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The Ecumenical Vision and the Desired Goals of
the World Council of Churches

In the wider framework of a seminar on the “Fruits and Challenges of the Ecumenical Dialogues”, I was assigned the topic “The Ecumenical Vision and the Desired Goals of the World Council of Churches”. As is often the case with ecumenical subjects, my theme allows for a wide range of approaches. I would like to propose a historical-theological introduction to the self-understanding as well as the vision of the WCC yesterday and today. In order to keep the focus and be as concise as possible, let me start by a quotation which was rather controversial in its own time.

The first WCC General Secretary, the Dutch Reformed theologian W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft, once wrote that the World Council of Churches exists “in order to deal in a provisional way with an abnormal situation”¹. This was a little more than 60 years ago, when the formation of a world council of churches, with no precedent in Church history, was the cause of much perplexity, concern, and excitement, which pushed the newly created WCC to clarify its theological or, more precisely, its ecclesial significance.

I think that this formula, which remains provocative despite its age, can help us to grasp, in the space of a short presentation, the theological self-understanding of the WCC and the dynamic core of the ecumenical vision and goals. I will first of all look at what my distinguished predecessor called “an abnormal situation”. From there, on a second moment, I will focus on the “provisional way” or the provisional solution. I will then review the vision of the ecumenical movement as it is formulated throughout the WCC assemblies and conclude by reflecting on the WCC and the desired goals of the ecumenical movement today.

¹ W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva, WCC, 1982, 76.

I. An Abnormal Situation: the Ecumenical Problem

What is then this “abnormal situation”?

1. The Problem of the Church is the (divided) churches The “abnormal situation” has two inseparable dimensions. The first one can be described by the following paradox: on the one hand we know from the Scriptures and Tradition that the Church, as the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, is a sign and “sacrament” of God’s promised, effective, cosmic reconciliation accomplished on the cross; on the other hand we constantly make the experience that Christians and churches do not live in full reconciliation. On the one hand we confess that one of the marks of the Church is its given oneness, its given unity; on the other hand we make the experience that the relationship among the divided churches remains marked by mutual doctrinal condemnations, by the fact that many of them do not yet feel able to recognise in each other the fullness of the Church of Jesus Christ and, as a result, do not feel able to live in eucharistic fellowship, in communion at the Lord’s Table. Not even if condemnations of the past are declared not relevant anymore for the present situation and partners, like between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. We find a very concise and provoking formulation of this abnormal, paradoxical situation in a publication in preparation for the first WCC assembly. Here it is: “The fundamental problem of the Church is the existence of the churches.”² The ecumenical literature abounds in references to its devastating consequences.

The divisions belong to historical and cultural realities. Centuries of separation among Greek and Latin Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have led us to discrepant forms of Church organisation, discrepant ways of theologising the Church in a variety of languages, and, consequently, to conflicting ways of describing what Church unity is and what it requires. This means that when we come to speak of Church unity, we almost inevitably use theological languages shaped by our past divisions; even when it has to do with recent phenomena of tensions and divisions in the churches. Moreover, whereas our inherited

² *The Universal Church in God’s Design*. London, SCM Press, 1948, 17.

divisions often crystallised in the past in issues of authority and doctrine, the ecumenical problem, following centuries of separation, has become a cultural problem. This has become a matter of a patient, creative dialogue involving exchange between what might be called Christian cultures, which are Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Byzantine, Western Roman, Western Protestant and predominantly Evangelical or Pentecostal in character, particularly the latter developing rapidly in many countries also in the Global South and countries like Korea.

Waves of immigration and intensive missionary work in the last centuries have established the confessional churches in new contexts and cultures. The biggest Lutheran church might soon be an African church, the biggest diocese of the Antiochian Orthodox Church is in San Paulo, Brazil. New forms of communication and globalization in our time make the cultures mixed and not so much bound to the place anymore. No surprise then that now we find that the cultural differences more than before goes through the churches, not so much between them. And as we see new challenges to church unity comes up e.g. related to issues of human sexuality, again the cultural differences are shaping the realities in and between the churches. E.g. what is defined as an Anglican or Lutheran position is to a large extent depending on which subculture or which continent we talk of, or what kind of culture or subculture you find to be most relevant and compatible with the values of church. These realities lead to discussions or dividing conflicts, sometimes resulting in new church configurations; or to the phenomenon that significant numbers of church members have their own positions and practises quite independent from official church positions. That is the reality in many of the larger church structures, like Protestant folk churches in Europe as well as in the Roman Catholic Church.

2. Invisible unity The second dimension of our “abnormal situation” is a consequence of the first. Although our church divisions have not destroyed all bonds of fellowship among Christians, our unity in Christ, our *koinonia*, bears only a pale witness, an obscure witness, an “invisible” witness, to God’s reconciliation with God’s whole creation, to our hope in the coming Kingdom of God, in the recapitulation of all things in Christ, who is both and inseparably the head of the Church and the head of the whole creation.

One of the major gifts of the modern ecumenical movement to the divided churches is the experience and the moving, inspiring

affirmation of this real (though imperfect) communion or oneness in Christ. Let us listen again to some of the twentieth-century witnesses to this foundational experience and awareness.

The Church of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople invited all churches of Christ throughout the world to grow together in *koinonia*, communion, through mutual learning and mutual support by establishing what it then called in 1920 a *Koinonia ton Ekklesion*, a “league of Churches”³. The participants in the 1925 world conference on Life and Work called their movement *communio in serviendo ecumenica*, in other words: ecumenical communion in service to the world⁴.

In their “Call to Unity”, the delegates to the 1927 world conference on Faith and Order relate their experience of oneness in Christ to God’s presence in the prayer and work of that pioneering conference: God’s presence has been manifest “in our worship, our deliberations and our whole fellowship. God “has discovered us to one another. (...) We have dared and god has justified our daring”. And they conclude: “we can never be the same again”⁵. Ten years later, the second world conference on Faith and Order states in its remarkable “affirmation of union in allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ” that our unity in faith in Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is “deeper than our divisions”. It “does not consist in the agreement of our minds or the consent of our will”. We are one because “we are all the objects of the love and grace of God”. This is, theologically speaking, the strongest foundation of any efforts to church unity, even if they in Edinburgh 1937 only said that our unity is “of heart and spirit”, of “spirit and aim”⁶.

Written in the same year of 1937, the “Letter of Invitation” to the establishment of the World Council of Churches formulates this foundational insight in an ecclesiological language. We commend the creation of the World Council, write its authors, “because the very nature of the Church demands that it shall make manifest to the world the unity in Christ of all who believe in him”. The full

³ For the English translation of that Encyclical see: “A New Translation of the 1920 Message of the Ecumenical Patriarchate”, *The Ecumenical Review*, XII(1), October 1959, 79-82.

⁴ G.A.K. Bell, *The Stockholm Conference 1925*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1926, 17.

⁵ H. N. Bate (ed.), *Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference – Lausanne, August 3-21, 1927*, New York, George H. Doran, 1927, 460.

⁶ L. Hodgson (ed.), *The Second World Conference on Faith and Order held at Edinburgh, August 3-18, 1937*, London, SCM Press, 1938, 275-276.

unity of the Church “is something for which we must work and pray”. But there exists “a unity in allegiance to our Lord for the manifestation of which we are responsible”⁷. In their message “to all who are in Christ”, the churches gathered in the WCC 1948 inaugural assembly admit that “we are divided from one another not only in matters of faith, order and tradition, but also by pride of nation, class and race”. However, they go on, “Christ has made us His own, and He is not divided. In seeking Him we find one another”. Therefore, they concluded, “We intend to stay together”⁸.

So far, a sketch of our “abnormal situation”: our past and present ecclesial divisions have paled, have obscured, have made “invisible” the unity in Christ whereby, as his body, we are “called out” to bear witness to the communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; to the reconciling breaking of the separation walls on the cross; to the renewal of all things in the one who is the head of the creation and the head of the Church.

However, the reality of the modern and post-modern ecumenical movement have provided other realities as well, visible for those who know these realities and are able to see the significance of them. We cannot become the same again, but it is very demanding to find lasting changes of structures of churches so that the new experiences of unity also become visible in the same way as the visibility of different confessional church buildings in the same street still is. Let us now move to what Visser ‘t Hooft called the “provisional way” of dealing with it, namely the World Council of Churches. In the next section I will introduce the WCC theological self-understanding by putting into dialogue the WCC Basis, or its brief confessional affirmation, and a reference document on the WCC ecclesiological significance known as the Toronto Statement⁹.

II. The Provisional Way: a World Council of Churches

⁷ “Letter of Invitation”, *Documents of the World Council of Churches*, Amsterdam, First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1948, 9.

⁸ W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft (ed.), *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, London, SCM Press, 1948, 9.

⁹ “The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches”, *Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva, WCC, 1950, 84-90. Web:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/toronto-1950/toronto-statement.html> .

How do the divided churches move from the real though imperfect fellowship that their members experience across confessional, denominational borders, to full visible ecclesial communion?

1. *Vestigia Ecclesiae* First of all by recognising that there is some common ground for a spiritual fellowship which allows them to move progressively from isolation to mutual support, mutual consultation and dialogue with a view to reaching consensus, overcoming inherited divisions, and moving accordingly to future ecclesial communion.

This common ground is provided by their allegiance to a Christological, Scriptural, Trinitarian faith. According to the WCC Basis¹⁰, the churches that gather around the ecumenical table confess that Jesus Christ, God and Saviour according to the Scriptures, is the Lord of the One Church and of the world, and that they live and witness for the glory of the Holy Trinity.

The Toronto Statement draws the implications of this common ground for the relations between the churches¹¹: each separated church believes that it is a manifestation (a “subsistence”!) of the One Church; each church recognises that membership in the One Church of Jesus Christ is more inclusive than their own membership; each recognises in the other churches authentic elements of the One Church of Jesus Christ, what traditional polemic theology calls *vestigia ecclesiae*; each church renounces to consider to other churches wholly heretical; each church thus recognises that despite the sin of schism, the means of God’s grace in Christ through the Spirit are not fully absent in the other churches.

In this sense the ultimate foundation of the ecumenical movement lies in Saint Paul’s teaching that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rm 5.20).

¹⁰ For the WCC Basis see <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/1-statements-documents-adopted/institutional-issues/constitution-and-rules-as-adopted.html> .

¹¹ “The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches”, Section IV: The Assumptions Underlining the World Council of Churches: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/toronto-1950/toronto-statement.html> .

2.A World “Counselling” of Churches This real though vulnerable common ground for fellowship leads the churches to mutual care and takes the institutional form of a world “council”. The World Council has come into existence, according to its inaugural assembly, “because we have already recognised a responsibility to one another’s churches in our Lord Jesus Christ”¹².

But this is not a council in the French sense of *concile*, in the German sense of *Konzil*, or in the Spanish sense of *concilio*, connotations which presuppose full visible communion and suggest jurisdictional authority, but a “council” in the more modest (and and rather laborious!) sense of counselling (*Conseil* in French, *Rat* in German, *consejo* in Spanish) or, in the words of a report on the WCC ten formative years, “a fellowship of discussion, cooperation and mutual aid”¹³.

The only authority of this fellowship is the wisdom of its actions and statements. Thus it is far from acting as a world church with central authority. It cannot negotiate union on behalf of its member churches. It cannot adopt a particular understanding of the Church and its unity. On the other hand, as they join this fellowship, the divided churches do not need to abdicate their own doctrine of the Church nor are they, obliged to adopt a specific understanding of church unity¹⁴.

How do the divided churches nurture their vulnerable pre-conciliar fellowship and therefore grow towards the promise of full visible communion?

The answer can once again be found in the text of the WCC Basis. They grow in unity as they “seek to fulfil together their common calling”¹⁵, or as “they act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act

¹² W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft (ed.), *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, London, SCM Press, 1949, 57.

¹³ *The Ten Formative Years 1938-1948*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1948, 9.

¹⁴ “The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches”, Section III: What the World Council is Not: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/toronto-1950/toronto-statement.html> .

¹⁵ Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches, article I: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/1-statements-documents-adopted/institutional-issues/constitution-and-rules-as-adopted.html>.

separately”¹⁶. By the time the WCC was developing its Basis, Visser ‘t Hooft was working on a theology of the ecumenical movement, *i.e.* a theology for the interim between separation and communion. The result was a book not incidentally called *The Pressure of our Common Calling*. His ecumenical theology was in fact a church-centred missiology. The WCC way of growing in unity formulated in the Basis reflects the central argument of the book: The churches which are no longer fully separated, though not yet fully united, will grow into full visible unity as they respond together, conciliarly, to the pressure of their common missionary and evangelistic calling in *marturia*, *diakonia* and *koinonia*¹⁷.

That is why in the WCC early history the word “ecumenical” does not refer primarily or exclusively to issues of “Christian unity”. It rather refers to – and this is remarkable – “...everything that relates to the whole task of the whole Church to bring the Gospel to the whole world”¹⁸. The ecumenical question is the question of the conversion, renewal, faithfulness of the churches and as a result – only as a result – the question of their unity.

Not surprisingly, the constitutional purposes and functions of the WCC are in reality commitments that the member churches are called to make with each other concerning intercession, deep relationships, mutual sharing of resources, and mutual accountability. In so doing they grow towards the ecumenical vision by calling one another “to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship”¹⁹.

When the churches lose sight of this engagement (and this happens more often than you may suspect), the ecumenical movement experiences a crisis. This is by the way one of the central insights of a remarkable analysis of the contemporary ecumenical situation produced in the early 1990s by the Strasbourg Institute for Ecumenical research²⁰.

¹⁶ O. Tomkins (ed.), *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, London, SCM Press, 1953, 16.

¹⁷ W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft, *The Pressure of Our Common Calling*, London, SCM Press, 1959.

¹⁸ “The Calling of the Churches to Mission and Unity”, *Minutes and Reports of the Fourth Meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches – Roll (Switzerland), August 4-11, 1951*, Geneva, WCC, 1951,

¹⁹ Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches, article III: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/1-statements-documents-adopted/institutional-issues/constitution-and-rules-as-adopted.html>.

²⁰ Institute for Ecumenical Research, *Crisis and Challenge of the Ecumenical Movement – Integrity and Indivisibility*, Geneva, WCC, 1994.

III. The Vision

Throughout the history of the modern ecumenical movement many of its protagonists have attempted to describe in more detail what the WCC Constitution calls the vision of “visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship”. However, in the spirit of the legacy from the use of the classical biblical text for unity, John 17, the search for unity is always in the WCC explored as to how it can contribute to the witness and service in and to the world. Given my assignment, I will briefly point to the significance of some statements received by the WCC assemblies.

1. Our oneness in Christ and the sin of our divisions One of the most honest and courageous statements about our “abnormal situation” and its provisional solution is the text “The Universal Church in God’s Design” received by the first WCC Assembly²¹. On the basis of the shared recognition that that “notwithstanding our divisions, we are one in Jesus Christ”, the text goes on to address “our deepest difference”, made clear in two conflicting types or models of describing the nature and mission of the Church called “Catholic” and “Protestant”. The essence of our situation, the text says, “is that from each side of the division, we see the Christian faith and life as a self-consistent whole, but our two conceptions of the whole are inconsistent with each other”²². Our divisions, despite “genuine convictions and loyalty to truth”, are ultimately a matter of sin in our midst, which means that the moving towards eucharistic fellowship requires penitence and renewal. The second WCC assembly’s statement on unity²³ provides biblical and theological ground for the affirmation of “our oneness in Christ” and, in line with the first assembly, approaches division (while distinguishing it from desired diversity), by reference to sin and, therefore, penitence, conversion and renewal.

2. All in each place in a fully committed fellowship We are celebrating this year the fiftieth anniversary of the most acclaimed

²¹ “The Universal Church in God’s Design”, W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft (ed.), *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, London, SCM Press, 1949, 51-57.

²² “The Universal Church in God’s Design”... 52.

²³ “Our Oneness in Christ and our Disunity as Churches”, *The Evanston Report – The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1954*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 82-91.

and authoritative WCC statement on the core vision of the ecumenical movement, which was received by the third WCC Assembly²⁴. Unlike the previous statements, the so called New Delhi Statement neither looks at the past nor frames the ecumenical problem in terms of sin, conversion and renewal. It is present and future as well as practically oriented. In the space of a single core sentence, comprised of inter-related inseparable elements, it confesses how the unity which is God's gift and our task "is being made visible" and, consequently, indicates what it requires for full organic unity. Though that core sentence is well-known, let us recall it once again:

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized in Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life that reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together ad occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people²⁵.

This almost-consensual, programmatic description of the ecumenical imperative has been widely received in multilateral and bilateral ecumenical settings – as the Faith and Order "Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry" process and several bilateral fellowship processes have shown - and is often referred to, in more recent debates on the "crisis" of the ecumenical movement, as a constitutive element of its integrity and indivisibility²⁶.

3. One Church One World Through a reinterpretation of the notion of catholicity challenged by the increasing affirmation of the theological and evangelical density of "secular" emancipation, the fourth WCC assembly affirms and enlarges the New Delhi vision of unity by linking in a more prominent way the

²⁴ "Unity", *The New Delhi report – The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1961*, 116-134.

²⁵ "Unity"... 116.

²⁶ For instance: Braaten, C. and Jenson, R. (eds.), *In One Body through the Cross: the Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003; cf. also: Institute for Ecumenical Research, *Crisis and Challenge of the Ecumenical Movement – Integrity and Indivisibility*, Geneva, WCC, 1994.

overcoming of Christian division to the overcoming of what divides the human family, the unity of the Church and the unity of humanity, and by so doing it signals a controversial turning point in the traditional WCC approach to church-world relations²⁷.

While the reception of the New Delhi vision emphasizes the unity of “all in each place”, Uppsala calls the WCC member churches to turn to the unity of “all in all places” by working for the time when, beyond the world counselling of churches, “a genuinely universal council may once more speak for all Christians, and lead the way into the future”²⁸. This insight is further developed in the following years so that the fifth WCC assembly envisions the one Church “as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united”. The Nairobi assembly relates the search for unity to a wide range of contextual church situations of “unity in tension” such as people living with disabilities, the community of women and men, tensions related to political struggles, and the search for cultural identity.

4. The Call to Reception

The biblical notion of *koinonia*, communion, which has been prominent in the life of the WCC since its inception but gains a new ecumenical momentum through bilateral dialogues in the 1980s, plays a key role in the statement on unity received by the seventh WCC assembly²⁹. The goal of the search for what the sixth assembly had called “the eucharistic vision”³⁰, namely full visible communion, is realized “when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness”³¹. It will be expressed “on the local and the universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action”³². The statement calls the member churches to take steps towards mutual recognition on the basis of the convergences, consensus and agreements achieved

²⁷ “The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church”, N. Goodall (ed.), *The Uppsala Report 1968*, Geneva, WCC, 1968, 11-19.

²⁸ “The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church”... par. 19.

²⁹ “The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling”, M. Kinnamon (ed.), *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report – Seventh Assembly*, Geneva-Gd Rapids, WCC-Eerdmans, 172-174.

³⁰ “Taking Steps towards Unity”, D. Gill (ed.), *Gathered for Life: Official Report – VI Assembly World Council of Churches*, Geneva-Gd Rapids, WCC-Eerdmans, 1983, 43-52.

³¹ “The Unity of the Church as Koinonia. Gift and Calling”..., 173.

³² “The Unity of the Church as Koinonia. Gift and Calling”..., 173.

through the multilateral and bilateral dialogues. The ninth assembly renews this calling to the churches to receive each other in its statement “Called to Be the One Church”³³. This text calls the churches to explore what level of mutual accountability already exist between the churches locally, and what kind of mutual accountability the churches might be willing to manifest in structures. Each church is the Church catholic, but not the whole of it, says that statement. And its goes on to conclude: “Each church fulfils its catholicity when it is in communion with the other churches”³⁴.

The vision is that of a eucharistic fellowship, sharing the gift of life and fellowship given by the creator, the Son who is offering himself, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in and under the bread and wine; a fellowship of fairness and sharing, of reconciliation, according to the vision of 1 Cor 11 inseparable from just peace in the earth community. This is also expressed in the most vital and comprehensive common description of Eucharist in the BEM document. This vision is now integrated in the theme of the 10th Assembly: “God of life, lead us to justice and peace!” Its ground is God’s gift of our real though imperfect communion in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. It presupposes the mutual recognition of multiform faithfulness to the apostolic faith, sacramental life and ministry, so that the fragmentary elements of the true Church which we discern in each other (*vestigia ecclesiae*) are transfigured into marks of the true Church (*notae ecclesiae*). In local, regional, and world conciliar forms of mutual accountability, our growth in koinonia as sign and “sacrament” of the eschatological, coming unity of humanity and the earth remains consistent with the prophet’s and Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom.

It does so to the extent it translates into engagement, together with people of other faiths or no faith, in the struggle against the systemic forces of death as they are named especially by the widow, the orphan, and the stranger.

IV. The Ecumenical Movement of the Cross

³³ “Called to Be the One Church”, L. N. Rivera-Pagán (ed.), “God in your grace... Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches”, Geneva, WCC, 2007, 255-261.

³⁴ “Called to Be the One Church” ..., 257.

You do know as well as I do that the world in which this evangelical ecumenical vision emerges through a missionary and critical dialogue with its own times and contexts is changing considerably in areas that are affecting directly not only the vision's immediate spiritual and theological transparency, but also the capacity, and sometimes the willingness of its major servants to reach common understanding or to carry these visions further. I do see it is one of my tasks in the WCC to remind the churches of the call of John 17, the call to be one, to be one church, and to remind all of us that this is not a call to our own wellbeing, but a call to follow Christ together.

The modern ecumenical movement had strong visions, to some extent strong models of unity, carried by the optimism of modernity. We are grateful for these visions and the institutionalized expressions of them, and the willingness to do so even if it was to be defined as "provisional".

The cross will always remain the common symbol of the churches. It has proved to be so, even if the crusaders and conquistadors and colonizers and warriors in different ages have used it as a sign of dominance, violence and oppression, and still might do so. The meaning of the cross in the Christian tradition will always have to be renewed by a reflection of the only sustainable ground for our unity: Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2).

The cross will always remind us of the gift of God through which there are churches or Christians at all. The cross will always remind us of human failure and weakness of, and the power of injustice and conflict, of our sin, even we seek the noble goal of visible unity. The cross will always remind us that God is with us and for us in everything. The cross will always remind us that the life in this world does not only carry meaning when we can describe it as a success story. The cross will always remind us that the Christian attitude is to be willing to carry the cross together, the cross of the imperfection of life, also the cross of not being able to agree or find the visible unity we are longing for. The cross always will remind us that God brings new life, also to the ecumenical movement, in normal and abnormal situations, in provisional and sustainable structures.