

The Work of the World Council of Churches and Catholic Involvement

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A discussion about the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) cannot be complete without reference to the greater ecumenical movement, which gathered momentum in the twentieth century. The beginning of the ecumenical movement is usually associated with the historical landmark of the *Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910*, which gathered to face the difficulties of division as they affected the Christian missions around the world. This fragmentation of the *una sancta cattolica et apostolica ecclesia* into many divided churches remains an anomalous contradiction, and calls for bold action to re-establish the original unity willed by Christ for his disciples. The three great ecumenical movements of the time, the *Missionary Movement*, the *Life and Work (L&W) Movement* and the *Faith and Order (F&O) Movement*, gradually merged into one ecumenical entity, which is today represented by the WCC. The following quote from its Constitution captures what the WCC represents to this day:

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures [...] to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit [...]. 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 in common life in Christ, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.

At the time of its foundation on August 23, 1948, the fellowship of the WCC comprised a membership of 147 churches in 44 countries. Today the fellowship consists of more than 349 member churches in over 100 countries representing over 550 million Christians. Members are from the Protestant family, the Anglican Communion, the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, as well as United and Uniting churches. Following the Second Vatican Council and therefore for more than 40 years, the WCC has become a major partner of the Catholic Church (CC) in the quest for Christian unity, aiming ultimately at full visible unity. The relationship involves intermediate goals of common witness to the Christian faith through initiatives such as common prayer, shared social action, theological reflection, joint ecumenical formation and mission.

As mentioned above, the F&O and the L&W Movements trace their origins to the Edinburgh Conference on mission. While the F&O Movement aimed at unity of doctrine, the L&W Movement emphasized service to society in terms of responsible involvement in socio-political issues as a way to unity. The CC did not take part in that conference. At present, preparations are underway for the celebration of the centenary of the Edinburgh Conference, and both the local CC and the PCPCU are fully involved in the event. This is a token of the progress made over 100 years of relationship between Christian churches. In this context, it must also be said that in January last year, the Joint Working Group (JWG) between the CC and the WCC, gathered in Rome and celebrated together with the Friars of Atonement at Centro Pro Unione, the centenary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The peak of the celebration was an ecumenical prayer led by His Holiness Pope Benedict the XVI on January 25, in the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls. Taking into consideration these two centenary celebrations, I have divided my lecture into two parts. The first will be an historical and conceptual survey of the ecumenical question as it relates to the WCC and the CC. The second part will be an attempt to gain insight into the ‘soul of the ecumenical movement,’ its vision, challenges and scope.

PART I

A. THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

During the First World War, Protestant Churches in Europe were marked by strong national identities, which made them ineffective in resisting the militant patriotism which sustained the war. The idea of founding the WCC had been worked out before the Second World War, and the hopes had been to found the institution either in 1940 or 1941, but this was never materialized because of the war. Remnants of various ecumenical movements, notably L&W and F&O, had continued to work separately, and even very intensely during the war, especially in services to refugees and prisoners of war. A provisional committee headed by Willem Adolf Visser’t Hooft, who had already been named General Secretary, commenced a process of the formation of the unborn child, and the WCC had begun. This desire to join efforts to tackle world problems was certainly the climate which surrounded the first assembly of the WCC in 1948 at its foundation. The World Council became the umbrella which would gather together in a single organization, the previously independent L&W and F&O movements. They had merged in 1937, and by 1939 the ecumenical movement had helped establish a network of contacts between Christians, which transcended the traditional ecclesial and national frontiers and made possible a united and international Christian voice, with the will to work together. While the L&W movement concentrated on establishing a united church front *ad extra*, the F&O movement worked *ad intra*, at a confessional *rapprochement* between churches divided over matters of doctrine and order.

The dream of Visser’t Hooft was first of all the establishment of the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, and this came to take place in 1946, as an intermediate step towards the establishment of the WCC. As such, Bossey was seen as the WCC ‘in the process of

formation'. Visser't Hooft realized that the ecumenical movement needed an international forum where the ecumenical vision could be explored, shaped, tested, experienced, taught and celebrated. The understanding was that such a forum would attract and equip future generations of ecumenical leaders among the churches. Bossey would become the place where Christians from all continents, races and confessions could experience their God-given unity and mission. It became a place where ecumenism is understood as a spirituality for witness in the world. Thus from the beginning Bossey and the WCC have been intertwined: a place where the Church and the world could meet in dialogue and sometimes in debate. To this day at Bossey, miracles for the future of ecumenical cooperation continue to take place.

Visser't Hooft needed money to establish the Ecumenical Institute and the WCC. He travelled to the USA with a small delegation, meeting with John D. Rockefeller Jr. and his wife and relating their experience of the war in Europe. In particular, they spoke of the spiritual story of changes in the minds of people, especially the young people, and of how destruction had inadvertently also caused a new spiritual awakening. While destruction had seen the breaking of traditions, the moral vacuum and the horrible brutalization of life, Visser't Hooft also showed how much people were moved to find courage and strength to oppose destruction by standing together to liberate the Jews in the refugee camps, in the prisoner of war camps, and in the resistance movements. The Rockefellers listened with great interest and granted funds, more than was actually asked for, the sum of a million dollars! Half of the money was to pursue the idea of the WCC and the other half the idea of the ecumenical training centre. That's how the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey came to be. Its venue was chosen near Geneva, close enough to maintain regular contact with the World Council headquarters, Bossey is a quiet place, ideal for study and for shaping ideas around the theme of unity. Dr Hendrick Kraemer from Holland became the first director and Suzanne de Dietrich of France, who had done a lot of work in the Student Christian Movement and had a special gift of leadership in Bible Study, became his assistant. They brought together young people from various countries in Europe. The very first courses were attended by young people who had come out of concentration camps, or had served in armies, or who had been active in resistance movements. Given that they came from various parts of Europe, their home countries had actually been at war with each other. So at first there was a good deal of tension. As Visser't Hooft puts it,

...Until the Germans and the French, the Germans and the English, had worked out their relationship, much hard thinking and praying had to be done...

Thus, the genetic essence of the ecumenical movement can be primarily considered to be reconciliation. In the aftermath of the World War II, people were tired of human divisions which had led to conflicts and confrontation, and were looking for ways of cooperation. Interesting is the fact that in its many manifestations, the ecumenical movement was shaped by that desire to promote common service, witness and worship among the divided Christian Churches. It should therefore not be surprising that ecumenism actually began as a 'protest movement'. People who heralded the ecumenical movement are people who saw that instead of Christians witnessing to the one Lord, Jesus Christ, they were, instead, competing denominations. That instead of working together for justice and peace in the world, Christians worked separately and at times contradicted each other.

Instead of forming a community that shows the world an alternative vision of human life, promoting Christian values together, Christians were divided on issues and therefore dissipated Christian ethical energies. That is the background for the establishment of the WCC. The desire was to gather Christian churches in a fellowship, which would help them to serve the Gospel imperative through cooperation and common witness. In February 2008, the WCC celebrated its 60th anniversary.

Organisation

The WCC's supreme decision-making power is the General Assembly, which gathers every seven years to make decisions on the life and future of the WCC.

There have been eight WCC General Assemblies:

- (i) Amsterdam (1948)
- (ii) Evanston (1954)
- (iii) New Delhi (1961)
- (iv) Nairobi (1975)
- (v) Vancouver (1983)
- (vi) Canberra (1991)
- (vii) Harare (1998)
- (viii) Porto Alegre (2006)

The last WCC Assembly in February 2006 was held at Porto Alegre, and laid down six programme priorities guiding the activities of the Council until the next assembly in 2013. The six programmes are each led by a director, supported by members and observers who deliberate on the way forward.

- P 1: The WCC and the Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century
- P 2: Unity, Mission, Evangelism and Spirituality
- P 3: Public Witness: Addressing Power, Affirming Peace
- P 4: Justice, Diakonia and Responsibility for Creation
- P 5: Education and Ecumenical Formation
- P 6: Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation

In between the assemblies, the decisions of the WCC are implemented by the **Central Committee**, whose members are elected from among delegates at the General Assembly. The Central Committee serves as the chief governing body of the WCC until the next assembly. It meets every 12–18 months. Its responsibility is to carry out the policies adopted by the Assembly. It reviews and supervises the WCC programmes and its budget.

The CC sends Observers to the Central Committee meetings. Observers can take the word and can intervene during sessions.

The Central Committee, also chooses 20 of its members to form the **Executive Committee**, which deliberates on the proposals made by the Central Committee. The latter also chooses a Moderator and two vice-moderators and meets twice a year. The Executive committee appoints programme staff, monitors the ongoing work of the Council and supervises over the budget.

B. THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Cooperation between the WCC and the Catholic Church certainly goes back to the decision of Pope John XXIII to convoke the Second Vatican Council, an epoch-making event which brought about a complete transformation in the attitude of the CC towards other Christians and to the movement for unity that was already in evidence since the beginning of the twentieth century. As a result of the Council, a new current of ecumenical grace was released in the Church, because the Catholic Church was now closely associated with other Christians in common prayer, in Christian witness and in other ways in the search for the fulfilment of Christ's own prayer, "that they may all be one" (John 17,22).

In its relationship with the WCC, the CC is involved in six main areas of engagement:

(i) The Joint Working Group (JWG)

An instrument of the CC and the WCC, the JWG was set up in 1965, and was entrusted with the task of discerning and implementing ways in which the two parent bodies can cooperate together to foster Christian witness in the world. Church unity is conceived in the larger context of human unity, taking into consideration the questions of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. A typical expression in this regard is, 'the unity of the Church and the renewal of the human community'.

The JWG consists of 36 members, 18 from each side, and is elected and given a mandate between two WCC General Assemblies, covering a period of 7 years. A report is written during each mandate and there have been so far 8 reports; the current JWG is underway preparing the Ninth Report. For its mandate, this JWG chose to work on two issues (a) Reception and (b) Spiritual Roots of Ecumenism and two themes (a) Migration and (b) Youth. Its mandate comes to an end in 2013 during the next WCC General Assembly.

(ii) The Faith and Order Commission (F&O)

Since 1968, 12 Roman Catholics, appointed by the PCPCU and ratified by the Secretariat of State, have been members of the 120 member-strong Faith and Order Plenary Commission. The Commission plays an invaluable role in resolving doctrinal differences among the various churches. Ever since the early sixties, the Commission has increasingly realized that doctrine cannot be treated in isolation from issues affecting humanity. The point is that there is no such thing as pure doctrine, because all doctrine is deeply embedded in the questions of life and death in the concrete existential life of the Church. Thus from

1963-1993 the Faith and Order Commission produced detailed documents devoted to theological analysis of the relationship between the Church and the world.

Perhaps F&O's greatest achievement has been the production of BEM. BEM deals with issues which are existential, and which touch the lives of Christians every day. The reality of Baptism and its recognition across the confessions; the inability of the Churches to gather around the table of the Eucharist together; the difficulties we continue to face in recognizing one another's ministries, certainly complicate our ecumenical journey. The F&O Commission would do a great service to the Church if some or all of these crucial agendas could find resolution. That will surely take time.

(iii) The Commission of World Mission and Evangelism (CWME)

The CC cooperates with the WCC in the area of mission. There has been a shift of emphasis over the years on the understanding of mission. Mission no longer features as the conversion of 'pagans', of those people who are supposed not to know nor worship God. In a world which is becoming increasingly more and more pluralistic, mission is understood as Christian witness in the world. When the Lord says, "You are the salt of the Earth... You are the light of the world" (Mt 5,13.14), he throws the challenge to his followers, to do what he is mandated to do. John in the Gospel of John is emblematic:

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming to the world (John 1,6-9).

Our mission is to testify, to witness to the light. The hope is that people will see the light and follow it. This is possible for Christians to do together, without having to fight over doctrinal differences. The more Christians can pray together, can work for justice together, can serve where there is human need, people can be led to join them. It is said that the first Christians in pagan Rome managed to convert the city to their side because the inhabitants of Rome in seeing how they lived in harmony, said, "See how they love one another." That was the primordial, paradigmatic mission, understood as witness.

The PCPCU has a Catholic consultant, residing in Geneva and working within the premises of the Ecumenical Centre, who works with the WCC's CWME. She is assisted by three Catholic Commissioners in her consultative work. The commissioners are appointed by the PCPCU and ratified by the Secretariat of State.

(iv) Education and Ecumenical Formation (EEF)

The PCPCU also nominates and supports a Catholic professor teaching at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, near Geneva. For many years now, the Catholic Professor offers courses in the field of biblical hermeneutics. This is a very valuable contribution in the work of formation of future ecumenists. The success of dialogue and reconciliation among Christians will emerge when Christians of different confessions are able to read and interpret the Holy Scriptures together. Conversion will take place and Christians will come closer as each of them draws closer to the heart of Christ. It is difficult to foresee the value of Christians belonging to different confessions, being able to agree on the way to interpret

critical biblical passages together. Christian unity is possible if consensus can be reached on a suitable methodology of biblical interpretation.

The Bossey students also have a yearly, one week study tour of Rome and the Vatican, sponsored by the PCPCU. This is always a tremendous moment of purification of memories. I accompanied the Bossey students seven times to Rome, during my seven years work at the institute as Catholic Professor. I always saw that after the trip to Rome, the relationships changed tremendously among the students. The many years of distortion of the reality of the Catholic faith disappeared and this is invaluable in terms of the future of ecumenism.

(v) The Joint Consultative Commission (JCC)

The JCC is a space of encounter between the Christian World Communions Conference of Secretaries (CWCs CS) and the WCC. The CWCs CS is an informal gathering of secretaries of World Communions, who discuss the trends of the quest for Christian Unity within their respective communions, seeking to organise a coordinated effort in search for the visible unity of all Christians. In sharing what is happening on the bilateral levels of dialogue between the CWCs, the secretaries inform each other of progresses made, of difficulties encountered and of prospects for the future of the ecumenical movement. The Secretary of the PCPCU attends the CWCs CS with an appointed expert from the Council.

(vi) The Global Christian Forum (GCF)

In the attempt to get on board the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches which have been unwilling to join the ecumenical movement, the Global Christian Forum was formed in 1998 at Bossey by the WCC. Although it is owned by the GCF Committee and not by the WCC, the GCF is a daughter of the WCC, which is also its main financial supporter. The PCPCU participates in the GCF through modest financial support and has had a permanent member of the GCF Committee since its foundation. After a series of regional meetings in different parts of the world, in 2007 the GCF World Event took place at Limuru, near Nairobi, Kenya, and launched a new era of relations between the traditionally ecumenical bodies and the Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches. The Committee meets once a year and holds regional meetings in different parts of the world, with an aim to expand the GCF methodology of ecumenical engagement, which consists in sharing faith journeys, seeking to know each other better, praying together and healing memories.

PART II

Today, in many parts of the world, under the inspiring grace of the Holy Spirit, multiple efforts are being expended through prayer, word and action to attain that fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires. ... This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time.

Is unity not the desire of Christ? And is not Christ strong enough to realize it even if we go on sleeping? Does not the whole peace of the world depend finally on this condition of unity among the followers of Christ?¹

Metropolitan Athanagoras (1929)

Both these epigraphs point to the fact that Christian unity is God's own desire, and that we who participate in it do so to fulfil not a project of our own making, but a mission whose origins are to be located in divine will. In 1925 at the First World Conference on Life and Work in Stockholm, a statement was made that continues to be quoted and quoted again in many different versions:

'The closer we draw to the cross of Christ, the closer we come to each other'²

The point is that it cannot be denied that disunity is a sin and a counter-witness to the Gospel of love and reconciliation, which is the very basis of the life and mission of the Church. Consequently, *Unitatis Redintegratio* retains that there cannot be ecumenism without personal conversion and institutional renewal (UR 15; 21; 34f.; 83f.). Conversion to Christ, which implies repentance, forgiveness and renewal, become necessary in the broader process of reconciliation. Repentance for the ways we have borne false witness against our neighbours as well as false witness against the unity that is ours in Christ, is a necessary step in the cause of Christian unity. Conversion implies also a new attitude of mind, a new way of seeing ourselves, others and the world. In this way, ecumenism must always be seen as a renewal movement. Cardinal Kasper has reflected:

Ecumenism *ad extra*, the dialogue with other churches and ecclesial communities, presupposes therefore ecumenism *ad intra*, learning from each other and self-reform. Full communion cannot be achieved by convergence alone but also, and perhaps even more, by conversion which implies repentance, forgiveness and renewal of heart.³

This means that ecumenism is not and cannot be seen as a matter of 'growth' in mutual agreement and recognition, but must remain a spiritual quest and as such is marked by a humble turning to God – and lots of surprises. Michael Kinnamon therefore puts it that " 'growth' is the wrong metaphor"⁴ when we attempt to describe the strides being made towards the goal of full visible unity.

Unity is therefore a gift from God, and communion is not our achievement. At the heart of the ecumenical movement is the conviction that there is one Church and that its members, however fragmented they may be, are deeply related to one another thanks to what God has done to Jesus Christ. It is crucial to recognize that unity is God's

¹ Quoted from W.A. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs*, Geneva, WCC Publications: 1987, 61.

² Cf. Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, eds., *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, Geneva, WCC Publications; Grand Rapids, Mich., Eerdmans: 1997, 267.

³ W. Kasper, *That They May All be One: The Call to Unity*, London/ New York, Burns & Oates: 2004, p. 44.

⁴ Michael Kinnamon, *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement and How It Has Been Impoverished by Its Friends*, St. Louis, Missouri, Chalice Press: 2003, 65.

achievement, already accomplished in Christ, and therefore the ecumenical mission does not consist in creating unity, but in addressing divisions of human origin in order that the unity God has given may be visible to the world. That is what makes the unity of the Church not only a gift but also a calling, so that “What we are we must become.”⁵ Put differently, modern ecumenism begins with the present fact of our unity in Christ. Our allegiance to the one Lord is what makes us seek and hope for the way of manifesting that unity in our witness to him before the world.

Indeed, the entry of the Catholic Church into the ecumenical movement was also greatly helped by the insistence of Cardinal Augustin Bea that baptism is the sign of our given unity in Christ. The Decree on Ecumenism (UR) of Vatican Council II puts it that,

Men [and women] who believe in Christ and have been properly baptised are brought into certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.

This ‘Christian *koinonia*’ which already exists among separated churches has been strongly reiterated by Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*, §42, who speaks of “the deep communion, linked to the baptismal character, which the Spirit fosters in spite of historical and canonical divisions.”

This does not minimize the damage created by division among Christians. The Second Vatican Council is clear about how much Christian divisions are a scandal to the preaching of the Gospel:

(Division) openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature.⁶

In order to overcome these divisions, certain methodologies are needed, which nonetheless must not diverge from the original understanding that Christian unity is the work of the Holy Spirit and that it will take place at such a time as will have been established by divine will. It will come about as a surprise. This puts the ecumenical movement within the sphere of spirituality, and spiritual ecumenism is, indeed, the ‘soul of the ecumenical movement.’

In practice then, the Church, considered as the temple of the Holy Spirit, has to cultivate mutual listening and common decision making, as a way forward to establishing full visible unity. The point which argues strongly for listening in dialogue, is the fact that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are found in the church as a whole; no single Christian can monopolize them. In the same way, the Body of Christ is made up of a great diversity of members called to act in solidarity, as Paul would have it in 1 Cor 12,12-30. As the People of God, the Church is made up of all the baptized; to serve these baptized, some will be conferred with particular ministries for which they will receive specific gifts for the benefit of all.

Thus the treasures of Orthodox Christianity consist in a wealth of spirituality, which continues to nourish this ‘soul of the ecumenical movement.’ An exchange between the East and the West is *a sine qua non*, if ecumenism is to make any strides. A number of

⁵ Philip Potter, *Life in All Its Fullness*, Geneva, WCC Publications: 1981, 37.

⁶ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1

Orthodox churches are members to the WCC, and some of them have been there since its foundation.

A New Ecumenism?

Contemporary ecumenical discourse has entered a new phase. The landscape is certainly undergoing rapid and radical changes, in which new trends and models are emerging. It is interesting to hear the names given to the emerging ecumenical forms, such as ‘Global Christian Forum,’ ‘Non-denominational Christianity,’ and ‘Ecumenism in the Twentieth Century’, etc. New ecumenical alliances and partnerships are being formed and new ecumenical agendas are being set, even as a new ecumenical language emerges. Under the circumstances, we can single out a few of these trends, and speculate on the possible future vision.

(i) *A People-centred Ecumenism*

Awareness is growing that if ecumenism is not rooted in the life of the people, its credibility and relevance will be considerably undermined. Thus a shift of emphasis is emerging from ecumenism being institution-based, to being something that emanates from the very life and needs of the people, and owned by the people. Ecumenism ought to touch the life of people in all its perspectives. Such a people-centred ecumenism will create ecumenical agendas which are feasible and relevant to the grassroots. The choice of the PCPCU to work on the “Harvest Project” and of the JWG to focus on “Reception” and “Spiritual Roots of Ecumenism” so also on Youth and Migration, tell it all. Ecumenism has to reflect the needs of the people and has to be doable. This is a very interesting trend, found also in movements like “Churches Acting Together.”

(ii) *Inadequate Models*

New ways of ‘being’ ecumenical and ‘doing’ ecumenism are unfolding. Networking is replacing institutions and advocacy is replacing the programme. Membership-based ecumenism is losing its importance and an ecumenism of partnership and alliance is gaining ground. More and more, Churches and ecumenical circles consider the ecumenical movement as a ‘forum’ or a ‘space’ for encounter and collaboration. What seems negative about these new trends is that there is a tendency to sanction and strengthen ‘non-committal ecumenism.’ That means, the main goal of the ecumenical movement – the establishment of full visible unity – seems to be sidelined by the new trends. Reflecting the new doctrinal difficulties that continue to emerge, one sees the difficulties of arriving at ‘full visible unity’ in the proper sense of the term. Unable to face them squarely, some tendencies want to develop *pseudomorphic* alternatives to costly dialogue. That creates a need to safeguard the sacred goals of the ecumenical movement even as ecumenists need to depart from ossified ecumenical approaches. Any ecumenism that does not support commitment to its goals is not ecumenism. ‘Easy-going’ and ‘freelance’ ecumenism is not helpful to the ecumenical journey. Ecumenism needs models that constantly challenge the churches not simply to cohabit, but to grow together and to move from self-sufficient existence to interdependent existence, from unilateral witness to multilateral witness.

(iii) *Shaping the Vision*

The current state of affairs in the ecumenical movement shows a tendency to run away from forms of ecumenical structures that have become rigid. They won't work any more, given the present needs and realities. The ecumenical movement is therefore called to discern and to articulate a new vision, which will take the goal of the ecumenical movement seriously and will seek solutions even as it will provide guidance in a troubled landscape. The desired new vision ought to respond promptly and efficiently to global crises and to the expectations and concrete issues facing the churches. A responsive and proactive ecumenism ought to take on board agendas that will accompany the churches in their efforts for renewal of the Church, that will encourage creative theological reflection and will shape a Christian conscience for witnessing in the pluralistic world. If ecumenism helps the churches to share gifts and to have one voice in matters of global ethical concerns, if ecumenism helps Christians to pray together and to act in unison when global crises occur, then such a vision will help not only the churches but the global human community as well.

(iv) *The One Ecumenical Movement*

Whatever its vision, the ecumenical movement ought to remain unified. There is only one ecumenical movement, although it is expressed in many forms and has many faces and voices. The difficulty is to ensure, safeguard and manifest this essential unity of the movement. The multiplication and diversification of bilateral theological dialogues have certainly given a new dynamism and richness to ecumenism. But these dialogues ought to converge towards a reception-oriented process, if they are to avoid endangering the oneness of the ecumenical movement. Diversity is helpful if there is a force which pulls it towards creative interrelation, especially between the global and the local, the bilateral and the multilateral. Unless a common vision helps them to be focussed, they may indeed become a negative force and a potential source of fragmentation. The question that remains a big challenge for the ecumenical movement is this: How can the 'oneness' of the ecumenical movement be safeguarded, even as the churches engage in fruitful bilateral dialogues? Perhaps you may be able to send me an answer, at the end of your course in ecumenism. Thank you.