we realize that we are actually "owned" by the ecumenical movement, not the other way around. It becomes our passion, as has often been said. Only in first becoming a part of the ecumenical movement, can it then also be "adopted" in an active sense, as our commitment towards unity. Thus, stewardship, advocacy and solidarity result from the fact that you participate, that you "are" a part of the ecumenical movement.

8. To translate this perception into theological terms would mean that when we consider the meaning and the implications of the ecumenical movement, the indicative of God's grace comes before God's imperative demanding our actions. These will be a reflexion of God's own action of love and salvation towards human beings. The next step of God's grace received in faith is the "incorporation" into the body of Christ, also expressed by the term "communion". From there derives the calling towards witness and service, mission and diaconia. By analogy our ecumenical commitment has its roots in God's own action of salvation, developing from there into participation in the body of Christ, and from there into responsibility and commitment.

9. As a fellowship of churches, the WCC is a space, which in this sense "belongs" to us all (although, I want to repeat, we actually "belong" to it), but it is also a space which we all ought to take responsibility for time and again. Looking at our history we have good reason to call it a privileged instrument of the ecumenical movement, but this affirmation is always tempered by the indispensable "modesty" of knowing that the one ecumenical movement is much wider than this instrument of ours. This is well expressed in the Common Understanding and Vision (CUV) document. God through the Holy Spirit has his own ways of calling the churches to unity, beyond our efforts.

### ***False dichotomies***

10. At the last central committee meeting I underlined in the moderator's address the holistic understanding of salvation and discipleship. This was done reflecting on the basis of the history of the ecumenical movement at large and the WCC constitutional provisions in particular.

"These formulations [in the WCC Constitution] 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. [...] 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."<sup>1</sup>

11. Yet quite often we have to struggle with false dichotomies when describing the ecumenical journey. By false dichotomies I understand a concept or attitude which separates from one another, elements which are central to the life of the church. Rather than recognized and affirmed as complementary to each other, they may even be played off one against the other.

12. One of these false dichotomies consists in playing off action and doctrine against each other. I referred to this dichotomy at the last moderator's address. Therefore, it suffices here to say that an emphasis on doctrine which would underplay action, for example social action, thus turning doctrine into a false, hypocritical and vain intellectual endeavour, would be a false dichotomy. On the other hand, an emphasis on action, which dismisses doctrine as irrelevant, loses its spiritual roots and therefore becomes empty and weak, like a house built upon shallow foundations.

13. I would like to reflect a little more on the importance of the diaconal ministry in the life of the church, because another false dichotomy which exists considers *diakonia* of lower value than mission, rather than seeing mission in a holistic way and *diakonia* as an essential dimension of mission itself. Mission without *diakonia* would easily turn into an arrogant and violent enterprise, not respectful of the culture, values and identity of the addressees of the Christian message. It would try to impose one's own faith upon others, instead of giving reasons for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15) and respecting the others' own faith decision. The Church's proclamation and celebration have to be strongly connected with *diakonia*. "If not, proclamation may be perceived as proselytism, not as an open invitation to receive God's gift of salvation, and celebration as mere spiritualism, not as a joyful adoration of the Triune God."<sup>2</sup>

14. On the other hand, *diakonia* is often segregated from the mission of the church not only for practical purposes, but as a principle, possibly under the convenient and in this instance not at all convincing excuse that service to the neighbour must be attentive entirely to their needs, without any self-interest on the side of those who are rendering the diaconal service. In this case *diakonia* could easily turn into a "professional" enterprise without heart and passion, delinked from its spiritual motivation, which remains hidden.

15. In this context, I share with you the following considerations from my recent address to the Assembly of the World Federation for Diaconia, in Atlanta, Georgia, USA:

"Diaconal ministry is part of the essence of the church. Witness and service have always gone hand in hand, or should always have been hand in hand. In Acts 6 we have the account of seven deacons being chosen to assist the members in need within the church, in particular the widows. This was done on the basis of the declaration of the twelve: "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait at tables." (Acts 6:2) Two misunderstandings arise quite often in relation to this passage. One assumes that the twelve kept in their own authority what is "really" important within the church, namely proclamation of the word and administration of the sacraments, while *diakonia* is

<sup>1</sup> moderator's Address, central committee, February 2008 in: *The Ecumenical Review*, January 2008

<sup>2</sup> Quotation from my key-note address held on 24 July 2009, at the Diaconia World Assembly (Atlanta, Georgia, USA)

viewed as something of a secondary nature, which can be left for others of lower authority. The other misunderstanding is that there are rigid boundaries between proclamation and service, each restricting themselves to their specific assignment and task.

Differently from these assumptions, Acts 6 must be seen as the sharing of responsibilities within the one ministry in the Church which derives from Christ's ministry. The twelve did not only proclaim the gospel, they also healed the sick. The deacons did not only help the needy in their material needs. Stephen, for example, was martyred for the witness he had given to the word. And Philip interpreted scripture to the Ethiopian finance official. He witnessed to Christ as the servant described in Isaiah 53, and baptized the official.

Thus, *diakonia*, as part of a holistic understanding of mission, was already installed in the early church when the apostles laid their hands on the persons chosen to become deacons, with the special task to take care of the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Their task was spiritually grounded in the second command to love our neighbours as ourselves and the teachings in the Scriptures about taking care of the needs of the orphans, widows and strangers. The diaconal ministry is deeply rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ, the saviour of our world."

### ***Memory at the crossroads: stock taking and dream weaving***

16. Some initial words about the economic situation of the world today. Since we last met, the world has been thrown into a financial crisis of catastrophic dimensions. Financial practices driven by speculation and greed, accompanied by an ideology of economic liberalism that radically deregulated banking and financial systems, disrupted the whole world economy. Wealthy countries suffered a strong decrease in their production. Unemployment grew in proportion. But those who have been the most affected, once again, have been the poorest of the world. Rather than moving towards achievement of the millennium goals, an additional 100 million people were driven into poverty, and world hunger has increased considerably. Extraordinarily large sums of money, which never seem to exist or be made available to combat world hunger, have been made rapidly available to rescue banks, other financial institutions and big enterprises. It is possible that at the end of the crisis the wealthy nations may have a somewhat lower share of the world economy and that some nations from the South, not involved in the malpractices of the banking system, may recover faster than others from the economic decline. Under the impact of the crisis, the ideological assumption that the free-market and globalization process would bring about world-wide prosperity, has receded. But there are no real signs that the imbalances and injustices of the world economic order are being addressed, and neoliberalism may celebrate a come-back once the recession has ended.

17. The year 2009 is also one of intense memories from the past and points to us being at a crossroads in the present. It has been the occasion for various celebrations and commemorations.

18. To start with church-related events, this has been the year of celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. Calvin recovered essential, long-neglected Christian principles, such as the sovereignty of God and the authority of scripture, by holding the doctrines of the Church up to the light of biblical teaching. His insistence on the freedom of individual believers and recognition that magistrates are sinful like everyone else, contributed to representative democracy and the separation of church and state.

19. Many voices, also from confessional families beyond the Reformed churches, highlighted Calvin's invaluable contribution to theology and church organization. Among the several approaches shared by the speakers and hundreds of Calvin enthusiasts who flocked to Geneva for "Calvin 500" earlier this year there was the perhaps surprising aspect of a great willingness to acknowledge Calvin's limitations. But perhaps it was not so surprising. This is not an approach driven by modesty. It has to do with self criticism and a realization that by their very nature churches exist in mutual complementarity. And, after all, Calvin himself always wanted to give glory to God alone.

20. Coming to more recent events, but of equally high ecumenical relevancy, let us remind ourselves that 1 September 2009, when we will still be meeting here as central committee, marks the 20th anniversary of the publication of the encyclical of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I on the day of the protection of the environment in 1989. The encyclical established that day of the year as a landmark for prayers for the protection of the environment, God's good creation. This year the days of creation in September will also serve as a preparation for making the voice of the churches heard at the United Nations climate negotiation in Copenhagen. May we all join together on December 13th, may the bells of our churches ring, the conch shells, drums and gongs sound 350 times for climate justice!<sup>3</sup>

21. As a Latin American I cannot omit the emergence of the Latin American theology of liberation as particularly relevant for the life of the church in recent decades<sup>4</sup>. Already in the year 1964, at a meeting of Latin American theologians, in Petrópolis (Rio de Janeiro), Gustavo Gutiérrez described theology as 'critical reflection on praxis'. This line of thought was taken up in various other meetings as a preparation towards the II Latin-American Catholic Bishops' Conference, held in Medellín, Colombia in 1968. Pastoral concerns demanded new theological reflections. Poverty presented a huge challenge to the Christian conscience and the churches' witness. These meetings acted as "laboratories for a theology worked out on the basis of pastoral concerns and committed Christian action"<sup>5</sup>. Forty years ago, then, the theology of liberation really came to the surface. A theological congress at Cartigny, Switzerland, in 1969, faced the challenge with the modestly phrased title "The Meaning of Development: Notes on a Theology of Liberation"<sup>6</sup>. Here Gustavo Gutiérrez first presented his notes towards a theology of liberation to an international audience. That conference was sponsored by SODEPAX, which was the then joint WCC-Vatican Committee for Society, Development and Peace.

22. It is the eve of the centenary of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh, and this is the last central committee meeting before that event of such great importance for the WCC. There appear to be four features of it which carry particular resonance at this time. The centenary of the World Missionary Conference next year is an evocative moment for many around the world who have the mission and unity of the church at heart.

23. As Kenneth R. Moss affirms: "Instead of being largely limited to the North Atlantic, there will be an intentional bias at Edinburgh 2010 to the South, recognizing that Christianity's centre of gravity has moved markedly southwards during the past century. The vision is that 60% of the delegates at Edinburgh 2010 will be from the Global South. The process will aim to be truly worldwide in its scope. (...) Imagination is needed to detect the contours of a missionary movement which is no longer 'from the West to the rest' but rather 'from everywhere to everyone'"<sup>7</sup>.

24. Coming to events in the political sphere, we recall first of all the year 1989, when an epochal change took place, with the fall of the Berlin wall. From 1961 to 1989 a wall 154 kilometres long made out of fortified concrete divided Berlin in two. It came to symbolise the division of the world into two conflicting systems. There is a large piece of that wall here in the garden of the ecumenical centre. It was a gift from the first freely elected GDR government to CEC as a sign of recognition for the role the churches played in the peaceful changes in Eastern Europe. In that process the churches had the chance to bring their commitment to peace, justice and the integrity of creation, their commitment to democratic processes, their commitment to the inalienable dignity of human beings to bear on civil society and to do so in a peaceful way. We remember with gratitude those days and can still see in our mind's eye the impressive pictures of the rejoicing people, climbing the wall and celebrating its end. Yet we do not forget either that

<sup>3</sup> To see more about the bell ringing campaign for climate justice visit the WCC website.

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/events-sections/countdown-to-climate-justice/bellringing.html>

<sup>4</sup> I follow here the account given by Leonardo and Clodovis Boff in *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.69.

<sup>6</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez Merino in: *In Search of a Theology of Development, A Sodepax Report*, Switzerland 1970, p.116 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. MOSS, Kenneth R.. Edinburgh 2010 – springboard for mission. Available at: [http://www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/files/edinburgh2010/files/pdf/Edinburgh%202010\\_03.pdf](http://www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/files/edinburgh2010/files/pdf/Edinburgh%202010_03.pdf)

many other walls, be they of concrete or of prejudices or of laws which discriminate foreigners, persist or are being raised, dividing peoples and causing great suffering, in many parts of the world. We also remember those who lost their lives in Tiananmen Square, in Beijing, China, 20 years ago.

25. The late 1980s were marked also by the move to the end of apartheid in South Africa. In 1989 Namibia began its transition to independence that was sealed the following year, becoming the last country in Africa to leave behind colonialism. In Latin America the end of the Pinochet regime in Chile marked the symbolic end of military dictatorships on that continent. The recent military coup in Honduras has evoked sad memories of the past; let us hope that it will also pass into history books as an anachronistic episode which will not endanger in any way the strengthening of democracy in the region.

26. We also have recent hopes to register. The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States has brought about a strong wave of hope throughout the whole world. Radical changes cannot be expected from a single person within a system that is based on the privileges of economic, political and military power. Nevertheless, the hopes range from policies of peaceful resolution of conflicts, to sensitivity towards the basic needs of the peoples of the world and putting environmental concerns on the political agenda of the USA. On 20 January 2009, members of the board, heads of churches and associate members of the United States Conference of the World Council of Churches signed and sent a letter to the office of President Barack Obama. The letter expressed the expectation of Christian communities in that country and, in many ways, also the international hope that blesses the new president of the most influential and powerful nation of the world.

“The challenges are enormous and formidable. They are found in every sector of this society and, indeed, across the entire spectrum of the human family worldwide. So many people in this world of abundance struggle with poverty; we are called by God to address the needs of the poor. So many places of this world are broken by violence and war; we are called by Christ to be peacemakers. Ours is not to point fingers at your new administration and say "Fix it." Rather, ours is to roll up our sleeves and partner with you to help bring about the changes that are so desperately needed for the United States and the world to more closely reflect God's vision for humankind and all of creation. Ours is to call us all into account when we do not follow that vision.”<sup>8</sup>

### ***And the churches and the ecumenical movement today and 20 years on?***

27. This meeting of the central committee is of particular importance. A glimpse at the schedule already gives us an overview of the number of important matters we will be dealing with during the upcoming days. Towards the end of this address I will highlight three of the issues we will be dealing with and make some brief remarks about them, and this does not even take into account the financial and programmatic challenges we have to cope with. I would like to take a moment to highlight a more fundamental issue. Perhaps this is also a particular opportunity to address anew "the vision thing" of our journey and of the WCC as a fellowship of churches. We do this very well in the privileged moments of common prayer we share. In addition, we have before us, in both theological reflection and in the revision of our programmatic activities, an opportunity to recapture our vision - a way of linking the past to a new future. The CUV document can certainly inspire and guide us. It should not be seen as a static position, but rather as an invitation to continue reflection on our vision.

28. Our reality is very complex and multi-layered. A simplistic vision does not suffice either to describe it or to face the challenges. Such a conclusion is also valid if we look at the lives of churches and the present situation of the World Council of Churches. On one hand, some churches discovered that they were close enough to merge or enter into agreements of full communion and have done so, thus changing the ecumenical landscape. Among the “mainline” Protestant/Anglican churches we may speak of *de facto*

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other-ecumenical-bodies/20-01-09-wcc-us-conference-letter-to-president-obama.html>

communion, a dramatic ecumenical development. On the other hand, the debate and conclusions on moral issues have been causing deep polarization between and within some confessional families.

29. As we have been stressing since Porto Alegre, we are in a very different world and religious landscape than in past decades. Religious pluralism and cultural fragmentation have become more prominent. The WCC constituency is no longer as representative of world Christianity (or of non-Roman Catholic churches) as it once was. Many new Evangelical and Pentecostal (also Neo-Pentecostal) churches are very active players in the religious landscape, but only a few of them have become members of the WCC or even desire to have dialogue with the WCC. For some it may seem that the vision of the ecumenical movement is perhaps vanishing. Yet, we also have good reason to express our gratitude to the history of the ecumenical movement and the WCC in its rather brief existence. A fundamental change leading to dialogue, cooperation and fellowship between confessional families has produced recognizable results. In the public sphere, personalities not representing the churches have openly acknowledged just how much fruit has come from ecumenical efforts in terms of solidarity: significant contributions towards overcoming apartheid, the ending of dictatorships in Latin America, the vision of overcoming the division of Europe, all mentioned above.

30. The Global Christian Forum, which met for the first time in Nairobi in late 2007, is evidence of a new approach to ecumenism that includes Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Reformation Protestant, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches as well as Christian networks and para-church organizations. A similar spectrum can be found on the General Council now preparing to mark the centenary of Edinburgh 1910 which is possibly representative of a wider cross-section of the world's Christians than any previous organization.

31. Now there is a need to look at how the ecumenical movement can offer a vision not for the institution but for the world, a world that is just as divided as it was when the iron curtain and the Berlin wall and apartheid and military dictatorship were still in place, although divided in a more complex and at one and the same time a more flagrant and more subtle way - the limitations or denial of access of a high proportion of the global population to water and food, education and health care. Grinding poverty remains.

32. The framework of the ecumenical scene today is marked by new actors alongside those following on from the founders of this movement. I have mentioned the new and growing Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. But also considering the churches traditionally with clear ecumenical involvement, new actors are on the scene. We have considered mainly the churches and the councils of churches, plus the Christian World Communions, now a "third actor" had arrived. Ecumenical organizations in a very wide sense, along with the specialized ministries from the churches, have achieved a high level of impact in the lives of the churches and in society, to a great extent due to their diaconal work on human relief and development. This has put them more visibly at the round table of ecumenical dynamics. To keep the coherence of the ecumenical movement has become quite often a huge challenge. The relations among these partners have become more complex, and the temptation to compete, rather than to cooperate, is not to be underestimated. All the more then should we be grateful for and support those efforts which do keep and strengthen a common ecumenical commitment, developing their relations around a commonly agreed agenda.

33. As the definition of our continuation committee on Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century says, ecumenical activities today are carried out at different levels by churches acting through conciliar bodies: 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 real challenge for churches and funding partners who are expected to participate in these bodies and support them.

34. The relationship between churches and ecumenical organizations at large can and should be further developed positively. On one side, we can understand the ecumenical organizations as extended arms of the churches, giving support to persons in need, raising issues of conscience, awareness and citizenship, struggling for a sustainable and just society. On the other hand, we can stress that the churches, as communities of faith, constitute the inspiration and motivation of the ecumenical organizations. Separated from each other, the churches, as bodies, would have only all too short arms as means of service and the ecumenical organizations would in the long run lose their vital inspiration.

35. Former WCC staff member Simon Oxley recalled in a presentation last year during WCC's library & archives "lunchtime conversations" that "change is a common thread across the four streams of the ecumenical movement which were combined in the WCC - Faith and Order, Life and Work, Mission and Education. We cannot achieve church unity, however we want to define that, without change. A just order internationally, nationally and locally is not achieved without change." Oxley then brought a historical example that illustrates how this issue is present in the life of the Council for so long:

The WCC archives from the 1950s contain a telling semi-public put-down by the general secretary, Visser 't Hooft, of a senior but fairly new member of staff in what we would now call an advisory body. The staff member made a comment to the effect that if the churches thought that in signing up to the WCC they were signing up to change they would never have joined. Visser 't Hooft's sharp response was that is what they had actually done in Amsterdam and since.<sup>9</sup>

36. When we adopted the consensus process, we changed considerably. In agreeing the new process in the WCC, the member churches signed up to openness to change. Oxley concludes by affirming that consensus implies not a way of finding some outcome to which everyone can comfortably agree but being open to changing position or discovering the new. The new framework of the ecumenical landscape is in front of our eyes, being experienced in the daily lives of our churches and their relationships and networks, but yet we still seem not able to describe and/or define it.

37. The Swiss theologian, currently working in Brazil, Rudolf von Sinner, member of the continuation committee on Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reminded us in 2007:

There can be no ecumenical movement other than the 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, often with outright competition reigning and trust consciously being destroyed.<sup>10</sup>

38. Trust can be developed only if we constantly return to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, seek diligently to know the will of God and are open to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

39. So let us now turn back to John 6. We interrupted the account of that story at the point where many of Jesus' disciples had turned their back on him, because they could not stand the radical consequences of that discipleship. Jesus then asked the Twelve: "Do you also wish to go away?" (John 6: 67) One of them would later betray him. Simon Peter would later deny knowing him, but he gave that answer that would overcome this denial and make him a faithful Apostle of Jesus: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life" (v.68). To whom can we go? As we follow Jesus, we remain faithful also to the ecumenical commitment. It is not optional. We cannot turn back and be content with our own particularities as diverse churches. Rather, we persevere in seeking unity among the churches, with those

<sup>9</sup> OXLEY, Simon. Where's the passion? Why ecumenism needs the heart as well as the mind. A conversation starter. Available at: [http://library.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcclibrary/Wheres\\_the\\_passion.pdf](http://library.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcclibrary/Wheres_the_passion.pdf) Accessed August 5 2009.

<sup>10</sup> cf. continuation committee on Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Papers for and a report on the first meeting of the committee, Geneva: WCC, 2008, p. 20



we have recognized as sisters and brothers sharing the one faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, to the glory of God Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### **Final remark to this central committee meeting**

40. I add a final word about our meeting. We have, as usual, a heavy agenda. Several decisions of particular importance for the life of the WCC will have to be taken. I would like to mention three of them. First, there is the question of the venue of the next Assembly, in the year 2013. We are very grateful that churches in four different locations have expressed their willingness to host the assembly. As we make our choice we will of course consider the logistical aspects, the churches' involvement and the public witness we will be giving in having the assembly in the particular place of our choice. Secondly, we will receive the report of the working group on governance, accountability and staff policy, and deliberate on it. We are grateful for the diligent work undertaken by this group. As a result of their deep commitment to the WCC they did not limit themselves to making proposals for immediate action, but also dared to look into the future asking themselves about which adjustments in the life and in the structure of the WCC could possibly better meet the challenges and tasks we have as an organization. The report of this working group will accompany us also beyond this meeting. Finally, I mention the election of the future general secretary of the WCC. There is obviously no need to stress the importance of this decision for the life of the WCC and for its member churches. Much of what the WCC is and how it is perceived is shaped by the way in which the general secretary carries out his or her responsibilities, both in the relations with the churches and in in-house management.

41. Our agenda at this meeting also allows us time to come together to express the gratitude of the World Council of Churches for the dedicated work rendered by Samuel Kobia as general secretary.

42. Our last meeting as central committee was extremely difficult and tense, as you certainly remember all too well. In the meantime we have been able to deal with the underlying issues and to overcome difficulties and obstacles. This could only be achieved by the efforts of everybody concerned. The best interest of the WCC was placed at the highest level by all. In particular, I would like to thank the Presidents, the executive committee, and the general secretary for all efforts of mediation and resolution, seeking truth and reconciliation, and then looking towards the future of the WCC, as instructed by the central committee. I hope and am confident that this central committee meeting will be held in the same spirit and reflect the same commitments. After all, it is not our cause which is at stake, but God's plan, in whose service the WCC exists. The confession of the Apostle Peter may guide us: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6: 68)