



Report of the Moderator

1. Assemblies are important stages in our ecumenical journey. Through prayer, meditation, presentations, discussion and decision, they provide a proper framework to evaluate the World Council of Churches' ecumenical witness, identify its future priorities and set a new course. Assemblies are also unique occasions to deepen our fellowship “on the way” towards the visible unity of the church. This 9th Assembly takes place in a period of world history when values are in decline, visions are uncertain and hopes are confused; when injustice is spreading and peace is almost unattainable; when violence and insecurity are becoming dominant in all spheres of human life.

“GOD, IN YOUR GRACE, TRANSFORM THE WORLD”

2. In this turbulent world we turn to God and pray: “*God, in your grace, transform the world*”: a supplication emanating from our broken hearts; a sign of hope emerging in the midst of the uncertainties of human life; a genuine expression of faith unfolding in the context of the tensions and anxieties of the world.

3. Grace (in Hebrew *Q'en* and in Greek *Xaris*) is the core of God's revelation. It appears in the Bible with multi-faceted meanings and manifold implications. Grace is benevolence, compassion, love, mercy, gift, and beauty manifested through God's “manifold gifts” (1 Pet. 4: 10) and “gracious deeds” (Is. 63: 7-9). St. Paul's letters are rightly described as the basis of the theology of grace. In the Bible, grace displays the following basic features: a) It is God's gift of the “fullness” of life (Jn. 10:10). It is also a quality of life sustained by obedient response to God. b) Grace is the concrete expression of God's love (2 Cor. 12:7-10), which makes the human being strong even in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:10). c) It is God's transformative power that restores His image in human beings. d) As God's essential attribute, grace pertains both to His transcendence and immanence. God has communicated and shared His grace with us; He came to us “full of grace” and “dwelt among us” (Jn. 1: 14-16). e) Grace is God's victory over sin (Rm. 5: 21). Salvation of humanity and creation is the fruit of God's intervention in Christ (Rm. 3:24). f) Grace is God's gift of justice and peace, namely, the expression of God's mercy and love towards humanity and His commitment to the covenant. g) The grace of God is His reconciliation in Christ with humanity (2 Cor. 5: 17-21). Reconciliation is healing and transformation of humanity and the creation realised by God's *Kenosis* in Christ (Col. 1: 19-20). h) God's grace is the coming of the Kingdom of heaven on earth manifested in and through Christ. God's Kingdom is the reign of grace. i) Grace has replaced the law. It is God's free gift (Rm. 3: 24) given to all without discrimination. However, God's preferential option is for the oppressed and marginalized (Mt. 5: 1-12).

4. The biblical perception of grace is dominant in Orthodox theology and spirituality. The following aspects capture our attention:

a) Grace aims at the renewal and transformation of the whole of humanity and creation; it is new creation. Grace as re-creation starts with the “microcosm”, i.e. human beings and the human community. Humanity and creation are interconnected. The blessing of elements of creation (water, fruit, land etc.) in Orthodox Churches indicates the integrity and sacredness of creation.

b) God's act of transformation has become a reality in the Christ-event. God's transformative presence with us is a continuous reality; it is both an event and a process, existential and eschatological. In the power of the Holy Spirit, God's grace becomes a living and life-giving reality in and through the eucharist.

c) The transformative action of God is Trinitarian: the love of God the father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Grace is God's all-embracing action; it permeates all dimensions and spheres of created order, which is referred to in Orthodox theology as the cosmic action of grace. Grace is God's omnipresent and omnipotent power; it transforms all aspects of human life. It comes through the sacraments of baptism, eucharist and ordination.

d) God's grace makes us all one body; it is the source of our unity in Christ and of our bond of unity with each other. In spite of worldly divisions, in the power of the Holy Spirit God's grace continuously ensures, undergirds and protects our unity, as well as the integrity and continuity of the church and leads it to *eschaton*, the second coming of Christ in glory.

e) God's grace creates communion between the human being and God. The human being is not only created by God, but also for God. The human being is co-worker (1 Cor. 3: 9) with God and the guardian of His creation. The human stewardship of the creation and accountability to God are expressed through the humanity-God communion that reaches its culmination in *theosis*.

f) Accepting God's grace means sharing it with others through evangelism and diakonia. This is “liturgy after liturgy”. Responding to God's grace in gratitude and faithfulness is costly; it implies *Kenosis*, namely, *martyria* in life and even in death.

5. Strenuous efforts have been made in history to transform the world. All political, religious, economic, ideological and technological attempts have failed. With its new value-system, paradigms and powerful forces, globalization is yet another attempt to transform the world. As Christians, we believe that only God's grace can empower, renew and transform humanity and creation. In this Assembly, we will identify the implications of this theme to the ecumenical movement and particularly to the ecumenical witness of the World Council of Churches by reflecting and praying: “**God, in your grace, transform the world**”. Indeed, this prayer is the cry of the poor for justice; the cry of the sick for healing; the cry of the marginalized for liberation; the cry of humanity and creation for reconciliation. Empowered with the grace of the Holy Spirit (Mk. 13: 11; Jn. 16: 13), the church as transformed and transforming community is called to be Christ's witness to the end of the world, until in Christ all things are reconciled and the whole of creation is transformed into a “new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1).

LATIN AMERICAN CONTEXT

6. This is the first assembly of the WCC to take place in Latin America. With its struggle and hope for justice and dignity, this continent will, undoubtedly, have strong impact on our deliberations and actions.

7. Latin American societies have suffered from their colonial origins. European societies, mainly Spain and Portugal, imposed their social and political systems and cultural values on the aboriginal peoples, thus destroying their cultures and religions. The coloniser's oppressive rule and culture

left deep scars on the Latin-American societies. The poverty, inequalities and foreign dependence, continued after the transition from the colonial period to the era of independence.

8. Today, although Latin American societies differ from one another in many ways, they also share a great deal. Most of them were affected by political, economic and social turmoil throughout the 20th Century. By the middle 1970's, many Latin American countries were ruled by military regimes, which violated human rights, persecuted and assassinated political and community leaders and outlawed political organisations. Since the 1980's, most governments of the region have adopted economic strategies that were inspired or based on neo-liberal principles and doctrines. For the last ten years, most countries in the region have suffered severe economic and political crises, which in turn have brought about social unrest and protests. Throughout this period, the Latin American people have struggled for life, dignity and human rights. Globalization has dramatically impacted the political, social and cultural aspects of the societies in the region. Because of globalization, local people have lost control over their national resources and economic activities, and the gap between rich and poor people has widened. Recently, several countries have elected governments committed to development strategies that are at odds with the policies of international institutions (IMF, World Bank, etc.).

9. Many churches have been and remain alert to these changes, developments and challenges. They believe that their pastoral and prophetic role is to participate actively in nation building. The churches' involvement in nation building has helped them to understand God's mission in a new context and in a new way. Faith is an essential reality in the daily life of the people of Latin America. Spirituality, evangelical zeal and ecumenical engagement are strong among the churches. The growth of non-institutional churches and charismatic movements is an important feature of Christianity in Latin America.

10. The Assembly theme has a special meaning at this moment in the history of this continent. Through the special session on Latin America, as well as through worship in local communities and daily contacts with the local churches and people, we will have the opportunity to learn more about the continent, in general, and Brazil, in particular.

A PERIOD OF UPHEAVALS AND TENACITY

11. The last seven years have been a complex and fragile period of world history. The report *From Harare to Porto Alegre* (1998-2006) covers the major developments and significant aspects of the Council's witness during this period. It briefly outlines the achievements made and the lessons learned during the journey from the 8th to the 9th Assembly. Attached to the report, you also have in your files the *Pre-Assembly Programme Evaluation*, which is a critical, comprehensive and objective assessment of the Council's work in its various aspects and manifestations.

12. As we look at the period that is now behind us, we may rightly ask how much we have been able to move forward towards our ecumenical goals. Giving a full and exhaustive account about the journey of our fellowship is not easy, indeed. One of the words frequently used in recent years to depict the life and work of the Council is "crisis". We have gone through crises of various kinds. We have faced tremendous tensions and have carried on the Council's witness under enormous pressures. Great achievements are realised and major goals are attained through crises. Was not the incarnation of Christ due to a crisis? Was not the creation of the WCC a response to a crisis? Crises will always remain with the Council in different forms and ways. We are called to respond to crises in faith and hope and with a forward-looking vision.

13. The last seven years in the life of the Council was a period of upheaval and yet tenacity. The Council experienced the strong impact of global developments. In spite of the negative repercussions of these developments, the in-house mood of restlessness, due to a significant fall in income and the necessity of reducing programme and staff and, in spite of the emergence of multiple concerns pertaining to Council-member churches relations, the Council largely realised the recommendations made and the programmatic priorities set by the Harare Assembly. The reflection and action of the Council were mainly organised around four foci: being church, caring for life, ministry of reconciliation and common witness and service amidst globalization. Financial constraints, programme re-adjustments and changes in staff leadership did not hamper the quality of the Council's witness. Nor did they affect the morale and dedication of the staff. Guided by the Central and Executive Committees and supported by programme-related committees and commissions, the Council's staff performed their work well. They deserve our great appreciation.

14. An assembly is primarily an occasion for the Council to be accountable by assessing its achievements, failures and deficiencies. It is also an opportunity to take a broader and realistic look at the ecumenical movement, which the Council is called to serve. Indeed, such a serious attempt to analyse the ecumenical situation, spell out the emerging new realities and concerns, and identify new expressions and challenges of ecumenism will enable us to look forward with greater confidence and clear vision. In the last decade, the ecumenical movement has witnessed significant developments, which will undoubtedly become, with their broader ramifications and far-reaching consequences, crucial for the future course of ecumenism. I would like to focus my observations on three specific areas: ecclesiology, inter-religious dialogue, and new self-articulations of the ecumenical movement.

FOR A CHURCH BEYOND ITS WALLS

15. The ecumenical movement is about “being church”. It will always remind the churches to fulfil their being and vocation in the context of changing times and circumstances. In my report to the Harare Assembly, I asked: “What kind of church do we project for the 21st century: a church confined to nation-states or ethnic groups and exclusively concerned with its self-perpetuation or a missionary church open to the world and ready to face the challenges of the world?”⁽¹⁾. Through its programmes, relations and activities, the Council continued to wrestle with this pertinent question. Our churches, too, each in their own way, grappled with this critical issue.

16. Mainstream Christianity is ageing and falling in number, and Christianity is re-emerging with new faces and forms. The formation of non-denominational congregations, para-church and mega-church organizations has dramatically changed the Christian panorama. Major changes are taking place also inside the churches: the institutional church is losing much of its strength and impact on society; tensions and divisions in many churches on ethical, social and pastoral issues are creating confusion and estrangement; the divide between “belonging” and “believing” is growing; and we hear more and more in the mass media about the church in “confusion”, the “polarised” church and the “silent” church. Many people, particularly the youth, seem to be disappointed with what they perceive as the incapacity of the institutional church to respond to the challenges and problems of new times. They are looking for a church that is capable of meeting their spiritual yearnings; a church that can serve their pastoral needs; a church that can provide answers to their questions.

17. These emerging trends urge the church to go beyond its institutional boundaries, to transcend its traditional forms and reach the people at the grass roots. For centuries, dogmatic, ethical, theological, ethnic, cultural and confessional walls have protected our churches. I wonder whether they can any longer defend the churches in a world where interaction and inter-penetration have become integral to human life. The church is exposed to all sorts of vicissitudes and upheavals of

society. Some churches have reacted to this situation by withdrawing back into their national, confessional or institutional boundaries to preserve their specificity. In response to the changing environment, others are seeking new ways of “being church”. The church can no longer stay inside the “fortress” as a self-contained reality; it must interact with its environment. The church cannot transform the world from inside the walls; it must reach out. In a new world context “being church” is, indeed, a great challenge with concrete implications:

a) It means perceiving the church essentially as a missionary reality and not a frozen institution. The church acquires its authentic nature and full meaning when it fulfils itself as a mission. The church is sent out to the world to discern and respond to the will of God in the complexities and ambiguities of the world.

b) It means going beyond itself, reaching out to the poor and outcast, sharing their concerns, identifying with their suffering, and meeting their needs. The church loses its credibility if it fails to interact with the people in the pews. It must become a “church for others”, a church that empowers the marginalized.

c) It means becoming a community of and for all; where all segments of society come together within the framework of a common life and decision-making, where the voices of women are heard, the participation of youth is encouraged, and expectations of differently-abled people are met; where, in fact, all forms of discrimination are destroyed.

d) It means addressing issues related to bio-ethics, bio-technology, human sexuality and other areas of ethics and morality. The ecumenical debate has taught us that the church's being and unity are intimately related to ethics. The churches can no longer ignore these issues in intra-church and inter-church relations. Through pastoral and contextual approaches a common ground must be sought. Such an engagement will greatly help the churches avoid tensions and divisions.

e) It means bringing healing and reconciliation to the broken humanity and creation. As God's transformed community, the foretaste and sign of the Kingdom, the church is sent by Christ to transform the world in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is mandated to exercise its responsible stewardship over the creation.

f) It means rediscovering the centrality of unity. A divided church cannot have a credible witness in a broken world; it cannot stand against the disintegrating and disorienting forces of globalization and enter into a meaningful dialogue with the world. Speaking with one voice and assuming together the church's prophetic vocation are, indeed, essential requirements of “being church” in a polarised world.

18. Today, new environments are being formed around the churches, calling on them to review and broaden the church's theological reflection; new ways of missionary outreach are emerging, challenging the churches to go beyond traditional norms of evangelism and diakonia; new ways of “being Christian” are being shaped, reminding the churches of the necessity to change their educational concepts and methodologies. Clearly, a self-sufficient and inward-looking church cannot survive in radically changing societies. Only a church liberated from its self-captivity, a church in creative dialogue with its environment, a church courageously facing the problems of its times, a church with the people and for the people, can become a living source of God's empowering, transforming and healing grace. I am not advocating for the church an uncritical openness to the world, but a dynamic and decisive move from self-centredness to dialogical interaction, from concern for self-perpetuation to missionary outreach, from reactive to proactive engagement, from self-protective to responsive action. “Being church” is an ecclesiological issue; it means going to the authentic roots of the church's catholicity, holiness, apostolicity and unity. “Being church” is a missiological issue; it means redefining and re-articulating the *esse* of church as

a missionary reality. “Being church” is also an ecumenical issue; it means challenging and helping the church to become an efficient and credible instrument of God's transformation in a changing world. “Being church” must remain at the heart of the ecumenical movement.

SELF-UNDERSTANDING IN PLURALIST SOCIETIES

19. Religious plurality constitutes the very context of “being church”. Our theology, our traditions, our values, and our way of life are strongly influenced by our pluralist environment. The church is called to redefine its identity and missionary vocation in the midst of religious plurality. The church has always lived in dialogue with its milieu. Globalization has made dialogue even more existential and integral to the church's daily life. Dialogue is the commitment of living our diversities as one humanity, meaningfully and coherently in one world. It is also the attempt to work together, irrespective of our divergences and tensions. The following considerations merit special attention:

a) Christian self-understanding in the context of religious plurality is crucial. Phenomenological approaches to the question of identity in a globalized world and in pluralist societies are simply irrelevant. The new environment in which we live questions exclusivist, monological, and self-centred self-understanding, and calls for a dialogical self-definition. Although our identity is conditioned by our faith, it is tested by the specific environment in which it is experienced and articulated. This interactive perception of Christian identity in spite of its potential risks, enriches and broadens our self-understanding; it also affects the way we organise Christian education and formation.

b) This approach to Christian self-understanding also helps us to understand in the right perspective the “otherness” of the other who is no longer a stranger, but a neighbour. Globalization has transformed the dialogue with strangers into a dialogue of neighbours. As an expression of compassion and respect, dialogue with our neighbour is a vital dimension of biblical teachings. To discover the “other” is to rediscover oneself. But our understanding of the “other” should always be checked by the “other's” self-understanding. Our perception of the “other” is also crucial for the church's missiological self-understanding and self-fulfillment. The churches' missionary outreach must not be perceived as a reaction “against” the stranger, but as a proactive engagement “with” our neighbor. Hence, we need to explore the meaning and implications of *Missio Dei* in the context of religious plurality.

c) Addressing religious plurality from a Christian perspective is always judgmental; it is based on our faith in Triune God and our commitment to *Missio Dei*. We must revisit the biblical theology and the Logos Christology of the early church, which help and remind us to look at the basics of our faith in a broader perspective. According to biblical teachings, God's gift of salvation in Christ is offered to the whole humanity. Likewise, according to Christian pneumatology, the Holy Spirit's work is cosmic; it reaches in mysterious ways to people of all faiths. Therefore, the church is called to discern the signs of the “hidden” Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit in other religions and in the world, and bear witness to God's salvation in Christ.

d) In inter-religious dialogue our truth claims cannot be compromised. Affirming our faithfulness to Christ, however, must not preclude engaging in dialogue and collaboration with other religions. The specificity and integrity of each religion should be respected in dialogue. To make our dialogue credible and set it on a solid basis, we must deepen our common values and accept our differences. While the need for religions to speak together on issues of common concern from the perspective of common values is growing with acute urgency, the ambiguity of religion's role in society and misuse of religion are ever increasing. The churches are caught in this dilemma.

This ambivalent situation makes inter-religious dialogue even more imperative. The churches and the ecumenical movement must take most seriously the inter-religious dialogue.

FOR A RELEVANT AND CREDIBLE ECUMENISM

20. We have entered a new period of ecumenical history. The ecumenical landscape is undergoing rapid and radical change: traditional ecumenical institutions are losing their motivation and interest; new ecumenical models and norms are emerging; new ecumenical alliances and partnerships are being formed; and new ecumenical agendas are being set. The ecumenical panorama today presents a new picture. I want to identify some of these significant developments:

a) *People-centred ecumenism*. In the last decade, institutional ecumenism began to generate indifference and even alienation, and ecumenism, as a movement pertaining to the whole people of God, started to acquire predominance. Ecumenism is steadily coming out from the narrow confines of institution and even going beyond the churches. Ecumenism is marginal for some churches, while it appears as a top priority for ecumenical agencies and action groups. Grassroots ecumenism is gaining more attraction in many regions. There is a growing awareness that if the ecumenical movement is not rooted in the life of people and is not looked at from the perspective of people, its authenticity and credibility will be considerably undermined. In fact, ecumenism is not something to be imported from the outside or developed on an institution-centred basis; rather, it must emanate from the very life of people and be owned by the people. It must touch the life of people in all its layers and dimensions. As a consequence of people-centred ecumenism, a life-centred vision of ecumenism is emerging as a feasible paradigm. Such a vision, which has all the potential to take the ecumenical movement beyond its institutional expressions, is already in formation. The movement of “Churches Acting Together” is a concrete manifestation of it.

b) *An ecumenism that is responsive to changing realities*. The ecumenical movement- for some - is getting old; for others, it has already become obsolete. The current norms of ecumenical culture and forms of ecumenical structure are no longer adaptable to new environments. Furthermore, the ecumenical agenda is, to a large degree, outdated and incompatible with present needs and concerns. In addressing issues, the ecumenical movement has perceived its role mainly as one of discerning and articulating. It is expected that the ecumenical movement go beyond its traditional role by seeking solutions, providing guidance and, when necessary, taking a strong prophetic stand. I also see a serious problem in the ability of the ecumenical institutions to respond promptly and efficiently to the churches' expectations and global crisis. Institutional ecumenism has been preoccupied with its own problems and has, therefore, lost touch with the issues facing the churches. This growing gap between institutional ecumenism and the churches must be treated critically. Rather than the reactive ecumenism that we have been developing, we must build a responsive ecumenism that transforms and accompanies the churches in their efforts for the renewal of the church, an ecumenism that questions archaic perceptions and encourages creative reflection, and one that endeavours to replace traditional styles by innovative methodologies and conservative approaches by realistic attitudes.

c) *Ensuring the complementarity and wholeness of the ecumenical movement*. More and more churches are engaging in bilateral theological dialogue (a form of ecumenical relationship favoured mainly by the Roman Catholic Church since the Vatican II Council) and in bilateral ecumenical collaboration. As a result, multilateral ecumenism is declining and conciliar ecumenism is stagnating. The ecumenical movement is developing in four directions: bilateral theological dialogue, bilateral ecumenical partnerships, institutional ecumenism and people's ecumenism. The ecumenical institutions and the churches thus far have not been able to ensure the complementarity of these directions. In fact, we are now witnessing the emerging signs of polarisation, identifiable in many areas and on different levels of ecumenical life, and a steady disintegration in many

ecumenical institutions. It is vitally important to establish coherence between ecumenical structures, initiatives or actions on global, regional and national levels. It is even more important to ensure the oneness, wholeness and integrity of the ecumenical movement. As the ecumenical statement on “Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches” (CUV) has stated, the WCC, as the most organised and institutional manifestation of the ecumenical movement, is obliged to engage in this major task⁽²⁾. During the last decade, the Council has made considerable effort to strengthen the inclusiveness of the ecumenical movement; yet, in my judgement, we have not been so successful in manifesting concretely, even with the Roman Catholic Church, the oneness and the wholeness of the ecumenical movement. It seems to me that if the churches, the main owners and actors of the ecumenical movement, do not assume this critical task, the ecumenical organisations will be dominated by ecumenical partners and the churches' ecumenical work will be confined to bilateral theological dialogues.

d) *Unitive or divisive ecumenism?* When the ecumenical movement came into existence, its stated aim was to destroy the “walls of separation” (Eph. 2:14) and lead the churches to visible unity. However, due to intra and inter-church developments and changing circumstances in the world, the ecumenical movement has become a space for new tensions and alienations. Controversies and divisions pertaining to ethical, political and social issues are often echoed in the ecumenical movement. Many churches misinterpret ecumenism; they equate it with the forces of liberalism and secularism. They fear that it threatens the church's moral teachings and will lead to proseletysm and syncretism. The WCC and many regional and national councils, and even world communions, have suffered from this misperception. This situation calls for deep reflection, a comprehensive approach and careful treatment. The only way to cope with this complex situation is for churches and ecumenical institutions to listen to and trust each other, understand each other's sensitivities and respect each other's concerns. The ecumenical movement must continue to provide space for the churches to engage in honest dialogue and creative interaction in order to see their contradictions clearly. It must also assist them to strive for greater coherence and consensus, while remaining faithful to their diversities.

e) *Emergence of new models of ecumenism.* For a long time the ecumenical stakeholders and actors were limited to churches and their hierarchs; they now include donor agencies and specialised ministries. New ways of “being” ecumenical and “doing” ecumenism are unfolding: networking is replacing institutions, advocacy is substituting 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. These new models of ecumenism are not only strengthening the non-committal ecumenism, but also sidelining the goal of visible unity. I believe that we should not waste any more time and energy on the perpetuation of vestiges of ageing ecumenism. The ecumenical movement must serve its sacred cause and not remain paralysed within ossified structures. I also believe that any form of ecumenism that does not create restlessness and does not generate commitment is not ecumenism. “Easy-going” and “free-lance” ecumenism impedes our ecumenical journey. We need ecumenical models that constantly challenge the churches not simply to co-habitate, but to grow together, to move from self-sufficient existence to interdependent existence, from unilateral witness to multilateral witness. This is the true ecumenical way.

f) *Are the institutions or the vision in crisis?* The ecumenical movement has always faced crises. Many believe that crisis is inherent in the institution. I agree. In my view, the ecumenical vision is also facing crisis. Some maintain that the problem is not so much with the vision, but with the way its imperatives and challenges are perceived and translated into reality. Others, however, are convinced that we are already beyond CUV, and, therefore, must seek a new vision for the 21st century. The real problem, in my judgement, is twofold: the ecumenical institutions have started to

lose contact with the vision; and the vision appears to be vague and ambiguous. We must not become captives of our ecumenical institutions; neither must we be trapped in our ecumenical vision. The ecumenical movement cannot be equated to the programmatic activity; it cannot be reduced to mere advocacy and networking. The institution cannot replace the spirituality, and action cannot replace the vision. As the gift of the Holy Spirit and as a future-oriented movement, the ecumenical movement transcends its institutional limitations and geographical expressions. What the ecumenical movement needs is a fresh articulation of its spirituality and vision. The horizontal dimension of the ecumenical movement must be under-girded by a vertical dimension, namely by a spirituality that will make the ecumenical movement a source of renewal and transformation. Furthermore, the ecumenical vision must be constantly re-assessed and redefined, both in faithfulness to the Gospel message and in response to changing conditions.

21. These developments will continue to have an impact on the WCC and we must have the courage to accept not only the Council's strengths, but also its vulnerability and fragility; along with its achievements, we must also have the humility to recognise its deficiencies and failures. A triumphant spirit will only deepen the stagnation, and a protective spirit will further isolate the Council from the ecumenical movement. The WCC is not an organisation to be evaluated only on "checks and balances". It is a fellowship of prayer and hope. The Council is called to become the sign, agent and instrument of a credible, reliable and responsive ecumenism. To achieve such a goal, the Council must undergo a profound change and renewal in its way of thinking and acting, and of organising and communicating its work.

BEYOND THE ASSEMBLY: LOOKING FORWARD

22. An assembly is also a unique opportunity to look forward, to attempt to identify those emerging priority areas and major concerns that will determine the future agenda and course of the Council. The post-Assembly period should be marked by intensive strategic planning, the aim of which should be to reshape the programmatic framework of the Council. In this process, which must start in this Assembly, I strongly believe that the following issues need to be given serious consideration:

FELLOWSHIP-BUILDING: AN ECUMENICAL PRIORITY

23. In spite of continuous efforts to fulfill itself as a fellowship of churches, the WCC has remained an organisation located in Geneva. More than ever, the fellowship character of the Council faces tremendous challenges: first, with the widening gap between the member churches and the Council; second, with the increasing participation of the ecumenical partners in the life and witness of the Council; third, with the growing shift of emphasis from fellowship-building to an advocacy-oriented role of the Council.

a) For many, unity is no longer an ecumenical priority, but, rather, an academic topic or at best an eschatological goal. In fact, as a new ecumenical methodology and strategy, the Council has linked unity to ethical, social and missiological issues. As a result, unity has lost much of its centrality and urgency. The Council must re-emphasise the vital importance of visible unity by re-embarking on convergence and reception processes, particularly through the following studies: "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry"⁽³⁾, "Confessing the One Faith"⁽⁴⁾, and "The Nature and Mission of the Church"⁽⁵⁾. Yet, on the other hand, the Council must also deepen the theological conviction that the quest for unity and engagement in common witness and service to the world are not mutually exclusive, but are, rather, mutually enriching.

b) What kind of Council are we: an organisation that plans activities, sets programmes and initiates advocacies, or, a fellowship that strives for the visible unity of the church? I would say

both. I do not see any dilemma or ambiguity; these two aspects of the Council's work condition and strengthen each other. Because we are an organisation, it is imperative that we work with a broader constituency, including ecumenical partners. It is also crucial for the future of the ecumenical movement that we develop a sense of mutuality and complementarity with ecumenical partners. The Council needs their expertise and financial resources. We must bear in mind, however, that the creation of new alliances and advocacies and the growing partnership with ecumenical partners may, sooner or later, reduce the fellowship character of the Council. The WCC cannot be transformed into a global ecumenical organisation that simply facilitates, networks, and organises activities. This would deny the very nature and vocation of the Council. The Council must remain accountable to the churches as a church-based fellowship; yet it needs more space for creative reflection and action. As the CUV has indicated, "deepening" and "widening" of the Council's fellowship are inseparable⁽⁶⁾. Therefore, the specificity of the Council as a fellowship of churches and its unique role as an organisation within the world-wide ecumenical movement need to be balanced, re-affirmed and reshaped.

c) Some churches believe that there are other ways of articulating ecumenical engagement. Hence, they are committed to working together rather than growing together and dialoguing within the membership of the Council. How can we initiate a process of deeper ownership of the Council by the member churches? The Council is the member churches in their common commitment to the Gospel and to one another. The Council must listen more carefully to the churches; its primary focus must be to deepen fellowship. And the churches must take their membership in the Council more seriously, and must recognise that being part of WCC fellowship has spiritual, ecumenical and financial implications. Once, when I asked a church leader what his church does for the WCC, he said: "we raise money". I said: "you must also raise awareness". Indeed, building fellowship entails deepening awareness, strengthening confidence and making sacrifices. At the Harare Assembly, the churches said: "We now commit ourselves to being together in a continuing growth towards visible unity"⁽⁷⁾. We are called to give a new quality to our fellowship: by sharpening the Council's accountability to the churches and by enhancing the churches ownership of the Council; by seeking new ways of reflecting, working and acting together; by initiating new ways of "being church" together. If a minimum ecclesiological basis is not ensured for the Council, our fellowship will always remain shaky and ambiguous. Is it not the time to revisit the Toronto statement?⁽⁸⁾

FROM CHANGE OF RULES TO CHANGE OF ETHOS

24. Since the end of the cold war, the WCC and the Orthodox Churches have basically followed separate directions, with different concerns and priorities. The WCC has neither fully nor correctly understood the Orthodox expectations in their attempt to recover and rediscover their identity and place in the post-communist society; at the same time, the Orthodox Churches' criticism of the Council has been exaggerated to the extent of ignoring fundamental ecumenical achievements, in which it had played a significant role. Some of the WCC-Orthodox tensions and estrangement were caused by the intra-Orthodox situation, the changing realities in new societies with a predominantly Orthodox population and the internal structure and agenda of the Council. After seven years of intensive work, the Special Commission, which was created by the Harare Assembly, has identified a number of specific areas that require serious review. The Commission's recommendations have been adopted by the Central Committee. Matters pertaining to the constitution and bylaws are on the agenda of the Assembly.

a) The consensus model in voting procedures is the most important achievement of the Commission. Through it the Council will experience a fundamental change by moving from a parliamentary voting system to consensus building. The consensus model is not only intended to change voting procedures; it is expected that it will promote participation, ownership and fellowship. Consensus does not necessarily mean unanimity; rather, it means preserving diversity

and respecting differences, and, at the same time, overcoming contradictions and alienation. Therefore, it is not merely a procedural matter; it is intended to challenge us to share our theological insights and spiritual experiences, as well as display our perspectives and concerns more effectively, empowering each other and seeking together the mind of the church. Initially, consensus was a move to strengthen the participation of the Orthodox Churches. It must go beyond the Orthodox Churches, and remind all member churches that they, together, constitute a fellowship and, therefore, are called to address issues in a non-confrontational way and in a spirit of mutual openness and trust.

b) Would the consensus model and other recommendations of the Special Commission change the ethos of the Council? In fact, the “Orthodox consultations” that we have organised, “Orthodox statements” that we have made, “Orthodox contributions” that we have offered to the Council since its creation in 1948 have, undoubtedly, had some impact; but they did not bring about any real change in the Western Protestant- dominated style, structure and methodology of the Council. This failure was mainly due to the lack of consistent and persistent engagement and follow-up on the part of the Orthodox Churches, as well as to the reluctance and indifference of the Protestant Churches regarding the Orthodox concerns and contribution. Here is the real problem; here is also the real challenge. The Special Commission has proposed new ways of working together in respect to controversial matters and divisive issues. It is expected that the Orthodox Churches will be better heeded and understood. I hope that the Orthodox Churches will, in their turn, seize this opportunity to bring more organised and efficient participation in all areas and at all levels of the Council's life and work. The Council's ethos cannot be immediately changed by the findings of the Special Commission. We must be realistic and patient. The critical question remains: how can the Council move from a change of rules to a change of ethos? All the member churches have a pivotal role to play in this long and difficult process.

c) Do the findings of the Special Commission meet the “Orthodox concerns”? Some Orthodox Churches are not fully satisfied with the work of the Commission. Some Protestant members of the Council also have reservations about certain aspects of the Commission's work. Besides common approaches, divergences and ambiguities will continue to exist. What the Special Commission has thus far achieved is not the end; it is only the beginning of a process. Further work needs to be done, particularly in respect to membership, common prayer, ecclesiology, social, and ethical issues. The times of Orthodox “contributions” have gone; and the time of Orthodox integration into WCC has come. This process must be primarily initiated in the Orthodox Churches at the grassroots level by building awareness of the importance of ecumenism for the life of the church. It must find its concrete expression through the active involvement of the Orthodox representatives in programme-related committees that constitute, in a sense, the heart of the Council's work. Consensus and the recommendations of the Special Commission facilitate this process. I hope that the WCC-Orthodox crisis will shake and challenge all member churches in their ecumenical commitment.

RECONFIGURATION: A PROCESS OF RENEWAL

25. The ecumenical institutions have been shaped in response to the old world order. They are incompatible with the new world context. The present ecumenical landscape, with its new developments and realities, may soon create confusion and disorientation if it is not critically assessed and reordered. In the last decade, the WCC has sought to address, through the CUV and Special Commission, urgent and pertinent questions facing the ecumenical movement in general and the Council in particular. The “reconfiguration” process that the Council recently embarked on must occupy an important place on the ecumenical agenda. The following questions and factors, in my view, need to be given due attention:

a) The concept of reconfiguration has different connotations in different regions, and the churches and ecumenical partners look at it with different perceptions and expectations. The common concern is that the ecumenical movement, in all its aspects and manifestations, needs a comprehensive and realistic re-evaluation, and a reshaping and refocusing. Therefore, reconfiguration must not be considered as a Council-related project with limited scope and implications. It must be perceived and organised as a global and common venture, involving all churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, ecumenical institutions, partners and different ecumenical actors.

b) Reconfiguration must not be confined to merely mapping and reordering of the oikumene. It must basically aim to renew the ecumenical life and witness by: adapting its culture to new conditions, restructuring the ecumenical institutions, reviewing the programs and relationships, deepening the quality of growing together, establishing coherence and networking among different forms and expressions of ecumenism, and broadening the scope of ecumenical partnership. The Council has not been able to incorporate CUV fully into its programmatic work. Although CUV, as a vision statement, still retains its relevance for the whole ecumenical movement, it needs reinterpretation. The CUV and the work of the Special Commission must be given proper attention in this process.

c) The ecumenical movement should develop an integrated approach to its institutions, agenda, and goals, as well as to its way of reflecting and acting. It must also develop an integrated perspective to respond to the critical issues and major challenges of the world. The integrated approach, which opposes the unilateral and isolated initiatives by promoting an interactive and co-ordinated perspective, is not merely a question of methodology or strategy; it is an ontological reality pertaining to the *esse* of Christian faith. Such an approach may also ensure the effectiveness of ecumenical witness.

d) The ecumenical movement is currently in a dilemma, wavering between integration and disintegration, partnership and fragmentation, advocacy and fellowship, and bilateralism and multi-lateralism. By its very nature, being a growing fellowship of churches, the WCC also has a facilitating, networking and co-ordinating role in the world-wide ecumenical movement. This specific and privileged vocation of the Council must acquire more visibility and efficiency at this critical juncture of ecumenical history.

e) The ecumenical movement is facing a crisis of credibility and relevance. We must not respond only by reconfiguring institutions. At the dawn of the 21st century, what the ecumenical movement urgently needs in order to respond responsibly and effectively to the problems of new times and the expectations of the churches, is fundamentally “*aggiornamento*”, i.e. renewal and transformation.

f) The Roman Catholic Church has been calling for “clarity” concerning the theological foundation and vision of ecumenism. I share this concern. One of the most valuable contributions of the reconfiguration process could be the development of what I call a shared ecumenical vision. By shared vision I mean a comprehensive review and articulation of ecumenical goals, with which all churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, and ecumenical partners can associate themselves. This shared vision must sustain our ecumenical action irrespective of its institutional or ecclesial framework. Such a step would significantly enhance the ecumenical goals. Otherwise, the growing activism may weaken the spiritual and theological basis of the ecumenical movement. Reconfiguration must also take into consideration this important matter.

VIOLENCE: A MAJOR ECUMENICAL CONCERN

26. In response to a growing culture of death, the Harare Assembly launched a *Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace (2000-2010) (DOV)*. In embarking on this landmark process, the Council said: “We will strive together to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence”, and our prophetic vocation calls us to be “agents of reconciliation and peace with justice”⁽⁹⁾. Regional launches, annual focus campaigns (Latin America is the focus for 2006), peace to the city projects and resource materials, significantly helped raise awareness and promote values of life, tolerance, and compassion. Responding to and overcoming violence must remain a major ecumenical priority. By assessing the insights and experiences gained during the first half of the Decade, the Assembly will certainly give its direction for the period ahead of us. In this context, I want to share with you a few perspectives:

a) We have repeatedly stated that DOV, being a Council-wide focus, is basically an ecumenical process. It is, therefore, vitally important that the ecumenical movement, with all its institutional expressions, consider “overcoming violence” as an urgent priority. The Christian contribution to this global campaign against violence must be reorganised in light of new developments, and its specificity be more sharply spelled out.

b) Violence is a complex phenomenon with different faces. The DOV must address not just the symptoms or blatant eruptions of violence, but also its root causes and its surrounding ideology.

c) Overcoming violence implies understanding the “other”, and promoting compassion, tolerance, and the values of co-existence. Religions can play a pivotal role in this context. Inter-religious dialogue and collaboration can serve as a proper framework to enhance community building.

d) Overcoming violence means healing memories by accepting the truth and thus moving towards forgiveness and reconciliation. DOV calls the churches to work for reconciliation. As an efficient way of conflict resolution, which is a vital dimension of Christian faith, the Council must take this particular area most seriously.

e) Often the root cause of violence is the denial of justice. Working for justice is an important way to overcome violence. On the other hand, sometimes violence is used to achieve justice. The inter-relatedness of justice and violence is a critical matter that requires a more comprehensive and deeper analysis. In this context, the study document prepared by CCIA on the protection of endangered population in situations of armed violence⁽¹⁰⁾, which was sent to the churches for reflection and reaction, must be revisited.

f) The church’s approach to violence must be proactive and not reactive. Non-violence must be considered as a powerful strategy and an active approach to overcoming violence. The church must preach tolerance, mutual openness and acceptance. Our Christian vocation is to become agents of God's reconciliation, healing and transformation. Others' strategy is “war on terror”; ours is “overcoming violence”; others' objective is “security”, even by military intervention; ours is peace with justice and the promotion of mutual understanding and trust.

YOUTH: THE GENERATOR OF A NEW COURSE IN ECUMENISM

27. “*God, in your grace, let the youth transform the world*”. This is what the youth said with a profound sense of humility, responsibility and courage at the last meeting of the Central Committee. They called for a more open church, more relevant theology, more credible ecumenism, more participatory society. I fully associate myself with the youths’ firm commitment and clear vision.

As Head of church and as Moderator, I have always enjoyed and been enriched listening to the youth in my church and in ecumenical circles. Listening to the youth! What a challenge to each of us sitting on chairs of authority in our respective churches and in ecumenical institutions. Certainly, youth have an important role to play in our churches, the ecumenical movement and our societies. But, to simply state that idea is not enough. We must engage them fully in the total life of the churches and the ecumenical movement at large. In this respect I want to make a few observations:

a) Youth have a special role in “being church”. I consider the role of youth as being essentially an agent of transformation. We must help the youth to move from the fringes of our churches to the heart of the churches’ life and witness, including the decision-making processes. I cannot imagine a church without its youth. They ensure the church's vitality and renewal. Youth should be actors, not merely listeners; they should be leaders, not merely followers.

b) Youth have a major role to play in “being ecumenical”. They are called to become actively involved in reshaping and transforming the ecumenical movement. When we organise meetings or appoint committees, we should not regard youth as merely an appendix or a separate category. The question of youth is neither about quotas nor about programmes directed specifically at youth. I want to see youth actively present in all categories, in all places, in all areas, and at all levels of the whole life and witness of the churches and the ecumenical movement.

c) The ecumenical formation of youth is of decisive importance for the future of the ecumenical movement. The quality and quantity of persons interested in ecumenical life, both in the WCC and elsewhere, is declining. The survival of the ecumenical movement is largely conditioned on the active and responsible involvement of youth. A vision requires visionaries to dream and struggle for its realisation. The preparation of a new ecumenical generation is imperative. It must become a major focus for the ecumenical movement. The future belongs to those who have the vision and courage to shape it.

d) If we do not empower our youth, they will find other “spaces” outside the churches and the ecumenical movement to create their own networks and seek other ways of expressing their concerns, their dreams and visions. The 8th Assembly was a Jubilee Assembly. This Assembly must become a Youth Assembly, not only by a strong youth presence, but also by their impact-making participation and challenging perspectives. Youth should become the pioneers of a new ecumenical order, as well as the avant-garde of a new ecumenical future.

A JOURNEY OF FAITH AND HOPE

28. I started my ecumenical journey as a youth delegate with such feelings and commitment. I was so delighted when, a few years ago, a group of young people from different parts of the world, meeting in my own church in Antelias, Lebanon, stated that being ecumenical “belongs to the very essence of being church”⁽¹¹⁾. This is what I myself learned out of my existential experience in the ecumenical movement.

Being ecumenical means engaging in a common mission and diakonia, and struggling for the visible unity of the church.

Being ecumenical means praying together, working together, suffering together, sharing together, witnessing together.

Being ecumenical means perceiving our essential identity not in those matters that distinguish us from each other, but in our faithfulness to the Gospel imperatives.

Being ecumenical means affirming our diversities, and at the same time transcending them to discover our common identity and unity in Christ.

Being ecumenical means being a church that constantly fulfils itself as a missionary reality in response to God's call in a changing world.

Being ecumenical means being firmly committed to and responsibly engaged in a journey of faith and hope.

29. In Amsterdam, at the 1st Assembly of the WCC (1948), we said: “*we intend to stay together*”. In Porto Alegre we must say: “*we shall stay together*” in this journey of faith and hope towards God's future.

30. When I assumed my task as Moderator in 1991, I said: “The sea is stormy; we are called by God to sail, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the ecumenical boat in the stormy sea”. The ecumenical movement is a boat moving forward. The profound symbolism of this image will always challenge us. While sailing through the stormy sea, the ecumenical boat has taken on plenty of water. Some would even say that the ecumenical boat is foundering. I deeply believe that our spiritual courage to seek new visions, our profound faith to hope for a new future, our firm commitment to the ecumenical cause will keep the ecumenical boat strong and straight in the terrible storms of the world.

31. The ecumenical journey is a pilgrimage of faith and hope. I have been on this pilgrimage since 1970– what a short period of time for such a long journey! In this journey of faith and hope I have had dreams:

I dreamed that mutual recognition of baptism, the seal of our Christian identity and foundation of our Christian unity would soon be realised. I dreamed that all the churches of the world would celebrate the Resurrection of our common Lord together on the same day, as one of the visible expressions of Christian unity. I dreamed that an Ecumenical Assembly – if not an Ecumenical Council at this point in time – would be convened with the participation of all churches to celebrate their fellowship in Christ and address common challenges facing the church and humanity. Dreaming is an essential dimension of “being ecumenical”. I am confident that new generations, sustained by renewed faith and hope, vision and commitment, will continue dreaming.

I am grateful to all those who, in this ecumenical journey, strengthened my faith, nurtured my reflection, supported my action and enriched my diakonia. I have had the privilege to work closely with three General Secretaries: Rev. Dr Emilio Castro, Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser and Rev. Dr Sam Kobia, and four Vice-Moderators, Bishop Dr Nelida Ritchie, Bishop Dr Soritua Nababan, Dr Marion Best and Judge Sofia Adinyira, as well as with so many sisters and brothers in Christ from different parts of the oikumene. Let God judge what I gave to the WCC. What I took from the WCC transformed my life and my ministry. I give thanks to God for granting me this privilege of serving Him through the WCC.

Recently, an ecumenical friend asked me: “Will this Assembly be the epilogue of your ecumenical journey?” I said: “On the contrary; it will become the prologue of my new ecumenical journey.” Ecumenism has become integral to my very being. Enriched by many years of experience, I will become even more ecumenically engaged. With the help of God, I will continue this journey of hope and faith as one of the devoted ecumenical pilgrims praying with you and with so many people around the world:

God, in your grace, transform our churches.

God, in your grace, transform the ecumenical movement.

God, in your grace, transform the world.

ARAM I
CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA

February 2006
Antelias, Lebanon

NOTES

1. Aram I, *In a Search of Ecumenical Vision*, Antelias, 2000, p. 283.
2. *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva, 1997, pp.18-20.
3. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111, Geneva, 1982.
4. *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith*, Faith and Order Paper no. 153, Geneva, 1991.
5. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper no. 198, Geneva, 2005.
6. *Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches: A Policy Statement*. Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1997. p. 14-15.
7. Diane Kessler, ed., *Together on the Way – Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva, 1999, p. 3.
8. In 1950, the WCC Central Committee, meeting in Toronto, formulated a text on “The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches: The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches” (see *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963*, ed. Lukas Vischer, St. Louis, MO, Bethany press, 1963, pp. 167-176). This text, which is referred to in ecumenical literature as “Toronto Statement”, remains fundamental for any common understanding of the WCC. It is in two parts; the first part makes five declarations about what the WCC *is not*; the second part offers eight positive assumptions which underlie life in the Council.
9. *World Council of Churches, Central Committee, Minutes of the Fifty-First Meeting, Potsdam, Germany, 28 January – 16 February 2001*, Geneva, 2001, p. 177.
10. “The Protection of Endangered Populations in Situations of Armed Violence: Toward an Ecumenical Ethical Approach”, in *Central Committee, Minutes, Fifty-First Meeting, Potsdam*, pp. 219-242.
11. “Vision from Youth Consultation on Reconfiguration of the Ecumenical Movement”, *Consultation on Reconfiguration of the Ecumenical Movement. Convened by the World*

Council of Churches, 17-21 November 2003, Antelias, Lebanon. Geneva, World Council of Churches 2004, p. 27.