# *Where Now for Visible Unity?*

## Proceedings and Reflections from the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order

### Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, 24–28 October 2025

Edited by
Stephanie Dietrich
Sandra Beardsall
Andrej Jeftić
Martin Illert

World Council of Churches

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# FOREWORD

*Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich,*
*Moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order*

In the Egyptian desert, where generations of monastic communities have sought God in prayer and discernment, Christians from most parts of the world gathered in 2025 in Wadi El Natrun to search together for visible unity. The desert has long been a place where the Church has returned in times of uncertainty to rediscover what is essential. In a similar way, the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order brought together representatives of many Christian traditions to reflect anew on the mystery of the one Church of the triune God and the calling to visible unity. At a time when the world is marked by deep fractures—political, social, and even ecclesial—the world conference reminded us that the search for visible unity remains a theological and spiritual imperative rooted in the very nature of the Church.

The conference also took place in a year of particular historical and theological significance, marking the **1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (325 CE).** This anniversary offered an important horizon for the reflections of the Sixth World Conference. The Council of Nicaea stands as a foundational moment in the life of the Church, when bishops from across the Christian world gathered to confess together their faith in Jesus Christ as truly God and truly Lord. The Nicene Creed continues to serve as a decisive common point of reference for Christian traditions and remains one of the most powerful expressions of the unity of the Church in faith. Remembering Nicaea in the context of the conference reminded participants that the search for unity is deeply rooted in the early councils of the Church, where theological discernment and ecclesial communion were inseparably linked. The anniversary thus invited the churches not only to commemorate a historical milestone but also to renew their commitment to the ongoing theological dialogue and shared confession of faith that continues to sustain the ecumenical journey today.

As moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order, it was a profound privilege to witness the depth of engagement and commitment that characterized the conference. Faith and Order has, for almost a century, served the churches by creating a unique space where difficult theological questions are addressed together with honesty, patience, and hope. The conversations in

Wadi El Natrun demonstrated once again that the journey toward visible unity requires sustained theological dialogue. Differences in doctrine, ecclesiology, and sacramental understanding cannot simply be set aside; they must be engaged with intellectual rigour, spiritual humility, and mutual trust. The conference, therefore, reaffirmed the continued importance of theological conversation as an essential dimension of the ecumenical movement. It is through such dialogue that the churches learn to recognize in one another the work of the same Spirit and to discern more clearly the faith we hold in common.

The main theme of the conference invited participants to reflect on the vocation of the Church in today's world and on the ways in which the quest for visible unity strengthens the Church's witness. Throughout the plenaries, group discussions, and shared moments of worship, participants explored the relationship between faith, ecclesial communion, and the Church's mission in a world longing for reconciliation and hope. The theological reflections presented at the conference demonstrate both the richness and the complexity of this task. They testify to a shared conviction that unity is not merely an institutional goal, but a theological reality grounded in the triune God and expressed in the life and witness of the Church.

One of the most significant outcomes of the gathering was the ecumenical affirmation, *Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope,* which emerged from the collective discernment of the participants. This statement expresses both gratitude for the ecumenical journey that has brought the churches closer together and a renewed commitment to continue the work that remains unfinished. The affirmation reminds us that unity is both gift and calling: a gift already given in Christ and a calling that challenges the churches to deepen their communion in faith, life, and witness. The call invites Christians everywhere to renew their commitment to prayer, dialogue, reconciliation, and common service in a world that urgently needs signs of hope. In this sense, the conference sought not only to advance theological reflection but also to strengthen the spiritual and moral witness of the churches.

The conference would not have been possible without the extraordinary hospitality of our host, the **Coptic Orthodox Church**, and the wider Christian communities of Egypt. Their welcome was marked by hospitality and a deep sense of fellowship. Participants were invited not only into conference halls and meeting rooms but also into a living Christian tradition rooted in the ancient history of the Church. The spiritual heritage of Egyptian Christianity, so closely connected to the origins of Christian monasticism and Nicene faith, provided a powerful context for our reflections. The gracious hospitality extended to all participants embodied the very communion we seek, reminding us that

ecumenism is lived not only through theological texts and dialogues but also through shared life, prayer, and friendship. The hosting of the conference by the Coptic Orthodox Church was, therefore, not merely logistical: it was a profound ecclesial gift, offering the wider ecumenical family the opportunity to encounter the faith, spirituality, and witness of one of the most ancient Christian traditions.

Another striking feature of the conference was the broadening of participation around the Faith and Order table. The strong presence of churches from the global South was decisive. Voices from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East contributed perspectives shaped by diverse histories, social realities, and ecclesial experiences. Their theological insights and lived experiences also reminded us that the centre of gravity of global Christianity has shifted in recent decades. The ecumenical movement must, therefore, continue to widen its listening, ensuring that the global Church is fully represented in the conversations that shape our common theological journey. The contributions from these churches also highlighted the importance of contextual theological reflection within the wider quest for unity.

Particularly encouraging was the vibrant presence of young people throughout the conference. Their participation brought creativity, openness, and a willingness to ask both old and new questions about the future of the Church and the ecumenical movement. These young theologians and church leaders actively shaped the conversations and contributed to the shared discernment of the conference. Their engagement offers a hopeful sign for the future of Faith and Order and ecumenism. The search for unity is not simply the inheritance of past generations but a living calling that must continually be rediscovered and embraced by those who will carry the ecumenical vision forward.

Beyond the formal sessions, papers, and theological discussions, the conference was also marked by what many participants described as *an ecumenism of friendship.* Shared meals, conversations in the courtyards of the monastery, moments of prayer, and encounters across traditions created spaces where trust could grow and relationships could deepen. Such friendships do not replace theological dialogue: rather, they sustain it. When Christians learn to listen to one another not only as representatives of traditions but as siblings in Christ, the theological conversations themselves are transformed. In this sense, the friendships formed during the conference became a quiet yet powerful sign of the communion toward which the churches continue to strive.

The papers and speeches collected in this volume bear witness to the theological richness of the conference. They reflect the diversity of traditions

present, the seriousness of the theological engagement, and the spirit of fellowship that characterized the gathering. Together they offer important contributions to the ongoing work of Faith and Order and to the wider ecumenical movement.

The journey toward visible unity remains long and, at times, demanding. Yet the experience of the world conference in Wadi El Natrun renewed our confidence that the churches can continue to walk this path together. Guided by the prayer of Christ "that they may all be one" (John 17:21), we are reminded that the search for unity is not merely a human project but a response to God's call. May the reflections in this volume inspire continued theological dialogue, deeper communion among the churches, and a faithful witness to the reconciling love of God in Christ for the life of the world.

# INTRODUCTION

*Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftić,*
*Commission on Faith and Order*

I am delighted that the report on the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, *Where Now for Visible Unity?* is now available in this volume. Although this report cannot fully capture the richness of the spiritual and personal experiences of the conference held at Wadi El Natrun, I nevertheless consider it a special gift to the ecumenical movement. This I think will best become evident from a brief overview of the book's contents.

With the ecumenical affirmation and the message adopted by consensus, the book contains two key elements of the conference's work. Both texts look to the future, as they do not merely seek to mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, but combine this perspective with comforting and encouraging reflections on the churches' shared pilgrimage toward justice, reconciliation, and unity, with a compelling call to all Christians throughout the world to renew their commitment to visible unity.

The three thematic pillars of the Sixth World Conference—faith, mission, and unity—represented the main focal points of the conference. They are reflected not only in the ecumenical affirmation and the message, but also in the keynote addresses and the contributions from the individual panels. These bring together an astonishing wealth of denominational and regional perspectives. They follow a distinctive methodology as they combine their respective focuses on Nicaea, Faith and Order, and the global ecumenical perspective. Out of these contributions, a truly inspiring and encouraging picture of the contemporary ecumenical movement emerges. This richness is further increased by the questions from the audience and the answers from the panellists, which highlight in a special way the lively participation and fruitful exchange that characterized the conference.

The three-part conference structure was supplemented by a look at the regional context of the Middle East and an outlook on the future of ecumenism. The panel on the Middle East impressively highlighted the blessings and the challenges of the regional context, whilst the GETI message and the panel on the future of ecumenism focused on young people's experiences, needs, and visions.

Alongside the conference message and the ecumenical affirmation, the keynote addresses, and the plenary sessions, this book also contains brief overviews of the workshops offered at the world conference. What immediately becomes apparent here are the intersections between the thematic work of the Commission on Faith and Order and the programmatic area of Life, Justice, and Peace of the World Council of Churches (WCC) as well as the fruitful dialogues and collaborations with the Roman Catholic Church, the Pentecostals, and the world communions.

The reports from the three study groups show how deeply the panel contributions and discussions inspired and advanced the Commission's deliberations. The three study groups—"Being Church on the Way to Visible Unity" (Group 1), "Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God" (Group 2), and "Being Church in and for the World" (Group 3)—draw upon the inspiring ideas from the conference contributions in a creative and fruitful manner, as the respective reports demonstrate in many places. At the same time, the workshops gave the groups the opportunity to present and discuss their own topics, thereby sharing experiences and feedback with conference attendees.

The documentation of the proceedings is accompanied by testimonials from conference attendees, which offer helpful insights into the conference experience from different regional and denominational perspectives. These texts specifically highlight the great impact of spiritual life on the conference. Our special thanks go to the hosting churches and particularly the Coptic Orthodox Church, which made the Sixth World Conference an impressive experience of her spirituality and hospitality. It is beyond doubt that the regional spiritual life gave the conference a distinctive character. In my view, this is an insight that needs to be taken into account in all discussions on the reception of the conference's ecumenical impetus.

In the run-up to the conference, webinars were used to involve the partners and regions that were unable to attend the conference in person. A list of the various webinars and consultations can be found in the table of contents of the report. It should also be noted that, in the wake of the conference, the Faith and Order secretariat will continue to address the issue of reception in a special way, deepening and promoting it through academic conferences and encounters with the churches.

This volume will best fulfil its purpose if it is widely read and discussed both within the Commission on Faith and Order as well as beyond it in the whole fellowship of the WCC. The secretariat is keen to facilitate this.

## Readers' Guide

In the run-up to the Sixth World Conference, several theological conferences took place, offering academic theologians the opportunity to engage with the theme of the world conference and the anniversary of the Nicene Creed.

### Bossey

A theological conference under the title "Towards Nicaea 2025: Exploring the Council's Ecumenical Significance Today" was held from 5–7 November 2024 at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey. The conference was jointly hosted by the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission on Faith and Order. It brought together more than 130 participants online and in person: academics, church representatives, pastors, and graduate students, who shared ecumenical-theological perspectives on the legacy of Nicaea from various theological and regional contexts. With six keynote addresses, and more than 40 paper presentations, participants addressed issues such as the contribution of Nicaea to ecumenical dialogue, its relationship to interfaith dialogue, the role of women at the Council of Nicaea, reimagining the Nicene Creed from the perspective of gender justice, and the relationship between Christian faith and empire.

### Fribourg

Two further academic colloquia explored different perspectives on Nicaea. On 18 November, a colloquium entitled "The Council of Nicaea as an Ecumenical Guide for Christian Unity" was held by the WCC Commission on Faith and Order in collaboration with the Study Centre for Eastern Churches at the Ecumenical Institute in Fribourg. The conference promoted reflection and dialogue by bringing together students from the University of Fribourg and students from the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. They focused on topics such as "Where Now for Visible Unity?," "Living the Apostolic Faith Together," and "Triune Love as a Missiological Blueprint," and more.

### Munich

On 13 December 2024, another colloquium took place at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, which is unique in Germany in having an Institute of Orthodox Theology alongside Roman Catholic and Protestant theological faculties. It likewise brought together perspectives on Nicaea as the beginning of public theology, the inception of synodality, and a milestone in shaping Christian identity from the different confessional viewpoints.

## Webinars

### Readers' Guide

In collaboration with the Christian world communions (CWCs), member churches, and ecumenical partners, the Faith and Order secretariat organized a series of webinars to deepen theological, ecclesiological, and missional reflection in preparation for the Sixth World Conference. These webinars served as platforms for dialogue around the conference's core pillars—faith, mission, and unity—while engaging with the legacy and theological significance of Nicaea. Insights from the webinars enriched the world conference materials and informed discussions.

### Webinar 1: Easter 2025—Celebrating Together to Strengthen Unity (with World Council of Churches Member Churches)

Held on 13 February 2025, this webinar brought together people from different traditions—Coptic, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran—to explore how a shared celebration of Easter can unite Christians worldwide in their common faith in the resurrected Christ. In 2025, Christians from all traditions celebrated Easter on the same day, 20 April. But in many years, major Christian traditions celebrate Easter on different dates, thus giving the impression of a divided witness to this fundamental aspect of the Christian faith. Since the 16th century, Eastern and Western churches have used different calendars to calculate the date of Easter, and only rarely do they coincide. The search for a common date for Easter was also one of the central issues of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

## Webinar 2: The Bishop of Rome and Christian Unity (with the Roman Catholic Church)

Held on 18 March 2025, this webinar, co-organized with the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, explored the evolving role of the Bishop of Rome in the ecumenical quest for unity. The discussion centred on the 2024 study document "The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in the Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*," which synthesizes insights from 30 responses to *Ut unum sint* and 50 ecumenical dialogue texts. The webinar aimed to foster reflection on these findings and stimulate further theological dialogue on the exercise of primacy in the service of Christian unity. Participants from Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant backgrounds engaged with models of primacy compatible with conciliarity and the *sensus fidelium*. The discussion provided valuable perspectives for the unity pillar of the world conference and highlighted pathways toward reconciling historical divides.

## Webinar 3: Bridging East and West—A Joint Statement on the Filioque (with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Lutheran World Federation)

Held on 27 May 2025, this webinar, co-organized by the Lutheran World Federation and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, explored the joint statement "We Believe in the Holy Spirit: A Joint Statement on the *Filioque*," developed by the Orthodox-Reformed International Dialogue. The event brought together Reformed and Orthodox theologians to discuss the theological, historical, and ecclesial implications of the *Filioque* clause. Participants examined how the joint statement reflects convergence on the role of the Holy Spirit and contributes to mutual understanding between East and West. The discussion highlighted the importance of such reconciliatory theological efforts in the broader pursuit of Christian unity, with several speakers stressing the relevance of conciliar processes like Nicaea in resolving historical divisions. The insights gathered informed the faith and unity pillars of the world conference.

## Webinar 4: Unity of the Church—Anglican Perspectives and Ecumenical Responses (with the Anglican Communion)

Held on 16 June 2025, this webinar focused on the document The *Nairobi-Cairo Proposals: Renewing the Instruments of the Anglican Communion*, produced by the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO), and asked the question if those proposals make sense. Three theologians involved in their development presented the rationale behind them, while WCC Faith and Order commissioners critically engaged with the

proposals and their ecumenical implications from Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant perspectives.

### Webinar 5: Nicaea and the Peace Witness of the Church (with the World Mennonite World Conference)

Held on 15 July 2025, the webinar featured a panel discussion exploring the significance and emergence of the Nicene Creed from a Mennonite/Anabaptist perspective, and how this influences the peace witness of the church. Panellists discussed how the church's focus on doctrinal questions sidelined Jesus' call to seek justice and live nonviolently. From a Mennonite/Anabaptist perspective, participants explored how recovering these aspects can contribute to the renewal of church witness today.

### Webinar 6: Ecumenical Perspectives on Nicaea and Its Legacy (with the Methodist Church in Kenya, Societas Oecumenica, National Council of Churches in the USA, and Christian Conference of Asia)

This webinar took place on 25 September 2025 and explored how the Nicene confession of faith—rooted in the affirmation of Christ's divinity and the unity of the Church—continues to serve as a foundation for ecumenical dialogue and cooperation. Participants offered a series of concise presentations and previews of recent and forthcoming academic publications, illustrating how different Christian communities are re-engaging with Nicaea in light of contemporary theological and social challenges. Speakers examined Nicaea's legacy not merely as a historical milestone, but as a living resource for unity, inviting renewed reflection on what it means to confess "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" in today's fragmented world. The conversation highlighted the creative potential of Nicene theology to inspire mutual recognition, shared confession, and collaborative witness among diverse Christian families.

By drawing on both academic research and pastoral experience, the webinar fostered an atmosphere of mutual learning and theological renewal, affirming that the Nicene Creed remains a vital ecumenical touchstone—a gift that continues to shape the Church's identity and mission across regions and generations.

## Webinar 7: "We Believe in God, Maker of Heaven and Earth"—Confessing, Celebrating, and Working Together as Members in God's Household (with the World Methodist Council)

The webinar took place on 29 September 2025 in collaboration with the World Methodist Council. This gathering held special significance as it coincided with the Season of Creation and marked an early contribution to the Ecumenical Decade on Climate Justice Action. These overlapping contexts underscored the theological urgency of the conversation, inviting participants to reflect on how faith communities can respond to the interconnected crises of climate, justice, and creation care. Through this theological exploration, the webinar emphasized the shared calling of all believers to confess, celebrate, and cooperate as members of God's household, both within the Church and in solidarity with the broader creation. The event offered an opportunity to deepen ecumenical understanding of how the confession of God as "Maker of heaven and earth" inspires concrete action toward ecological renewal, peace, and justice. Four distinguished speakers from diverse Christian traditions shared rich theological insights and practical perspectives, exploring how doctrines of creation and community shape faithful living today. Their reflections encouraged churches and believers alike to cultivate a spirituality of stewardship, gratitude, and mutual care, rooted in God's creative and redemptive work in the world.

# Regional Online Pre-Conferences

## Readers' Guide

Online pre-conferences engaging theologians, youth, and clergy on trinitarian theology, conciliar memory, and contemporary challenges to visible unity were designed to foster regional theological dialogue, deepen contextual engagement with the theme of the world conference, and prepare delegates for active participation at Wadi El Natrun. They represented a truly polycentric ecumenical approach, valuing the diversity of voices and experiences on the shared journey toward visible unity. In collaboration with the regional ecumenical organizations (REOs), the WCC worked closely to align with their specific time zones, methodologies, plans, and contextual needs, ensuring that the timing and format of each pre-conference was appropriate and inclusive. These online gatherings, held throughout September and October, brought together a broad range of participants, including representatives of REOs, world conference delegates, WCC presidents, Faith and Order commissioners from the regions, members of WCC commissions and working groups, the WCC central committee, and other interested participants from member churches and ecumenical organizations. Reports of these events were presented during the session dedicated to regional meetings of the world conference.

### Pacific pre-conference

From 16–18 September 2025, the Pacific pre-conference met for a webinar under the title "Re-Weaving the Creed: A Pacific Voice for Christian Faith, Unity, Mission." In it, they invited the global church to gain a richer, more holistic understanding of Christian unity by engaging with Pacific epistemologies. Participants proposed to "re-weave" the ancient creed, infusing its timeless truths with the vibrant threads of Pacific *vanua*, *moana*, and communal traditions. This process, detailed over three days of rich dialogue, yielded a living, prophetic confession that addressed contemporary crises and strengthened both regional and global ecumenism.

### Caribbean pre-conference

On 19 September 2025, the Caribbean pre-conference met and gave conference delegates the opportunity to share their perspectives on the three building blocks of the Sixth World Conference: faith, mission, and unity. They included an invitation to webinar participants to give feedback on the presentations.

## European pre-conference

The Conference of European Churches met for a digital pre-conference from 23–25 September 2025 under the title "Where Now for Visible Unity?" This conference brought together more than 70 participants from churches and ecumenical organizations across Europe. It explored the enduring significance of the Nicene Creed as a foundation for Christian unity—both historically and in the present—shaping the Church's shared faith, especially amid contemporary crises such as war, inequality, climate change, and displacement.

## African pre-conference

From 13–14 October 2025, the All-Africa Conference of Churches, in collaboration with the WCC, hosted an online regional pre-conference for Africa under the theme "Revisiting Nicaea: African Perspectives on Controversies and Unity of Churches Today." The conference covered the key areas of theological discernment, biblical hermeneutics, the significance of the Nicene Creed, the question of the date of Easter, and the lessons from Nicaea for the African churches and global Christianity.

## Contributions from the Asian and North American regions

The regions of Asia and North America were also involved in the preparations through their key contributions to the Nicaea topic in webinar 6 ("Ecumenical Perspectives on Nicaea and Its Legacy"), which was held in collaboration with the Methodist Church in Kenya, Societas Oecumenica, the National Council of Churches in the USA, and the Christian Conference of Asia. This webinar focussed on recent ecumenical publications on Nicaea.

## Introduction

*Rev. Prof. Dr Charlotte Methuen*
*H.E. Metropolitan Dr Job of Pisidia*

A key element of the process leading up to the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order was the preparation of a draft conference message for presentation and approval at the world conference. Moderated by Metropolitan Job Getcha of Pisidia and Rev. Prof. Charlotte Methuen, a working group was convened that incorporated Faith and Order commissioners from across the WCC member churches. In consultation with the World Conference Steering Group, the working group prepared a draft conference message and a shorter call to all Christians. These were shared with other members of the Commission on Faith and Order for comment. The draft conference message and call to all the faithful were made available to all delegates before the conference.

At the conference, the draft texts were generally well received. Comments were invited and these gave rise to extensive discussions. Proposed amendments to both texts were received and incorporated. The most substantial change was the decision that the draft message, entitled *Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope*, should become an "ecumenical affirmation" and that the original "Call to All Christians" should become the conference message. Both texts—the ecumenical affirmation and the conference message—were accepted by consensus by the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order.

Both *Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope: Ecumenical Affirmation* and "Call to All Christians: Message of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order" explore the conference theme, "Where Now for Visible Unity?," through the lenses of the three thematic days of the conference: faith, mission, and unity. They draw on insights from the Council of Nicaea, the 1700th anniversary of which was marked by the Sixth World Conference, and from the first century of the work of Faith and Order, since the First World Conference on Faith and Order took place in Lausanne in 1927. Both recognize that the process of walking and witnessing together in and of itself helps to deepen unity. Nonetheless, the doctrinal and ecclesial aspects of understanding what divides and what unites us continue to be vitally important. Going forward, the work

of the Commission on Faith and Order will continue to engage with our shared mission while also seeking to deepen our shared theological understanding.

## Call to All Christians: Message of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order

Call to All Christians: Message of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, taking place 24–28 October 2025 in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt.

Beloved in Christ, marking the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order meets in Egypt, the land where the Holy Family took refuge, the land out of which God called his Son (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15). We have been overwhelmed by the generous hospitality of the Coptic Orthodox Church and express our deep gratitude to His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, to his fellow bishops, and to all his people for their warm welcome. We have been deeply impressed by the witness and mission of the Coptic Orthodox Church not only now but through the centuries. We acknowledge this ancient land where many generations have lived, breathed, and had their being in God. We are conscious that here in Africa and the Middle East, as in other places across the world, many people, including Christians, are today facing persecution and suffering horrific violence, existential threat, dehumanization, and utter disregard for human rights. In a world marked by division and polarization, by violence and war, and by apathy and complicity in the face of the resulting injustices, Christ's call to unity (John 17:21) remains as urgent as ever.

We rejoice that the past century of Faith and Order work has revealed that on many questions we agree more than we disagree. In the face of continuing disunity, the Sixth World Conference continues the ecumenical journey towards visible unity. Building on the legacy of previous Faith and Order conferences—from Lausanne (1927) to Santiago de Compostela (1993)—this gathering reflects on progress made and the persistent call to embody Christ's prayer: "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

We share faith in God—Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—which brings us together across time and traditions. Trinitarian faith is not merely a heritage to be preserved, but living water to be offered through both word and deed. We are called not only to believe, but to walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7): to live lives of hope, love, and transformation for the healing and reconciliation of the nations and of God's good creation.

Mission is rooted in the very identity of the Church, whose task is to proclaim the gospel. The faith of the Nicene Creed is not focused on itself, but reminds us that the Church exists to be sent into the world. For the churches in some contexts, mission has been entangled with histories of enslavement, colonialism, and power. Therefore, in our time, mission must be marked by repentance and a reorientation toward decolonization and justice, reconciliation and unity.

Unity is more than agreement: it is communion. Rooted in baptism, expressed in shared prayer, unity begins to be visible when we live together, moving towards mutual sharing of the Eucharist and recognition of each other's ministries. Unity also begins to be visible when we live together in ways that embody faith, hope, and love: not in isolation, but in solidarity with those who are marginalized by gender, race, poverty, disability, or ecological devastation. The Nicene Creed, ancient yet ever new, reminds us that we share a gift and call to full, visible unity: a unity that Faith and Order works to make visible in the life of the Church through seeking deeper understanding and agreed doctrine.

Where now for Visible Unity? In this ongoing journey, this is our call: to renew our commitment to faith, mission, and unity in Christ Jesus; to listen together to the Holy Spirit; to walk together as pilgrims, as children of the Father learning together to live out our faith, hope, and love in the practice of justice, reconciliation, and unity. Let us aspire to live the unity for which Christ prayed, that the world may believe and experience God's gifts of healing, justice, and abundant life.

## Ecumenical Affirmation

Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope: Ecumenical Affirmation

Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope: Ecumenical Affirmation of the World Council of Churches Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, taking place 24–28 October 2025 in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt.

I. Introduction

1. Where Now for Visible Unity? This question has shaped the deliberations of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order meets in Egypt, the land where the Holy Family took refuge, the land out of which God called his Son (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15). We have been overwhelmed by the generous hospitality of the Coptic Orthodox Church and express our deep gratitude to His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, to his fellow bishops,

and to all his people for their warm welcome. We have been deeply impressed by the witness and successful mission of the Coptic Orthodox Church not only now but through the centuries. We acknowledge this ancient land where many generations have lived, breathed, and had their being in God. We are conscious that here in Africa and the Middle East, as in other places across the world, many people, including Christians, are today facing persecution and suffering horrific violence, existential threat, dehumanization, and utter disregard for human rights. In a world marked by division and polarization, by violence and war, and by apathy and complicity in the face of the resulting injustices, Christ's call to unity (John 17:21) remains as urgent as ever. That call challenges us to seek out this unity in faith and in mission and to begin to live it out.

2. As Christians we are called to be one. In the Nicene Creed, we affirm one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. As we meet, 1700 years after the Council of Nicaea convened in 325, 100 years after the World Conference on Life and Work gathered in Stockholm in 1925, and over 30 years since the last World Conference on Faith and Order met in Santiago de Compostela in 1993, we acknowledge and celebrate the progress made by the ecumenical movement, while recognizing the challenges that continue to confront us.

3. The first ecumenical council in the history of Christianity, Nicaea sought the unity of the Christian faith. Through the Sixth World Conference we call each other to Christian unity. Informed by our engagement with Nicaea, it builds on what has been achieved by the Faith and Order movement over the past century. In gathering together, we continue the living tradition of the ecumenical movement. We affirm that the visible unity of the Church is not only a theological aspiration but also a gospel imperative, for our own time, as for all times. As we look to the future, we commit to dignifying humanity in all its expressions, acknowledging that we are all God's children, created in God's image and likeness. We commit to deeper engagement with one another and to travelling together on our pilgrimage of faith, however long or complicated that journey might be. We affirm a renewed ecumenical vision that is both courageous and compassionate in responding to the call of Christ and to the cries of the world. We affirm our mutual accountability in our search for common faith, shared mission, and lived unity.

## II. The World Conferences on Faith and Order

4. This is the sixth in a series of World Conferences on Faith and Order that reach back nearly a century: Lausanne (1927), Edinburgh (1937), Lund (1952), Montreal (1963), and Santiago de Compostela (1993). Each has deepened our understanding of the theological, ecclesial, and ethical dimensions of unity,

shaping the churches' shared witness in a fragmented world. At Lausanne (1927), the Faith and Order movement embarked on a deep exploration of the doctrinal divisions that separate the churches, affirming the vital role of theology in the pursuit of visible unity. Edinburgh (1937) carried this exploration forward by focusing on ecclesiology and sacramental theology. Together with the Oxford Life and Work Conference (1937), and the International Missionary Council (founded in 1921), it laid the groundwork for the establishment of the World Council of Churches, emphasizing the importance of unity in both faith and mission. Lund (1952) called churches to act together wherever possible—the famous Lund Principle—and marked a significant turn towards common action and shared witness in a divided world.

5. Building on these foundations, Montreal (1963) sought to define the nature of the unity we seek, advocating for a communion rooted in apostolic faith and for the unity of all in each place. This impulse would later inform the Faith and Order convergence paper, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM). Santiago de Compostela (1993) highlighted *koinonia* or communion as the heart of unity, calling churches to engage seriously with the fragmentation of the world and to work together to support justice, openness to dialogue, and contextual engagement. It reaffirmed that the theological concerns of Faith and Order cannot be separated from those of Life and Work, of mission and evangelism, and of justice and peace.

6. We rejoice over the ecumenical progress that has been made in the past century, especially the achievements of the many bilateral and multilateral dialogues that have borne real fruit. As we now ask, "Where Now for Visible Unity?" we lament our continuing disunity, while recognizing that the processes of theological exploration in which we have engaged and our shared responses to the needs of the world in and of themselves bring churches closer to realizing such a unity. As churches engage in dialogue on faith and collaborate in mission together, the relationship between them is deepened and their unity begins to be made manifest. We live in a world in which too many face hunger, war, and displacement. Our lived unity implies that these cries and pains are shared. We can do nothing less than respond to each other, weep together, seek to heal those wounds, and look for and bring about a different world. The challenges that confront the world are faced by all Christians. Together, Christians and churches can offer an important witness that transcends their differences and separation.

7. Drawing on the tradition of the early Church, past insights, and new ecumenical experiences, while recognizing that the fullness of ecclesial unity is God's gift and our calling, we commit ourselves and our churches to seeking fresh

pathways of reconciliation, renewed theological engagement, and transformative practices, confident that these will also move us towards deeper communion. In articulating (1) our common faith, (2) our shared mission, and (3) our vision of lived unity, the Wadi El Natrun World Conference (2025) hopes to revitalize the Church's witness. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we hope that we may embody Christ's prayer: "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

## III. Faith

8. Faith is not theory, but transforms our everyday life: we are called not just to learn the faith but to "walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7). Faith requires us to define doctrine and what it means truly to believe, but also encompasses faithfulness, trust, loyalty, and allegiance. Christian life is faith lived with others; our faith is confessed and enacted together. Faith underlies our liturgical and prayer life: we believe what we pray, and we pray what we believe. Faith seeks to bring about transformation, not only of believers but also of the world.

9. The trinitarian—Nicene—faith underlies the approach taken by Faith and Order from its beginnings and is affirmed by all member churches of the WCC. That is, whether or not they use the Nicene Creed liturgically, the churches from which we come have shared roots in the apostolic faith; worshipping the triune God, Father, Son, the Holy Spirit; and affirming faith in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly human, who came to save the world. As we commemorate the Council of Nicaea, we acknowledge with gratitude the theological and ecclesiological foundations laid by the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (hereafter referred to simply as the Nicene Creed), the canons of Nicaea, and the council's advocacy for a shared date for the celebration of Easter.

10. Building on these foundations, the Church in every era is called both to declare and to display how to live faithfully in changing and varied contexts. At the time of Nicaea, the Church was in crisis and the Roman Empire under pressure, both internally and externally. The idea of a Faith and Order Conference was first proposed at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, but planning was delayed by the First World War, and in 1927 the Lausanne Conference was shaped by political breakdown and economic instability in the aftermath of that conflict. The World Council of Churches, proposed in 1937, came into being in 1948, in the wake of the Second World War. Today Christians and churches across the world experience similar challenges, specific to their contexts, as they seek to live out their faith in Christ through collaboration in mission and service. Convictions about the importance of such faithful collaboration in our own times are threatened by secularism, relativism, and religious fundamentalism. Churches are called to speak with a

prophetic voice—which is also a moral and ethical voice—to their people, their governments, and the whole world.

11. Some question the importance of faith. Insistent secularism dismisses faith itself as irrational or as irrelevant to the realities of contemporary life. However, we affirm that Christian faith is not blind belief, but a bold and active response to God's revelation and love. It engages with the realities of the world, empowering believers to stand and act together in hope. As each new generation seeks meaning and identity while grappling with peer pressure and doubt, we affirm the need for open hearts and whole-life discipleship. The Christian lifestyle is rooted in a loving relationship with God, ourselves, and one another, and promotes just relations that are contextually aware of God's unfolding desire for the fullness of life among all people, especially in our daily lived experience. We confess with Augustine, "our heart is restless until it rests in you" (*Confessions*, 1.1.5). Faith is not impersonal, but a lived relationship: personal and communal.

12. Some question the importance of doctrine. Radical relativism argues that teaching about truth is irrelevant and divisive. We affirm that what we believe about God informs how we live and relate to others. Our shared belief in the Trinity as a communion of love enables and requires us to engage honestly with doctrinal and religious difference. Human beings, created in the image of God, are called to reflect that trinitarian communion in how they love God, each other, and God's creation.

13. Some question the importance of mutual acceptance. Racism, gender injustice, ableism, xenophobia, and violations of Indigenous peoples, water, and earth are interconnected expressions of sin. Religious fundamentalism denies respect to the faith of others, cultivating exclusivity and fanaticism, often in the name of truth or of faith. It is a threat, not only to unity and peace, but also to life itself: millions of people globally—Christians and non-Christians—experience fundamentalist persecution. The Christian response should be fearless faith and witness, speaking truth to power, clear-sighted discernment of sin that lovingly challenges those who oppress, even when confronted by persecution and death. We reject violence, especially that targeting minority and vulnerable groups. Faith informs how Christians live and how they love: faith is not theoretical and incidental, but practical and life-transforming.

14. In a world asking what it means to be human in the light of contemporary technological and social developments, through faith we affirm that our faith in God, who created each person in God's own image, implies a holistic theological view of being human, that includes the inalienable dignity of each and every person. In a world marked by discrimination, we affirm with the Faith and

Order text, *Racism in Theology and Theology Against Racism* (1975), that the creation of all people in God's image gives each of them a dignity which should be respected. In a world fractured by fragmentation and division, riven by wars, injustice, and uncertainties, our faith informs and undergirds our journey not only toward a common vision of the Church but toward shared action. It is often in sharing together in God's mission that common ground is revealed between apparently incompatible church structures and identities. As Christians and churches, we engage with these challenges together, listening, talking, and working with one another, and holding the vision of a future in which a united Church articulates and lives out its faith convincingly.

15. We recognize that faith can be shaken by these glaring inequalities, by the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few, by failures to attend to the common good, by the use of violence and the resulting loss of human dignity, by the exploitation of vulnerable people, and by the ravaging of creation, and by the associated climate crisis. In some contexts, Christians and churches have been shaped by—and also complicit in—the destructive forces that threaten the world. They are called to speak against these forces together, proclaiming and living out Christ's message of hope. Local churches play an important part in sharing this hope through their faith, work, and witness, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. Christians remain people of hope, proclaiming that Jesus Christ has overcome the power of death through his resurrection. "Rejoice in hope; be patient in suffering; persevere in prayer," Paul exhorts the congregation in Rome (Rom. 12:12). Faith encourages all Christians and churches to face these challenges not with despair, but with hope.

## IV. Mission

16. Christ said: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20). The Church, through the witness of the disciples and apostles sent by Christ, inspired and empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit, has expanded to encompass all nations. As churches and as individual Christians, we too bear witness to the triune God in, to, and for the world, participating in the mission of God, the *missio Dei*. The dual mandate of proclaiming the gospel and engaging in service is foundational to the mission of the Church and to transforming discipleship. The Nicene Creed affirms that this calling is made manifest in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Christian faith asserts that the incarnation of the Word of God is "for us and for our salvation." The missional task of the Church includes the sharing of that faith, witnessing to the way in which salvation transforms both individual lives and the world.

17. As *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* affirms, the Church is called to be a sign and servant of God's design for the world. The Church is a foretaste and an instrument of God's purpose "to sum up all things with Christ as head" (Eph. 1:10). Sharing the good news and articulating the ways in which God's reign breaks through in this world are integral to Christian identity. To make Christ known, to testify to the world, requires word and deed, proclamation and acts of love. This witness unfolds through proclamation, through prophetic witness, and through service to humanity and to creation. Jesus declares, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Love, which is embodied and enacted and which has the wisdom to distinguish a person from their mistakes, is the primary outward sign of authentic Christian faith.

18. To participate in God's mission and to walk together, accompanying one another, Christians and churches must be grounded in a fundamental conviction of their shared identity. The Council of Nicaea sought unity, and as a result many Christians were united in faith, witness, and service. The confessional and doxological nature of the Nicene Creed for this reason gives a foundation for the Church's mission, calling those who confess the faith to share their faith. The pursuit of unity in faith is for that reason also an expression of a common mission. This shared faith in the Trinity, and in Christ, truly God and truly human, is the faith that the Church is sent to share with the world. It is the faith that Christians and churches are called to believe, profess, and live together.

19. The apostle Paul asks whether Christ has been divided (1 Cor. 1:13). As the WCC's 1st Assembly (1948) said: "Christ made us His own, and He is not divided. In seeking Him, we find one another." We commit to put Christ first and overcome our divisions. The "scandal" of Christian division, whether between or within confessions, impairs the churches' witness to the reign of God. We are called to proclaim the good news of the gospel working together with each other, not in competition. The goal of our unity is not to benefit the churches, but to fulfil the prayer of Jesus, "that the world may believe" (John 17:21). Although we should not overlook the way in which diversity and even disagreement might contribute positively to truth-seeking, theological integrity, or contextual mission, all Christians and all churches are called to confess and repent of the sin of disunity, and to reorient their mission and evangelism as an affirmation of the richness of unity.

20. Although the Council of Nicaea was intertwined with the political life of the Roman Empire, the Nicene fathers were able to confess the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith in those historical and political circumstances.

Contrary to that spirit, some Christian churches and organizations have spread—and sometimes imposed—the gospel in ways that have been influenced by and complicit with colonial and other oppressive systems, interests, and powers. Historically, Christians not only experienced oppression and persecution but in some cases have also themselves oppressed and persecuted. We acknowledge the suffering of many Indigenous Peoples in the name of mission. Some churches, recognizing their own complicity in injustice and dehumanization, have begun to ask for forgiveness of God and of their siblings in Christ. We commit to taking a clear-eyed view of our own history as churches.

21. All Christians and all churches are called to reflection and discernment regarding the relationship between their mission to proclaim the faith and their need to struggle against the evil and destructive forces at work in the world, always remembering that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38–39).

22. Acknowledging that we are in the world but not of the world (John 17:16), we affirm that our witness is directed to the world because "God so loved the world" (John 3:16), because in Christ, God reconciled the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19), and because we "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). The WCC document *Together towards Life* (2013) affirms that mission is for Christians "an urgent inner compulsion (1 Cor. 9:16) and even a test and criterion for authentic life in Christ." It calls for reflection on the Church's relationship to the unity of humanity, and also to the unity of the cosmos as the whole of God's creation. Unity is rooted in God's love for all of creation as well as arising from our understanding of salvation and the Church.

23. As the ecumenical celebration of the Season of Creation reminds us every year, we are part of God's creation, we recognize that the churches must consider the implications of *koinonia* for responsible care of God's world, a just sharing of its resources, concern for the poor, and countering the forces of marginalization. As churches we are called to mutually respectful mission and evangelism that listen to the voices of all people and attend to the groaning of creation (Rom. 8:22), seeking to bring the whole of creation, sanctified and healed by the Word of God, into communion with God in Christ. Christians cannot remain silent when human dignity and the integrity of creation are violated; nor can they ignore the tensions and power struggles between Church and state that sometimes compromise the Church's prophetic voice. We are called to offer a faithful contextualization of the gospel, engaging in interconfessional

and intercultural dialogue, rooted in honest self-assessment and mutual critique that leads also to mutual enrichment.

24. We witness in confidence to the undaunted love of God, revealed in Christ and kindled by the Holy Spirit, through which all things will be reconciled. This is, as the WCC's 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe (2022) put it, "an ecumenism of the heart," rooted in the love of the triune God, which offers this divine love to the world. As churches and as individual Christians, we are the signs and servants of the breaking of God's future into the present. "Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:8). We testify to the conviction that a different world is possible, and that our quest for unity is an essential aspect of that testimony.

## V. Unity

25. The Council of Nicaea aspired to be a council of unity: unity in faith in the triune God, unity in church structures, and unity in celebrating Easter together. We affirm the Nicene faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and we ask particularly what it means to be one. The anniversary of the Council of Nicaea calls us to remember that Christian unity is rooted in the apostolic faith of the early Church as revealed in the Scriptures and confessed in the Nicene Creed. We acknowledge that subsequent developments brought about new challenges in ecclesial relationships. Yet, the Nicene faith continues to stand as a shared doctrinal foundation and a unifying witness to the truth of the gospel. We recognize that the differences that emerged in the subsequent history of the Church have led not only to division but, with the help of God's providence, to a rich diversity. However, despite the enrichment of theological reflection produced by these divisions, they also undermined the unity demonstrated in Nicaea. We affirm that the unity of the Church is rooted in the unity of the three persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the relationship between them which expresses full and perfect communion (*koinonia*). This trinitarian unity is reflected not only in common faith, but also in the mutual acceptance—in accordance with the canons of Nicaea—of trinitarian baptism by most of our churches. Although we exist as individuals, through baptism we affirm that we exist in our relationship with God and become one body with and in Christ. We look forward to the time when our unity can be fully expressed also in our sharing of the Eucharist and the recognition of each other's ministries. We continue to seek the fulfilment of Christ's prayer to the Father: "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21).

26. Visible unity has been the goal of the ecumenical movement since its inception. We affirm, however, that this unity is not the ultimate aim in and of itself, but it is an essential aspect of—and establishes a credible foundation for—our common witness in and to the world. We recognize that Christian unity cannot and should not be identified exclusively with institutional unity: our lived experience of Christian unity in an important way arises from and is affirmed by our common commitment to God's mission. Nonetheless, there are and remain important ecclesial aspects of our journey toward unity, some of which continue to offer considerable challenges. Preaching together the divinity of Christ does not solve dogmatic, ecclesial, and liturgical differences. Ecclesially, our unity becomes visible in the common confession of apostolic faith; through the mutual recognition and celebration of baptism and the Eucharist; in the ministers of the church recognizing their shared responsibility for preaching the gospel, administering the sacraments, and maintaining unity among the faithful; and in moves towards shared structures of oversight. These aspects have been explored in the WCC's Faith and Order convergence documents *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982) and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013). We celebrate the many ways in which churches have moved to work more closely together since the beginning of the ecumenical movement a century ago.

27. We reaffirm our commitment to this quest for Christian unity. At the same time, we recognize that Christian unity cannot be (re-)established solely by agreed texts. Rather, it also needs to be lived out in daily Christian life: in shared prayer and study of the Bible, in the constant reception of the heritage and tradition of the early Church, in personal encounters and meetings between the faithful, theologians, and church leaders from different confessional backgrounds, and in common service to and in the world. Christian unity is achieved and manifested by the churches serving humankind together in integrated support to wounded humanity, at all levels: socioeconomic, moral-ethical, and emotional. Unity is a call to a way of life that reflects and participates in the life of the Trinity. In that sense, unity is not something we can achieve only by our own efforts, but is rather God's gift to be revealed in the way Christians love, serve, and pray together, even while we continue to work to overcome our differences. The goal should be to maintain unity where it already exists, reveal unity where it has been obscured, and recover unity where it has been lost. This needs to happen both on an institutional and on a personal level. Personal experience deepens the awareness that individual Christians and churches are already connected in their faith in Christ as God and Saviour. These personal relationships in turn shape and form the relationships between our churches. At the same time, we recognize that the institutional life of our churches also requires transformation if that revelation of unity is to be realized. The quest

for unity thus calls for the whole people of God to be engaged in a movement towards Christian unity, locally, regionally, and globally, always in the service of God's mission.

28. The ecumenical movement aspires to visible Christian unity in a reconciled Church, an answer to Christ's own prayer, which is able to give a trustworthy testimony to the Christian belief that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became human in order to redeem the whole of creation. Christian unity is a gift from the Holy Spirit that challenges us as individual Christians and as churches to work towards the unity of the entire human family. Christian witness calls us to overcome boundaries: between nations and generations, between different peoples and different cultures. We strive for a unity rooted in justice, which involves and is attentive to the voices of all, including the children, women, and men, those experiencing forces of marginalization and forced to the periphery of our societies, and the whole of creation. Christians and churches should always remember that they will be asked and have to answer for what they have done for their neighbour (compare Matt. 25:31–46). In these anxious times, we affirm our Christian hope as the discipline of finding grace: nurturing justice and flourishing and moving forward together.

29. This call to a just and hope-filled unity is a reminder that the unity of Christians is a foretaste of the unity of all under God's reign. This is not only a hope for the future, but a breaking through of God's reign into this world, which has already begun now, as Jesus proclaimed: "The kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt. 10:7). We are called to live out our hope for this unity now, making it tangible and visible in one faith, witness, and service, arising from our shared faith in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

*Prof. Dr Ani Ghazaryan Drissi,*
*Coordinator of GETI 2025*

## Readers' Guide

The Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) is an international study programme of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Theological Education (WCC-ETE) programme, engaging young and emerging theologians in theological and ecumenical study and discourse while participating in a large WCC event. GETI 2025 was the fourth such institute.

## A Journey of Formation, Dialogue, and Visible Unity at the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order

GETI 2025 formed an integral part of the wider ecumenical journey surrounding the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. Designed as a space of theological formation, spiritual encounter, and intercultural learning, GETI 2025 gathered around 105 young theologians, church leaders, and facilitators from across the world to engage deeply with the theme of the conference, "Where Now for Visible Unity?" Convened by the World Council of Churches' programme on Ecumenical Theological Education, GETI 2025 provided a unique opportunity for a new generation of ecumenical leaders to reflect together on the meaning of Christian unity in the contemporary world and to participate actively in the life and discussions of the conference.

The journey of GETI 2025 unfolded in several stages, combining online preparation with an intensive residential programme in Egypt. It culminated with participation in the Sixth World Conference itself. This structure allowed participants to move gradually from theological reflection to embodied experience, and then to engagement with the wider ecumenical community gathered for the conference.

The preparatory phase began with four weeks of online sessions bringing together participants from diverse regions and church traditions. These meetings

focused on revisiting the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as a foundational expression of shared Christian faith, particularly significant as churches worldwide approached the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025. Through lectures, discussions, and small group reflections, participants explored the theological significance of the Creed as a common confession that continues to shape the identity and unity of the church.

Alongside this theological foundation, participants also examined the historical development and vocation of the Faith and Order Commission within the broader ecumenical movement. Particular attention was given to the contributions of Faith and Order to theological dialogue and the search for visible unity among the churches. At the same time, the preparatory phase invited participants to confront the complex realities that shape Christian life today, including experiences of trauma, colonization, systemic injustice, and social fragmentation. These conversations helped situate the quest for unity within the lived contexts of Christian communities and prepared participants to engage the conference theme with both theological depth and contextual awareness.

The residential phase of GETI 2025 took place in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, at the Monastery of St Bishoy, a place deeply rooted in the spiritual heritage of Coptic Orthodox monasticism. The desert setting provided a powerful environment for reflection and community life. Historically associated with early Christian monastic traditions, Wadi El Natrun offered participants not only a physical location for study but also a spiritual landscape that shaped the rhythm of prayer, learning, and fellowship throughout the programme.

In this setting, participants embarked on what the GETI 2025 curriculum described as a *via transformativa*, a transformative journey combining academic exploration with spiritual formation and intercultural encounter.[1] Living together for several weeks allowed participants to build relationships across confessional, cultural, and linguistic boundaries, embodying in their daily life the unity they were seeking to understand theologically. The journey was guided and accompanied by fourteen facilitators—seven women and seven men—from diverse regions. They supported participants throughout the programme, fostering dialogue, reflection, and intercultural exchange.

A central focus of the residential programme was the experience of Christian communities in the Middle East. The region, marked by historical depth and

1. Ani Ghazaryan Drissi and David Montealegre, eds., *Where Now for Visible Unity? Curriculum and Methodology Booklet GETI 2025* (WCC Publications, 2025), 27–32, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/GETI%202025%20Curriculum%20and%20Methodology%20Booklet%20Final%205.pdf.

contemporary challenges, offered participants a context in which questions of faith, identity, and coexistence are lived in particularly intense ways. Church leaders from the region shared their experiences and reflections with the GETI community, offering insights into the realities of Christian witness amid political instability, social tensions, and the ongoing search for peace.

Among those who addressed the participants were His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of All Africa; His Beatitude Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem; Bishop Munib Younan, former Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land; Rev. Prof. Dr Anne Zaki, President of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo; and Rev. Prof. Dr Grace Al-Zoughbi. Through their testimonies and theological reflections, participants encountered a vision of Christian faith deeply rooted in resilience, hospitality, and hope. Their testimonies, particularly on the realities of Gaza and other challenging contexts, were invaluable in helping participants understand the human dimension of ecclesial witness.

These encounters reminded participants that the search for Christian unity cannot be separated from the concrete realities in which Christian communities live. In contexts marked by suffering and displacement, unity is often experienced not as an abstract theological concept but as a practical necessity for survival, witness, and service.

Another important dimension of the programme was engagement with religious pluralism and interfaith relations. In the Middle East, Christians live close to followers of other religions, particularly Islam. This reality challenges churches to develop forms of dialogue and cooperation that contribute to peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding.

Through lectures and guided discussions led by Prof. Dr Azza Karam, participants explored theological and practical approaches to interreligious engagement. These conversations were complemented by study visits to institutions such as Al-Azhar University and the Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism. These visits offered participants the opportunity to engage with His Eminence Grand Imam Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb and other Muslim scholars committed to promoting dialogue, countering extremism, and strengthening social cohesion.

The programme also included visits to important cultural and ecclesial sites in Cairo and Alexandria. At the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, participants encountered a symbol of intellectual exchange linking ancient traditions of

knowledge with contemporary scholarship. Visits to the Coptic Orthodox Seminary and St Mark's Cathedral offered insight into the life and heritage of the Coptic Church, one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. These experiences allowed participants to engage with the historical and spiritual richness of Egyptian Christianity while reflecting on the role of tradition in shaping contemporary expressions of faith and unity.

Throughout the programme, prayer played a central role in shaping the community life of GETI 2025. Guided by the GETI 2025 Ecumenical Prayer Book,[2] participants gathered daily for worship that integrated diverse liturgical traditions, languages, and musical expressions. These moments of shared prayer provided a space in which theological reflection was complemented by spiritual experience. They also served as reminders that the search for unity is not only an intellectual endeavour but also a spiritual journey rooted in common prayer and mutual hospitality.

In support of the theological formation and spiritual life of GETI 2025, several companion publications were produced and made available to participants. Alongside the GETI Ecumenical Prayer Book, the Ecumenical Reader offered a curated collection of key texts, theological essays, and primary documents, providing participants with both historical context and contemporary perspectives on ecumenical theology, Christian unity, and interfaith engagement.[3] These publications not only enriched the academic and spiritual experience of the Institute but will also serve as enduring resources for participants and their wider communities, ensuring that the learning and reflections of GETI 2025 continue to inspire ecumenical formation beyond the programme itself.

The academic programme of GETI 2025 was enriched by contributions from theologians and ecumenical leaders from different regions of the world. Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and Rev. Prof. Dr Kuzipa Nalwamba reflected on the ongoing work of the WCC and the significance of ecumenical theological education for the life of the churches. Prof. Dr Agnes M. Brazal addressed the theological implications of migration, highlighting the ways in which global mobility challenges traditional understandings of identity, community, and belonging. Rev. Dr Deenabandhu

2. Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, Chad Rimmer, and Joo Mee Hur, eds., *GETI 2025: Where Now for Visible Unity? Prayer Book* (WCC Publications, 2025), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/GETI%202025%20Prayer%20Book%20Web.pdf.

3. Ani Ghazaryan Drissi and Lawrence Iwuamadi, *GETI 2025: Where Now for Visible Unity? An Ecumenical Reader* (WCC Publications, 2025), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/GETI%20Reader%202025%20Web.pdf.

Manchala invited participants to consider poverty and systemic inequality as fundamental challenges to the realization of visible unity.

A special moment in the programme was the encounter with students from the Global Institute of Theology (GIT) of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. This joint session highlighted the importance of collaboration among ecumenical institutions committed to theological formation and provided an opportunity for participants to share perspectives across different networks of global theological education.

The final phase of the GETI 2025 journey took place during the Sixth World Conference itself. By joining the conference, participants were able to move from formation to participation in the broader ecumenical conversation. They attended plenary sessions, engaged in thematic discussions, and interacted with theologians, church leaders, and delegates from across the global Christian community.

One of the most significant contributions of GETI 2025 to the Sixth World Conference was the presentation of a collective message prepared by the participants. This message reflected the insights and concerns that had emerged during the weeks of study and dialogue. While expressing gratitude for the achievements of the ecumenical movement, particularly the work of the Commission on Faith and Order, the message also voiced concern about the persistent gap between theological agreements and their implementation within the life of the churches.

Participants emphasized that unity must become visible not only in theological statements but also in the lived practices of Christian communities. They called for renewed attention to the experiences and voices of those living at the margins of society, including communities affected by poverty, displacement, discrimination, and violence. For the participants, these contexts reveal both the urgency of unity and the ethical dimensions of the ecumenical vocation.

The message also invited the churches to reflect on what it means to exercise prophetic courage in the pursuit of unity. This involves not only continuing theological dialogue but also addressing the social and political realities that threaten human dignity and undermine the credibility of Christian witness.

As the programme concluded, participants returned to their churches and ministries with new perspectives, strengthened relationships, and renewed commitments. Many expressed a desire to continue their ecumenical formation through further study or involvement in ecumenical initiatives at local and

regional levels. Others committed themselves to fostering dialogue and cooperation among churches in their own contexts.

Perhaps one of the most enduring outcomes of GETI 2025 is the fellowship and the network of relationships formed among participants. These relationships, built through shared study, prayer, and experience, continue to connect emerging leaders across continents and traditions. In this sense, GETI functions not only as a programme of theological education but also as a catalyst for long-term collaboration within the ecumenical movement.

What began in the desert of Wadi El Natrun therefore continues far beyond the boundaries of the programme itself. Through the lives and ministries of its participants, the vision of visible unity explored during GETI 2025 continues to unfold in diverse contexts around the world.

In the context of the Faith and Order Sixth World Conference, the presence of GETI 2025 served as a reminder that the future of the ecumenical movement depends in part on the formation of new generations of leaders capable of carrying forward the work of dialogue, reconciliation, and common witness. By bringing together young theologians and church leaders from across the globe, GETI 2025 contributes to this ongoing task of nurturing hope, courage, and commitment to the unity of the church.

GETI at the Sixth World Conference thus stands as both a continuation of the ecumenical tradition and a sign of its future. It is a journey of formation, encounter, and shared faith that invites the churches to continue seeking visible unity together.

Looking beyond the Sixth World Conference, the impact of GETI 2025 continues to unfold through several concrete initiatives. One important dimension of this legacy is the strengthening of regional ecumenical theological formation through the development of Regional Ecumenical Theological Institutes (RETIs). Many participants have already begun sharing their experiences and insights within their local and regional contexts, contributing to new spaces of theological dialogue, leadership formation, and ecumenical collaboration. Through RETIs and other initiatives, the learning and relationships formed during GETI are being translated into concrete actions that support the life and witness of churches worldwide.

Another outcome is the academic work produced by participants. Throughout the GETI journey, students engaged in sustained theological reflection, culminating in final research papers addressing themes of unity,

justice, reconciliation, and Christian witness. A selection of these papers will be published in a forthcoming volume, offering emerging theologians an opportunity to contribute to wider ecumenical conversations.

GETI 2025 also formed part of the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Global Ecumenical Theology (CAS-GET), in collaboration with the University of Geneva through the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. Participants received academic credits for their studies, strengthening the link between ecumenical formation and accredited theological education. Several participants plan to continue their studies at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, deepening their theological formation and sustaining the relationships and networks built during GETI.

In these ways, GETI 2025 is not merely a temporary programme but part of a longer process of nurturing ecumenical leadership for the global Church. The experiences, friendships, and theological reflections formed in Wadi El Natrun continue to shape ministries, institutions, and communities worldwide, bearing fruit in teaching, dialogue, pastoral leadership, and engagement with the pressing challenges facing the church today.

The insights, reflections, and recommendations gathered throughout GETI 2025 were collectively summarized in the GETI Message, presented to the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. This document captures the voices of the participants and their vision for a visible, just, and reconciled church.

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# A Message from the World Council of Churches' Fourth Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2025 to the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order at Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, 15 September–29 October 2025

## Preface

The Fourth Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2025 brought together emerging ecumenists and theologians at Saint Bishoy Monastery in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt at the invitation of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order gathered under the theme of "Where Now for Visible Unity?"

This Conference provides a capstone moment to what has been called an "ecumenical year."[4] This message itself holds a distinct and historic place within the ecumenical movement, being the first of its kind to be presented to the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Conference. In many ways, this presents a distinctive starting point for deep listening and intentional intergenerational dialogue.

## The Issues Facing the World and the Churches

We live in an intersectional reality of multi-crisis, including but not limited to: ongoing colonial and neo-colonial legacies, violence against Indigenous peoples, discrimination, persecution, climate catastrophe, gender-based violence, sexual abuse and femicide, human trafficking, injustices against children, economic injustice, famine, war, genocide, forced displacement, authoritarianism and nationalism, fundamentalism, and the misuse of artificial intelligence. These crises are compounded by delayed justice and the paralysis of words without effective redemptive action. This reality requires the Church to respond with lament, anger, and courage, asking: how do we embody our unity in diversity as we respond to the multi-crisis of our world across our varied contexts?

We celebrate the work of Faith and Order while also lamenting the expanding gap between dialogue and praxis, manifested in the lack of robust reception of ecumenical texts. Ecumenical theology often seeks

4. "2025–An Ecumenical Year on the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity" (WCC Publications, 2024).

unity through doctrinal coherence, and yet, we must also explore how unity becomes visible through our embodied experience. So, we ask, what does it mean to be truly ecumenically and prophetically courageous in our world, offering glimpses of hope in the brokenness of our world? We call the Church to locate itself centrally within the continuous sufferings of humanity and all of creation rather than standing apart from it.

## Prophetic Duty and Kenotic Embodiment

We call the Church to live its prophetic duty to speak truth to power in all its forms, standing in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. Following in the incarnational way of Christ, who entered into human reality, the Word made flesh (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο), dwelling in solidarity with the downtrodden (cf. Jn 1:14). This solidarity requires fearless unity in our shared witness and resistance to unjust systems rather than placating and conforming to them. "There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth" (Amos 5:10). Our shared ecumenical theology cannot be only abstract in nature. Rather, it is our imperative to kenotically embody Christ, emptying ourselves for the other.

This proposed theological turn to kenosis is understood as the humility and love to willingly relinquish power and privilege in order to form mutual relationships of equality and compassion with the marginalized (cf. Phil. 2:5,7a). In our kenotic embodiment, we offer service with open hands to the other, working together towards life and the unequivocal promotion of human dignity alongside the dignity of all creation, knowing "that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor" (Rom. 8:22). This kenotic approach invites embodied interaction and mutual vulnerability as paths toward overcoming division.

As we embody a living and breathing faith, we are called to be faithful interpreters of Church memory, including the councils and creeds, proposing faithful ways rooted in our rich Christian Tradition, and yet remaining both living and accessible for our diverse contexts today. Faithfully interpreting theology in our diverse contexts does not limit or somehow change our *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic* nature; no, it rather expands our faithfulness, speaking into our present contextual realities.

Such a way of reading allows our ancient confessions to speak anew in contexts of marginalization and hope. For this, we need to cultivate wounded discipleship, glimpsed at GETI, where we learned to share pain and remember

truthfully together. Unity emerges as the Church learns to stay when it is hard, listen when it costs, remember what hurts, and hope against the odds. Unity becomes visible when the Church prophetically shares pain, remembers truthfully, and lives the hope of abundant life together in Christ.

## Reimagining Faith and Order for the 21st Century

GETI's hope is in shared humanity and an ecumenism born of pain and promise. We call Faith and Order to deepen its engagement with the *lived theologies* of people at the margins. Visible unity cannot be achieved solely through institutional or doctrinal dialogue but must additionally engage the realities of displacement, poverty, and pain in refugee camps, migrant shelters, in the exploited earth, and in communities where unity is practised daily through survival, reconciliation, and solidarity. If ecumenical councils such as Nicaea stood to articulate our shared, common faith, what will Faith and Order do to protect justice, human dignity, and the integrity of all creation?

The Church participates in the life of Christ when we embrace an embodied Christian theology. This is the *Solidarity of the Shaken*, where unity arises through shared vulnerability and compassion. As such, we cannot neglect Jesus' Passion for it embodies God's solidarity with suffering humanity. If the Eucharist signifies the broken body of Christ, then our communion as Christ's body is called to share in that same suffering, sent into the world as wounded healers. GETI showed us that unity is God's gift, received when we are brave enough to be wounded together and discover we have always been one body. In a world of graves, broken bodies, and defiled creation, we envision a new, contemporary visible unity arising from recognition of our shared pain and our mutual commitment to action. Indeed, we are "longing for an ecumenism in which we bring all of ourselves to the journey and to the table, not separating thought from prayer, prayer from action, or action from thought."[5] When we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8), we come to smell the sweet scent of resurrection.

Theology that only intrigues the mind while neglecting wounded bodies is complicit in injustice; we need a kenotic Church that empties itself in service, presence, and concrete solidarity. We therefore call for Healing Solidarity Circles, community-based theological gatherings where refugees, women, people with disabilities, youth, and grassroots leaders contribute to theological reflection. Our hope is not abstract optimism, but a call to embody the abundant life

5. Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity, the Unity Statement of the World Council of Churches' 11th Assembly, Karlsruhe, Germany, 31 August to 8 September 2022, para. 15; cf. *What Are the Churches Saying About the Church? Key Findings and Proposals from the Responses to The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (WCC Publications, 2021), 17–19.

Christ promises (John 10:10), even amid disorder and uncertainty. Unity takes shape in acts of solidarity, shared lament, and collaborative service.

In the face of diverse contexts and the loss of credibility of the Church in many spaces across the world, the Church's witness and engagement is contingent upon its willingness to widen the ecumenical table. It must open itself to new generations, digital spaces, and creative forms of theology reflecting the Church's diversity and vitality. As churches continually expand the table and grow in hospitality into these new, shared realities, these spaces will respond with engagement. By embracing participatory and imaginative methods, Faith and Order can reclaim its prophetic vocation as a movement where theology is not only articulated but lived and shared.

Indeed, churches are confronted with a world faced with intersectional multi-crisis. "As the crisis deepens day by day, what both the oppressor and the oppressed can legitimately demand of the Churches is a message of hope."[6] The Church then is called to proclaim eschatological hope amidst global suffering and injustice, and to make the Church credible in its practices, its economy, and its internal life. GETI urges Faith and Order to employ a theological language speaking meaningfully into *today's* wounded world, calling the churches to embody the kenotic self-emptying love of Christ. Let us act with humility, walk in unconditional solidarity, and announce with prophetic courage the hope which dwells within us.

6. The KAIROS Theologians, *The KAIROS Document: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Skotaville Publishers, 1985), sec. 4.6, "A Message of Hope," 26.

## Readers' Guide

The World Conference opened with a series of brief addresses from World Council of Churches leaders and conference organizers, along with welcome speeches by the hosting Egyptian Coptic and Presbyterian churches.

## Opening Address by Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich, Moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order

Your Holiness, Eminences and Excellencies, Graces, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

With deep gratitude and reverence, I welcome you to the opening of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, gathered under the theme *"Where Now for Visible Unity?"* It is a privilege beyond measure to stand here among you.

I wish first to express our heartfelt thanks to our gracious hosts, the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, and to Your Holiness Pope Tawadros II, for receiving us in this sacred place of Wadi El Natrun—a land consecrated by prayer, witness, and monastic faithfulness since the times of the early Church. We are all deeply impressed by this place, and not least by the hospitality and friendliness which embraces us here, offered by members of your church.

This moment is not an ordinary convocation. It is a moment of historic significance—for many of us a once-in-a-lifetime occasion. The last world conference met 32 years ago in Santiago de Compostela, in 1993. Today, we gather again in a year marked by the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea—that first ecumenical assembly of the global Church, summoned to guard the faith and to bring and hold the Church together *in unity*. The very memory of Nicaea stands behind our meeting and gives weight to our work.

We have come to contemplate afresh the faith handed down through two millennia, as witnessed through the Scriptures and the tradition of the early Church; to receive and advance the theological work entrusted to Faith and

Order; and above all, to discern how we might, in our time and for the sake of the future, pursue the path together toward visible unity.

We shall do this through shared listening in plenary, through mutual deliberation in sections, through workshops, and through the joint discernment of a common message. Business sessions will serve our faith and order; worship and prayer will sustain our spirit. Our days here are framed by common worship morning and evening, and they resonate with the unceasing prayer that has hallowed this place through generations of monastic life.

The conference will lead us through its guiding triad of days, with the three overarching themes: unity, faith, and mission. Along the way, we will hear from and stand alongside our Christian sisters and brothers in the Middle East, and we will experience some of the living spirituality that breathes here in Wadi El Natrun.

This encounter is therefore not only an exchange of theological thought. It is also a school of mutual listening, a testing of our faith beside the faith of others, and a shared obedience to the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ—*"that they all may be one" (John 17:21).*

The fruit of this conference will depend upon the faithfulness of each of us—that we may receive again Christ's call to unity in witness and in service.

May the triune God guide our minds, purify our hearts, and lead us in all things toward the unity of His Church.

## Address by Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary, World Council of Churches

Your Holiness, Your Eminence Cardinal Koch, Eminences and Excellencies, dear representatives of the Christian world communions, dear Faith and Order commissioners and delegates, reverend fathers, dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC), I warmly welcome you to the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order.

It is a particular pleasure for me that this conference is being held on the African continent for the first time, as we are meeting here in Egypt. I would like to express my special thanks to our member churches in Egypt, above all

the Coptic Church with its head, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, for their kind invitation to Wadi El Natrun, but also to all of the churches who are hosting us together with the Coptic Church: the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Anglican Diocese of Alexandria, and the Synod of the Nile. I would also like to extend a special greeting to the Middle East Council of Churches, whose voices we will hear this afternoon on faith in the Middle East.

It is a very precious experience for all of us to be guests in this environment of Orthodox spirituality, in Wadi El Natrun, the birthplace of monasticism. I am sure that this spiritual setting will have a great impact on our conference. In prayer and spiritual life, as well as in Sunday pilgrimage encounters and conversations with our hosts, we will certainly share important and enriching experiences, will deepen our fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the host churches and enrich our lives together in Christian unity. So let me say to our hosts: Thank you very much for having us here!

I am also delighted that due to the presence of GETI, this conference is an intergenerational learning conference. And in addition to the members of the Commission on Faith and Order, the representatives of the world communions, and the participants from our member churches, I would therefore like to extend a special welcome to the participants of GETI, who have already been gathered here for two weeks and will now be taking part in our conference.

This conference brings together spirituality, reflection, and formation. May our encounters and conversations become a mutual blessing and enrichment between generations, cultures, and denominations on our shared path toward visible unity.

Not every WCC general secretary has had the opportunity to welcome the participants of a Faith and Order World Conference. The last time this happened was in 1993. The theological insights that emerged from that gathering profoundly shaped the life and self-understanding of the WCC.

The concept of *koinonia* that arose from the Fifth World Conference in Santiago de Compostela has borne much fruit and continues to shape our understanding of what it means to be a fellowship of churches. Indeed, each Faith and Order World Conference throughout history has left a lasting mark on the ecumenical movement.

It is therefore my hope—and my encouragement to you, the participants in this historic event—that by offering your gifts, sharing your wisdom, learning from one another, and inspiring one another, you will help to renew our

common vision and give a new impetus to the churches and to the future of our ecumenical journey together.

Asking "Where Now for Visible Unity?," we are meeting at a particularly crisis-ridden time. Poverty, ecological crisis, war, racism, gender-based violence, human rights violations, and many other sufferings characterize our times. Emerging technologies do not keep pace with the reflections on their ethical implications. Therefore, now more than ever it is important to ask what unites us as churches and Christians, but also as humanity as a whole. Instead of unilateral action, it is more important than ever to seek multilateral understanding in order to achieve peace and heal the wounds of the world.

Christ's prayer for unity, that all may be one, is guiding us on our way.

Our conference reminds us, if we look back at the journey from Lausanne 1927 to today, that for almost a century now, the Faith and Order movement has greatly contributed to understanding between churches and to growing in unity for the sake of common witness. Together with Life and Work, Faith and Order has been one of the fundamental currents of the ecumenical movement that have shaped the WCC since its beginnings. Faith and Order enables the churches to find a common, unifying self-understanding, thereby strengthening our shared witness and our common action.

Our conference is an important milestone on our pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity. Inspired by the Council of Nicaea, which convened 1700 years ago to seek unity in faith and in the common confession of Christ, and to heal the wounds of persecution and repression, we meet today in a shared quest for unity and solidarity. Healing the wounds of the inhabited world: this was one of the declared aims of the discernment at Nicaea, a task that is no less important today than it was then. May the thought that faith heals and makes us healthy inspire us today at our meeting.

Let us also be inspired by the story of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt, their rescue from persecution and oppression—a story that is closely connected to this very place where we meet. As we ourselves come from various and manifold contexts in which we seek unity instead of division and solidarity with those who suffer on this earth, may we all be inspired by Christ who came as a refugee to Egypt and who showed solidarity with those who suffer.

On our shared journey during this conference, we will proceed in three steps.

First, faith. What does it mean today to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and God? This question will guide us tomorrow. We will not only recall the studies that Faith and Order has devoted to this question, but above all we want to hear voices of testimony today that give us guidance on this question. As people of faith, we can assure each other of this faith and bear witness to it together for the world.

Second, mission. How does God's love work in this world? Here we look at the transforming and liberating dynamics expressed in the Nicene Creed and we explore the hope for transformation in hearts, minds, and actions it enables us to take. We will also reflect on the challenge of decolonizing our mission work, which has, throughout Christian history, been all too often closely attached to the imperial powers that sought not to lift up but to oppress and marginalize. On our journey towards justice, reconciliation, and unity, we can draw not only on the work of Faith and Order, but also on important missiological perspectives that help us seek peace and understanding. Christ sends us into this world to follow him as transforming disciples—that is a decisive missiological perspective.

And third, unity. As people of faith, it is our fundamental and profound conviction that humankind must stand together to seek each other's best interests and to uphold the dignity of each human being and the whole creation. As a fellowship of churches, we are obliged to call one another to visible unity. The anniversary of the Council of Nicaea is an encouragement to consider the significance of synodality and conciliarity, which enable us as people of faith to deepen solidarity and community.

I can proudly say that this conference has also pointed to a new direction in our programmatic work within the WCC. We no longer work in isolation, but in close collaboration with one another. I am therefore pleased by the wide range of topics and issues the conference is addressing, and by the presence of various streams of our programmes—extending far beyond what has traditionally constituted the Faith and Order agenda.

Furthermore, this conference is not a single event, but the fruit of a process through which we have journeyed together with the Christian world communions and regional ecumenical organizations, making use of modern tools of engagement. In this way, we have sought to ensure broader participation—not only among those present here, but also by fostering an ecumenism that is polycentric, contextual, and regionally grounded.

It is my hope that, in responding to the question at the heart of this conference, we may find both strength and inspiration to discover anew the

unity we already share, and to grow toward the fullness of the unity to which we are called.

As we "stay together, pray together, move together, and act together," and as we confess the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, let us trust the Holy Spirit to lead us. May the grace of God be with us all.

## Address by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark

General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Moderator of the World Council of Churches Central Committee, Moderator of the Faith and Order Commission, Director of the Faith and Order Commission, distinguished guests and attendees,

I would like to welcome you all to Egypt and to the Logos Conference Centre, in this holy place, at the Monastery of the Great Saint Anba Bishoy in the Holy Desert of Scetis in Wadi El Natrun, which has been a beacon and inspiration for monastic life since the 4th century CE.

The Council of the Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 15), which discussed the issue of Judaization and conversion from Judaism to Christianity, was the basis for the idea of church councils. For every council convened, there was an issue or problem, dialogue and discussion, a leader and management, and the Holy Spirit was the spirit of strength, love, advice, and success for any church council.

### The Council of Nicaea

Convened by Emperor Constantine the Great after Christianity had become a permitted religion in the Roman Empire, the Council aimed to achieve unity of faith after the emergence of sharp doctrinal divisions and to achieve peace throughout the empire.

The issue arose from Arius, a priest in Alexandria, who taught that:

"The Son is not equal to the Father in essence, but is created by God and has a beginning in time."

This teaching threatened the unity of the Christian faith, and a great uproar arose within the church.

This reminds us of the danger of individual interpretation and teaching without returning to the roots represented by the Holy Gospels and the teachings of the Holy Fathers, the teachers of the church.

Here, the role of the leader became prominent. The council convened, attended by approximately 318 bishops from various regions of the Christian world, under the leadership of Pope Alexander, Patriarch of Alexandria, and his young deacon, Athanasius the Apostolic, who played a pivotal role in defending the theology of the Son.

The Council made several historic decisions, the most important of which were:

- Condemning the teachings of Arius and excommunicating him from ecclesiastical communion.
- Establishing the divinity of the Son as "begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father" (*homoousios tō Patri*).
- Formulating the Nicene Creed, which became the fundamental reference for universal Christian doctrine.
- Determining the date of Easter to be celebrated in all churches on one day, separate from the Jewish calendar.
- Issuing several church canons related to priestly order and church discipline.

## The theological and ecclesiastical impact of the council

The Council of Nicaea had a profound impact in consolidating the theological foundations of Christian doctrine, particularly regarding the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The Council affirmed the unity of the divine essence between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and put an end to heresies that diminished the divinity of Christ.

The council also established a new model for ecumenical ecclesiastical dialogue, bringing together bishops from around the world and establishing the principle that faith is determined through universal councils, not individual opinions.

## The political dimensions of the council

From a political perspective, the Council of Nicaea represented the first formal cooperation between the Church and the Roman state, when Emperor

Constantine intervened to ensure unity of faith to preserve the unity of the empire. From here, a new relationship began between temporal and spiritual authority, a relationship that would have a profound impact on the history of Christianity throughout the ages.

The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea was not merely a theological event; it was a historical moment that established the identity of the universal Church. In it, the orthodox faith was preserved from deviations and heresies, and it laid the foundation for the Nicene Creed, which is still recited today in the liturgy of churches around the world.

Thus, it can be said that Nicaea was the true starting point for explaining the Orthodox Christian doctrine in its universal form, and a lasting example of the role of councils in preserving the one, holy, apostolic faith, which we received from the apostles and holy fathers and which has been preserved in the Church of God throughout the generations.

The First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea is considered the cornerstone of the development of Christian theology in subsequent centuries. It laid out precise concepts of the relationship between the Father and the Son and established the principle of equality in divine essence. Through the Creed, the dimensions of the universal Christian doctrine were defined, touching the very core of the Holy Trinity. This Creed became the primary faith reference that preserved the unity of the Church and consolidated the foundation of the Orthodox faith, which has continued to enlighten believers generation after generation.

## Where we stand today: Nicaea and visible unity

The meeting of the Faith and Order Commission coincides with the commemoration of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 CE), considered one of the most important pivotal events in the history of Christian thought and ecclesiastical theology. It marked a turning point in defining the contours of the orthodox faith and formulating the universal doctrine passed down by the Church over the centuries.

Recalling the Council of Nicaea is not merely a celebration of the past; it is a renewed call to remain steadfast in the apostolic faith and to be open to constructive dialogue that unites the churches on the path toward true unity, based on truth and love.

The Nicene Fathers' declaration of faith in the Son, "true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father," remains the cornerstone upon which Christian doctrine is built in every time and place.

Thus, this gathering serves as an opportunity to reflect on the Church's faithfulness in preserving the Nicene faith and to reaffirm its mission in a world marked by intellectual and cultural pluralism. Within this context, the Commission on Faith and Order bears the responsibility of continuing its pursuit to renew the witness to divine truth within the framework of the universal ecclesial unity.

The goal of Christian unity is indeed a noble one: to be truly one in Christ, members of one body in Christ. This is the very unity for which our gracious Lord prayed: "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that You have sent me" (John 17:21).

We believe that true unity is unity in faith, whose tangible reality is full communion in the divine mysteries: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph.4:5).

We believe that the path towards unity is not easy. The divisions that arose after Nicaea fragmented the Church and persisted for many years, even to this day. Such divisions can only be healed through theological dialogue.

The Fathers believed that preserving the oneness of the Body is both a divine calling and an ecclesial responsibility, to be carried out in a spirit of love, gentleness, and humility, coupled with a sound knowledge of the truth and right teaching. Hence, they did not hesitate to confront all who sought to tear apart this one Body, whether through heresies, schisms, doctrinal deviations, or false teachings not in harmony with the spirit of the gospel and the teachings of the Fathers. This vigilance was clearly manifested in the ecumenical councils, foremost among them the First Council of Nicaea (325 CE), where the Fathers stood united in defence of the apostolic faith against the heresy of Arius, affirming that the unity of faith is the sure foundation of the Church's unity.

Among the theological and ecclesial issues of particular significance in the present time is the interchurch dialogue. Just as the Fathers at the Council of Nicaea gathered in a spirit of communion to articulate a shared expression of faith, the Church today is called to engage in dialogue grounded in mutual understanding and respect, within the context of the one faith.

A fundamental question arises in this context: Why do we engage in dialogue? Our purpose and mission must be clear before engaging in any theological dialogue, lest it turn into a debate or a mere aimless exchange of opinions. The primary aim of dialogue is getting to know and understand the other as well as seeking to find out how each ecclesial tradition expresses the shared faith in its own distinctive way, reflecting the richness of the heritage. True dialogue is not about imposing one's views or defending oneself, but rather about mutual listening, allowing the other to express their faith freely and openly in the light of the revealed truth in Christ, who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

In this sense, theological dialogue is a journey toward a shared understanding of faith. It is not an attempt to eliminate or dissolve differences, but rather to discover the profound faith uniting the Church. As one contemporary Father expressed: "Dialogue is not a concession of faith, but a testimony to the truth in the spirit of love."

Theological dialogue begins first and foremost with the art of listening, for listening is the path to mutual understanding. When each side is given the space to freely and openly express its faith, new horizons of closeness and unity unfold before the Church. Thus, dialogue is not intended to eliminate differences or deny diversity, but rather to understand one another.

In light of this understanding, we affirm that dialogue is neither a concession of faith nor a relinquishment of doctrine. It is a testimony to truth in the spirit of love and a constant striving towards achieving the unity for which Christ Himself prayed: "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in You" (John 17:21 NIV).

Distinguished guests,

Your visit to Egypt, hosted by the Coptic Orthodox Church, in this place where the hermits once lived and from which great saints of monastic life blossomed, is a profound source of inspiration for us all. Here we are reminded of the life and the holy bond that once united the saints. The spiritual discipleship and friendship that united St Athanasius the Apostolic and St Anthony the Great influenced the entire Church with the spirituality and prayer that marked St Anthony's life and was reflected in the purity of St Athanasius' teachings intertwined with the life of piety.

I warmly invite you, at this blessed time and while you are here among us, to get to know our Coptic Orthodox Church: this long-standing Church that has

preserved its sound faith and profound patristic heritage, a faith watered by the blood of the martyrs through generations and faithfully safeguarded across the ages as a sacred deposit passed down from our early Fathers.

I also invite you to discover our beloved Egypt, the land of the See of St Mark, which has embraced the Christian faith since the dawn of time. Here, monasticism was born; theology and spirituality flourished. Egypt, with its ancient history and civilization spanning thousands of years, continues to offer the world a living testimony of steadfast faith and unifying love.

It is, indeed, a great honour and pleasure to welcome you to our Coptic Church and to our homeland, Egypt, which today is privileged to host this significant event in the journey of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and in the history of the Commission on Faith and Order. This meeting stands as a radiant sign affirming that Egypt, together with the Middle East and Africa, still serves as a living bridge among the churches, bearing to the world a message of hope and unity before the eyes of the entire Christian family.

Let us lift up our hearts in gratitude to God for bringing us together in this blessed gathering, asking Him to grant us the spirit of wisdom and understanding to continue the journey toward achieving the unity of faith in truth and love.

And let us pray together that this gathering bears new fruit on the path of dialogue and common edification among the churches. Let us pray that our Coptic Church and our beloved Egypt will remain a beacon of faith and a witness to the unity of the one Church throughout the ages.

## Greeting from Rev. Prof. Dr Kuzipa Nalwamba, Programme Director for Unity, Mission, and Ecumenical Formation

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, sisters and brothers in Christ,

It is both a profound honour and a deep joy to add my voice to the welcome to this long-awaited and historic Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. We gather on this sacred ground, not as isolated communities, but as pilgrims on a shared journey towards the visible unity of Christ's Church.

## I. A moment of historical significance

The path to this conference is paved with the prayers, scholarship, and faithful dialogue of generations. We stand on the shoulders of giants. We recall the visionary First World Conference in Lausanne in 1927, which laid the foundation for a structured theological dialogue on the issues that both divide and unite us. Subsequent conferences in Edinburgh (1937), Lund (1952), Montreal (1963), and Santiago de Compostela (1993) have each marked critical turning points, deepening our understanding of baptism, scripture, tradition, and the very nature of the Church. This Sixth World Conference is a testament to the enduring legacy of the Faith and Order Commission. Therefore, our first and most heartfelt thanks must go to the Faith and Order Commission of 2013–22, which seamlessly handed over the conference project to current 2022–30 commission. Your tireless work, your theological rigour, and your commitment have prepared the soil in which our discussions here will grow. Current moderator, Rev. Dr Stephanie Dietrich, immediate past moderator, Rev. Dr Susan Durber, and Sixth World Conference steering group moderator, Dr Sandra Beardsall, with the commissioners and collaborators, thank you. We are the richer for your dedicated work. We are also indebted to the leadership of my predecessors, Rev. Fr Ioan Sauca and Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus. Dr Pedroso Mateus is also the immediate past Faith and Order director. We remember his work with much gratitude, and regret that he could not be here with us. We recommit ourselves to the goal that animated their lives and work: "That they may all be one ... so that the world may believe."

Finally, on a more immediate note, I must extend my deepest gratitude to the Faith and Order team, the Faith and Order director, Dr Andrej Jeftić, and his team, with all your countless collaborators within the wider World Council of Churches (WCC), and especially the Coptic Church host team led by His Eminence Bishop Abraham, with the blessing of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria. You have accompanied the conference planning graciously and with dedication, even when the going was tough. Your dedication, logistical prowess, and spiritual stewardship have brought us to this moment.

## II. Unpacking our theme: "Where Now for Visible Unity?"

Our theme for this conference is not merely a title: it is a compass, a provocation, and a prayer. It is a question: "Where Now for Visible Unity?" On one level, this is a theological and ecclesiological question. As a pilgrim people, we are a people on the way, not yet at our final destination. We are called to ask, What does it mean to be church in the 21st century? What old maps do we need to reread, and what new terrain must we navigate together? But this theme is also deeply

programmatic. It is a question directed at the WCC and its member churches. At this turning point in the history of the ecumenical movement, it demands a response that will shape our collective work for decades to come. The "Where now?" is a direct charge to this assembly to provide direction. The outcomes of our dialogue here will directly inform the programmatic pillars of unity, mission, and ecumenical formation, and of life, justice, and peace:

- For our work on unity, "Where now?" challenges us to move beyond well-rehearsed theological differences and explore the emerging frontiers of unity—in a digital age, in the face of global migration, and in our relationship with a wounded creation.
- For our work on mission, it asks how a pilgrim people proclaims the gospel in a pluralistic world with humility and conviction, rejecting the shadows of colonialism and embracing a mission of reconciliation and justice.
- For our work on ecumenical formation, it compels us to ask how we form the next generation of pilgrims—equipping them with the theological tools, the spiritual depth, and the relational courage to continue this journey long after we are gone.
- Our work on life, justice, and peace is the logical consequence of our quest for unity and the authentic fruit of our mission. Churches that are not a force for life, a witness for justice, and a bridge-builder for peace have forgotten their pilgrim identity and calling to be a blessing to all the earth (Gen. 12:3).

## III. Shaping the future

In essence, the question "Where Now for Visible Unity?" will shape the future of the WCC itself. The answers we discern here, and the pertinent question we raise, will determine our priorities, our partnerships, and our prophetic voice. They will define what it means to be a council of churches in a world yearning for healing and hope.

May our deliberations be marked by grace, our disagreements by charity, and our consensus by a renewed commitment to the one Lord we all serve. Thank you.

# Welcome Address on Behalf of the Synod of the Nile (Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt) by Rev. Dr Refat Fathy

Your Holiness, Your Eminences, Your Graces, dear brothers and sisters, distinguished guests from all around the world,

On behalf of the Synod of the Nile—the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt—I warmly welcome you to Egypt, the ancient land of faith and civilization. This is the land blessed by God since ancient times, the land that once sheltered the Holy Family, and became a refuge of peace and a symbol of hope.

Welcome to Egypt—the land of history and mission. Throughout the centuries, Egypt has been a beacon of knowledge and faith, a meeting place of civilizations, and a bridge between East and West.

We express our deep gratitude to the government of Egypt, and to His Excellency President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, for his sincere efforts to strengthen citizenship, to promote interfaith dialogue, and to encourage peaceful coexistence among all Egyptians.

We also express our heartfelt thanks to the Coptic Orthodox Church, and to His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, for hosting this historic conference, marking 17 centuries since the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 CE)—a moment that shaped the foundation of Christian faith and affirmed the unity of the Church throughout history.

Our gratitude also goes to the World Council of Churches (WCC), to its general secretary, the Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, and to the Commission on Faith and Order for organizing this remarkable gathering, which brings together churches from every continent, to celebrate our common faith and to renew our shared mission in today's world.

Dear friends, we stand today at a sacred moment, where history meets the present, and the voice of faith echoes across the centuries.

We recall the spirit of Nicaea—when the Fathers of the Church gathered in love to proclaim their common faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer, and to affirm that the unity of the Church is a living witness to Christ in the world.

The Council of Nicaea was not merely a theological debate. It was a call to unity. A declaration that true faith unites hearts, even across different languages, traditions, and cultures.

From that day, the voice of Nicaea continues to call us—to live out our shared faith, to guard our common witness, and to proclaim that there is one Lord, one God, one Saviour for all.

And today—after 17 centuries—we meet again on this blessed land, to renew that sacred covenant, to proclaim that the spirit of Nicaea has not faded but still shines as a light for our path.

It invites us to live unity in diversity, love in difference, and share witness in a world wounded by division.

Dear sisters and brothers, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt rejoices to take part in this historic moment. From its very beginning, our church has believed in dialogue, served through love, and witnessed that unity cannot be imposed—it must be built through trust. Faith is not complete until it becomes service, justice, and peace.

We in the Synod of the Nile believe that unity does not cancel diversity—it enriches it. We are not called to erase our differences, but to sanctify them through mutual love and respect.

Unity is not uniformity. It is harmony within the one body, where every member serves the other and together reflects the face of Christ to the world.

And as we gather here in Egypt—the bridge between East and West—we pray that these days will renew our commitment to unity in Christ, to fellowship among churches, and to a renewed witness in a world that longs for hope.

Welcome, dear friends, to Egypt—the land of faith, peace, and diversity. A land that embraces all faiths and cultures, a land that offers a living example of peaceful coexistence, and a land that reminds us that God loves all His children.

May this gathering continue the spirit of Nicaea, where the Fathers once proclaimed:

> We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds,

Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made.

Let us be united in faith. Let us grow together in love. And let our fellowship become a living testimony to the world of the one Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Thank you, and welcome again to Egypt—the land of faith and peace.

## Greetings from the Nicaea Steering Group by Rev. Prof. Dr Sandra Beardsall

It is my privilege to greet you on behalf of the Nicaea 2025 steering group, which I have served as convenor over the past six years. Greetings to all of you here in this beautiful and special space, and also to you who are viewing these proceedings through the livestreamed videos. The scriptures are replete with stories telling of the people of God undertaking a journey. It is my task this morning to say a little about the world conference journey: how it came into being, about our plans for these days, and our hopes for what happens next.

This journey began at the meeting of the Commission on Faith and Order in Nanjing, China, in 2019. Then Director Odair Pedroso Mateus invited interested commissioners to consider the possibility of a world conference to mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. A small group of commissioners and staff, some of whom are here in the room with us today, began the process. Aware of the size and scope of such an undertaking, we determined that there should be a world conference in 2025, if at all possible. With World Council of Churches (WCC) approval, we agreed that Nicaea 2025 would be not only a world conference, but a year of commemoration. In discerning the importance of Nicaea specifically for Faith and Order, we chose a theme for the year, "Living the Apostolic Faith Together Today," and for the world conference, "Where Now for Visible Unity?" We spent more time than I care to admit considering how we should spell *Nicaea*.

Eventually, with an expanded membership of commissioners and secretariat and WCC staff, we became a steering group. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Director Andrej Jeftić, the secretariat members, and the rest of the staff team, the creative work of the commissioners, and with the generosity and goodwill of many, we find ourselves here.

The plan to make the whole of 2025 a year of Nicaea has blossomed into an "ecumenical year" for the WCC, recognizing several key milestone anniversaries. This year has featured Nicaea 2025 in many ways, beginning in January with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, followed by numerous webinars, an online course on the Nicene Creed, and conferences and publications that have explored many aspects of Nicaea.

And now, we are at the world conference itself. Early in the planning, we wrestled with the nature of the theological conversations we hoped would unfold during these next days. The planners recognized that the conference needed to reflect Nicaea as a creed, but also as a remarkable church council in a challenging context. We will reflect on these topics: creed, context, and council—which we may take to correlate to the themes faith, mission, and unity—in our three theme days. Tomorrow, Saturday, the plenary presentations will focus on the apostolic faith. On Monday, the plenaries will focus on mission: how, as at Nicaea, context continues to inform our search for visible unity today. And on Tuesday, the plenaries will focus directly on the goal of Nicaea and our conference theme: unity. For more information on the background and shape of the conference, please see the excellent programme and resource books.

Another goal of the steering group can be described succinctly in some words of the Archbishop of Canterbury Designate, the Rt Rev. Sarah Mullally, who said, shortly after the announcement of her appointment: "You may know the saying: If we want to go fast, we go alone; if we want to go far, we go together." In this Nicaea project, we will go together. Regional pre-conferences have already harvested fruit. And this week's conference is intended to be participatory. The plenaries will feature a rich plurality of voices in conversation. Commissioners and church delegates have been assigned to specific sections and subsections, which are dedicated to aspects of Faith and Order's ongoing work. In these groups, delegates will discuss what they are hearing. These groups have been carefully populated to create numerical evenness, and also to maintain the balances so important to make sure we hear the range of voices gathered here. This is our polite way of asking you not to section-hop!

As a participatory conference, we need to hear your voice. For some people, that will come naturally; for others, it may be intimidating or challenging. But please do speak your faith, your questions, your insights. You are here because the Holy Spirit has uniquely gifted you, and we want you to share that gift. We will pledge to listen, carefully and reflectively, to one another.

During this journey many words have been and will be spoken, prayed, and sung; hundreds of voices heard. What will happen to it all? Some of it will settle

in your minds and hearts, and whether in person or online, by God's grace, you will carry it into your lives and ministries all around the world. But some of it will be recorded as text and preserved in reports. These reports will help inform and direct the work of the Commission on Faith and Order until the next WCC assembly. The commission will use the momentum of the conference to better serve the churches as they call one another to visible unity, and its fruits will be harvested in other parts of the WCC.

We are grateful that you are here. We also know that life is difficult, especially for those among us suffering personal sorrow or the world's violence. We do not leave our burdens at the door. We ask, Where Now for Visible Unity? not despite, but because the world needs the healing, justice, reconciliation, and unity rooted in the apostolic faith we share. Throughout the gospels, Jesus makes challenging demands of his followers. But he also makes a generous offer: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me," he says. "For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:29–30).

Friends, as we journey these next few days, may that promise help us to learn from and in Jesus Christ, through one another, with freedom and joy. May we indeed go together, confident that by God's grace, we will go far. Thank you, and blessings.

## Readers' Guide

The opening plenary session, featuring addresses by three key leaders and guides in Faith and Order, addressed the purpose of the World Conference theme: "Where Now for Visible Unity?," situating it within the work of Faith and Order over time, and suggesting some of the paths the discussion at the conference might follow.

# Moderator's Address: "There Now for Visible Unity"—An Invitation to Continue the Joint Journey Toward Visible Unity

*Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich*

### Introduction

Let me begin this presentation by reminding ourselves of what has brought us to this world conference here, what binds us together, and what remains as a continuous call to each and every one of us present here today:

> The World Council of Churches (WCC) Constitution, Section 3, states:
>
> The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to *call one another to visible unity* in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe (emphasis added).[1]

That is why we are gathered here. And that is also the fundamental vocation of the Commission on Faith and Order. It does not say the primary goal is to achieve visible unity; it says the primary call is "to call one another to visible

1.Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches, as amended by the central committee of the WCC in Geneva, Switzerland, June 2023 (WCC Publications, 2023), §3, para. 2. https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2026-03/Constitution-and-Rules-of-the-WCC-June%202023.pdf.

unity." The search for unity is deeply relational and can only be sought together, in fellowship. Faith and Order is the most broadly composed theological commission in the global Church, drawing members from all traditions and regions.

Since its beginning in Lausanne in 1927—in the aftermath of war, fragmentation, and theological distrust—the movement has carried the vision of unity at the heart of its mandate. Ecumenical work was not new. Lausanne was followed by Edinburgh 1937 and Lund 1952, with its famous call to act together in all things except where deep convictions require otherwise. Montreal (1963) expanded the theological scope, and Santiago de Compostela (1993) emphasized *koinonia* as a key concept for understanding Christian unity in a rapidly changing global context.

Each Faith and Order world conference and each WCC assembly has, in its own time and ways, asked what *visible unity* means—not merely organic or doctrinal agreement, not only institutional or spiritual fellowship, but a unity embodied in common faith, common worship, and common witness and service in the world.

Over time, our understanding has grown from an expectation of organic institutional unity to a more holistic understanding shaped by communion, mission, shared discernment, and lived discipleship. In other words, we are not aiming at establishing one church body, but seeking visible unity in both faith and order, life and work, and witness and service to the world. You will also find this reflected in the programme of this world conference, where all programmatic work of the WCC is integrated in the overarching themes that will guide our days. In other words, there has been a development from defining visible unity as merging churches to a much broader understanding, where visibility encompasses the faith and life of the churches in a holistic way.

## Looking back—key milestones

A decisive point in the history of our commission was the first convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), which, for the first time in modern history, expressed a common understanding of central elements of church life across traditions. It did not erase all differences, but it made visible a surprising degree of convergence.

After the Fifth World Conference in Santiago de Compostela 1993, much of the work centred on ecclesiology, hermeneutics, and ethics. Building on this, the commission developed the convergence text *The Church: Towards*

*a Common Vision* (TCTCV), received by the WCC central committee in 2013.[2] TCTCV affirms that unity is rooted in the life of the triune God and is expressed through confession of the apostolic faith, sacramental communion, and a ministry of oversight in service to the Church's mission. It also recognizes persistent disagreements around authority and ethics, yet it calls churches into deeper mutual accountability and discernment. After the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan (2013), almost 80 responses to TCTCV were analysed.[3] I only want to share one conclusion from that reception process, which remains essential: *there is more that unites us than divides us.* That recognition obliges us not to stop, but to continue seeking unity in faith, witness, and service. It reminds us to focus on what unites us, what keeps us together, rather than only focusing on problems and disagreements.

We carry these theological achievements as a gift—while we experience that the context has changed dramatically. Christianity is expanding and diversifying, especially in the global South, while parts of the global North face decline, secularization, and polarization. The rise of Pentecostal, independent, and Indigenous churches has reshaped the ecumenical map. To speak of visible unity today without the participation of these churches misses the actual shape of world Christianity.

The WCC assembly in Karlsruhe emphasized the "continent of youth." Younger Christians in many countries may be less invested in institutional identities and more oriented to shared mission—climate justice, migration, conflict, religious plurality, decolonization, the digital public sphere. I am very glad that so many young people are present here at the world conference, both as participants from GETI, as delegates, and, not least, as the fantastic stewards who constantly help us and guide us on our way here. A special thanks to them!

## Where Now for Visible Unity?

Ecumenism cannot be only about doctrines negotiated at desks; it must also be about disciples walking together in a fractured world. As we gather for this Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, the call to unity is not only, but also

2. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision,* Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/The_Church_Towards_a_common_vision.pdf.

3. Ellen Wondra, Stephanie Dietrich, and Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, eds., *Churches Respond to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, vol. 1, Faith and Order Paper No. 231 (WCC Publications, 2021), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches_Respond_Church_vol1_WEB.pdf; Ellen Wondra, Stephanie Dietrich, and Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, eds., *Churches Respond to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, vol. 2, Faith and Order Paper No. 232 (WCC Publications, 2021), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches_Respond_Church_vol2_WEB.pdf.

doctrinal—at the same time it is practical and urgent. It concerns not only what we confess together, but how we walk together as one Body of Christ in a world longing for healing.

This was also the case at Nicaea 1700 years ago. The search for visible unity at the time of the council must be read against its historical backdrop: years of persecution and martyrdom, and the urgent need for the Church to stand together in faith, witness, and service to the world.

In other words, visible unity has never been merely a doctrinal concern. At Nicaea—and still today—it was a living summons to follow Christ, the incarnate One, in both faith and life. Unity is a bridge between doctrine and devotion, between what the Church confesses and how it embodies that confession in its communal witness and *diakonia*.

As the Nicene Creed says: Christ "who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven." *For us, and for our salvation*. Nicaea guides us to understand and believe the mystery of Christ's incarnation and is essential for both anthropology and soteriology. Because God has become fully human, and Christ is of one essence with the Father, humankind can be saved. The Nicene Creed is thus the cornerstone of our ecumenical togetherness. And it becomes our task to unfold and explore what salvation means today, for humankind and the whole creation.

For me, as the moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order, it is somehow also a bit comforting that it takes time to reach the most important agreements of faith. Looking at the historical processes lying behind the Nicene Creed, we realize that it took 56 years, from 325 to 381 CE, to find its final shape. That might teach us a bit about the need for ecumenical patience, along with stubbornness and the will to never give up.

In our time, the vision of unity must be understood not as a static destination but as a pilgrimage: a movement marked by vulnerability, mutual listening, and shared responsibility. A pilgrimage is not triumphant—it is humble, unfinished, and dependent on grace. It accepts that we have not yet arrived, yet we do not walk alone.

One of the most important shifts we must embrace is the move from confidence in our own strength to an ecumenism of vulnerability. The 2016 text, *The Gift of Being*, by the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) and Faith and Order, articulated this by reminding us that the Church is called

to be a church "of all and for all."[4] The Church is becoming more aware of its fragility, its failures, and its loss of credibility. Yet this awareness opens deeper possibilities for honesty and communion. Vulnerability is not the enemy of unity—it is often its precondition.

## "There—now—for visible unity"

The quest for visible unity is not only a theological exercise, but an urgent demand placed upon us by Christ and by the suffering world. Fragmented churches cannot credibly speak of reconciliation to a world in conflict. The scandal of Christian division remains a wound to the body of Christ and an obstacle to the gospel.

Visible unity does not mean uniformity, nor the erasure of tradition. We do not choose between gospel and tradition; the Church lives by both. The Church is an earthly vessel that hands on the apostolic deposit through time; and at the same time, the Church is an instrument of God's revelation for the sake of the world. Unity, therefore, cannot be reduced to structures or agreements. It must be seen in shared faith, sacramental life, common mission, public witness, and service to a wounded creation.

Many responses to TCTCV stressed that acting and speaking together for justice and peace is itself a visible and credible sign of the unity to which Christ calls us.

Jesus prayed "that they may all be one. ... so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). The meaning of that prayer must be continuously interpreted in our time. The ecumenical movement has committed itself to continue the search for visible unity—a unity that is both visible and tangible in faith, life, mission, and love.

## Conclusion—a renewed invitation

The Sixth World Conference is not merely a commemoration of past achievements. It is a moment for honest reflection and bold imagination. A moment to receive new voices, especially those long excluded. A moment to discern where the Spirit is already moving ahead of us.

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4. Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network and the World Council of Churches, *The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church of All and for All,* adopted by the WCC central committee, 28 June 2016, Trondheim, Norway (WCC Publications, 2016), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/GEN-PRO-06-Gift-of-Being_ADOPTED.pdf.

TCTCV reminds us that the Church exists not for its own sake, but to serve God's plan for the transformation of the world.[5] Unity is not a human construction, but a participation in the life of the triune God. It is Christ who calls, the Spirit who equips, the Father who draws us toward reconciliation.

This vision resonates with the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity, which invites us not merely to talk about unity, but to walk together where the world is breaking. Unity will emerge not only from documents and dialogues, but from shared struggle, shared witness, and shared hope.

The road ahead will demand patience, courage, and humility. But above all, it will demand faith—faith that the One who prayed for our unity continues to do so and will not abandon the Church he loves and the world he was incarnated into "for us and for our salvation."

May God bless this world conference and make it and all of us an instrument for visible unity!

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5. TCTCV, §58. The exact quotation is "The Church was intended by God, not for its own sake, but to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world."

Wondra, Ellen, Stephanie Dietrich, and Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, eds. *Churches Respond to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Vol. 2. Faith and Order Paper No. 232. WCC Publications, 2021. https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches_Respond_Church_vol2_WEB.pdf.

# Director's Report: The Work of the Commission on Faith and Order (1993–2025)

*Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftić*

## 1. Introduction

Your Eminences and Excellences, Your Graces, dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

It is my exceptional honour and privilege to greet you on behalf of the Faith and Order secretariat and welcome you to the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. The preparation and planning have been a long journey, and it is extremely exciting to see the plans finally coming to fruition.

In the following 20-plus minutes, I need to speak to you about more than 30 years of history—the time between our last world conference on Faith and Order, held in Santiago de Compostela in 1993, and our gathering here in Wadi El Natrun in 2025. It is a privilege—and a challenge—to summarize such a long and fruitful journey in such a short time.

In these minutes, I wish to do three things: first, to recall what the Faith and Order world conferences are, and what Santiago meant in that tradition; second, to highlight the major developments and study processes that have shaped our work since then; and third, to describe the significance of the present conference—its inspiration, its preparation, and its promise for the years ahead.

## 2. What are the Faith and Order world conferences?

The Faith and Order world conferences are among the most visible and creative expressions of the ecumenical movement's theological reflection. They are not legislative assemblies, so we will not be establishing new proclamations of faith or deciding on church unions. Rather, they are moments of shared discernment: gatherings of church representatives and theologians from all regions of the world and from across all church traditions, who come together to reflect on the

matters of unity—that particular unity that we, as Christians and as churches, already share but need to unfold and uncover; the unity we have lost and need to recover; and, finally, the unity that is now being challenged, and that we need to protect.

If we were to take an apophatic approach, speaking about what the world conferences are not, we might say that these conferences are not and should not be bureaucratic gatherings; and perhaps for that very reason, they are not that easily defined. Speaking cataphatically, they are more of a pilgrimage experience of conversation and prayer, where the churches' common faith and their honest differences are held together in a single, prayerful, discerning, and respectful way.

The Faith and Order world conferences have always marked significant milestones in the ecumenical journey. Since the first gathering in Lausanne in 1927, each conference has opened a new chapter in the churches' long search for visible unity. Every such meeting has both summarized the fruits of Faith and Order's theological work and set the direction for the decades that followed. These conferences are moments when the ecumenical conscience of the churches takes stock—of our faith, our divisions, and our shared hope for reconciliation. In many ways, they have also shaped the theological discourse of the global fellowship and contributed to reshaping the self-understanding of the World Council of Churches (WCC) as a fellowship of churches called to manifest and deepen their unity in Christ.

## 3. What was the Santiago conference?

The last such event, the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, met in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, from 3–14 August 1993, under the theme "Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness."

The choice of Santiago—a place of pilgrimage—was profoundly symbolic. It expressed that the unity of the Church is not a static ideal but a journey: not a destination we have yet reached or are about to reach, but a journey we experience together.

The conference emerged from a rich period marked by the reception in 1982 of Faith and Order's first convergence document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), which had been welcomed with great enthusiasm and hope by the churches.[6] It also harvested the fruits of another significant process—the effort to explicate the meaning of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed,

6. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no. 111 (WCC Publications, 1982), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/FO1982_111_en.pdf.

resulting in the publication of *Confessing One Faith*.[7] This latter document holds particular relevance for us today, as we commemorate the Council of Nicaea and continue to reflect on the faith we confess together.

The theme of *koinonia* embodied another important conviction: that Christian unity is not only a structural, institutional, or doctrinal matter. It is a lived reality, a communion of faith and life, which is both God's gift to us and our calling. In that regard, *koinonia* was described in Santiago as "a gracious fellowship in Christ expressing the richness of the gift received by creation and humankind from God."[8] This communion, the conference claimed, rooted in the triune God, is "the perfect expression of unity and diversity and the ultimate reality of relational life."[9] From that insight came the clear conviction that both unity and diversity must be safeguarded within the life of the Church.

The conference lasted 11 days and brought together a number of participants comparable to those gathered here today. Its main theological fruits—the message of the world conference,[10] the discussion paper (*Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness*),[11] and the official report (*On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*)—marked a decisive shift in the language of unity. The concept of *koinonia* has since remained the interpretive key for much of the work not only of the Commission on Faith and Order, but also of the World Council of Churches as a whole.

The world conference in Santiago took place in a very different global setting, at the threshold of a new era. The Cold War had just ended, and new political, cultural, and religious pluralisms were emerging. Within the WCC, Faith and Order entered a period of renewal, focusing on studies that could give theological depth to the vision of *koinonia*.

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7. *Confessing One Faith: Towards an Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as Expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, Faith and Order Paper No. 140 (WCC Publications, 1987), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.147/mode/2up.

8. Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann, eds., *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*: *Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, Faith and Order Paper No. 166 (WCC Publications, 1994), 230, https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.173/mode/2up.

9. Best and Gassmann, *Fuller Koinonia: Official Report*, 231.

10. "The Message of the World Conference," in *Fuller Koinonia: Official Report*, 225–27.

11. *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness: A Discussion Paper*, Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela (WCC Publications, 1993), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.168/mode/2up?q=%22perfect+expression%22.

## 4. What has happened since?

Over the last three decades, much has evolved in the life of the churches and in the work of the Commission on Faith and Order. The main instrument of the commission's work has remained the study process—the steady, patient work of dialogue, drafting, and joint discernment that yields documents for the churches to study, test, and receive. And, at times, maybe even oppose.

After the breakthrough of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), the commission returned to the foundational question: "What does it mean to be the Church?"

Building on the momentum of the world conference in Santiago, the commission continued its core work on ecclesiology, producing two important documents: *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (1998) and *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005).[12] Each represented a significant step in what became a 20-year journey culminating in the publication of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV).[13] This document stands as only the second convergence text in the history of Faith and Order—the first since *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.

A convergence text, as defined by Faith and Order, does not claim to represent full consensus, yet it goes far beyond a simple study guide. It articulates a shared theological understanding, bearing witness both to the progress already made and to the work that still lies ahead. TCTCV has been received by more than 75 churches. Its reception revealed remarkable convergence around the idea of the Church as communion, yet also continuing differences on authority, ministry, and the relation between the local and universal Church. The process that followed broadened the conversation, engaging churches of the global South and new ecclesial movements.

Today, TCTCV stands as the most comprehensive ecclesiological statement since BEM, and its questions continue to shape our present study on authority and synodality.

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12. *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 181 (WCC Publications, 1998), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.188; *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (WCC Publications, 2005), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/FO2005_198_en.pdf.

13. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/The_Church_Towards_a_common_vision.pdf.

Prompted by the WCC's 8th Assembly in Harare (1998), the commission undertook a study on theological anthropology—on what it means to be a human being. The result was *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*, which addressed pressing issues of human dignity, community, sexuality, disability, and bioethics.[14] Remarkably, it also foresaw challenges emerging from new technologies—even addressing artificial intelligence long before it became a concern of today's world.

The study *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels* began a major reflection on how the churches interpret Scripture and tradition together.[15] Follow-up resources—*Interpreting Together* (2001) and *Reading the Gospels with the Early Church* (2013)—recognized that differing theological and cultural contexts can both divide and enrich our reading of the divine word.[16] This work continues to inform ecumenical formation and dialogue worldwide.

Two companion volumes, *Sources of Authority, Vol. 1*: *The Early Church,* and *Vol. 2: Contemporary Churches* (2014), examined how Scripture, tradition, and experience function as loci of authority across traditions.[17]

Faith and Order has undertaken a study on moral discernment in the churches, exploring how churches make ethical decisions and why their conclusions often differ. The first phase led to the publication in 2013 of a study document, *Moral Discernment in the Churches*[18] This was followed in a second phase between the WCC assemblies in Busan and Karlsruhe. Using a case study approach, the project examined how communities formulate their positions on contested moral issues, how these positions have evolved through history, and which theological, cultural, and ecclesial factors interact in the process of

14. *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*, Faith and Order Paper No. 199 (WCC Publications, 2005), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/FO2005_199_en.pdf.

15. *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics,* Faith and Order Paper No. 182 (WCC Publications, 1998), https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/a-treasure-in-earthen-vessels-an-instrument-for-an-ecumenical-reflection-on-hermeneutics.

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17. Tamara Grdzelidze, ed., *Sources of Authority, Vol. 1: The Early Church,* Faith and Order Paper No. 217 (WCC Publications, 2014), https://archive.org/stream/wccfops2.224/wccfops2.224_djvu.txt; Tamara Grdzelidze, ed., *Sources of Authority, Vol. 2: Contemporary Churches*, Faith and Order Paper No. 218 (WCC Publications, 2014), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Source%20of%20Authority%20Vol2_web.pdf.

18. *Moral Discernment in the Churches: A Study Document*, Faith and Order Paper No. 215 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.222.

moral discernment across different traditions. The goal was not to eliminate disagreement, but to help churches disagree faithfully—engaging in meaningful dialogue and sustaining *koinonia* even amid tension.

Since 2013, Faith and Order has also interpreted its mandate through engaging in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, following the call of the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan. Three study documents—*Come and See* (2019), *Cultivate and Care* (2020), and *Love and Witness* (2020)—have invited churches to see theology itself as pilgrimage: a shared journey of conversion, reconciliation, and renewal.[19] In terms of its composition, until 2015, Faith and Order functioned through two complementary bodies: a Plenary Commission, comprising around 120 representatives appointed by the churches, and a Standing Commission of some 30 theologians who met more frequently to guide the ongoing work and draft study documents. The last Plenary Commission met in Crete in 2009, while the Standing Commission held its final meeting in Bose Monastery in 2014.

Since then, the commission has adopted a single integrated structure and today includes 62 commission members and 3 consultants, organized around three study groups. This model has proven more agile and collaborative, becoming more effective and focused in its work.

One of the most important developments since the world conference in Santiago has been the increasing involvement of Pentecostal churches. The commission's collaboration with the Pentecostal World Fellowship has led to substantive representation of Pentecostal churches in the commission, which has deeply enriched the conversations within the Commission.

Pentecostal theologians have brought new vitality to our studies on worship, spiritual discernment, and mission—enriching the ecumenical movement with a deeper sense of the Spirit's presence and power.

In the last decades, not only has the composition of Faith and Order changed, but also how it operates. Online meetings, webinars, and hybrid consultations have become the norm. The creation of the Faith and Order Papers Digital

19. *Come and See: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, Faith and Order Paper No. 224 (WCC Publications, 2019), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/File/ComeAndSee-Full-Pages.pdf; *Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and within Creation,* Faith and Order Paper No. 226 (WCC Publications, 2020), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.235; *Love and Witness: Proclaiming the Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ in a Religiously Plural World*, Faith and Order Paper No. 230 (WCC Publications, 2020), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Love_Witness_Web.pdf.

Edition on archive.org—now hosting more than 220 papers dating back to 1910—has made our collective memory freely accessible to the entire world.

For the first time, a student, an educator, or a pastor in Nairobi, Amsterdam, or Wadi El Natrun, for that matter, can easily access the entire history of Faith and Order production in a matter of seconds.

## 5. What is the Wadi El Natrun conference?

Although there had already been discussions about the possibility of holding another world conference, the proposal first took concrete form with the suggestion that a Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order be organized to coincide with the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025. This was affirmed by the WCC's 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022.

Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus, then director of Faith and Order, proposed that the conference should be not merely a historical celebration but a living invitation to rediscover the faith we confess together and its implications for the Church's visible unity today. The preparation for this conference has been a long journey—one that was envisioned years ago but was brought to fruition over the course of this past year. In that sense, this gathering stands as both the culmination of that journey and the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Faith and Order.

In the lead-up to the conference, the commission worked closely with the Christian world communions, ensuring that every major church family contributed to the conversation. Together, we co-organized a series of webinars on themes of particular relevance to the different communions. These were well attended and have since become valuable resources, now accessible online to a wider audience.

We also convened a number of regional online pre-conference meetings across all continents—most of them in collaboration with regional ecumenical organizations—bringing together hundreds of theologians. These consultations helped root the work of the commission in the contextual realities of each region, while also offering the regions an opportunity to express a unified voice. I am especially pleased that tomorrow, during our second business session, we will hear and discuss the reports from these regional gatherings.

This broad and inclusive process, related to the fact that the conference is being livestreamed and followed online by fellow Christians from across the

globe, has made the Wadi El Natrun conference the most globally participatory Faith and Order event ever held.

Within the commission, preparation for the world conference was led by our three study groups, which also shaped the three thematic sections of this gathering:

- Being Church on the Way to Visible Unity
- Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God
- Being Church in and for the World

Each section builds on the work of the study groups and, in turn, will inform and enrich their future direction. The conversations in which you will take part over these days will therefore play a decisive role in shaping the next phase of the commission's work.

In addition, the programme includes a range of workshops that draw directly from our ongoing studies—addressing themes such as visible unity, baptismal ecclesiology, synodality, theological anthropology, science and technology, moral discernment, decolonization, and inculturation. Several of these workshops are being facilitated in close cooperation with other WCC programmes, allowing Faith and Order's work to connect, integrate, and intersect with the wider theological and programmatic life of the WCC. In both its design and spirit, this conference reaffirms the enduring conviction of Faith and Order that theology and life, study and witness, belong together.

## 6. Closing remarks

The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order marks a new moment in the long ecumenical journey, like Santiago in 1993. It stands as both a culmination and a new beginning. It will help us strengthen our fellowship, deepen theological reflection, and also provide guidance and vision for the future of our ecumenical engagement.

The outcomes of this conference will guide Faith and Order's agenda in the years to come. The insights born here will accompany the next Commission on Faith and Order meeting in 2026 and inform the broader WCC reflection leading to the next assembly.

In an age of polarization, conflict, and ecological distress, this conference bears witness to a simple truth: the call to unity is not optional. It is essential to the credibility of our faithfulness to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our

hope is that the conversations of these days will renew the churches' confidence that visible unity is both possible and urgent.

## Unity that reflects the love of the triune God in the healing of the world.

Here in Wadi El Natrun—a place of ancient monastic witness and modern dialogue—graciously hosted by the Coptic Orthodox Church, we stand in continuity with generations of faithful who believed that doctrine and discipleship, faith and fellowship, theology and mission belong together.

May the Spirit who called us to this work lead us once again "into all the truth" (John 16:13), so that, confessing one Lord Jesus Christ, one faith, and one baptism, we may anticipate and work for growing into unity.

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# Where Now for Visible Unity?

*Rev. Dr Susan Durber,*
*WCC President for Europe*

## An echo of Nicaea

We have come here to Wadi El Natrun, hundreds of us from around the world, with different languages, experiences, and expressions of the Christian faith. In some ways, we are an echo of another meeting that took place 1700 years ago in Nicaea. They came, as we have, from many places. They travelled, much less comfortably than we have, some of them needing permission to enter Roman territory. Some carried the physical wounds of persecution, and the mental traumas that were part of life in a world of violence and threat. They were ethnically diverse, many of them younger than we now expect bishops to be, some ready for intense theological discussion and others keener about more practical issues. They must have been overwhelmed by the hospitality when they arrived and wondering what this meeting, with so many who were strangers to them, would be like. Some had long been hoping that such a meeting could happen because they feared that the Body of Christ, wounded and divided in difficult times, might fragment and disappear, or its message be so distorted as to be lost. They came seeking visible unity, a unity that would be strong enough to resist the power and corruption of any violent empire, that would entrance the people of their world with its promise of a truly life-giving God, and that would be shaped by unity with Jesus Christ himself, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It would be terrible pride on our part to imagine ourselves as a new Nicaea, but we *are* united with them because we, with them, are part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We share their woundedness and are marked, as they were, by division. We can echo today their sense of the vulnerability of Christian faith in a world often opposed to it, and their hopes for the mission of God in and for the world. Christianity today would be very different but for their decisions and for the tenacity of Athanasius and others like him. And they came, and we have, to seek consensus and to call one another to visible unity.

We have received so much from Nicaea. This year we have celebrated Easter together, as those at Nicaea intended, and perhaps by God's grace we shall find a way to do that every year. We have received their statement of faith and, in its later form from 381 CE, it has become the symbol of our unity, a declaration of faith to be made together but, even more, words to offer in prayer and praise.

We have received their 20 canons, with wisdom on so many practical things, like how we treat our bodies, how we use our money, how we honour each other's ministries, how we give space for repentance and renewal, how often we should meet in synods to seek the mind of Christ together, and more. Now, gathered here, we will have a shorter time together than they did, as we ask "Where now (*in our times*) for visible unity?" I hope we will be as ready as they were to give our energy and our abilities to responding to the prayer of Jesus that "they may all be one" (John 17:21). We meet in a wadi, in a place often dry, but sometimes filled with water. I hope that this gathering will renew and replenish both our faith and the ecumenical movement and bring forth springs in the desert.

## The challenges facing unity today

The image of a wadi, a dry place sometimes filled with life-giving water, might evoke for us some of the changing fortunes of the ecumenical movement. Some will tell us that the heyday for visible unity has passed, that the springs of hope for a united Church have dried up. Churches that have been born from a formal union (like my own) often find themselves in steep decline today, and the kinds of structural church unions that were much talked of in the middle of the last century seem less attractive to many, and in some places are rarely even imagined. In some parts of our world such churches, along with others, are having a final service, thanking God for what has been without knowing yet what the future will be. This kind of unity (born of long negotiations and signed agreements) seems to some also to be part of a movement with roots in European or North American colonialism, that needs transforming.

Even an expression of unity like the World Council of Churches (WCC), with offices in Geneva and New York, seems to some a leftover expression of the post-World War Two consensus that is disrupted and under question now, when international organizations are sometimes disregarded and even ignored. We live in a world of heightened nationalism—of breakaway groups, of new churches, of local initiatives and entrepreneurial ventures—a world inclined to be suspicious of unity projects lest they are nothing but cloaks for the overwhelming of the many by the few. What place does global, visible unity have in such a world as this one?

## The gift of unity

In this world of division, hate speech, and culture wars, of sometimes harmful identity politics, we need a movement that treasures, values, and works for unity, connection, and communion, and believes them to be God's gifts to the world. If the world now sometimes encourages division, even under the cloak

of pretending to support diversity, we need a story that can celebrate unity and communion. Whether I am in a local church or a global gathering, I always want to bring people together. I want to explore what things we have in common so that we can understand each other better. I long to resolve even long-held difficulties, and I want to deepen the sense that we belong to one humankind, one world. And not because I am impossibly idealistic, but because I am a Christian and I belong to the body of Christ. I am fascinated by the differences between human beings, but grieved when difference leads to hatred, scapegoating, exclusion, or violence. I believe in the common good, in human solidarity, that men and women are bone of bone and flesh of flesh, that we are right to name universal human rights and that a good future for each of us must imply a good future for all of us. I believe in the catholicity of the Church and I know that my identity can never be defined by my nation, gender, economic situation, or ethnicity alone. I treasure St Paul's conviction expressed to the Galatians that in Christ there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. And because of all this I believe that we are made for mutual dependence, to be giving and receiving from each other, and because Christ, to whom I belong, prayed that we may be one.

Like the World Council of Churches, I was born in the long aftermath of the Second World War, and entered a world that needed to overcome the horrors of colonialism, racism, and inequality, that wanted to open opportunities for everyone and to build a future in which nations would fight wars no more. We don't know very much of what Jesus prayed in those times when he went off to be alone with God, but John's Gospel tells us that he prayed fervently that we should be one. I long to be part of God's response to that prayer.

## A vision of unity from Nicaea

Let us turn back again to Nicaea to ask how those who met then might help us now. It is plain, from the New Testament, that the Church has always celebrated diversity and difference. Those at Nicaea knew that witnesses to Jesus Christ come with extraordinarily diverse voices. They treasured between them, for example, a variety of gospel texts, and Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were celebrated and canonized by the Church at a time not far from the Council of Nicaea. That kind of diversity was not crushed, denied, or hidden. Yet, there was also always a strong thread, running right through the stories of the earliest Christian communities, calling for unity, a unity grounded, not in sameness, but in the oneness of God, in the unity of Jesus with the Father, and in the unity of the disciples with Christ. Jesus prayed: "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one" (John 17:22–23a).

Jesus gives us the *glory* of unity! This unity is not about agreement or organizational structures, not a strategic goal that we plan for or an abstract identity that we assume, but a union of love, a deep and eternal intimacy of mutual dependence and life-affirming closeness. This unity does not obliterate difference, but is actually *made* of it, just as our familial unions of love are made of our fascination with each other's difference. It is this kind of unity, at the heart of God, that those at Nicaea were tasked with putting into words. Constantine may have wanted a monochrome and disciplined religion for his newly united empire, but the bishops at Nicaea had a quite different imperative for unity, based on the foundational narrative of the faith they shared about the God who was from the very beginning, creating, loving, giving, and generating a creation in which every part needs the other.

The creed of Nicaea, whether the 325 CE version or the one agreed in Constantinople in 381, repeats the word *one* and the idea of *oneness* several times. "We believe in one God," the one maker of everything in heaven and earth, of all that is. There are no other gods, no hierarchy of gods, but one God. Creation is wonderfully diverse (we need only think about how many species of beetles are there), but united in its source in the one Creator.

And we believe in "one Lord, Jesus Christ," who is so profoundly united with God that he is of the Father's very being, completely at one with God, eternally. What we have seen in Jesus of Nazareth, the one who announced the coming of God's eternal kingdom, who touched the sick and who welcomed those despised by others, who put a towel around his waist and washed dirty feet, this Jesus shows us who God is and is eternally. God is always at one with what we see in Jesus: love, compassion, self-giving, and self-emptying. They are one.

And Nicaea celebrates that God became incarnate, one with humankind, whoever we are, one with all flesh. And there is one Church, one baptism. The Nicene Creed, you might say, is all about unity. But this is a unity that is not about sameness, not about domination or compulsion, and not about the dissolving of difference. In a recent talk given in Cardiff, Rowan Williams suggested that unity is not actually the opposite of disagreement and difference, but the opposite of isolation and aloneness.[20] Unity is about *interdependence*, the mutual giving and receiving that happens in a loving relationship or in a mature and peaceful community. And this very interdependence reflects the very life of the eternal Trinity, where God is known as the one for whom there was no time before which creation, life-giving, begetting was not happening. God is not

20. Rowan Williams, in an as-yet-unpublished lecture given at a conference of the Porvoo Communion of Churches, 7–9 October 2025.

an abstract, independent, self-sufficient being, but always one who is giving of God's self, for Christ is eternally begotten, and there was never a time when God was not begetting, giving, creating. And so, we may reimagine unity, not as the opposite of difference or diversity, but as the opposite of independence (in the sense of self-sufficiency).

## A unity of interdependence

Those of us gathered here for this conference may not have the same ecclesiology or theology on every point, not the same notions of how to be church or how to live Christian life, but we are drawn into unity because we all belong to Christ who is in union with all of us and with many others beyond our walls and borders. We are, we say, wholly Church, but never the whole Church on our own. Our life, our faithfulness, depends on our interdependence with others, even our dependence on others. We are made not for self-reliance, but to be those who give to and receive from others. There is no other way to be Christian than to live a life of radical mutual dependency. And that is, of course, a rather demanding, even fearful reality as well as what John's Gospel calls glory.

This means that all the signing of agreements on doctrine, all the speaking of high-level aspirations, any engaging in common work for peace and justice, or even forming united churches will be wonderful, but these things will never be enough in themselves. We need to make visible that interdependence, our need of each other, our vulnerability without each other, our willingness to receive gifts from each other that will make a difference to us and to the world. And that means being honest about our wounds and our weakness as well as being proud of our histories and traditions.

Let me, if I can, suggest what might actually make this kind of unity visible in the world today. I see it when growing Christian communities from beyond Europe are given space in the emptying buildings of our smaller European congregations and when worship and life is shared freely and absolutely generously to the mutual joy of all. I see it when Western missionary agencies change into authentic global partnerships in which resources are truly shared. I see it when people from the global South come to bring the gospel to the now much more secularized nations of the North, and when colonial history is honestly faced and reparations offered and made after centuries of colonial exploitation. I see it when friendships happen across the borders of our churches, whether among leaders or people, when treasures of songs, traditions, pilgrim routes, and places are truly shared with wonder and appreciation. I see it when ecumenical agreements are actually taken down from the shelves, dusted off, and used to make practical new things happen. I see it when the pain and suffering in

one community becomes the shared pain of others, and when the celebrations of one community are echoed even by those who have to change their thinking and their ways to make that joy possible. We are not alone, and sometimes we really learn the truth of that in ways that make unity visible. We are not alone. We must depend on each other if we are truly to be the body of Christ.

I grieve too when there is no visible unity. I grieve when churches, in the face of the challenges of our times, decide to go their own way, to celebrate their own identity rather than seek unity with others. I grieve when churches break communion or withdraw from ecumenical partnerships to preserve their own resources or because they think they will do better and be more successful alone. I grieve when Indigenous people and their traditions are denied a place within established or formerly colonial churches and have only the choice then to strike out alone. I weep when Christians, in so many places, forget that they have a wider family who need not be a threat to them but could be the source of the gifts they need. And I am sad when it seems that unity has to wait for impossibly perfect formal agreements, because it is always already possible in many ways, even now.

## An ecumenism of the heart

The theme of the 11th World Council of Churches Assembly in Karlsruhe was "Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity." This was the first time that the word *love* had been part of such a theme, and it called the ecumenical movement back to its foundations in relationship, in the mutual giving and receiving that is at the heart of the God we know. The assembly called for a renewal of ecumenism that would bring together prayer, thought, and action as we live as pilgrims and companions on the road together. It called us to heal the cracks between Faith and Order, Life and Work, Mission and Evangelism so that we can move together as a body with head, hands, feet, and heart. We need to let go of the resentments and anxieties born of past wrongs or present defensiveness, overcome our fears of failure and vulnerability before each other, and find again the passion and power of the Holy Spirit that calls to us.

In the end, ecumenical work and experience will always be shaped by the quality of our relationships. If we take seriously the imperative to love one another, and if we open ourselves to receive the gift of Christ's love working in us, then we shall be able to do more than we seem to be able to at present. If we truly love one another, then the more formal, doctrinal debates about *faith* or the apparently intractable arguments about *order* are transformed, not because we just don't mind or care about the differences and dividing issues anymore,

but because we care enough about each other that we long to know *why* we each treasure the things we do about our faith and our churches and why they mean so much to us. If we truly love one another, we will also be desperate to understand each other's experiences of exclusion or suffering, and we will find it natural to make each other's causes, campaigns, and longings ones that belong to us all. If we truly desire one another, if we actually love one another, then we shall long to receive each other's best gifts and traditions and to impress each other with the best of our own, as well as be ready to be vulnerable, acknowledging that we really do need each other. And just as our very personal relationships can be strengthened and hallowed by promises, covenants, and commitments, so too may our ecumenical ones. An ecumenism that is rooted in love will not be without agreements, even formal ones, but will surely lead to them, because love invites commitment, love bends towards covenant, love longs for full communion.

Ecumenism doesn't come about by conference call or webinar. It happens in friendships built over time, and it depends on the love that builds in human encounter and even confrontation, in the passion for each other that spills over into the longing for unity. Love is what can stir us to keep going when things are hard, when ideas clash, and when even the style of discourse is contested. When we are moved, when the journey moves on, it is love that does it. Even when we think we are being scholarly and thoughtful pre-eminently, even when we are engaging in the writing of statements together, it is love that moves us and fills us with the courage and belief that unity is both desirable and possible.

In the 2013 Faith and Order text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, there is a glorious sentence that says that "the first and foremost attitude of God towards the world is love, for every child, woman and man who has ever become part of human history, and, indeed, for the whole of creation."[21]

What could it mean if *our* foremost attitude towards each other truly were love? When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he made the self-giving love of his heart visible. At this moment he said to his disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34).

A text reflecting on the theme of the 11th Assembly suggested that in the ecumenism of the heart, "love draws us to one another, makes us want to be together, to share everything we have, to make a new community, to bring

21. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision,* Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), para. 58, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/The_Church_Towards_a_common_vision.pdf.

forth life and to stand beside one another even when trouble comes and when suffering is deep. Love and communion go hand in hand. Unity and love are found together."[22]

When we love others, we know that we have lost a measure of independence. If we are united with another human being, whether through family, through passion, in community, in whatever way, we (gladly) give up our independence, our self-sufficiency, and find the glory of *dependence*. We give of our own life and we receive too. We are not an isolated self ever again. This is not our tragedy, but our glory. This is what God makes us for: communion, unity, love. We are brought alive, as we bring life to others. Unity and love can sound so abstract, so soft, so fragile. But they are actually the stuff of being, the material of creation, what God is and what we could be. The call to unity, to love across difference and borders and boundaries, is not an expression of post-World War Two optimism or naïve romanticism, but an invitation into glorious life. It is this invitation that the faith of Nicaea offers us. Our task in this meeting is to answer it and to make it visible and possible for the Church, and indeed witness to it for the world.

An ecumenism that recognizes its foundation in relationship will likely be one that focuses first on shared faith and shared action. It may have less patience for questions of order than in previous times, though the hard, patient work of resolving such questions will continue to need the labour of love. We may find that a new generation of ecumenists has an impatience for change that is ready to break or challenge the "rules" of either Church or world. There is energy and commitment for transforming an ecumenical movement that remains entangled with forms of colonialism, along with a passion for mission and evangelism that will make the body of Christ more evident and visible in the world. There is perhaps no longer the optimism that shaped some, including ecumenists, in the late 20th century, but there is a real sense of faith in the promise of the coming of the Christ in glory.

## Conclusion

If I had been at Nicaea, I would have been in the kitchens preparing the meals or in the laundry washing the linen. If I had been able to eavesdrop on the debates or talk to the bishops, I would have seen that a faith *all about unity* would mean that the world was changing, and that my life too could change. The world of emperors and empires relies on people holding onto their own interests above

22. *Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity: A Reflection on the Theme of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Karlsruhe 2022* (WCC Publications, 2021), 20, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/AssemblyThemeBooklet_Eng_Web.pdf.

others. But those on a pilgrimage of unity are ready to give things up, ready to lose ourselves, to relinquish power (where it is held unjustly) for the sake of others. When we love, we lose our self-sufficiency, and we find what we are made for: a true communion where we must rely on each other, and where we know our need of one another, like the parts of a living body.

I hope that we shall glimpse such unity here and hear God's call to us in our times, 1700 years after Nicaea, to live it and witness to it today.

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## Readers' Guide

A key plenary session on the first day of the Sixth World Conference was devoted to the context in which it was meeting: the Middle East. This plenary helped to set the tone for the conference, powerfully reminding the participants of both the ancient Christian heritage of the region and the contemporary crises confronting Middle Eastern Christians and their neighbours.

## Moderator's Opening Remarks

*Fr Dr Antoine Al Ahmar*[1]

Eminences and Excellencies, dear Reverends, dearest GETI team and participants, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I had the privilege of organizing this panel, and I am deeply honoured to moderate it today.

First, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to our colleagues at the World Council of Churches for dedicating a plenary session to the Middle East—the region where the Christian faith was first proclaimed (and continues to bear witness, often under challenging circumstances).

This conference of Faith and Order, which celebrates the Nicene Creed—our common confession of faith—has formulated its theme as a question: "Where Now for Visible Unity?"

That question reminds me of another, asked by our Lord Himself: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8).

This question follows the parable of the persistent widow—a woman who, day and night, seeks justice from an unjust judge until he finally grants it. Jesus reminds us that if even an unjust judge responds to perseverance, how much more will God grant justice to those who cry out to Him day and night.

1. Director of the Theological and Ecumenical Department, Middle East Council of Churches.

Yet, immediately after this assurance, he poses that piercing question: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

With this striking question, Jesus invites us to reflect on faith that perseveres amid adversity, faith that bears witness to hope, and faith that remains steadfast even when tested by suffering and uncertainty.

In the Middle East—a region facing what many now call a polycrisis, marked by what I might describe as existential challenges—this question resonates deeply.

In some parts of our region, where the presence of Christians is steadily eroding, the question about faith becomes even more crucial—it becomes a question about the believers themselves: Will the Lord find believers on earth?

- Will He find them in Iraq, where the journey of faith began with Abraham, the father of believers?
- Will He find them in the Holy Land, where He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made human, suffered, and was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead?
- Will He find them in Syria, where Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was baptized and began his mission?
- Will He find them in Antioch, where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians?
- Will He find them in Turkey, the land of Nicaea, the early councils, and the great Fathers of the Church, where the foundations of our faith were laid?

This plenary session—"Faith in the Middle East"—invites us to turn our attention to the region where Christian faith was first proclaimed, lived, and spread to the ends of the earth.

The Middle East is not only the birthplace of Christianity, but also a living testimony to the endurance, transformation, and vitality of faith across centuries. Here, the testimony of faith became martyrdom (it remains so today), and defenders of the faith such as St Athanasius and the early Church Fathers bore courageous witness to the truth of the gospel.

This session seeks to deepen our understanding of Christian faith in the Middle East—a faith shaped by history, enriched by diversity, and tested by complex social, political, and interreligious realities.

To help us in this reflection, we are honoured to welcome representatives from the four church families that together form the Middle East Council of Churches:

- From the Oriental Orthodox family, His Eminence Anba Hermina
- From the Protestant family, Rev. Dr Rima Nasrallah
- From the Catholic family, Fr Dr Karam Shamasha

Each of our speakers will offer unique insights on the lived experience of faith in the Middle East today. Through their reflections, based on personal experience and direct observation, we hope to gain a fuller understanding of how faith continues to be both a sustaining force and a unifying call within and beyond this region.

## Introduction of the speakers

- To begin, I have the pleasure of inviting His Eminence Anba Hermina, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church for East Alexandria.
- We will then listen to Rev. Dr Rima Nasrallah. She is professor of practical theology and academic dean at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. Rev. Rima is an ordained minister at the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, a Reformed Congregational Church in Lebanon.
- And then, we will turn to a voice from Iraq—Fr Karam Shamasha, from the Chaldean Catholic Church. Fr Karam is a professor of moral theology and provost of the Catholic University in Erbil, Kurdistan. A dedicated academic leader and theologian, he brings over a decade of experience in pastoral ministry, higher education, interfaith dialogue, and community development, with a special focus on Oriental studies and cultural diversity.
- We wish we had more time to cover the various situations in all Middle Eastern countries. Following the suggestion of Rev. Jerry Pillay, I ask you to stay a little longer in the hall to listen to a short update from Palestine, given by Dr Awdeh Qawass.

# Faith in the Middle East

*H.G. Bishop Anba Hermina*[2]

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the moderator of the central committee of the World Council of Churches, the moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order, the director of the Commission on Faith and Order, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, esteemed participants,

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ, who has called us to be His witnesses in all places and to proclaim peace to those around us.

The Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, in cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches, has chosen for this plenary session the theme: "Faith in the Middle East."

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, we meet today in the unity of Christ's love, at a time when the world urgently needs to see in us a living testimony of faith—the faith of the East, from which the light of the gospel first shone upon the whole world. For the Middle East was not merely the stage of the early events of Christianity, but rather the very womb from which faith was born, and the light that illumined the inhabited world.

Today, I would like to share with you four principal axes of reflection:

- The Christian faith—deeply rooted in the soil of the Middle East
- The Christian faith in the Middle East—a living and suffering faith
- The Coptic Orthodox Church—a living witness to the apostolic faith
- The present reality of the Christian Church in the Middle East—challenges and opportunities

## First axis: The Christian faith—deeply rooted in the soil of the Middle East

The Middle East is not merely a region that received Christianity, but the very place where Christ himself was born—to him be all glory—and where he found refuge from Herod's tyranny, particularly in the land of Egypt. From here the gospel began its movement: from the soil upon which the Lord Jesus walked, to the early churches in Antioch. From this sacred land, the apostles went forth; in its languages the gospel was first proclaimed to the nations; and upon its

2. General Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Church.

earth the blood of the martyrs was shed—becoming the seed of a living Church through all generations.

From the time of the Lord Jesus Christ through the Middle Ages, Christians have been deeply rooted in the soil of the Middle East. They are not a minority in any negative sense, but an essential part of this land—of its culture, its history, and its social fabric.

In this sense, we are before a church that is not an "import" from outside, but a local church—with roots that are Aramaic, Coptic, Syriac, or Arabic—living within a multicultural and multireligious reality.

This history stands before us as a calling: not to see ourselves as a "migrant community" within this region, but as authentic citizens, co-builders of our homelands and of a shared future with all.

## Second axis: The Christian faith in the Middle East—a living and suffering faith

The Christian faith in the Middle East is a faith that transcends time—shaped by suffering and sustained by hope. Across the centuries, our region has endured waves of persecution, displacement, and socio-political challenges. Yet the Eastern churches, in all their diversity, have remained steadfast in their witness, holding fast to the gospel of love and forgiveness.

The world today longs for living examples—luminous icons through which the light of eternity may be glimpsed, and in which faith is manifested in its fullness and love in its boundlessness.

As our Lord Jesus Christ offered his own blood for his bride, the Church, so too the Church has offered her blood out of love for her Bridegroom. In every age there have been martyrs for Christ—not only by their lives but also by their blood—for, as Scripture affirms, "He has not left Himself without witness" (Acts 14:17).

When the Lord sent His disciples to preach the gospel of the Kingdom, He forewarned them that the world would not welcome them, but would offer them affliction, persecution, torture, and death, saying: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (John 15:20).

Martyrdom in Christianity, above all, is a continuation of the redeeming act of Christ—not out of love for pain or despair of life, but as a sanctification of

suffering and an exaltation of life. Christ suffered and thereby endowed suffering with divine meaning. Christ died and rose again to proclaim victory—his own and that of all who believe in him—over death.

Today, the Christians of the Middle East live amid a complex reality:

- Armed conflicts, economic crises, and rapid cultural transformations
- Massive emigration that has deprived several countries of a large part of their historic Christian presence
- Challenges to interreligious coexistence and dialogue

Yet faith has not been extinguished—rather, it shines more purely when tested by fire. As St Peter the Apostle wrote: "So that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet. 1:7).

## Third axis: The Coptic Orthodox Church—a living witness to the apostolic faith

The Coptic Orthodox Church, one of the oldest churches in Africa and the Middle East, comprises the largest Christian community in the region. From the dawn of its history, it has faithfully preserved the deposit of apostolic faith and transmitted the tradition of the early Church with clarity and precision, despite centuries of pain and persecution.

### *The church of the martyrs*

From its very beginnings, the Coptic Church has walked the path of martyrdom, beginning with St Mark the Apostle, who was martyred in the streets of Alexandria. The Copts endured waves of persecution so severe that Egypt came to be called "the Land of the Martyrs." So deeply was this reality engraved in their consciousness that they established their own Coptic calendar—known as the Era of the Martyrs—held in equal reverence with the Gregorian calendar.

Martyrdom for the Copts is not a past event but a way of life, an expression of faith grounded in the hope of the resurrection, echoing the words of St Paul the Apostle: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

The modern martyrs of our age—notably the Coptic martyrs of Libya in 2015—are powerful witnesses that Coptic faith remains living and unshaken even in the face of death, proclaiming the name of Christ until their last breath.

We believe that every martyr's death is embraced within the sovereign will of God, who permits evil to act within its limits only so that His grace may abound all the more—beauty arising from ashes, victory from death, and growth from weakness.

### *The church faithful to the patristic tradition*

The Coptic Church has faithfully upheld the Orthodox faith through her great Fathers—St Athanasius the Apostolic, St Cyril the Great, St Didymus the Blind, St Anthony the Great, the father of monasticism, among many others.

From Egypt, monasticism spread to the world as a spiritual force of immense influence—a school of deep faith, unceasing prayer, and total consecration to God.

### *The church of hope and resilience*

In every age, the Coptic Church has resisted attempts at assimilation or erosion through her steadfast attachment to her Christian identity and through education, pastoral ministry, social service, and the testimony of love.

The Coptic Orthodox Church plays an active role in preserving Christian faith in the Middle East, notably through education and faith formation, monastic life, and social service.

### *Ecumenical and interchurch dialogue*

The Coptic Orthodox Church actively participates in the ecumenical movement, seeking to build bridges among sister churches. Her early membership in the World Council of Churches stands as a sign of her spiritual openness and her dedication to a common witness to Christ before the world.

## Fourth axis: The present reality of the Christian church in the Middle East—challenges and opportunities

### *Challenges*

Speaking of Christian faith in the Middle East requires frank acknowledgement of real difficulties. There has been a marked demographic decline of Christians due to migration, displacement, and emigration, compounded by economic hardship, political upheaval, and conflict. This shrinking presence in some areas affects both the church and Christian communities.

Another challenge concerns identity. In the face of marginalization in public life, questions arise: How can Christians live as integral members of society, not as isolated enclaves? Middle Eastern Christians do not seek to be viewed as minorities, but as citizens contributing to their homelands.

Interreligious and intra-Christian relations also present challenges: How can faith be practised in pluralistic societies? How can genuine dialogue and coexistence be built? How can Christian witness be authentically lived in this complex reality?

### *Opportunities*

Yet, alongside these challenges lie profound opportunities. Christian faith in the Middle East bears distinctive features that can greatly enrich the universal Church:

- Living in multireligious and multicultural contexts enables Christians to bear witness to the beauty of human diversity.
- The church's rootedness in the Middle Eastern soil grants her credibility in interreligious dialogue and in the pursuit of justice and peace, serving as a bridge among peoples.
- The churches of the region possess rich spiritual traditions, educational institutions, hospitals, and schools that serve all, not only Christians.

This reality invites us to renew our understanding of Christian witness and mission—not limited to the internal life of the Church but extending outward to society as a whole—to every person, regardless of faith or affiliation.

We are called to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

Our hope in Christ does not disappoint. The Eastern church—including the Coptic Orthodox Church—believes that her mission is far from over. Indeed, it is ever more urgent: to bear witness to Christ with courage and humility, to guard and transmit the faith, and to remain a beacon of peace in a land thirsting for reconciliation.

As churches of the Middle East, our vocation is not solitary but shared—with one another, with our brothers and sisters of other faiths, and with all who strive for goodness and peace. We are called to

- Build bridges of dialogue, not walls of isolation;
- Express our presence in society as contributors to the common good, not as a separate enclave;
- Cooperate with sister churches in the region and with the World Council of Churches for a joint regional and global mission.

Looking to the future, let us renew our commitment that the Middle East may no longer be a land where Christians are seen as isolated minorities, but as active partners in building peace and community. Let us work together to

- Safeguard freedom of faith and equal citizenship for all, as is being affirmed in Egypt under the leadership of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi;
- Empower youth and women as active participants in the Church and society;
- Renew our language of faith in response to a digitally transformed generation;
- And to remain in this land not as guests, but as citizens and witnesses of a living faith that proclaims hope.

## Conclusion

Beloved brothers and sisters, the Christian faith in the Middle East is not merely a heritage of the past but a life renewed by the Holy Spirit—a vocation of faithfulness to our roots, to our present, and to our future.

The Coptic Orthodox Church, with her deep historical roots, vibrant present, and hopeful vision for the future, continues to guard and present this faith as a living testimony to the risen Christ.

We pray that the Middle East may remain a land of light and holiness, that the Lord may lead us all to unity of faith in His boundless love, and that His holy name may be glorified.

We pray for our beloved Egypt—for her safety, peace, and stability; for all the nations of the Middle East; and for the peace of the whole world.

May the peace of Christ, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

## Faith in the Middle East

*Rev. Prof. Dr Rima Nasrallah*[3]

Growing up, during the 15 awful years of the Lebanese Civil War, I was often told that we, as Christians in the Middle East, are like the disciples in the boat during that famous storm on the Sea of Galilee.

This image endured during the aftermath of the war, the repetitive invasions, attacks, explosions, crises, and wars. We have heard this same metaphor from our brothers and sisters in Syria as they battled their most recent war and as they find themselves today tossed from every side in the new reality of an unpredictable regime. And we have witnessed our Palestinian neighbours weather tornado after tornado in a ship that hardly holds together anymore.

"We are in the boat in the storm," we told ourselves, and we waited for decades on end for the storm to be stilled. For the chaos to subside, for our lives to begin. And we are still waiting. ...

It is difficult to accept being constantly tossed and pushed on the stormy water! To watch as some of us jump ship and swim to safer shores—reaching as far as Germany, Canada, or Australia. Or to see those who were swept by the current, killed in war zones, collapsing under the weight of insecurity, financial stress, and even despair.

And it is more difficult to count those who have remained in this ship. (How many Christians are left in Syria? The See of Antioch where the believers were first called Christians? How many in Lebanon where Jesus walked and where Peter and Paul were welcomed by local believers? How many in Palestine where

3. Rev. Prof. Dr Rima Nasrallah is professor of practical theology at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon.

it all started?) We are afraid to count—knowing that the few remaining would also leave if they can.

Because this constant feeling of vulnerability—of uncertainty—of chaos—is too much to bear. And in our desperate attempt to fight this vulnerability, we confess that we have typically, as Christians in the Middle East, resorted to three main responses:

- The first is a response toward our own people. In order to counter vulnerability, we have become obsessed with survival and existence. Not able to promise our people a better future, we started focusing on the distant past with its glory, attempting to convince them to stay out of respect for the past: looking backward so that we can tolerate the present. We have also tended to shield them within quasi-ghettos, creating safe spaces where they can be protected, where they can huddle together in security.
- The second response to our vulnerability is toward our Christian brothers and sisters in the West and elsewhere. Finding ourselves abandoned and ignored, we needed to find ways to elicit empathy and support—sometimes by embracing the language of minority, a term that might guarantee some attention from NGOs and Christian organizations. We waved our hands in the air wondering to ourselves, Do they see the storm? Do they not care that we are drowning?
- And our third response to vulnerability is toward the political powers under which we exist. In our inescapable context where we hardly have a choice in who will reign over us, we found ourselves tempted to exchange authenticity for protection. The question that burns the heart of each church leader is this: Who in our region can secure our lives? Which president or king? Which political entity would give us a few years of stability so we can catch our breath, so we can live a little?

And the storms are still raging as we speak.

But lovely as the image of the ship is, we cannot keep waiting for the storms to end and hope that after the wind has subsided, we will build again, grow again, flourish again, or return to our villages and lands.

Though the fear is real, the trauma enduring, and the future unclear, I believe that we are called, as churches in the Middle East, to accept that we live in this liminal place of uncertainty and to embrace RISK! To embrace our vulnerability.

To embrace it not because we seek martyrdom, or need the thrill of adventure, but to embrace vulnerability because it is our vulnerability that keeps us close to the kernel of our faith in a God who gave up every form of security so that all may have life. A God who—as we state in our Nicene Creed—came down, took flesh, suffered ... not for himself—but for the world.

Sadly, today our entire world, and our churches with it, are more impressed by strength, power, security, growth, and success. Somewhere along the way, we have—willingly or unwillingly—embraced the consumerist and capitalist mentality of the market and applied it to church life, where we count numbers, and evaluate growth and impact. We look at reports and budgets and judge a community's worth by how well it fits our growth plan. And it seems that we have learned to focus more on avoiding risk and danger than on authentically living the gospel that we are called to live.

In our region—where God and religion are used to justify violence and oppression, to dispossess, vilify, and eliminate the other—we need to accept the risk!

We accept the RISK because we believe that we have a role to play in the transformation of our societies—and we who are natives to these lands, who know the culture and share in the pain, can best fulfil this role. We embrace the risk so we can counter hatred with love, pain with understanding, and suffering with compassion. We embrace this RISK together, as the churches of the Middle East, but we also invite you all not to shy away from risk but to walk with us as equal companions, not to secure our own survival, but for the life we share with the most vulnerable among us.

So, pray for us, so that we can be equipped with the courage to continue to live in the midst of chaos and fear. The courage to love when hatred surrounds us. The courage to act when nothing seems possible, the courage to serve when our energy is drained and resources depleted.

Pray for courage to accept the risk of living as Christians in the Middle East and to embrace vulnerability in a deeply Christological manner.

And to God be all glory!

# Faith in the Middle East

## Witness of the "Living Stones": Living Christian Faith in Iraq—Challenges and Horizons

*Fr Dr Karam Shamasha*[4]

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, the One God. Amen.

Your Eminences, Your Graces, distinguished delegates, colleagues, and friends in Christ, may the peace of Christ be with you all.

We gather in this plenary session as pilgrims in Egypt, a land deeply connected to our apostolic faith. In this moment, we stand on the land of Athanasius, the great defender of the Nicene faith, commemorating his 1700th anniversary.

This plenary, entitled "Faith in the Middle East," is not an academic diversion; rather, it is a return to our roots and an opportunity to engage with the "living stones" of the Church. Our aim, as outlined in the conference programme, is to deepen our understanding of the lived faith in this context, to discuss its contemporary realities, and, importantly, to foster solidarity.

To ensure that our discussion is not merely abstract, I invite you to journey with me from the land of Nicaea and Athanasius to another cradle of early faith—to Mesopotamia, to Iraq. Christianity in Iraq is not a recent development; its roots are apostolic, stretching back to the first century through the missions of the apostles St Thomas and St Thaddeus (Mar Addai). The Church of the East, centred in Mesopotamia, was a vibrant theological and missionary force long before the Council of Nicaea, developing its own profound theological language and spiritual heritage. It is from this ancient, Indigenous, and apostolic context that I wish to speak.

I will begin my intervention with a story from my own journey—one that I did not choose, but which has become an integral part of my vocation.

I was a seminarian at the patriarchal seminary in Baghdad in 2006. Suddenly, sectarian violence struck our community. We began to see the bodies of the murdered victims in front of the seminary gates. We heard of the kidnapping of priests, threats to Christian families, and the bombing of churches. We

4. Provost of the Catholic University in Erbil, Iraq.

would pray our evening prayer by candlelight, and the concussions from nearby explosions would rattle the windows.

Then came the difficult decision: "The seminary must be closed." It was the beginning of an exodus. We left the capital: the seminary itself becoming a symbol of a church leaving everything behind to save the vocation. We arrived in Ankawa, in the Kurdistan Region. I remember 32 of us living in a 100-square-metre basement hall, before moving to a caravan where we spent two years. Life had become an unknown fate. Beds were lined up like in military barracks. I was about 20 years old, and the question that haunted me every night was, Does God still want me for Him? Or did the vocation end at the first test?

But in the silence of those nights, I heard an inner voice: "The vocation does not end in darkness; it begins from it."

## First: Faith as heritage and identity (the pillar of faith)

In this conference, we speak of the pillar of faith and of "confessing the one faith" inspired by Nicaea. But in the Middle East, the Christian faith is not just a rich historical contribution; it is not a relic in a museum. It is a living identity.

This heritage, this faith formulated in Alexandria and Antioch, is what was put to the test. Years after graduation and ordination, the test of August 2014 arrived, when we were told to flee Nineveh before the advance of ISIS.

It was a long, anxious night, filled with the sounds of cars fleeing in the darkness. We left before dawn. My family, like thousands of others, carried few belongings but many memories. The road was choked with the cries of children, the prayers of women, and the silence of men. More than 13,000 families were displaced to Erbil alone. Churches and schools became shelters.

I remember standing at the door of a small church as people entered carrying their children, not only to pray, but because the church was their first safe haven. An elderly woman said to me through her tears, "My son, we have nothing left, but the Lord has not abandoned us. As long as the church doors are open, we will remain."

In those moments, I understood that the faith we defend academically in conferences was, for this woman, the only identity she had left.

## Second: Mission as presence and resilience (the pillar of mission)

The concept of *mission* holds significant meaning, especially in the context of the Middle East. Here, the mission is not about expansion but rather about presence. It is a "mission from the margins," serving as a deep testament to the outpouring of God's triune love within vulnerable communities. Our resilience itself becomes a form of evangelization.

When the Christians of Iraq were commanded to renounce their faith, pay the *jizya* (tax of submission), or face the sword, their steadfastness was the mission.

After the liberation of the villages in 2017, we returned to find our towns nearly deserted. Many houses had been burned, and churches had been turned into firing ranges by ISIS terrorists. However, with every stone we placed back in position, we felt we were rebuilding more than just houses; we were rebuilding our sense of self.

*Faith preceded reconstruction.*

Today, the Church in Iraq embodies a new form of witness: the witness of presence, construction, and martyrdom (*shahada*). Engaging in health projects, supporting young individuals in their careers, and praying with our Muslim neighbours for peace—these actions represent the miracles of our time. Our faith urges us to be active participants in society rather than mere spectators of history. This is the mission we face in contemporary reality.

## Third: Unity as an existential imperative (the pillar of unity)

Finally, this brings us to the heart of our conference theme: "Where Now for Visible Unity?" For the churches of the Middle East, this is not an abstract theological question. It is an existential imperative.

This ordeal reminded us that disunity is a scandal with devastating consequences. When ISIS targeted Christians, they did not ask whether a person was Chaldean, Syriac, Assyrian, or Armenian, nor did they inquire if they were Catholic or Orthodox. We witnessed what has been described as the *ecumenism of blood*.

More importantly, we also experienced what I refer to as the *ecumenism of solidarity*.

First, global ecclesial solidarity. When we were displaced, we were not alone. I vividly remember the nights we received news that churches around the world were holding prayers for "their brethren in Iraq." We saw photos of prayer processions in Rome, Paris, Sydney, Canada, and the United States. We felt a sense of connection, knowing we were not alone. This solidarity was a powerful moment of realization about the true Body of Christ: we are one body, and when one part suffers, the entire body suffers with it.

Second, local ecclesial solidarity. During that time, churches of all denominations worked side by side. The question was not, Who follows whom? but rather, Who can we help today? Joint committees established psychosocial support programmes. We truly felt united as one Church with shared wounds.

Fostering solidarity and support for Middle Eastern Christians is not just an ancillary project of ecumenism: it is the essence of ecumenism. It is how the global body demonstrates that it is indeed one body.

## The horizon: From hope to practical resurrection

Brothers and sisters, faith today is not just about enduring pain; it is about living for the sake of that faith. In the aftermath of the hardships faced in 2014, His Excellency Archbishop Bashar Warda made the decision to transform suffering into a powerful message and displacement into a project of hope. Thus, the Catholic University in Erbil (CUE) was established in 2015 from the midst of tents and rubble.

The university started with just eleven students, but it embraced a vision: the story of every student matters.

This project serves as clear evidence that faith is not merely a prayer offered in a persecuted church, but an active expression of solidarity within a community. Here, Christian students study alongside their Muslim, Yezidi, and Kurdish peers. Today, the university is home to over 700 students, including many from families that once lived in tents. In the pharmacy, engineering, and media labs, they are discovering that education is not a means to emigrate, but a way to stay and persevere.

Every building constructed here helps save a young person from leaving their home, and every scholarship awarded supports families in remaining on their land. As I walk through the university corridors, I see more than just structures; I see the emergence of new life. I see the face of Christ, reminding us, "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you

did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). I envision the Iraq we aspire to create. This initiative embodies the good news of the resurrection following Good Friday. It is a tangible expression of our Lord's words: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

## Conclusion

Christians in the Middle East, through their experiences in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and other nations where they face persecution, enrich our global understanding of faith and unity. They show us that faith is not just a set of beliefs we recite; it is a way of life demonstrated through our actions and presence, for which, if necessary, we are willing to sacrifice our lives.

Today, we bear not only the cross of Iraq but also the hope of the world, for we have witnessed that love is stronger than death. We are not merely the victim church, but rather, the church of solidarity, the church of sacrifice and witness (*shahada*), the church of the suffering and risen Christ.

As the universal Church, let us work together to honour the witness of persecuted Christians and respond to their call for a unity that is not just spoken but truly visible through solidarity and communion.

I raise this prayer with you: O Lord, teach us to carry our cross without complaint and to see in every displacement a new vocation. Help us understand that faith is not about being saved from the fire, but about being a light within it. Bless the churches that stand in solidarity with us, and all the people who pray for us. Transform our weakness into strength, our exile into a witness, and our suffering into the birth of a new hope. Grant us the grace to remain, despite all that has changed, as witnesses to Your presence, a small leaven that brings the taste of life to our wounded East. Amen.

# Faith in the Middle East

*Fr Prof. Dr Jack Khalil*[5]

Your Eminences, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When we look into some people's faces in Syria and Egypt and Lebanon and Cyprus and Iraq, they look very similar to saints we see in icons. And we wonder about how they still exist in this area that saw many invasions, many persecutions, and the destruction of churches. We really wonder that they still exist there. But if we read in our common Christian sources, if we read in the gospel and in other later sources, we may understand that Christianity is so strongly linked with the population of this area.

We see examples of strong faith that this area witnessed, and they are still inspiring the Christians in the Middle East in a very lively way. I can mention St Ignatius of Antioch, St John Chrysostom, St Maroun, and all the monks of Antioch and Cyrus. We read their lives and wonder at the way they loved Christ. So, the Christians in the Middle East received their faith from those teachers, who taught not only in words but also in their lives, in the consecration of their lives for Christ.

It was necessary that a voice from the Greek Orthodox of the Middle East be heard here, and I thank you for your invitation. I have to say that after Antioch and Alexandria were established at the end of the 4th century, the Greeks started to exist in this area and they spread their culture to other cultures. The Phoenicians and the Egyptians here adopted the Greek language and the Phoenician language disappeared in the 2nd century.

We read in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 11, this very important chapter, that the Greeks at Antioch believed and this puzzled the apostles in Jerusalem that this big group of Gentiles now believed in Christ and didn't know what to do. So they sent the apostle Barnabas the Cypriot to investigate the situation, and he saw that the grace of God was with them. He recommended them to the apostles, and it was the beginning of this journey of Christianity to all nations according to the commandment of Christ. Christianity spread very quickly.

Maybe this is due to the intensive apostolic mission—I am talking about the 12 apostles—that among the populations in Antioch, in Cyprus, and in Egypt,

5. Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, dean of St John of Damascus Institute of Theology and Philosophy, the University of Balamand, Tripoli, Lebanon, member of the Faith and Order Commission.

the faith spread quickly and they believed in Christ and turned their whole hearts and their whole love toward Christ. So, we saw also these monastic communities everywhere in the Middle East and in each place, it has its own character, its own identity. Some of them lived in open areas winter and summer—teaching, preaching, doing wonders, and witnessing to Christ that the power of Christ becomes stronger even in witness. I think this power of Christ and the grace of Christ remained with the prayers of those saints in this land. So, it remains steadfast, one invasion after another, persecutions from everywhere, from inside and from outside.

We hope that God protects those witnesses of these ancient communities in the Middle East by the prayers of all the saints who lived there.

## Moderator's Closing Remarks

*Fr Dr Antoine Al Ahmar*[6]

Dear friends,

As we conclude this rich round of presentations, we return to the question that opened our session:

"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8).

After hearing these profound testimonies, we can say with conviction that yes, he will find faith. A faith that endures amid trials, that serves in love, that seeks justice, and that unites across boundaries. The faith of the Middle East—ancient and living, tested and resilient—continues to remind the global Church that faith is not merely believed, but lived.

In my introduction, I drew a connection between the question posed by our conference and the question raised by the situation in the Middle East. Both invite us to self-examination and renewed commitment. One asks about our unity, the other about our faith. And perhaps the two cannot be separated—for visible unity among Christians is itself a witness to living faith—and faith, when lived authentically, always seeks unity.

May this witness inspire us all to remain steadfast, and to live out our faith with courage and hope—until the Son of Man comes again.

6. Director of the Theological and Ecumenical Department, Middle East Council of Churches.

## Readers' Guide

The three theme days of the Sixth World Conference focused on faith, mission, and unity. Each day featured two morning plenary sessions: a keynote address and a conversation panel. The hope was to provide conference participants with insights from differing perspectives and contexts that, taken as a whole, would weave together the significance of the Council of Nicaea with the work of Faith and Order and other movements in search of visible Christian unity and global ecumenism.

All the keynote addresses involved three speakers who each offered 20-minute presentations focused on the day's theme (faith, mission, or unity) from an assigned perspective: Faith and Order, the legacy of Nicaea, or wider ecumenical contexts. Conference participants used a QR code at their seats to submit questions or comments for the presenters. This report includes the keynote addresses, as well as brief summaries by the keynote moderators of submitted questions and responses.

The conversation panels were intended to expand the number and range of voices speaking within the plenary sessions and to enable the presenters to dialogue with each other. As with the keynote addresses, each panellist was asked to speak from a particular perspective, such as that of a church family or Christian world communion, a specific ecumenical community, or a decolonial point of view. While these panels varied somewhat in size and shape, they all involved a brief response to a question or prompt posed by the moderator. These questions were discussed by the panel and moderator in advance. This was followed by a conversation among the panellists. These panels did not allow time for questions and comments from the conference floor, but it was hoped that the panellists' discussions would be taken up by the conference participants over the course of the day. This report includes summaries of the conversation panels by their respective moderators.

# Keynote Address—A New Paradigm for Ecumenism?

*The Most Rev. Archbishop Dr Antje Jackelén*

Where Now for Visible Unity? This was the guiding question for the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order at the Logos Papal Centre of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, 24–28 October 2025. On the second day of the conference, the focus was on faith. The theme of the first plenary of the day was "The Triune God and the Identity of the Church." This article builds on the keynote I delivered during this plenary.

There are, of course, multiple ways of addressing the topic of faith from the perspective of the overall conference theme, along with an ecclesiological angle. I decided to engage with the topic in the shape of—not 95, but—eight theses. And yes, I am Lutheran.

## First thesis: It is helpful to distinguish between *fides quae* and *fides qua*.

*Fides quae* is what someone believes in: the content of faith; that which is formulated in doctrines. *Fides qua* describes faith as an act, the faith with which you believe. The biblical Greek word for faith, *pistis*, means "trust."[1] When Jesus compliments the Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion for their faith (Matt. 15:28; 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10), it is certainly not their adherence to doctrinal truths he has in mind, but the trust that guides their action. When the apostle Paul speaks about his own faith or the faith of his addressees, this might as well be expressed as his or their "trusting."[2] *Pistis* can also be described as a praxis that draws its norms from the gospel.[3] The reformers tended to understand faith as confidence, or in Latin *fiducia*, because they saw faith as the ability to trust God's promises and, thereby, receive what God promises. Faith

1. Art. *pistis* in Walter Bauer, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (de Gruyter, 1971), 1313f.

2. See, for example, Rom. 1:8 and 1 Cor. 2:5; 15:14–17.

3. Lothar Coenen et al., eds., *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament*, 4th ed. (Theologischer Verlag R. Brockhaus, 1977), 570.

then is the ability to trust God and God's promises.[4] Faith as *fiducia* has a focus on *fides qua*.

Although an expression of a Eurocentric intellectual framework, the distinction between *fides quae* and *fides qua* has far-reaching potential, because the emphasis on *fides qua* prompts us to pay attention to faith as a process rather than as a package to be adopted. Or, at least, it makes us aware that the path toward a reflected *fides quae* leads through a diverse landscape of *fides qua*, as Jesus paradigmatically demonstrates in the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). Even the Israelites' 40 years of journeying through the desert guided by God's promise, as narrated in the Hebrew Bible, can illustrate this. Recognition of the importance of *fides qua* entails openness towards local epistemologies and local expressions of faith. The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) can serve as a case in point. Here, we witness someone who belongs to a people considered to be marginal and second-class in the religious system, but through trust shown in action, he sets a new agenda for the Pharisees and breaks the dominance of a certain religious narrative in a particular time. If we fail to distinguish between *fides quae* and *fides qua*, we run the risk of worshipping our beliefs rather than God.

In other words, the distinction between *fides quae* and *fides qua* enables critical and self-critical reflection on traditional theological expressions in a glocal perspective. Thus, it contributes to a decolonization of theological language, which is one of the working tasks of the Faith and Order Commission.[5]

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4. It is broadly assumed that Luther essentially understood the act of faith in the sense of *fiducia*, without neglecting the two other dimensions of *notitia* ("knowing") and *assensus* ("assenting to"), as Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele asserts ("Fiducia bei Martin Luther," in *Gottvertrauen: Die ökumenische Diskussion um die fiducia*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth and Simon Peng-Keller [Herder, 2012)], 163). See Luther, who says that there is only one article and one rule in theology, namely, true faith or trust (*fiducia*) in Christ, and without adherence to this article and this rule nobody is a theologian. All the other articles flow into and out of this one, and without it, the others are nothing. "Unus est articulus et una regula theologiae, et qui hunc articulum et hanc regulam non tenet, non est theologus, scilicet vera fides vel fiducia in Christum. In hunc articulum omnes alii fluunt et refluunt, et sine illo alii nihil sunt" (Martin Luther, *Weimarer Ausgabe*, vol. 2 [WA TR 2], 140, 25–141, 1 [Nr. 1583]). See also Johannes Bugenhagen, "Concerning the Christian Faith and Proper Good Works," in *Johannes Bugenhagen: Selected Writings*, ed. Kurt K. Hendel (Fortress Press, 2015), 250: "True faith is trust in God ..." and this trust leads to love of God and God's word as well as love of neighbour.

5. As emerging ecumenists and theologians put it: "We call Faith and Order to deepen its engagement with the lived theologies of people at the margins" (Global Ecumenical Theological Institute, "A Message from the World Council of Churches' Fourth Global Ecumenical Theological Institute [GETI] 2025 to the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order at Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, 15 September–29 October 2025," 4.1, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/a-message-from-the-world-council-of-churches-fourth-global-ecumenical-theological-institute-geti-2025-to-the-sixth-world-conference-on-faith-and-order-at-wadi-el-natrun-egypt-15-september-29-october-2025.

## Second thesis: The distinction of *fides quae* and *fides qua* can reshape ecumenism.

The former president of the (then) Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Walter Kasper, stated that ecumenism "does not involve the conversion of one Church into another; it involves the conversion of all to Jesus Christ."[6] How then can the distinction of *fides quae* and *fides qua* help such ecumenism?

With a focus on the process of faith as the trusting implied in *fiducia*, "wrong" faith is not in the first place the same as believing the "wrong stuff," adhering to the wrong dogmas, or having the wrong understanding of sacraments and ministry. Rather, it is a matter of putting your trust in the wrong place. In the explanation of the first commandment of the Decalogue in the *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther writes that a God is what you expect everything good from and where you take refuge in all kinds of needs. To have a God is to trust this God wholeheartedly. Hence the trusting and believing of the heart (*cordis fides atque fiducia*) makes both God and idol. Those who put that kind of expectation and trust in their money and goods (mammon), their ingenuity, education, wisdom, power, popularity, friendship, or honour, also have a god, albeit not the one trustworthy God. Hence, where you put your confidence and trust is decisive.[7]

*Fides qua* prevents us from seeing faith primarily as a cognitive, intellectual enterprise. Nor is faith merely emotional trust. Rather it is a thoughtful and intentional trusting, which reminds us of the existential character of faith. It concerns the whole person in all their dimensions and relationships, and it includes a risk-taking. Moreover, attention to *fides qua* protects us from the illusion that *fides quae* is definable and graspable. Focus on *fides qua* can protect faith from degenerating into a controlling attitude, which is a risk in personal spirituality as well as in ecumenical work. *Fides qua* allows us to fathom faith precisely as unfathomable.[8]

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6. Walter Kasper, "Mercy Can Heal the Wounds of the Church," *The Tablet*, 20 November 2015, https://associationofcatholicpriests.ie/mercy-can-heal-the-wounds-of-the-church/.

7. Martin Luther, *Der Große Katechismus*, Weimarer Ausgabe, vol. 30, part 1 (WA 30 1): 133, 1–11, 17–35; 134, 1–2.

8. Claudia Welz, "Vertrauen und/oder Gewissheit? Kontroverstheologische und religionsphilosophische Fragen im Anschluss an Luther, Kierkegaard und Wittgenstein," in *Gottvertrauen: Die ökumenische Diskussion um die fiducia*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth and Simon Peng-Keller (Herder, 2012), 357: "Das *Was* und das *Wie* des Glaubens sind einander insofern sowohl entsprechend wie auch entgegengesetzt, als die *fides quae* unfassbar bleibt, durch die *fides qua* jedoch gerade in ihrer Unerfassbarkeit festgehalten wird."

For ecumenism, this means that the only way to unity then is not to negotiate the differences between dogmatic profiles with the aim of smoothing them out. This is a wisdom also gained from the other noteworthy ecumenical event that celebrated a significant anniversary in 2025, namely the 1925 Stockholm Meeting, also known as the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work. It was the brainchild of Archbishop Nathan Söderblom (1866–1931), who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for this endeavour. The theologian and later Bishop of Oslo, Eivind Berggrav (1884–1959), noted that the programme of the two-week meeting was packed with speeches and was rather dry and boring, but that it was the lived experience of togetherness that turned a previously bold dream into an everyday reality. Along these lines, he described the sense of unity that characterized the Stockholm Meeting as "neither doctrinal Christianity nor legalistic Christianity, but a Christianity of life."[9] In a similar tone, Pope Leo XIV remarked in his message to the participants in the Ecumenical Week in Stockholm in August 2025 that Archbishop Söderblom "called on his Christian brothers and sisters not to wait for agreement on every point of theology, but to unite in 'practical Christianity'—to serve the world together in the pursuit of peace, justice, and human dignity."[10] He continued in support of this ecumenical direction, adding: "While the Catholic Church was not represented at that first gathering, I can affirm, with humility and joy, that we stand with you today as fellow disciples of Christ, recognizing that what unites us is far greater than what divides us."

An emphasis on lived or practical Christianity does not mean an ecumenism that pits theological work and service against each other, since theology is the very motivation for service. Neither does it imply a choice between either theological discussions or shared praxis in worship and service. Both are needed; however, theology should not be allowed to be a roadblock for common prayer and service to happen.

*Fides quae* and *fides qua* need to be distinguished but not separated. When Pope Leo reflected on changes in Roman Catholic ecumenical engagement after the Second Vatican Council, he expressed this relationship of distinction without separation: "We believe that the unity Christ wills for his Church must be visible, and that such unity grows through theological dialogue, common worship where possible, and shared witness in the face of humanity's suffering."[11]

9. Eivind Berggrav, *Ekumeniska mötet i Stockholm 1925* (Sveriges Kristliga Studentrörelsens Bokförlag, 1925), 13f. (my translation).

10. Leo XIV, "Message of His Holiness to the Participants in the Ecumenical Week in Stockholm on the Centenary of the 1925 Ecumenical Meeting," Stockholm, 18–24 August 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/pont-messages/2025/documents/20250822-messaggio-stoccolma.html.

11. Leo XIV, "Ecumenical Week in Stockholm."

This papal statement is in line with *From Conflict to Communion*, a document released prior to the ecumenical milestone of the Joint Commemoration of 500 years of Reformation in Lund, Sweden, on 31 October 2016. Here, for the first time in 500 years, Lutherans and Catholics agreed on a description of history as well as on five common imperatives for the future. According to the first imperative, in ecumenism, we must "always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced." The second imperative calls the dialogue partners to "let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith": a quite self-explanatory challenge, which, nevertheless, requires some conscious exercise. And third, "Catholics and Lutherans should again commit themselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal." The fourth imperative joyfully says: "Lutherans and Catholics should jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time." This is an agenda that calls not only for common words but also for common action. Consequently, the fifth imperative states that ecumenical partners "should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world."[12]

The Joint Declaration of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Leo XIV, issued on the occasion of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, points in a similar direction. Both church leaders affirm: "The goal of Christian unity includes the objective of contributing in a fundamental and life-giving manner to peace among all peoples."[13] While speaking of the irreplaceable role that theological dialogue plays in an ecumenical process, they also "commend the other necessary elements" of this process, such as contacts between sisters and brothers, prayer, and joint work wherever possible.[14]

Such reshaping of ecumenism was voiced as an urgent call from young ecumenists and theologians at the Fourth Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) from 15 September–29 October 2025 in Egypt. In their message to the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, this new generation of ecumenists rejects the primacy of *fides quae* as the centre of ecumenical

12. Lutheran World Federation, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), paras. 239–243, https://lutheranworld.org/resources/publication-conflict-communion-lutheran-catholic-common-commemoration-reformation-2017.

13. Leo XIV, "Apostolic Journey of His Holiness to Türkiye: Joint Declaration of the Holy Father Leo XIV and His Holiness Bartholomew I," 29 November 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/travels/2025/documents/20251129-dichiarazione-congiunta.html.

14. Leo XIV, "Apostolic Journey." (Instead of sisters and brothers, the document uses the term *fraternal*.)

work. "Ecumenical theology often seeks unity through doctrinal coherence, and yet, we must also explore how unity becomes visible through our embodied experience. … We call the Church to locate itself centrally within the continuous sufferings of humanity and all of creation rather than standing apart from it."[15] The Church must always ask: "How do we embody our unity in diversity as we respond to the multi-crisis of our world across our varied contexts?"[16]

What the young ecumenists describe as the way to unity is closer to the act of putting trust in the right place and showing confidence in times of need than to traditional ecumenical dialogues: "Unity emerges as the Church learns to stay when it is hard, listen when it costs, remember what hurts, and hope against the odds. Unity becomes visible when the Church prophetically shares pain, remembers truthfully, and lives the hope of abundant life together in Christ."[17] They go so far as to say that "it is our imperative to kenotically embody Christ, emptying ourselves for the other."[18]

Beyond doctrinal dialogue, these statements and developments indicate how the distinction without separation of *fides quae* and *fides qua* offers new visions and methods and thus reshapes ecumenism. The more promising path for ecumenical dialogue now is common practice of faith in worship and in service in the world. Because living out the gospel in worship and loving service to the world of our neighbours and fellow creatures is nothing less than apostolic discipleship.

## Third thesis: Faith is always contextual in two ways.

Faith is formed and expressed together with a text (*con-textum* = "intertwined and connected, without interruption, without break"). Faith is shaped, nourished, and expressed together with the text of scripture, with the text of the creeds and, secondarily, with the texts that have interpreted and interpret those primary texts. Faith is naturally also *con-textual* (again: "intertwined and connected, without interruption, without break") with human experience, which always is fourfold: it consists of our relationship with (1) the very ground of being—God Creator, Saviour, and Giver of Life; (2) with world and nature—the whole of creation; (3) with the neighbour—our fellow human beings; and (4) with our own selves.[19]

15. GETI, "Message from GETI 2025," 2.2.

16. GETI, "Message from GETI 2025," 2.1.

17. GETI, "Message from GETI 2025," 3.4.

18. GETI, "Message from GETI 2025," 3.1.

19. Antje Jackelén, "Baptismal Ecclesiology: A Relational Theological Perspective," *The Ecumenical Review* 77 (2025): 54–58, https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12901.

Experience is both internal and external, and it is embodied. Likewise, the body of Christ is not mystically and sacramentally constituted only from inside. It takes shape and is experienced also from outside—when others and we ourselves see us living and acting as body of Christ in the world, in the awareness that the church is on a continuous pilgrimage, or, in Reformation lingo, as an *ecclesia semper reformanda*, always in need of being reformed.[20] One might say that this unity of inner constitution and outer experience of the Church has a Christological equivalent: it is the ecclesial expression of the full divinity and the full humanity of Christ. The same can be argued from a missiological perspective: the Church is not an end in itself, but is the expression and instrument of God's ongoing mission in the world. Unity should be restored "so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). Self-occupation is not an option for the church. In short, a church that moves towards unity only by theological introspection would be a *communio in se incurvata*, a union bent inwards on itself, which is a classic description of living in sin.

Fourth thesis: This contextuality of faith and church requires interpretation of the signs of the times.

At a global level, the world experiences several crises at the same time: war and conflict, economic, food, and health crises, the global decline of democracy, forced migration, the good and bad of digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI). Permeating all of this is the biggest challenge humankind has ever faced together: the loss of biodiversity and the climate emergency. Climate change affects every place on the planet and yet it affects people and peoples differently, with those who have contributed the least to the crisis often suffering the most.

With the rapid development of AI, some may find reasons to embrace techno-messianism (AI will save us, at least from the climate crisis!) whereas others will fear techno-dystopia (AI could be the end of humanity!). For now, a middle path seems most realistic.[21] The progress made by AI is close to overwhelming. The amount and speed of data processing by large language models (LLMs) can both impress and intimidate, making us forget about the limits of artificial intelligence. Embodiment is crucial to human intelligence, and humans seek and find meaning even beyond ordinary reality, whereas AI is stuck

20. See the call to the churches by the World Council of Churches to walk together in a pilgrimage of justice and peace (World Council of Churches, "Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," n.d., https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace).

21. Antje Jackelén, "Freud Would Have Called AI a 'Narcissistic Insult' to Humanity—Here's How We Might Overcome It," *The Conversation*, 19 August 2025, https://theconversation.com/freud-would-have-called-ai-a-narcissistic-insult-to-humanity-heres-how-we-might-overcome-it-255802.

in the "here," in the profane.[22] When a large language model creates nonsensical or inaccurate outputs, this is called a hallucination.[23] Artificial intelligence hallucinates; human intelligence transcends.

If the development of AI is to be beneficial for humanity and for planet Earth, a number of challenges must be met. A wholesome approach needs us to make things not only intellectually but also spiritually fit. In this regard, faith communities have a prophetic, diaconal, ethical, and theological role.[24] Fulfilling this role requires not only ecumenical synergies but also interfaith engagement.

In addition to undergoing a massive technological shift, the world suffers from the five poisonous "Ps": polarization, populism, protectionism, post-truthism, and patriarchy. Polarization widens the gap between those who have too much and those who have too little, creating climate, education, health, demographic, and intergenerational injustice. Populism pits people against each other and fails to do justice to the complexities of current crises. Populism nurtures hostility and even hatred toward those who are different and claims the superiority of one group over others. This results in scapegoating, racism, xenophobia, and irrational fear of ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. Protectionism sacrifices the common good for self-interest and promotes egoism and nationalism. Post-truth, involving the dissemination of disinformation and lies, undermines the honest communication that is vital to every democratic system. Patriarchy boosts a global pushback on the rights of women and girls, promotes toxic masculinities, and counteracts gender justice.

All of this is at odds with faith in the triune God: Father, maker of all things visible and invisible; Son, light from light for our salvation; and Holy Spirit, giver of life. The five Ps lead to high levels of anxiety, anger, and even desperation—the opposite of *pistis*, *fiducia*, trust, and confidence. The Church cannot move toward unity without acknowledging and responding to these signs of the times.

When people of faith are confronted with collective human failure to create good societies and to care for planet Earth, they cannot stay indifferent. As churches striving for unity, we must pause and ask ourselves whether God can still have faith in humankind. As unsettling as this question is, we may find

22. Beth Singler, "The Anthropology and Sociology of Religion and AI," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religion and Artificial Intelligence*, ed. Beth Singler and Fraser Watts (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 229, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009031721.016.

23. Sebastian Farquhar et al., "Detecting Hallucinations in Large Language Models Using Semantic Entropy," *Nature* 630 (2024): 625–30, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07421-0.

24. Antje Jackelén, "Technology, Theology, and Spirituality in the Digital Age," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 56, no. 1 (2021): 9f., https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12682.

some comfort in the fact that it is an old question.[25] Through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, God asks: "What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless in themselves?" (Jer. 2:5). In frustration, God sighs, "I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?" (Jer. 2:21). Such human failure is nothing churches can shrug their shoulders at, since it matters deeply to God. Human failure to care for creation and build decent societies cries out to the heavens. As Jeremiah proclaims: "Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:12–13). God's people have put their trust in the wrong place and confide in that which cannot quench the thirst of the earth and all creatures. It is God's love of this mistreated and thirsty world that made the incarnation take place (John 3:16).

## Fifth thesis: The signs of the times point us to the connection between faith and justice.

Theologically speaking, justification and justice belong together.[26] *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* is the title of an influential book published in 1983 by the American philosopher and theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff, who is personally and academically firmly grounded in the Reformed, neo-Calvinist tradition.

Wolterstorff speaks of world-formative Christianity, which means that Christianity is not a passive beholder of world history: it actively shapes the world. Sin, he says, is not about individuals only, but also about social structures. Hence, redemption must transform not only individuals, but also structures. This implies that the Church, as well as each and every Christian, is called to let its faith become active in public action.

The idea is that peace, *shalom*, cannot be achieved without justice. Therefore, Christians are called to work for justice as a response to God's grace, expressed through gratitude, obedience, and vocation. They are called to be responsible for one another, to build a community of *shalom*, and to seek the good of humanity and creation.

This coincides with the old Christian admonition *ora et labora* ("pray and work") that has been alive and well through the centuries, not only in

25. See Gen. 8:3–24; 6:6; 11:4–8.

26. Ps. 85:10–11 speaks of righteousness and peace kissing each other; Psalm 36:6 brings together God's righteousness and God's judgements for the salvation of humans and animals alike.

monasteries but also in parishes across the denominations.[27] It goes well with Eastern Orthodox tradition that can speak of service in the world as "liturgy after the liturgy"[28] and with Martin Luther's words about the freedom of a Christian: "Behold, from faith thus flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one's neighbour willingly."[29]

A loving service among individuals is mandated but not enough. To build peace, we need to work for justice, individually and structurally. Ecumenical breadth is an asset in this. Wolterstorff's book is a good example. The book has motivated churches to realize that sin is not only personal but also structural, and to shape their active engagement toward peaceful and just societies. This is where other traditions (not least my own Lutheran Church) often have failed. However, while Wolterstorff's neo-Calvinist emphasis on liturgy as a motivator for action in and for the world is strong and useful, it seems somewhat forgetful of eucharistic spirituality, of the enjoyment (the Augustinian *frui*) of the divine in awe and wonder, of dwelling in adoration and in the communion of holy mystery. Since the stakes in peacebuilding are high and pitfalls are many, we need each other in the ecumenical family—for mutual enrichment, for correction, and for encouragement. Keeping this insight alive is necessary as churches strive to make progress on the journey to visible unity.

Following the Prince of *shalom* ("peace with justice, just peace") wherever we are and in whatever challenges we face, requires us to think hard about our time and place. We must contribute what we realize is right in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rather than what is acceptable to the powers of the day. As the delegates of the 1925 Stockholm Conference, with the horrors of World War I just seven years behind them, put it:

> We summon the Churches to share with us our sense of the horror of war, and of its futility as a means of settling international disputes, and to pray and work for the fulfilment of the promise that under the

27. Even though the wording does not exist in the Benedictine monastic rule from the 6th century, the motto has been understood as a summary of the *Rule's* 48th chapter about the daily manual labour of the monks, built on the conviction: "Idleness is the enemy of the soul" (*The Rule of Benedict*, trans. Leonard Doyle, Order of Saint Benedict Archive, https://www.archive.osb.org/rb/text/toc.html).

28. Nikolaos Tsirevelos, "Liturgy After the Liturgy: A Code Phrase Exhorting to Missionary Outreach Introduced by Archbishop Anastasios of Albania," *Theology & Culture* 5 (2022): 49–69.

29. Martin Luther, "On the Freedom of a Christian" (1520), *Weimarer Ausgabe*, vol. 7 (WA 7), 36. *(De libertate Christiana,* ad 27: "Ecce sic fluit ex fide charitas et gaudium in domine et ex charitate hilaris, libens, liber animus ad sponte serviendum proximo").

sceptre of the Prince of Peace, "mercy and truth shall meet together, righteousness and peace shall kiss each other."[30]

Unity must never be the altar on which justice is sacrificed—neither in and between churches nor in the world. This injustice happens when agreements are made that hide the costs others are paying for such unity. It happens when the Church fosters Christian nationalism and aligns itself or subdues itself to worldly powers instead of speaking out for justice for the "little ones," those whom Jesus put centre stage. "Theology that only intrigues the mind while neglecting wounded bodies is complicit in injustice."[31]

When Christian faith is hijacked to justify injustice against women, against the poor, migrants; when communities are marginalized because of race, and some are dehumanized, it is a litmus test for the leadership of the church and all Christians: How do they/we in words and deeds confess and practise our faith in God, who created all humans in the image of God?[32] How is the Church "a credible icon of the triune God" in the world? [33]

In this, we need honest ecumenism. Justice and peace must embrace when the different branches of the Church talk about each other and work together. The kiss of justice and peace needs to be sought also when people of different faiths and no faith engage together in peacebuilding.

## Sixth thesis: Faith is resistance.

Faith is about not losing trust in face of evil. In theological theory, where evil puts faith to the test, theodicy is the main question. In praxis, *pistis* can actually grow in such situations. Martin Luther went so far as to say: "God can be encountered only on the cross and in suffering."[34] This sounds harsh in cultures that are used

30. G. K. A. Bell, ed., *The Stockholm Conference 1925: The Official Report of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work held in Stockholm, 19–30 August 1925*, 713; Nathan Söderblom, *Kristenhetens möte i Stockholm: Augusti nittonhundratjugufem* (Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelses bokförlag, 1926), 678.

31. GETI, "Message from GETI 2025," 4.3.

32. Regarding (in)justice for women, with perspectives from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, see Mary Mikhael, "The Christian Woman," in *Arabic Christian Theology: A Contemporary Global Evangelical Perspective*, ed. Andrea Zaki Stephanous (Zondervan Academic, 2019), 297–373.

33. "The Church knows that it is called upon to live in the world as a credible icon of the triune God" (keynote address by Kurt Cardinal Koch, delivered at the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order at the Logos Papal Centre of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, 25 October 2025, 4).

34. *At Deum non inveniri nisi in passionibus et cruce* (Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* [1518], *Weimarer Ausgabe*, vol. 1 [WA 1], 362, 28s [thesis XXI]; English translation: https://bookofconcord.org/other-resources/sources-and-context/heidelberg-disputation/).

to peace and prosperity. But it rang true when a Palestinian priest told me during the war in Gaza after 7 October 2023:

> In Gaza, people are not asking: Where is God? They say: God is our only refuge. But they are asking: Where is humanity? Where are those who have spent millions on teaching us about human rights? Where are they now, when our human rights and dignity are taken away from us?[35]

Or as the woman running a trauma healing institute in Ukraine, where they use both psychiatrists and Bible stories, said: "In the fourth year of war this big heap of dirt is drowning us, but no matter how deep the darkness, we must keep being here as the light of God."[36]

Or as Dietrich Bonhoeffer has expressed it: "We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice; we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself."[37]

When churches come together and strive to be one, they are called not only to resist personal sin and the sins of the Church as institutions, but also to resist structural evil. This should be done in a spirit of love, as Cynthia Moe-Lobeda has argued.[38] For example, the connection of ecology and justice requires understanding of the interacting forces that propel an unwholesome future for people and planet. Based on love, Moe-Lobeda develops a moral vision that cannot do without ethically motivated action. If sin has a structural character, then love also can be understood structurally, namely as an economic-ecological vocation and a political as well as interpersonal vocation.[39]

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35. Personal communication during *Himmelske Dagar*, Silkeborg, Denmark, 29 May to 1 June 2025.

36. Communication to an ecumenical delegation of Nordic church leaders during a solidarity visit to Ukraine from 29 September to 3 October 2025.

37. The expression "spoke in the wheel" (*dem Rad in die Speichen fallen*) has been attributed to Bonhoeffer in various ways, both in the 1930s and during his time in prison in the mid-1940s. He used it in his 1933 article "Die Kirche vor der Judenfrage," *Werke*, Bd. 12 [Collected Works, vol. 12]: Berlin 1932–33 (Christian Kaiser, 1997), 353f.). *See also* Wolfgang Huber, "Dem Rad in die Speichen fallen: Dietrich Bonhoeffers Weg in den Widerstand," *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 4 (2020): 115–17, and Kirsten Busch Nielsen et al., eds., *Dem Rad in die Speichen fallen* [*A Spoke in the Wheel*]*: Das Politische in der Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2014).

38. Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Fortress Press, 2013).

39. Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, xviii, 183.

These witnesses of faith also show how faith, hope, and love are and must be interrelated. Faith without love is "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1). As Werner Jeanrond remarks: "For many theologians, faith has been more important than love, whereas in my assessment, love is more important than faith."[40] At any rate, faith without love is outright dangerous. Faith without love comes with oppression instead of resistance against evil. Jeanrond suggests that we need to acknowledge the dialectic of love and faith. It is precisely this dialectic that "might be able to protect faith from hubris and from claims to power and control, and it ought to protect love from reducing itself to mere works of charity or romantic sentimentality."[41]

## Seventh thesis: We need a new dialectic theology.

The main reason for this is that faith distinguishes without separating. As we have already seen, the distinction between *fides quae* and *fides qua* is important and relevant, but it does not mean separation of the two. The process of nurturing and showing trust cannot be separated from where the trust is directed and what its goal is. Similarly, word and action can be distinguished, but from the perspective of faith, they cannot be separated. Prayer and work belong together. "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead" (James 2:26).

The same goes for faith as a personal and a communal phenomenon. Faith resides in a person, but it also resides in the community of the church. This can be distinguished, but it should not be separated. Because if faith only resides with the church, the faithful are kept in a state of immaturity. If faith only resides in the believing person, this leads to pietism and to an individualism that hurts communion and community in the Body of Christ.

Such dialectic relationships, as well as the complexity of the five Ps, calls for a new dialectic theology. The old dialectic theology, born after World War I in a time of crisis, is widely associated with Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) and the stereotypes *senkrecht von oben* ("vertically from above") and *Offenbarungspositivismus* ("positivism of revelation"). It emphasized the radical difference between God and humans, and the discontinuity between human knowledge and divine revelation.

While focus on discontinuity and radical difference may have had its merits in the framework of a deterministic Newtonian world view, it is inadequate

40. Werner Jeanrond, *Faith and Love* (forthcoming), chs. 1, 4.

41. Jeanrond, *Faith and Love*, chs. 1, 5.

for a universe marked by entanglement and emerging complexities.[42] It is also insufficient when it comes to the creation-centred approach needed to overcome anthropocentric shortcomings. Moreover, it is not very helpful when it comes to managing plurality and overlapping identities. These days, many people live with hybrid identities, often due to migration. One and the same family can have members from different parts of one religious tradition as well as members from different religious traditions. A dialectic of either/or is mostly unhelpful in daily life, as well as in the celebration of religious holidays and festivals—and maybe even more so when it comes to death and burial. If, in such situations, clergy from different backgrounds hold onto the dialectic of either/or, the result can very well be pastoral cruelty.

A new dialectic theology would be less occupied with difference and discontinuity and more focused on continuity and relationships between global and local, inwardness and outwardness, pastoral and doctrinal. God's faithfulness on the one hand and human lack of faithfulness to the basic standards of the love commandment and the golden rule on the other hand require the Church to move beyond beautiful words about ecumenism and unity to concrete acts, in ways that are glocal, combine contemplation and action, work and prayer, and express pastoral wisdom.

I would like to elaborate on this need for a new dialectic theology with an example from my own Lutheran tradition. Lutheran theology is deeply steeped in dialectics. It frequently comes across "couplewise," in pairs, such as law and gospel, humans as simultaneously justified and sinners (*simul iustus et peccator*), God's alien work and God's own work (*opus alienum* and *opus proprium*), our being before God and before humans (*coram deo* and *coram hominibus*), freedom and service, and theology of glory and theology of the cross (*theologia gloriae* and *theologia crucis*). Dialectics also applies to faith itself in its being torn between the certainty of trust and the reality of doubt (*Anfechtung*), because faith must deal both with God hidden and with God revealed (*deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus*). Some of these pairs represent a simultaneous both/and; others signify both/and over time, and depending on circumstances; and yet others represent an either/or. It is the hallmark of a good theologian to be able to discern the ways these dialectical relationships are supposed to work out.

42. The 2025 article by nanotechnologist Maria Strømme, "Universal Consciousness as Foundational Field: A Theoretical Bridge Between Quantum Physics and Non-dual Philosophy," illustrates the difference between a Newtonian world view and an understanding of the universe in view of quantum physics (*AIP Advances* 15, 115319 [2025], https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0290984). On the importance of understanding time in light of modern physics, see also Antje Jackelén, *Time and Eternity: The Question of Time in Church, Science, and Theology* (Templeton Foundation Press, 2005), 121–98.

It is worth noting that the terms dialectic and dialogue share the same root: namely, the Greek verb διαλέγεσθαι, meaning "to have a conversation, to talk." The new dialectic theology finds its practical application in dialogue and beyond dialogue, in common praxis. Such dialogue is more than a method. As Pope Leo XIV said in regard to *Nostra Aetate*, the declaration by the Second Vatican Council on the relation of the Roman Catholic Church to other religions: "This historic document ... opened our eyes to a simple yet profound principle: dialogue is *not a tactic or a tool, but a way of life*—a journey of the heart that transforms everyone involved, the one who listens and the one who speaks" (emphasis added).[43] Put differently, such dialogue must also lead to diapraxis, namely relationships where common praxis is essential. Diapraxis is dialogue as action and entails a "contextual approach to dialogue, where people meet to reveal and transform their shared reality."[44]

## Eighth thesis: A theology of the cross is a model for a new relational-dialectic theology.

The new, relational-dialectic theology I am calling for is always about relationships between poles. In the case of *simul iustus et peccator*, the dialectic implies a both/and relationship, whereas theology of glory and theology of the cross represent an either/or, as Luther argued in the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518.[45] While meant to contain Luther's critiques of scholastic theology within the fold, the disputation achieved rather the opposite, with Luther's arguments "capturing the imaginations of those who witnessed his performance."[46] Deanna Thompson suggests that it was Luther's retelling the story of human experience in light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, together with the use of evocative biblical metaphors and images, that gave his listeners and readers a compelling new vision for doing theology and being a theologian.[47] Experience matters, and God is experienced as hidden in the suffering of Christ. However, at the end of the disputation, hope and joy reign, because Christians always see the cross "through the lens of resurrection."[48]

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43. Pope Leo XIV, "Commemoration of the Conciliar Declaration 'Nostra Aetate,'" 28 October 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/october/documents/20251028-nostra-aetate.html.

44. Lissi Rasmussen, "From Diapraxis to Dialogue: Christian-Muslim Relations," in *Dialogue in Action: Essays in Honour of Johannes Aagaard*, ed. Lars Thunberg et al. (Prajna Publications, 1988), 282.

45. Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation*, WA 1, 353–74.

46. Deanna A. Thompson, *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism, and the Cross* (Fortress Press, 2004), 15.

47. Thompson, *Crossing the Divide*, 15.

48. Thompson, *Crossing the Divide*, 17.

As always, there are pitfalls also with a theology of the cross. Does it glorify self-renunciation and suffering? Yes, it has been and it can be used that way. Women and postcolonial theologians especially have fiercely criticized disempowering uses of the theology of the cross. For example, in her postcolonial Christology, Wonhee Anne Joh criticizes understandings of the cross that have "perpetuated subjection and submission to self-abnegation as a 'true' sign of Christian discipleship."[49] For her, the convergence of differences in Christology—divine and human, transcendence and immanence, holy and abject as well as the Korean terms *han* ("suffering") and *jeong* ("right-relation")—leads to a deepened and radicalized understanding of relationality: "The double gesture on the cross as homage *and* menace to empire works to challenge radically much of the dualistic thinking that is the foundation of Christian theology" (emphasis in the original).[50] Thus, Joh also points in the direction of a hermeneutical use of relational dialectics.

Does a theology of the cross play Good Friday and Easter off against each other? Yes, this can also happen. Karl Barth understood the Western church as inclined towards the cross, and the Eastern church as more focused on the resurrection—and hence more inclined towards a *theologia gloriae*. He conceded that Luther was right in working out the Western tendency, but "we ought not to erect and fix any opposition; for there is no *theologia crucis* which does not have its complement in the *theologia gloriae*. Of course, there is no Easter without Good Friday, but equally certainly, there is no Good Friday without Easter!"[51] While Barth is correct in this, he overlooks that it is not the ontology that is the point of the distinction between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross, but rather the hermeneutics it offers. As Luther concludes: "Thus true theology and true knowledge of God lie in Christ the crucified one."[52] Hence, Jürgen Moltmann rightly observes that Luther uses the *theologia crucis* "strictly as a new principle of theological epistemology."[53] For example, Luther understands the cross of Christ as God's protest against the misuse of God's name "for the purpose of religious consummation of human wisdom, human works, and the Christian imperialism of medieval ecclesiastical society. It is *a protest for the freedom of faith*" (emphasis added).[54] With a theology of the cross

49. Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 71.

50. Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 77.

51. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (Harper and Row, 1959), 114.

52. Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation*, Thesis 20 (WA 1, 362, 18s): Ergo in Christo crucifixo est vera Theologia et cognitio Dei.

53. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Fortress Press, 1993), 207f.

54. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 208.

we speak of a God beyond metaphysics (Hegel) and beyond morality (Kant) and avoid the misconception of an apathetic God.[55]

The theology of the cross is to be understood as an epistemic key, allowing for "transgressive knowledge—a theologian of the cross should constantly transgress the limits of accepted epistemes."[56] Also, this understanding needs to be handled with care and responsibility in global and local contexts. Mary Solberg, for example, has asked whether a privileged church can claim an epistemology of the cross and whether a theology of the cross, in spite of an epistemological understanding, still glorifies suffering.[57] However, as Vítor Westhelle points out, "Jesus died on the cross because he named the law that kills and practised the healing that restores."[58] The law here signifies (in the Pauline sense) powers that destroy relations and kill bodies. Therefore, the two questions Why did Jesus die? and Why do people suffer? belong together. Westhelle suggests that the relationship between these two questions points us to "a concealed truth in suffering that risks disclosing the nature of our societal and human relations—discloses it in ways we might not otherwise endure."[59] This is certainly a more complex way of rendering the basic statement that a theologian of the cross will call things what they are, because he or she has learnt to see God hidden in the suffering and humiliation of Christ on the cross and therefore is sensitive to suffering and injustice.[60]

Theologians of glory are obsessed with (God's) glory and power and hence look at the world through a filter of power, glory, and control.[61] They can sacrifice justice for unity. They can call something peace that is not peace. They are more inclined to love what is like, rather than to love that which is different and other.

Translated into praxis, a theologian of the cross will never pay more attention to two men kissing each other than to thousands of civilians killed in war. Or become so occupied with the internal dynamics of the church as to forget about the wellbeing of God's beloved creation and all its creatures. It is the kiss of justice and peace under the promise of God's faithfulness that a theologian of

55. Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 235–78.

56. Vítor Westhelle, *The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross* (Fortress Press, 2006), 84.

57. Mary M. Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross* (State University of New York Press, 1997), 141, 159.

58. Westhelle, *Scandalous God*, 85.

59. Westhelle, *Scandalous God*, 84.

60. Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation*, Thesis 21 (WA 1, 362, 21s): "Theologo gloriae dicit malum bonum et bonum malum; theologus crucis dicit id quod res est."

61. Such patterns can be recognized in various forms of fundamentalism and their consequences. They cause theological, political, ecclesial, and personal challenges, and crises all over the world.

the cross is after. This is where *fides quae* and *fides qua* come together in both: *Kyrie eleison* and *Gloria in excelsis Deo*: Lord, have mercy and Glory to God in the Highest.

## In conclusion

Will faith reach fulfilment? One answer simply is: Not on this side of the eschaton. Not until the divine consummation of creation, when God will wipe every tear from our eyes (Rev. 21:4), and when all will have access to "the river of the water of life" and "the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:1–2).

But there is a second answer, too: Since God's reign has come near with Christ (Mark 1:15) and since we have been given a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3), and because the Holy Spirit continues to bring this to life in the hearts and minds of people across generations (Rom. 8:26–27; 1 Cor. 12:4–11; Gal. 5:22–23), we have every reason to trust, believe, pray, and work for the embrace of justice and peace on this side of the eschaton.

In this imperfect world, we are gifted with visions and tools that give peacework direction and strength. As children of God, we are co-creatures with all other living beings and at the same time also God's created co-creators.[62] We know alternatives the secular world may miss.

Let me conclude these eight theses on faith and ecumenism with some words from Martin Luther:

> Faith is a living, courageously daring confidence in God's grace, so certain that one would die a thousand times for it. And such trust and knowledge of divine grace make a person joyful, defiant, and full of desire toward God and all creatures: this is what the Holy Spirit does in faith.[63]

62. The term *created co-creator* was coined and developed by Philip Hefner in *The Human Factor*. It has since proved fruitful in the dialogue between theologians and scientists as well as in revisiting the theology of creation in the context of environmental degradation and climate change. In the latter context, the term has been supplemented with the concept of *co-creatures* to overcome an anthropocentrism that has been and is detrimental to "the rest" of creation.

63. Martin Luther, *Vorrede auf die Epistel an die Römer* (WA Abt. 3, Band 7), 11, 16–19: "Glaube ist eine lebendige, erwegene Zuversicht auf Gottes Gnade, so gewiß, daß er tausendmal drüber stürbe. Und solche Zuversicht und Erkenntnis göttlicher Gnade macht fröhlich, trotzig und voller Lust gegen Gott und alle Kreaturen: das macht der Heilige Geist im Glauben." (Language adapted; English translation by author).

The German word that I have translated into "courageously daring" is *erwegen*. This word is no longer in use in modern German and is hard to translate, since it can take on several meanings. However, Luther uses it frequently. On many occasions, *erwegen* comes across as something active and bold.[64] It seems to contain the word *weg* ("way, path") and indicate activity, motion. This can be seen as a reflection of the process associated with *fides qua* and the importance of putting one's trust in the right place. Faith includes a dimension of courageous daring. On the one hand, it is a gift to be received; on the other, it includes bold risk taking. As Claudia Welz puts it: "Trust, as a deliberate, conscious act of entrusting oneself to another, is a risk that cannot be reduced to an affective movement."[65]

Luther describes the energy of faith in strong terms. Trust in the grace of God makes one joyful, but also defiant, prone to resist, and full of desire. Such experience does not allow one to sit still. As Luther continues to say:

> Therefore, without coercion, you become willing and full of joyful desire to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer several kinds of things for the love and praise of God, who has shown you such grace. Therefore, it is impossible to separate works and faith, as impossible as it is to separate burning and shining from fire.[66]

This is how it should work for ecumenism as well.

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64. Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, Lfg. 5 (1861), Bd. 3 (1862), Sp. 1048, Z. 66; s.v. "erwegen," Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, https://www.dwds.de/wb.

65. Welz, "Vertrauen," 380: "Vertrauen als reflektiertes, gewolltes Sich-Anvertrauen ist ein Wagnis, das sich nicht auf eine affektive Bewegung reduzieren lässt."

66. Martin Luther, Vorrede, 11, 19–23. "Daher wird der Mensch ohne Zwang willig und voller Lust, jedermann Gutes zu tun, jedermann zu dienen, allerlei zu leiden, Gott zu Liebe und zu Lob, der einem solche Gnade erzeigt hat. Daher ist es unmöglich, Werk vom Glauben zu scheiden, ja so unmöglich, wie Brennen und Leuchten vom Feuer nicht geschieden werden kann." (Language adapted; English translation by author).

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## Keynote Address—The Triune God and the Identity of the Church

*H. E. Dr Kurt Cardinal Koch*

The World Council of Churches (WCC) defines itself in its Constitution and Rules as "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[67] With this basic statement, the WCC expresses its ecclesial identity of faith. By professing Jesus Christ as God and Saviour and allowing this profession to flow into the trinitarian doxology, it makes it unmistakably clear that it stands on the ground of the Council of Nicaea.

67. *Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches*, as amended by the central committee of the WCC in Geneva, Switzerland, June 2023, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2026-03/Constitution-and-Rules-of-the-WCC-June%202023.pdf.

## Gift of a common Christian creed

This is self-evident today, but it has not always been the case throughout history. At the beginning of the 4th century, a fierce dispute broke out, mainly in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, highlighting that the fundamental question of who Jesus Christ is had become the "problem of Christian monotheism."[68] The theological debate has focused primarily on how Christian belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God can be harmoniously reconciled with the equally Christian belief in the one God in terms of the monotheistic confession.

The dispute was primarily provoked by the Alexandrian presbyter Arius, who advocated strict monotheism in line with the philosophical thinking of the time. To maintain this position, he excluded Jesus Christ from the concept of God. In his conviction that there can only be one God, Jesus Christ could not be the Son of God in the true sense, but only an intermediary being whom God used in the creation of the world and in his relations with human beings. This does not mean, of course, that Jesus Christ is simply a creature like the others; rather, he is ontologically distinguished as a creature before all creation. The Son is indeed created by God, but not like the other creatures. However, because of the strong emphasis on the transcendence and unity of God, Jesus Christ could not, in Arius' view, be eternal in the same way as God. Only the one God can be uncreated and eternal.[69]

Since this serious doctrinal problem could not be resolved at the local synods of the church in Alexandria, Emperor Constantine summoned all bishops to a pan-church synod in the city of Nicaea in Asia Minor. In the Letter of the Synod of Nicaea to the Egyptians, the bishops announced after lengthy deliberations that they had unanimously decided to anathematize Arius' "hostile attitude towards the faith" and "his blasphemous statements and designations, with which he reviled the Son of God." The bishops thus rejected the model of strict philosophical monotheism propagated by Arius, stating in the Nicene Creed that the one Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God: "born of the Father as the only begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, born, not created, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made in heaven and on earth."

While the Council of Nicaea defined belief in Jesus Christ, it only mentioned belief in the Holy Spirit in general terms: "and in the Holy Spirit."

68. Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger, "Das Credo von Nikaia und Konstantinopel: Geschichte, Struktur und Gehalt," in *Theologische Prinzipienlehre: Bausteine der Fundamentaltheologie* (Kösel, 1982), 123.

69. Theofried Böhm, "Die Theologie des Arius," in Ulrich Heil and Jan-Heiner Tück, eds., *Nizäa: das erste Konzil: Historische, theologische und ökumenische Perspektiven* (Herder, 2025), 111–26.

It was not until the Council of Constantinople that the creed concerning the Holy Spirit was defined in detail. This enabled the formulation of the dogma of the Holy Trinity, which is specific to Christian monotheism. The Nicene Creed therefore marks an important, albeit incomplete, step towards the Great Creed of Constantinople in 381 CE.

## The confession of Christ as interpretation of the communication between the Son and the Father

The decisive term in the Nicene Creed is the Greek word *homoousios*. This raises the question of whether the Council Fathers did not thereby "Hellenize" the biblical faith and burden it with a foreign philosophy, as the Council of Nicaea has been repeatedly accused of doing by many theologians since the Protestant church historian Adolf von Harnack in the 19th century. According to Harnack, not the Son but only the Father belongs in the Gospel as proclaimed by Jesus,[70] which is why Christological dogma would have replaced the Gospel of Jesus with a construct of Greek philosophy.

However, when we compare the Christological confession of Nicaea with the confession of Christ as presented in the New Testament, we find more similarities than differences. In the New Testament, Jesus is most clearly seen as the Son of the heavenly Father in his prayers. So the innermost core of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is encountered in the predication of Jesus as the Son. If the essence of the biblical view of Jesus is his constant prayerful communication with his Father, then it is reasonable to conclude that the innermost mystery of Jesus, as revealed in Scripture—that he is the faithful Son of the Father—was accurately expressed at the Council of Nicaea with the term *homoousios*. With this statement, the council provided an adequate interpretation of Jesus' prayer, as Joseph Ratzinger rightly observed: "The core of the dogma defined in the early church councils is the assertion that Jesus is the true Son of God, of the same substance as the Father, and through the incarnation, of the same substance as us. Ultimately, this definition is an interpretation of the life and death of Jesus, which was always destined to be the conversation between the Son and the Father."[71]

The Council of Nicaea did not Hellenize the Christian faith with the word *homoousios*; rather, it expressed the incomparable newness and uniqueness that is visible in the relationship between the Son and the Father as attested to in the

70. Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, ed. Trutz Rendtorff (Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999), 154.

71. Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger, "Christologische Orientierungspunkte," in *Schauen auf den Durchbohrten: Versuche zu einer spirituellen Christologie* (Johannes Verlag, 1984), 29.

Bible. Regarding Christological dogma, it is therefore more accurate to speak of "a Christianisation of Greek thought than a Hellenisation of the Gospel."[72] While the Council of Nicaea used contemporary philosophy to articulate the distinguishing features of the Christian faith, it was in fact the Alexandrian presbyter Arius who adapted the Christian faith to the enlightened Greek thinking of the time, thereby transforming it.

## Christian transformation in the concept of God

This conclusion is particularly evident when we consider the transformation in the concept of God that began at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and was completed at the Council of Constantinople in 381 compared to the Greek concept of God. This is characterized by the assumption of a strict unity without relations, which is why multiplicity represents an inferior reality. From a religious point of view, ancient thinking considers only unity to be divine, whereas multiplicity arises from decay and tends towards it, and therefore appears as the decay of unity.

By contrast, the Council of Nicaea's definition of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father and the subsequent exposition of the mystery of God's one substance in three divine persons opens up space for multiplicity in the concept of God itself. Consequently, unity and multiplicity are both reflection and participation in the divine: "Not only is unity divine, but multiplicity is also an original concept with an inner reason in God himself."[73] Unity and multiplicity thus lie ontologically on the same level, with the consequence that the God revealed in Christianity is precisely one in the multiplicity of relationships between the divine persons.

Another closely related fact is that the trinitarian concept of God has broken down the sole dominance of substance thinking. Instead, relation is now regarded as an equally essential mode of reality as substance. Consequently, God is no longer to be considered a monadic unity, but rather as unity in relation. The relationship between the eternal Son and the eternal Father also shows that not only relationships exist in God but also that God himself is "a being of relationship."[74]

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72. Karl-Heinz Menke, "Das Homoousios to Patri scheidet die Geister: Zur kriteriellen Funktion des Symbolum Nicaenum," in *Nizäa—das erste Konzil: Historische, theologische und ökumenische Perspektiven*, ed. Ulrich Heil and Jan-Heiner Tück (Herder, 2025), 365.

73. Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum: Vorlesungen über das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis* (Kösel, 1968), 139–40.

74. Jan-Heiner Tück, "Die Homoousie eine 'Revolution' im Gottesbegriff? Das nizänische Bekenntnis als Weichenstellung," in *Nizäa—das erste Konzil*, 442.

Thus, the Christian transformation in the concept of God consists of the harmonious coexistence of unity and multiplicity in God. On the one hand, the trinitarian mystery of God contains the beautiful message that there is room for the other in God himself. The Father is different from the Son, and the Son is different from the Holy Spirit. There is an original and beautiful diversity of persons living in the divine Trinity. Accordingly, the Church has condemned modalism as heretical, since this doctrine asserts that the one divine being merely manifests itself in three different ways. However, the Church professes that God is also different in the distinctness of persons within himself.

On the other hand, the diversity of the divine persons in the Trinity precludes an unconnected pluralism. Although the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct from one another, the divine persons live as heavenly trialogue partners on the same level of being. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. There is an original and wonderful unity of persons in God or, as the Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov says, a "pre-eternal Trinitarian council."[75] The Church has, therefore, condemned tritheism—which misunderstands the Trinity as a federalist community of gods—as heresy. For the Church professes that God is in himself a living community in the original relational unity of love.

## The Church as icon of the Trinity

This combination of unity and multiplicity in God has consequences for the theological description of the Church's identity. The Church knows that it is called upon to live in the world as a credible icon of the triune God. In this sense, Faith and Order is also convinced that the "quality of synodality or conciliarity reflects the mystery of the trinitarian life of God," [76] insofar as God reveals himself in his innermost life as *syn* ("with")—as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In Catholic ecclesiology, the Church as icon of the Trinity is understood as a communion in the unity of the universal Church and the multiplicity of local churches constituted by bishops. Just as the unity of God can be recognized in the Trinity of Persons, so too can the unity of the universal Church be recognized and realized in the multiplicity of local churches. And just as in the Trinity, the triunity of persons neither negates nor produces the unity of the divine substance, so too the one universal Church is something qualitatively different from a mere federation of independent individual churches, even though it

75. Paul Evdokimov, "Welches sind die Hauptanliegen der orthodoxen Kirche gegenüber der katholischen Kirche?," *Concilium* 2 (1966): 267.

76. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), §53.

consists of and is made up of local churches. In this sense, the Catholic Church understands itself as both *communio ecclesiae* and *communio ecclesiarum*.

The Second Vatican Council recalled this ecclesiological intertwining of the plural *churches* with the singular *Church*. This intertwining encompasses the ecumenical problem as a whole; in this context, the plural *churches* refers to churches and communities not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church. The ecumenical problem lies in the fact that the Catholic model of the unity of the universal Church and the multiplicity of local churches cannot simply be transferred and applied to those churches and communities that have come into being through divisions, since divisions are fundamentally alien to the innermost nature of God.

In order to make further progress toward the hoped-for unity, two models must be ruled out. The first is the model of so-called *ecumenism of return*, which would involve all non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities returning to the bosom of the Catholic Church. This model would confuse the search for unity with uniformity and absolutize it, thus representing ecclesiological modalism in ecumenism.

However, the model described by Cardinal Walter Kasper as *federation ecumenism* must also be ruled out.[77] According to this model, all churches that are still separated would recognize each other as churches and join together in unity on the basis of the one baptism while preserving their current status quo. However, this model, which is favoured above all in the Protestant world, is not conceivable as a solution to the ecumenical problem from a Catholic or Orthodox perspective, because its absolutization of diversity represents an ecclesiological tritheism. If more or less everything were to remain status quo in the churches that are still separate, it would be difficult to speak of church unity.

## Nicaea as a milestone in ecumenical unity

The insight that these two paths do not lead to the future was already recognized by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal, who emphasized that unity that does not depend on multiplicity is dictatorship and that multiplicity that does not depend on unity is anarchy. In the ecumenical movement, too, we must constantly seek a middle way between dictatorship and anarchy. And this means that the ecumenical movement is called and obliged to reconsider the fundamental relationship between unity and multiplicity in a fundamental way:

77. Walter Kasper, *Der Wahrheit auf der Spur: Mein Weg in Kirche und Theologie* (Herder, 2025), 142.

namely, in the light of the trinitarian mystery, in order to gain an ecumenical identity for the Church in this way.

In this sense, I see the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea as a particular challenge and opportunity. It reminds us that ecumenism is fundamentally a matter of faith, and that the unity of the Church cannot be rediscovered without the truth of faith. This is because its restoration requires agreement on the essential content of the faith, not only among today's churches and ecclesial communities, but also with the Church of the past and, above all, its apostolic origins. The unity of the Church can never be anything other than unity in the apostolic faith—the faith handed down and entrusted to every new member of the Body of Christ at baptism.

The Council of Nicaea is of particular ecumenical significance because it took place at a time when Christianity had not yet been wounded by the numerous divisions that followed. Its creed is therefore common to all Christian churches and ecclesial communities, uniting them to this day. As the Protestant ecumenist Wolfhart Pannenberg has emphasized, it is "associated with a claim to universal ecclesial validity and was also received by the early Church as binding on all Christians."[78] Its ecumenical significance cannot, therefore, be underestimated.

For this reason, it is to be hoped and desired that the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea will be celebrated by all of Christianity in an ecumenical spirit, and that the Creed will be reappropriated in ecumenical fellowship. This will allow further steps to be taken toward restoring the unity of the Church. This conference in Egypt, organized by Faith and Order, has a particular responsibility to reconsider questions of faith and church structures. If our shared reflection on the mystery of the triune God sheds new light on the identity of the Church, the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea could become a milestone in ecumenical unity.

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78. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Die Bedeutung des Bekenntnisses von Nicaea-Konstantinopel für den ökumenischen Dialog heute," in *Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie*, vol. 3: *Kirche und Ökumene* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 197.

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# Keynote Address—The Nicene Blueprint for the Unity of the Church: Upholding Holiness, Apostolicity, and Catholicity

*H. G. Bishop Dr Kyrillos*

## Introduction

I thank God that, after 17 centuries, we—representatives of Christians from every corner of the world—can gather to honour the First Council of Nicaea and to reflect on its enduring gift to the life and unity of the Church. I am grateful to the organizers of this Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order and deeply humbled to speak on behalf of the Coptic Orthodox Church. May these reflections be found worthy of the occasion and edifying to our common journey toward unity.

The Council of Nicaea remains decisive in Christian history—not only for its trinitarian and Christological definitions, but for its enduring vision of church unity. The conciliar texts repeatedly affirm visible oneness—a unity rooted not in compromise, but in fidelity. Yet unity is not achieved by the Creed alone; it is inseparable from the Church's defining attributes.

Today, I wish to propose a simple thesis: the oneness of the Church depends upon her holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. These three pillars are not optional adornments, but essential pillars for genuine and visible communion.

## Pillar One: Holiness

At Nicaea, holiness was understood both ontologically and soteriologically. The Church is holy because she is the Body of Christ—the dwelling place of divine grace, where humanity is sanctified and transfigured. As St Athanasius expressed it: "God became man to make man like God."[79]

Holiness, then, is not a moral achievement but a divine gift, rooted in obedience to scripture and in prayer, and realized in partaking of the Sacramental Mysteries. As St Cyril of Alexandria affirmed, "He took what is ours and gave us what is His," so we might fulfil the Father's command to "be holy" (1 Pet. 1:16).[80]

79. From Athanasius' *De incarnatione* 54:3.

80. From St Cyril of Alexandria's *Quod unus sit Christus.*

Holiness distinguished orthodoxy from heresy. Arius' teaching was not merely erroneous—it was unholy, because it arose from private, speculative reasoning rather than from the spirit of truth. By contrast, Nicaea was holy because it was guided by the Holy Spirit. The Fathers did not speak from themselves, but from what they had received.

The Second Ecumenical Council of 381 reaffirmed this same holiness as the fruit of the indwelling Spirit—the Spirit of sanctification, as St Athanasius called Him. The same Spirit who descended at Pentecost continued to guide the Church from Nicaea through Constantinople and Ephesus. St Cyril of Alexandria testified that this same Spirit inspired both Nicaea and Ephesus, ensuring their unity in faith and continuity in truth. Valerianus of Iconium even called both Nicaea and Cyril holy, because each was animated by the same divine Spirit.

Holiness, therefore, is the thread of continuity that runs through Pentecost, through the ecumenical councils, and through the life of the Church today.

But holiness also demands separation—a consecration. The Church must remain set apart from worldly ambition and political convenience, from anything that quenches the Spirit. To be holy is to conform our minds and wills to the word of God, not to bend Scripture to our opinions.

Finally, holiness defines the prophetic vocation of the Church. Like Jeremiah, the Church is called "to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:9–10). To be holy is to speak God's word faithfully—to expose falsehood, uproot sin, and plant the life of grace for the sanctification of the world.

## Pillar Two: Catholicity

The second pillar of oneness is catholicity—the fullness of faith and sacramental life, not merely geographical extension. Vincent of Lérins famously defined it as "that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all."[81]

Heresy, by contrast, is narrow and divisive, and is attached to an individual: Arius, Macedonius, Nestorius. Catholic faith, however, is universal in truth and essence.

81. From Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium* 2.

St Cyril of Jerusalem explained that the Church is called Catholic because she "teaches fully and unfailingly all the truths."[82] Even before Nicaea, St Alexander of Alexandria addressed his "beloved and most-honored partners in the liturgy of the Catholic Church" (τῆς καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας), affirming the apostolic doctrine of the "one and only apostolic catholic Church."[83]

Catholicity implies conciliarity—the Church journeying together on the same road (σύνοδος). It is not uniformity, but harmony of faith amid diversity. In every place and within every culture, the Church possesses the fullness of truth and grace in Christ. Diversity of expression does not fragment the Body; it reveals the richness of the one life in the Spirit.

The Nicene Creed itself embodies this catholicity. It was conceived by bishops from across the whole *oikoumene*, and it has received universal assent across centuries and continents. Whether in the confession of Christ's divinity or in the shared celebration of Pascha, catholicity manifests itself not only in doctrine, but in the lived communion of the faithful—the unity of the many in the fullness of the one faith.

This is a unity in diversity, not division in confusion. Catholicity holds together what the world separates. It allows the faith to be at once local and universal, ancient and ever new.

## Pillar Three: Apostolicity

If holiness gives the Church her divine character, and catholicity reveals her fullness, apostolicity grounds her in history, faith, and continuity. While holiness and catholicity describe the Church's inner life and breadth, apostolicity defines her lineage—her dependence upon the historic apostles and the living continuity of their faith.

Though the term apostolic was formally added to the Creed at Constantinople in 381, the idea was already foundational in the writings of St Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. St Athanasius insisted that neither he nor the Fathers of Nicaea innovated doctrine; they preserved the apostolic faith transmitted through Holy Scripture and Tradition.

82. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lecture 18, 23.

83. Alexander of Alexandria, Encyclical Letter on the deposition of Arius, 1.

In *De Decretis*, he writes:

> About the faith they did not write, "It seemed good," but "Thus believes the Catholic Church"... in order to show that their own sentiments were not novel, but apostolic; and what they wrote down was no discovery of theirs but it is the same as was taught by the Apostles ... and [their] view has been handed down from father to father....

To St Serapion he adds: "The Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers kept. For on this tradition the Church is founded, and if anyone abandons it, he cannot be a Christian nor have any right to the name."[84]

For this reason, our Coptic Orthodox Church calls him St Athanasius the Apostolic. He embodied fidelity to that same unbroken Tradition: "In accordance with the Apostolic Faith delivered to us by tradition from the Fathers, I have delivered the tradition, without inventing anything extraneous to it. What I learned, that have I inscribed conformably with the Holy Scriptures...."

Subsequent councils—Constantinople, Ephesus, and beyond—did not replace Nicaea but reaffirmed and deepened its confession under the same Spirit. St Cyril of Alexandria himself affirmed, "I have not departed from the Orthodox account of the faith nor offended against the Creed issued by the holy and great council convened at Nicaea."[85]

Apostolicity, therefore, demands continuity, not novelty—faithful interpretation, not reinterpretation. As St Vincent of Lérins wrote, the Church's task is to hold "old truths in a new way."[86]

The Church remains apostolic not only through her confession of the faith, but through her sacramental life, the succession of ministry, and the living tradition passed from father to father and from generation to generation.

## Conclusion

The Nicene formula for oneness teaches that unity is not achieved by lowering standards or setting aside differences, but by deeper fidelity to holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. These are not abstract descriptions; they form the very identity of the Church and of every Christian.

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84. Athanasius of Alexandria, *First Letter to Serapion concerning the Holy Spirit*, c. 359 CE.

85. Cyril of Alexandria, Letter 44.

86. Cyril of Alexandria, Letter 44.

Holiness directs us to the Spirit. Catholicity ensures the fullness of that faith across time and place. Apostolicity grounds us in the faith once delivered to the saints. Together, these three pillars uphold the Church's oneness and sustain her mission in the world.

Drawing from the image in Ephesians 3:17–18, we may claim that the Church in her holiness embodies the height of divine love, reaching towards God through prayer and the Sacramental Mysteries. In her catholicity, she expresses the width/breadth of God's mercy embracing all peoples, cultures, and tongues in the fullness of faith. And in her apostolicity, she manifests the length and depth of God's faithfulness found in the apostolic teachings which endure from generation to generation.

If the Church is to be one, she must live again by these same dimensions of divine love—height, width, length, and depth.

As we reflect upon our common desire for unity, we must ensure that our efforts are free from political motivation and calculation, and that they are faithful to Scripture, conformed to the Fathers, and rooted in the Apostolic Tradition.

And as we gather under the legacy of Nicaea, our ecumenical challenge is clear: true unity will come not from diplomacy or sentiment, but from recovering, retrieving, and reclaiming the Nicene vision—a unity that is holy, apostolic, and catholic, rooted in Christ, the One Lord of the one Church.

## Questions from the Floor

### Questions to the Most Rev. Archbishop

Question 1: You stated that theology of the cross will be less focused on two men kissing each other than on people being killed. My question is, Should theology rank moral issues in order of importance or should all sins and injustices be treated with equal seriousness in the eyes of God and the church?

Question 2: Thank you for your thought-provoking thesis. Not that I don't appreciate your distinction between believing the wrong stuff and putting faith in the wrong place. But a question comes to mind: If wrong faith is not believing the wrong stuff, what was the point of Nicaea?

## The Most Rev. Archbishop Antje Jackelén:

I understand your point that this is almost enough for the Seventh World Conference. I start from the end. I think I was not saying that believing the wrong stuff does not matter. It does matter. But I think that in theology we have oftentimes overrated the importance of time and history over the dimension of space. And I think if we think more about space—about how and where we place our faith; how that matters and how we see issues—that will change a little bit of our theology. I'm not saying that the creeds don't matter. I wouldn't be here if that were the case. But I also think, in spite of all the splendour and the importance of the creeds, they also have their limits.

I mean it's quite obvious that the word *love* is not really in there and yet, with the apostle Paul, we say "faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). I think what he believes is that faith and hope will come to a fulfilment but love is eternal. And yet, *love* is not in the Creed, which is sort of a limitation. Also, we know that the life and ministry of Jesus is not really in the Creed. So, in spite of all the splendour and importance the creeds have in keeping us together, we also need to see that they do not cover the whole ministry of Jesus. They do not cover the wholeness of Christian life in love.

And I think it is the superiority of love that makes me think that the Trinity is not only about unity and multiplicity; it's also about dynamic relationality. I think this is what I have learned from my Orthodox brothers and sisters. It's about this perichoresis. It's a dynamic going on. It's a dynamic of love. That is also the reason why I talked about what we pay more attention to than other things. I didn't say and I don't mean that there are things we shouldn't pay attention to at all that are hurting in our communities; that are hurting in people; that are hurting creation. But still with our human finitude, we have to make some priorities. And of course, when the blood of thousands and thousands of people innocently killed cries from the earth, we can't just close our ears to that and look in other places that are also important but don't have this cry of injustice in it. After all, it's the kiss of justice and peace which I'm after and which we all should be after, in line with Psalm 85.

## Question to H.E. Cardinal Koch

Question 1: Since the unity of the Church is not rooted only in baptism and unity is related particularly with the apostolicity and the apostolic faith of the Church, what has been believed everywhere always and by all? How would the concept of baptismal ecclesiology help the ecumenical endeavour for Christian unity?

Question 2: What specific steps must be taken so that the recognition of elements of sanctification and truth in other ecclesial communities can lead to a recognition of these communities as churches in the apostolic faith?

## H.E. Cardinal Koch:

I think what is common to all Christians is the apostolic origin of our faith. And in this sense, it seems to me very important that we discuss the relationship between the churches and communities today. But the Council of Nicaea invites us to widen our perspective and to see also the relation between the churches in the past and above all in the apostolic origins. This is for me very important and I think this is the common foundation of all ecumenical engagement of all churches.

And the second question: The Second Vatican Council has just recognized many elements in other churches because the leitmotif of a communal engagement in the Catholic Church is the exchange of gifts. That means no church is so poor that it cannot give a particular contribution for a wider unity. But no church is so rich that we must not accept the gifts of the other churches because we believe that every church has a gift from the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit has given these gifts not only for the Catholic and for the Lutheran and the Orthodox and the Oriental churches, but for all Christianity. To have an exchange of gifts is very important and in this sense, to have a wider view of unity, we must recognize these beautiful gifts in the other churches.

## Questions to H.G. Bishop Kyrillos

Question 1: Does not reception that is always interpretation often require reading the Tradition against the Tradition to truly receive it?

Question 2: You said that Arianism was rejected because it arose from private speculation rather than truth. But don't all theological advances come out of private speculation? Then they are shared with others in the church, then discerned with others, and sometimes rejected, sometimes accepted by the church? How can we do theology faithfully if private speculation is discouraged?

## H.G. Bishop Kyrillos:

There is an ongoing question, I think, of how private speculation was interpreted and how, later on, heresy was defined. Heresy was a new idea that was contradictory to what was established and this was not an easy determination to make. In the Council of Nicaea, there were actually ongoing debates and the

primary reference for all of their work was Scripture, which is not really focused on today when we talk about heresy and orthodoxy.

It was the way they looked at Scripture; the way they interpreted Scripture. Based on their interpretation, they made the conclusion whether it was as we heard in the first talk, intertextual; whether it was coherent; whether it was consistent with the sayings and the teachings that came before. The Council of Nicaea was unique because, as we know, it was the ecumenical work where people were gathering all together for the first time to make the same determinations—whereas before the local councils made these assessments on a local level. I think we see it in St Athanasius and all his writings, especially the *Contra Arianos*. It is an exegetical work where he is trying to set forth the hermeneutic of how to approach Scripture and interpret it appropriately. I think many times what I see in the modern context is that exegesis is not always linked directly with systematic theology, but this was the reality in Nicaea.

We say the same thing when there is a new idea. If I take some of the children from our Sunday school and give them an incorrect teaching, I'm confident—and I've seen this many times—they will be correct, not just from the grace of the Holy Spirit because it [the teaching] is foreign to the life of prayer, the teachings that we have, and to the Scripture. So, it is something that is very deeply rooted in the teaching and that's what we call the coherence of the teaching.

So, what we pray is what we believe and also what we see and read in the Fathers. I think this coherence is the reality we attempt to bring forth in our church. So, from generation to generation, it is passed to us in that way. It's not always easy and it sometimes comes by way of very deep and extensive discussions, but we are sure that through that gathering of prayer, through open-mindedness, through lack of stubbornness—I would say even in this discussion—the fullness of the truth always comes and the orthodox faith, the catholic faith, is always victorious. That's what we see, I think, in Nicaea: that when we are faithful, this truth always reveals itself. So, we must be, I say, obedient to that revelation.

## Question to all:

How do you understand the dynamics of power at play in the Council of Nicaea and in continuing processes of discernment? How do you balance trust in the Spirit with recognizing the reality of the use and misuse of power in such moments?

### The Most Rev. Archbishop Antje Jackelén:

I think we do this by returning to the example of the theology of the cross and glory as a hermeneutical key for this new dialectic theology. I think it is actually the idea of distinguishing without separating that gives the means to distinguish power that is healthy, power that needs to be exercised as a service to the community, to the communion, from power that is actually authoritarian and oppressing and not allowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit to fully flourish in the communion.

### Cardinal Koch:

I want to add two things. First of all, the council is a beautiful sign of how we can find a solution to problems. This is the issue of synodality: we have a synodal way for searching for solutions in the challenging situations that we have in the 4th century. The second issue is that the emperor had a very great role in the council. And this is for me a question. He had a great issue and a great role and that made the council. Today we don't have an emperor and few people are sad about this. But I have a question: When we want to have a new ecumenical council, who can play this role or convene councils and conclude councils? This is an issue and a question that I think we must also discuss in the ecumenical dialogues.

### H.G. Bishop Kyrillos:

I think this question always comes up when we are speaking of theology. The political realities are always a challenge that the Church has had to confront. It was a relatively peaceful time in the time of Nicaea, but as we see even in the life of Athanasius, most of his exiles were a result of misunderstanding or the difficult relationship that he had with different emperors. One emperor exiled him on two occasions.

We see that when the Church is able to deal with these political realities as Athanasius of Alexandria did in a very statesmanlike way, so that a lot of people with controversial perspectives saw how he was able not to be submissive to the political reality but to navigate the reality without compromising the faith. This was the challenge to the Church. And so in our Coptic Church after Chalcedon, it was a very different situation. Where the Church is moving, the councils are no longer even possible—only local synods at most. Now in the modern reality we have a different political situation. We have different countries. We don't have an official emperor, but there are different realities when we come together. Hopefully, we can put the Scripture and the faith and the Church and the king

of kings above all other kingdoms, so that we can find that truth that exists in whatever politics, whatever country, and whatever language.

## Plenary Panel—Unpacking Apostolic Faith: Living the Nicene Creed in Context

*Rev. Dr Mercedes García Bachmann, moderator*

This plenary panel sought to connect the celebration of Nicaea with faith in its many current dimensions and, in particular, with moving forward into the work of the Commission on Faith and Order in the coming years. The panel was composed of five speakers, each of whom was invited to address a particular angle. In order of appearance in the plenary, the panellists were:

- Prof. Dr Tamara Grdzelidze (Ilia State University of Georgia, Orthodox Church of Georgia)
- Rev. Dr Victor Lee (Bible College of Malaysia, Pentecostal World Fellowship)
- Dr Mutale Mulenga Kaunda (Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Pentecostal Assemblies of God)
- Rev. Prof. Dr Miroslav Volf (Yale Center for Faith and Culture, Episcopal Church USA, minister of Croatian Pentecostal Church)
- Rev. Prof. Dr Sandra Beardsall (Saskatoon Theological Union, United Church of Canada)

Two of the five are current Faith and Order commissioners, while a third is a former Faith and Order staff member. There are other common characteristics that some or all these distinguished scholars share, as one may gather from their conversation after their presentations.[87]

Dr Grdzelidze reviewed some of the earlier achievements of Faith and Order in terms of visible unity. "The search for visible unity must lead us to thinking broadly and dreaming big," she stated. Dr Grdzelidze challenged her own Orthodox world to consider whether "ecclesiological disagreements within the same family of churches, resulting from political causes affect Christian unity, [and] if so, can a church tormented by internal conflict lead its flock towards unity?"

87. See a video recording of this plenary panel at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5NkGtfA-20.

Dr Lee preferred a storytelling style, through which he reflected on the increasing importance of the Nicene Creed for him and for his church. Even though the Creed is not officially professed, there is "a deep sense of connection between Pentecostal spirituality and the broader Christian family."

Dr Mulenga emphasized the range of representatives at the Sixth World Conference with the search for unity at Nicaea and challenged the audience to re-imagine female voices making their way through the communities and bishops they nurtured.

For Dr Volf, "the absolutely crucial question for us is who is Jesus Christ for us today." The Gospels, Nicaea, and many other examples show us the need to watch that we "align our lives closer to what is, as witnessed by the Gospels, God's life among us as humans."

Dr Beardsall referred to the ways in which the Nicene Creed is accepted or not throughout the diversity of denominations in her home country and which Faith and Order resources have addressed already. She posed the question, subdivided into four items: "What would happen if we set generosity at the core of our relationship with the Nicene Creed, and with each other?"

The remaining time of the panel was spent on a wonderful dialogue that pivoted around issues of church growth and decline, new opportunities for personal and communal growth, and contextuality.

## Morning Reflection

*Rev. Prof. Dr Anne Zaki*[1]

When we read the Gospels, we get an idea of what Jesus was like from a collection of incidents and scenes of interaction with God the Father and different groups and individuals. But in this passage from Isaiah 42, we get an impression of Jesus' general demeanour, his daily attitude. It is as if Isaiah's prophecy is giving the people clues for how to identify the true Messiah when he comes.

First, he will be humble: "He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets" (Is. 42:2).[2] He will not promote himself, as was the custom of religious leaders at the time. He will not shout in the streets, calling people to his revival meetings and spiritual gatherings for the sake of reaching record attendance—preferably more than the gathering next door—rather than for the sake of reaching lost souls. Jesus did not need to self-advertise, because the content of truth and grace he offered was already attractive enough.

Second, he will be compassionate: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out" (Is. 42:3). He will seek out the wounded and heal them, whether the wound was caused by the evil of others, or their own evil choices. He will seek out everyone who has faded and breathe new life into them. He will set the crooked straight and restore the broken.

Third, he will be persevering: "He will not falter or be discouraged" (Is. 42:4a). Jesus will not give up. He will continue to be the God of the second chances, third chances, fourth, fifth, millionth chances. He will persevere in the areas where we get discouraged. He will endure when we falter. He will redeem what we give up on.

Fourth, he will be just "till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope" (Is. 42:4b). Jesus will not rest until "justice rolls on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream" (Amos 5:24), not only to his own people of Israel, but also to the nations inhabiting the far-off islands—those

1. Prof. Dr Anne Zaki is assistant professor of preaching and practical theology at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo.

2. Except where noted, the biblical passages in this reflection are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

who put their hope in him. This is what Jesus' daily life looked like. But what enabled and empowered such an attitude of humility, compassion, perseverance, and justice?

Paul answers this question for us in Philippians 2:6: Christ, "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage." Jesus, who is true God from true God, as the Nicene Creed confesses, did not try to grasp equality with God, or try to use it to his own advantage.

This stands in stark contrast to what Adam and Eve did, when they tried to grasp equality with God: "'For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Gen. 3:5–6).

They grasped equality with God when they desired: 1) absolute knowledge (anti-humility); 2) the right to use that knowledge to judge others (anti-compassion); 3) immediate glorification (anti-perseverance); 4) to become the centre of life and control it independently of God (anti-justice). In every way that Adam and Eve failed, Christ succeeded.

Where Adam and Eve became disobedient unto death, Christ became obedient unto death—even death on a cross. It was not enough that he emptied himself of his glory, taking on human likeness; he humbled himself further by dying a criminal's death. In his first humility he united himself with our humanity, and in his second humility he united himself with our sin.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). By the disobedience of the one man, we became sinners, and by the obedience of the other man we became the righteousness of God (Rom. 5:19). The One who first created us in his image now takes on our image, in order to restore to us God's image by inviting us to become in the likeness of Jesus.

This is why the verse that precedes the Christ hymn in Philippians 2 says, "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" (2:5). While verses 6–11 are a song about Christ, they are actually a song written for us. It is for our benefit so that we know how to live his life, having his attitude, so that Jesus can send us in the same way as the Father has sent him:

- In our relationships we are to put on Christ's attitude of humility, which looks like this today ...
- In our relationships we are to put on Christ's attitude of compassion, which looks like this today ...
- In our relationships we are to put on Christ's attitude of perseverance, which looks like this today ...
- In our relationships we are to put on Christ's attitude of justice, which looks like this today ...

### Christ the cornerstone

We are to align our lives according to his, marked by obedience in humility, compassion, perseverance, and justice. What was the result of Christ choosing not to consider equality with God something to be grasped?

> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9–11).

Everyone will be visibly united in Christ's worship and exaltation. May it be true unto us, on earth as it is in heaven.

## Keynote Address—Orthodox Political Ecclesiologies and Divisions Beyond Nicaea in Africa

*The Very Rev. Fr Dr Evangelos Thiani*[3]

### Church in or for the world?

> I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth (John 17:15–17).

3. The Very Rev. Fr Dr Evangelos E. M. Thiani teaches practical and public theology at Makarios III Seminary in Nairobi, the main school of theology for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa.

Church-state relations have experienced varying levels of support and rejection both within and outside the church in modern times. Is the church in and for the world? Or is the church in but not for the world? Some critics believe the church should focus solely on the Gospel and avoid involvement with secular institutions like the state and its "dirty" politics. For such critics, the church is a holy institution that should avoid worldly matters, such as the "dirty game" of politics.[4] This separation helps the church preserve its prophetic voice against the state. It further prevents complacency among religious leaders amid state failures and corruption, while avoiding theological conflicts that could influence politics or spark national disputes. In a contemporary pluralistic and democratic world, church-state separation safeguards religious pluralism and freedom, prevents the persecution of minority faiths, and maintains state neutrality.

Those who support limited church-state relations understand, as Augustine did, that although cooperation is necessary, the church and state are two separate institutions. One is an earthly city, and the other is the city of God—each with its own authority, secular and spiritual, and led by the citizens' choice.[5] The earthly city deals with worldly and temporal matters, while the city of God focuses on spiritual lives with a heavenly destiny. In this view, although the state operates in the world, it must do so under God's law; therefore, in this relationship, the church works with the state, holding a higher position than the state. Conversely, if the state is driven by moral decay and vices, it falls; if it wants to remain strong, it must maintain the church's purity.

The third approach involves aligning church-state relations so that they function together to promote religious and political issues. What the Orthodox call *symphonia,* "the one (God)–one (King) logic," exemplifies this.[6] These joint efforts combine resources to expand their influence, promote policies and laws based on spiritual and moral values, encourage civic participation, and strengthen community bonds. Here, the church continuously prays for the state and works alongside it in its endeavours, sanctifying the state's activities. Meanwhile, the state supports the church in reaching new heights in its mission and philanthropic-*diakonia* works. While it sounds ideal, achieving such a balance is never easy.

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4. Stephen K. Otite, "The Problem of Dirty Hands and Christian Participation in Politics," *Tropical Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2021): 33–41.

5. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Modern Library, 1993).

6. Davor Džalto, "Orthodox Political Theology: An Anarchist Perspective," in *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity: Common Challenges–Divergent Positions*, ed. Kristian Stoeckl et al. (Bloomsbury, 2017), 112.

The development of the Constantinian church-state relationship in Byzantium was excessive. Justinian I, a 6th-century Byzantine emperor and theologian, elevated this relationship by creating political laws that directly affected the church and by declaring that church councils had equal status with imperial law.[7] As a result, rejecting church councils' and imperial laws relating to the church was officially considered lawlessness, punishable by the state. The state-sanctioned *nomocanons* (political-religious laws) would sometimes elevate the church's ideals and agendas and sometimes be used to control the church.[8] The state was viewed as the body and the church as the soul of the empire. This close relationship between imperial νόμοι (secular laws) and church κανόνες (canon laws) led to the creation of the Eastern Church's 6th to 15th-century canon law collection, called nomocanons (νόμοκανών) that blended imperial and church canon law.[9] While this symphony worked well for the church, it offended those opposed to the existing church theology and Christianity.

## Constantine and Nicaea

The Eastern Church considers Constantine the Great a saint equal to the apostles. This church honours him not only for ending early Christian persecutions and martyrdoms and for legally enabling the church and its evangelization efforts to operate freely, but also for helping to expand the church's mission and growth in the newly unified Greco-Roman empire into regions where the faith was previously unknown.[10] As emperor, Constantine may have primarily aimed to maintain peace in his empire, not necessarily to promote the church's growth or to spread the gospel across the *Pax Romana* (Greco-Roman world). However, his actions had a lasting influence on the church's expansion and mission during his time and beyond. The Constantinian policies of the 4th century became an effective model for mission that later Christian empires would follow.[11] As the Byzantine Empire expanded from the Nicaean period onward, so did the Christian faith.[12] Whether the empire's expansion was voluntary (when communities requested to join) or forceful (when the empire fought to take over territories), the church expanded into those regions either way.

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7. David J. D. Miller and Peter Sarris, *The Novels of Justinian: A Complete Annotated English Translation* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 9–10.

8. Asterios Gerostergios, *Justinian the Great: The Emperor and Saint* (Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1982), 86–188.

9. See Wilfried Hartmann and Kenneth Pennington, eds., *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500* (Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

10. See G. P. Baker, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Revolution* (Cooper Square Press, 1992).

11. A. H. M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (University of Toronto Press, 1978).

12. See R. H. C. Davis, *A History of Medieval Europe* (Routledge, 2013).

To others, Constantine the Great and his successors were tyrants who used the church to force their ideologies, expanding their empire far and wide, with faith as a weapon. The state would sometimes imprison, exile, banish, or even execute those deemed heretics. While this use of force by the state against heretics often resulted in their submission to the orthodox faith, it sometimes backfired. Where it did, especially when the state's actions against heretics were seen as martyring them, the heretical side of the church sometimes grew even greater than the orthodox side, again affecting missions in those regions. The state has, therefore, contributed both positively and negatively to the church's mission from the very beginning.

The Byzantine Empire strengthened the relationship between the church and the state: funding church activities, including paying the clergy; building churches and monasteries; funding the church's social welfare; and even allowing the church to perform the legal union of loved ones in marriage, whether they were Christian or not.[13] The church in this period was considered to be not just a fundamental ally of the state but a fundamental part of the empire. State–church relations expanded to the extent that the fate of one affected the other significantly. The first and second iconoclastic controversies of the Byzantine period find the church and state in this situation. The debate in the 7th to 9th centuries over whether religious images (icons) would be accepted among Christians in the Byzantine Empire was fundamental to both the state and the church.[14] Representing the saints and the Gospel messages in iconography was central to the church's faith. Meanwhile, for the state, if worship were performed incorrectly, the wrath of God would surely bring down the empire. This brought the emperors and empresses into the time's sophisticated philosophical and theological debates over the use of icons. The Nicaean debates over Christ's humanity and divinity resurfaced, becoming the primary reason the icon lovers (iconodules) prevailed over the icon haters (iconoclasts).

The first (720–87 CE) and second (815–43 CE) periods of iconoclasm saw the state and the church clash over icons, which were seen as forms of idolatry, in conflict with Christology and the first commandment.[15] These conflicts were also linked to the Byzantines' defeat in war against the Ottoman Empire, which resulted in the loss of significant territories to the Arabs and Persians. It was believed that God was displeased with the icons in Byzantium; therefore, this

13. Michael Grant, *Constantine the Great: The Man and His Times* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 125–210.

14. Steven Bigham, *Early Christian Attitudes Toward Images* (Orthodox Research Institute, 2004).

15. Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council*, rev. ed. (Brill, 2005), 1–21.

disapproval was seen as the cause of the hardships the church and the empire faced. Emperors ordered the removal of the Christ icon from imperial coins, the destruction of icons, and the persecution of iconodules. These periods of persecution and iconoclasm ended with Empress Irene during the first period and Empress Theodora during the second. The incarnation of Christ, the God-man, along with distinctions between honour and worship and between image and prototype, were key theological arguments that ultimately led to the restoration of icons in the church.[16] This victory marked the triumph of Orthodoxy, which is celebrated today on the first Sunday of Lent in Eastern Orthodox churches. Because the church's faith was believed to influence the nation's fate, the tension between politics and political ecclesiology, along with iconoclasm, significantly affected the church's mission and unity in the 8th and 9th centuries. The church's conflicts and divisions would not have stopped without the two queens who abandoned their dead husbands' policies.[17] Politics saved the church to the extent that the feasts and core beliefs of the church are embedded around these two empresses.

## Political ecclesiology and mission

The role of political theology within the church—that is, political ecclesiology—is essential for understanding how the church influences and is influenced by society in promoting justice, peace, equality, national leadership, and socio-economic stability.[18] The word *politics*, when combined with *theology*, sounds more worldly than divine. Is the church in or for the world? Some see the world as evil, while others believe the God-created world is meant for sanctification. For the Orthodox, says Alexander Schmemann, the church's mission and its worship exist "for the *better* life of the world," as the church in its mission seeks to recover and "catch up with the life that has gone astray."[19] Here, the church cannot escape the world, nor can the world escape the church. The world needs sanctification and priests of creation from the church, and the world provides the church with the sacramental elements used to sanctify the world and "everything that has breath" is used to glorify God. Christ's incarnation and the salvation he grants are part of this journey of the world and all creation, getting

16. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980); Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, trans. Catherine P. Roth (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981).

17. Judith Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence: Women and Empire in Byzantium* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 61–69; Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 51–129; 185–239.

18. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, Introduction to *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Blackwell, 2004), 2.

19. Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 12–13.

sanctified through the church, creating a vision of the reign of God on earth. Thus, as Plekon argues,

> Orthodox Christianity is marked by the vision of the eternal kingdom of heaven and the beauty of God's transcendence. Yet Orthodox Christianity, contrary to assumptions, does not flee the world or condemn it as essentially evil. Rather, intensely aware of God's creation of all things as good and of the entrance of God into creation by the Incarnation of Christ, one should embrace the world as the only place where the drama of salvation occurs. The church, as the outreach of the kingdom of God, seeks to transform the world again into God's good creation.[20]

When political ecclesiology supports a close relationship between the state and the church, both institutions benefit from each other. For the state, this helps calm the population and reduce uprisings and opposition. Anyone opposing the state is also against the church. Many citizens, being Christians, avoid opposing their church-backed Christian government. Additionally, the church helps the state reach grassroots communities through its state-funded philanthropic-*diakonia* efforts. As a result, the state uses the church as a form of soft power, allowing it to rule with little opposition. For the church, this political ecclesiology promotes greater church unity by promoting state-approved shared theologies that help eliminate heresy. The church grows under the protection of the state, which safeguards its people and church institutions. Furthermore, the church's mission expands into new imperial territories. The church's mission is also extended through state-funded social work, which helps shape and uplift many lives.

Church-state relations also threaten the church's growth and mission and could harm those who do not follow the official church theology and administration promoted by the state-recognized church. Additionally, the church is sometimes complicit in supporting the right and just political leadership, but at times it also endorses wrong and unjust state religious policies of the empire. The church's occasional silent acceptance of unjust situations weakens its prophetic voice and mission, which conflicts with the Gospel it preaches, leading to the loss and suffering of some Christians and regions. From Nicaea to today, Christians continue to pray and work to maintain close church-state ties that help the church influence society, but it remains a complicated relationship.

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20. Michael Plekon, "Eastern Orthodox Thought," in *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, 104.

## African Orthodox case studies on political ecclesiology effects on mission

Deducing political matters properly puts the church in a difficult position. The church is focused on the eschaton (the life of the age to come), but it also exists in the world, where it is called to make disciples for Christ (Matt. 28:16–20) and to use creation to glorify God. The church must fulfil both roles, even when tensions arise between the world and itself. Here are some examples of the complexity of state-church relations in contemporary African Orthodox churches.

### *Case Study 1: Russian–Ukrainian war and the Alexandrian Patriarchate*

The Eastern Orthodox Church spread to Slavic lands through invitations from their rulers, including King Rostislav (863 CE) and Prince Vladimir (988 CE).[21] Furthermore, the Byzantine *symphonia* model in this region was used to unify the people and resist Germanic influences and their Latin missionary efforts. Therefore, the use of church-state relations to delay religious and political competition in these lands is not new. After the fall of communism, the Orthodox Church in Russia experienced a significant revival. Orthodoxy re-entered society and impacted the country's social identity, religious life, and political policies. The government supported rebuilding churches and monasteries, along with the church's extensive philanthropic work, while the church built the people's spiritual identity.

Meanwhile, the church and state supported the ideologies of the Russian world, with the church, state, and nation being considered one.[22] This *Russkiy Mir* (Russian world) ideology, which envisions the state and church in Russia growing and influencing others globally, was revived, especially under President Putin and Patriarch Kirill. They particularly emphasized the importance of avoiding Westernized ideologies, politics, and even religiosities. This policy favours the Russian Orthodox Church and the state, both of which pursue global expansionist goals. The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war is, according to the Russians, about distancing the Slavic territory from Western influences, including Western religiosity, economics, politics, and modernity. NATO and the Ecumenical Patriarch are seen as oppressors by this Russian state and church narrative.

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21. See Basil Lourié, "Russian Christianity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Parry (Blackwell, 2007), 207–30.

22. See Sophie Kotzer, *Russian Orthodoxy, Nationalism and the Soviet State During the Gorbachev Years*, 1985–1991 (Routledge, 2020).

For the Ukrainians, a state and even a church can choose whom to associate with, reflecting their desire to break free from Russian influence, regardless of whether it aligns with traditional norms. The Ukrainian church and government worked together to achieve independence from Russia. They understood that neither could succeed without the other's support. Therefore, President Zelensky, a Jewish man, also played a role in advocating for the autocephaly of the Ukrainian church. He needed the church's backing to distance his country from Russia. To prevent this joint church-state movement, Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 and continues to do so. The number of deaths from both countries is staggering. Rather than shared church affiliation uniting the two nations and encouraging a ceasefire, their Orthodox identity has instead fuelled the ongoing war.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa (PA) supported the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's independence from Russia. Thus, the PA accepted the autocephaly granted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate (EP) to Ukraine in 2018 but also condemned the Russian war in Ukraine. Considering the church-state relations and politics of the region, the PA's spiritual choice was equally tied to a political choice, whether or not it was their intention. This decision significantly impacted the African church. In response, the Moscow Patriarchate (MP) declared the PA a schismatic church and, in December 2021, established an Exarchate in Africa, taking some of the PA's clergy and churches in the region without following the right ecclesial procedures.[23] This has resulted in court cases and the loss of Orthodox believers amid parish conflicts in Africa. Additionally, the canonical territory of the PA, confirmed by Canon 6 of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea and later expanded with the sub-Saharan section added by the EP in 1921, was for the first time encroached upon by a canonical Eastern church. Furthermore, many Africans have since joined the war in Ukraine through job agencies or after failed scholarships, while Russia uses the church as a tool of soft power to expand its economic and military influence in Africa.[24] All these factors have led to the longstanding relationship between the PA and the MP breaking down, with both churches no longer in communion with one another. The distant conflict in Ukraine has profoundly impacted the African Orthodox mission, all in the name of national politics affecting church affairs under a blurred relationship of church and state.

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23. See Evangelos Thiani, "The Russian Orthodox Church in Africa—For Political or Ecclesial Reasons?," *Studies in World Christianity* 30, no. 2 (2024): 249–68.

24. Robert Lansing Institute for Global Threats and Democracies Studies, "Russia and African Workers in the Defense Industry: A New Chapter in Neo-Colonialism," 17 June 2025, https://lansinginstitute.org/2025/06/17/russia-and-african-workers-in-the-defense-industry-a-new-chapter-in-neo-colonialism/.

## Case Study 2: Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC), the largest Oriental Orthodox church in the world by membership, became autonomous from the Coptic Orthodox Church in 1959.[25] Since then, it has faced daily leadership struggles that threatened its unity, especially due to ethno-nationalism and Ethiopian political movements. This comes with the EOTC history: they supported the ancient Christian empires, served as the state church for 1700 years until 1974 when the communist government disestablished them,[26] and with their advocacy for Pan-Africanism in Ethiopian politics and its national leaders, thus remaining attached to national politics.[27] Unfortunately, recent national events have plunged this church into highly politicized and ethnic conflicts. In 1991, the EOTC split into two factions, forcing one of their patriarchs, Abuna Merkorios, and his followers into exile for over 27 years. The schism and exile occurred after a new patriarch was elected following the "Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) removing the Derg military regime from power."[28] It was a Derg military officer turned politician and Ethiopian prime minister in April 2018 under the Prosperity Party who helped bring this Ethiopian Orthodox group back to Ethiopia from exile. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, an adherent of Oromia Pentecostalism, brokered the reunion of the two patriarchs and sought peace within Ethiopia. This effort, along with others, ultimately led to Prime Minister Abiy receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. The Ethiopian state promoted the unity of the EOTC, demonstrating how much it valued the church's cohesion and how much respect the EOTC still holds for this state.

Then came the war in northern Ethiopia, which started in 2020, between the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Many lives were lost, properties destroyed, and military and political leaders arrested and persecuted. The EOTC remained silent at first, probably because Prime Minister Abiy, who united the EOTC, also led the defence forces involved in the war, thereby limiting the EOTC's prophetic voice. Some Ethiopian Orthodox clergy and laypeople from the north, realizing that

25. Tsegaye Ebabey Demissie, "Anti-Orthodox Christian Attitudes in Ethiopia: An Assessment of Historical and Contemporary Persecutions of Christians," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 11, no. 4 (2020): 11.

26. Sileshie Semahagne Kumlahew, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as Religious Other in Contemporary Ethiopia: Discursive Practices of Three Selected Religious Authorities," *Religions* 15, no. 6 (2024): 744, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060744.

27. Kumlahew, "Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church," 11–15.

28. AFP, "Ethiopia's Torn Orthodox Church Reunites After 27 Years," *France 24*, 27 July 2018, https://www.france24.com/en/20180727-ethiopias-torn-orthodox-church-reunites-after-27-years.

their church headquarters was not exactly defending them, took action to fill this gap. The Orthodox Diocese of Tigray declared its separation from the official EOTC due to the silence of the church during the bloodshed, displacement of people, and destruction of infrastructure and property in northern Ethiopia.[29] They were seen as out of line because that was not their expected role. This sparked a divide between the EOTC clergy and faithful in the north and south, risking another church schism among the Orthodox of Ethiopia.

Upon closer examination, the EOTC was not fractured by ecclesial or theological issues, but rather by national differences intertwined with local ethnic identities. The Orthodox Christians in northern Ethiopia are mostly Tigrayan, while those in the central and southern regions are primarily Amhara and Oromo. Ethiopia's national and political divisions are similarly shaped by these lines. Therefore, ethnicity, combined with national politics, appears to influence the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian state enough to cause separation.

## Conclusion

Since the 4th-century reign of Constantine the Great, when Christian persecutions ended, the Christian East has sought to be closely involved in imperial and national politics. Subsequently, from Nicaea onward, when the state works closely with the church, the church has flourished and has utilized political leaders to further its unity, social development, and missional agendas. Unfortunately, this relationship does not always assist the church. In contemporary times, ethnonationalism within Orthodox Christianity globally has caused divisions within local churches and negatively impacted interchurch relations. The divisions among the Orthodox churches in Africa that have been evaluated here, and their relationships with other Orthodox churches abroad, have shown that even when everything else, including faith, remains constant, national and political agendas can create church divisions.

Historically, it is clear that when an empire is too closely aligned with the church, the empire's failures are also seen as the church's failures. Likewise, those who despise or seek to overthrow the empire often target the church as well. Despite these lessons, modern Orthodox Christianity still shows a nostalgic desire to work closely with the state. "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of

29. Anonymous, "The Challenges of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Leadership in the Restoration of Peace and Stability in Ethiopia," *Studies in World Christianity* 30, no. 2 (2024): 167–68.

the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (Gal. 3:1–3). If these words of St Paul to the Galatians were spoken to the Orthodox Church today, they might seem offensive. But when examining how the church handles contemporary politics and how that impacts its mission and the mission of God, one might wonder: Are these Christians truly not bewitched? Why would something like national politics, which are outside the church, influence it so deeply as to cause major divisions? Modern Orthodox Christian political ecclesiologies tend to be highly nationalist and ethnic, often overshadowing the church's mission in the world. This diminishes, frustrates, and limits the church's evangelization, missionary growth, and social development efforts. When a church becomes too involved in state affairs without proper boundaries, it can sometimes lose its saltiness and prophetic voice to the point that it might bless or support war, conflict, and divisions rather than striving for visible unity. Would not a church today be considered bewitched if it clearly recognizes that supporting the state divides the church of Christ, yet continues to follow this path?

The contemporary Orthodox Church must learn to detach itself from empires because they rise and fall. The church that exists in and for the world must stay faithful to its mission of sanctifying the world, enlightening the dark world, glorifying God through creation, and giving life to the world. This is not achieved solely through prayer (Divine Liturgy), but also through prophetically guiding the world through mission (liturgy after the Divine Liturgy). Many individuals and families are suffering, many nations are hurting, and the world is groaning in pain (Rom. 8:22). Therefore, the church must fulfil its purpose and mission to give the world hope and light amid surrounding darkness and hopelessness. The church cannot become part of the world or oppress others; rather, it is part of the physical world but must not imitate the ways of the world. The holiness and eschatological hope of the church must be preserved, even in the face of the world's corrupt politics. Such is only possible if the church objectively detaches itself from nationalistic tendencies and politics.

Consequently, a roundtable that develops a proper Christian political ecclesiology for our time could help evaluate and end current models and practices that appear ineffective in Orthodox missiology. This could be a practical way to demonstrate visible unity in a global and diverse context. While the state has positive roles within church programmes, especially in philanthropic-*diakonia*, if national politics are allowed to dominate or hold the church hostage, the church risks losing itself. Just as Nicaea gathered to address significant challenges, modern Orthodox churches should confront the ever-changing political landscape. However, for a complete transformation

of Christian missiology, *metanoia* and re-evaluation of modern church-state relations are necessary to achieve a renewal worthy of followers of Christ—the Church, which seeks visible unity.

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# Keynote Address—"Do This in Remembrance of [Ruptured] Me": An Afterlife Ecumenical Posture

*Rev. Prof. Dr Septemmy Eucharistia Lakawa*[30]

In preparing for this conference over the past year, many have asked deep, challenging, complex, and in some ways similar questions and have shared reflections on identifying and reflecting on the significance and relevance of the First Nicaean Council 1700 years after it took place. The socio-political context of the Nicaean council was a time in which churches were surviving persecution and perhaps being traumatized, yet they were gaining public and political status throughout the Roman Empire under Constantine. Thus, it is likely that the first ecumenical council pointed toward a paradoxical space—that of trauma and survival, of the spiritual and the political, of theology and politics, of faith and power. Perhaps we are still in such a paradoxical space 1700 years later. The question, however, is this: How are we different from the Nicaean Council in how we embody the ecumenical vision and how we exercise ecumenical leadership? Further, how much do Nicaea and Egypt—the site of this conference so many centuries later—have in common?

Theologically, both sites point to the dimension implied by the question about the church in and for the world. It is about the space—the spatiality of being ecumenical—the location, the context of being church in and for the world. After 1700 years, are we now embodying a different kind of ecumenical fellowship and ecumenical leadership, a different way of being ecumenical?

The title of my presentation is "Do This in Remembrance of [Ruptured] Me." I inserted the word *rupture*. It means more than "brokenness," or "being broken"; it is meant to signify the One whose very identity was the centre of the Nicaean Council. However, this is not a Christological discourse on the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. The insertion of the word *rupture*, paradoxically, aims to remind us of our call to be church in and for the world. What if being church today also means being against the world, the world being taken over by contesting megapowers in a new display of the violent hierarchy of global empires that signals the dawn of a cosmic catastrophe? This is the same world that is ruled by the powers that continue to play God. It is a world that celebrates ignorance and hatred and succumbs to violent powers rather than challenging, resisting, and collaborating across differences to bring justice and healing, starting from

30. Septemmy Eucharistia Lakawa is a former president of Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Theologi Jakarta (Jakarta Theological Seminary), Indonesia. She teaches mission studies, feminist theology, and trauma theology.

the ruptured places of the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned, the terrorized. It is a world where sufferings are ranked in a new hierarchy, where one's history of violence often becomes a norm rather than a reference, a mirror, a reflection, or a resonance for condemning new forms of existential dehumanization through genocide, war, hatred, and ignorance.

My use of the concept of *after* in the term *afterlife* in the subtitle of this speech ("An Afterlife Ecumenical Posture") is inspired by Palestinian liberation theologies. In these, according to Graham McGeoch in his introduction to the book *Theology After Gaza*, the meaning of *after* has always been "spatial."[31] Adding to the spatiality, I use the concept of *afterlife* in reference to Shelly Rambo's theological rethinking of resurrection from a trauma perspective to show the persistence of life from within the "ongoingness of forces of violence."[32]

As an Indonesian feminist mission theologian, my theological voice has been shaped primarily by Indonesia and my understanding of the Bible and Christian faith from within and toward that context. Although a participant in the global ecumenical fellowship, I have always kept the contexts of Indonesian churches as a part of my ecumenical and critical self-reflexive missional voice and posture.

I use three analogies of the afterlife theological posture as an ecumenical ruptured posture. Each posture is retold from a particular space leading to interconnected spatial postures. I offer these analogies as a response to the question of how we remember Nicaea today, but also to the question of where we remember it from.

31. Graham McGeoch, introduction to *Theology After Gaza: A Global Anthology*, ed. Mitri Raheb and Graham McGeoch (Cascade Books, 2025), xxi.

32. Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Baylor University Press, 2017), 5.

## The breaking of bread (Luke 24:30–31): The unmasking of fear and terror

> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight (Luke 24:30–31).

The road to Emmaus is the story of two disciples' traumatic journey in the aftermath of the Lord's passing. It is also about a journey of survival. Witnessing and surviving the death of their beloved unmasks their own wounds, embedded in fear and uncertainty and the decision they made to leave Jerusalem, the site of violence and trauma. It is also a journey of facing, naming, and thus unmasking the terror of fear that clouded their minds and hearts and that resulted in their failure to recognize the presence of the resurrected Lord.

Mitri Raheb, a Lutheran Palestinian liberation theologian, unmasks the silence of the international community regarding Palestinians. Referencing the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, who expressed the pain of being abandoned by the Arab countries and called for unmasking their ignorance after the siege of Beirut in 1982, Raheb calls for the unmasking of the international community's silence toward the cries of the Palestinians, toward the genocide in Gaza. He claims that

> Gaza in 2023/2024 has exposed the masks of the international community. Their masks have fallen. We were aware that the world was not in a rosy state but Gaza showed us the real faces without makeup. Gaza became a magnifying glass that revealed the details of the ugly face that were not obvious previously; we can now see things as they are and understand the state of the world more clearly.[33]

The world after Nicaea is a world in which the masks of terror, ignorance, and violence must fall. If Gaza is a lens through which we envision the call to be church today, then it is a call to be against the world of masks. From Gaza, we witness that the One who breaks bread is the ruptured one. In Gaza, there is no bread to break, only his body that is being ruptured every day in the ruptured world.

The unexpected guest who turned out to be the host unveiled the masks of fear and terror that had overwhelmed the two disciples by performing the

33. Mitri Raheb, "Theology After Gaza: Political Context and Theological Challenge," in *Theology After Gaza: A Global Anthology*, ed. Mitri Raheb and Graham McGeoch (Cascade Books, 2025), 43–44.

familiar ritual of breaking bread. But the unmasking is a kind of decolonial practice and requires a *metanoia*, a transformation of all the presumably correct and normative knowledge of who the guest—who turned out to be the host—was. "Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:31). The Lord unveils the fear and terror that had covered their eyes so they can now see, but as their knowledge of the previously unknown descends, the Lord is already gone. The breaking of bread becomes both the site and the posture of the rupture.

Breaking the bread is the afterlife site where the dead and the living are interwoven. When the resurrected Lord broke the bread, that is the afterlife posture—the sign of his ruptured body.

### *A child with the staples of fish and bread (John 6:1–14): A spirituality of enough*[34]

> There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people? (John 6:9).

The child with the staple foods of fish and bread reflects a dimension of the vulnerability of the ruptured posture in the story of two fish and five loaves of bread in John 6:1–14. Different from the versions of the story in the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John inserts a fascinating piece of information: "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" In John, the child becomes an important figure in sustaining the life of the *ochlos*, the ordinary people. Although there is only one sentence about the child, rereading the story from his perspective shifts the orientation and character of the story. The economy—or household management (*oikonomia*) and distribution (*nomos*, *nemein*)—is now dependent on the most vulnerable sector of the populace, the community of thousands of hungry people. While the disciples doubt the feasibility of the only obvious option that is available—"but what are they among so many people?"—Jesus exercises an alternative management of the "household." He says, "Make the people sit down!" (John 6:10). Sitting down is a calming exercise; sitting down in groups, moreover, is a collective exercise of sharing the energy of trust. We can imagine that if thousands of hungry people gathered, they would become vulnerable to external influences; violence might be imminent. Jesus seems to know this. So, instead of ordering the food to be distributed immediately, he creates a safe space for everyone to receive and to share the seemingly insufficient resources for their meal.

34. This section is based on my presentation entitled "The Interconnectedness of Economics, Ecology, and Theology: An Indonesian Ecofeminist Theology of Enough" (paper presented at the World Communion of Reformed Churches Consultation on Economics, Ecology, and Theology, Jakarta, Indonesia, 20 October 2023).

Furthermore, if we reread this story intertextually with, for example, the texts of Mark 6:40 and Luke 9:14, we can see the extent to which grouping becomes an effective strategy. The crowd is divided into groups of fifty or a hundred, and this grouping is also intended to create groups that share their resources. Often, we assume that the crowd—comprised of ordinary people, the poor—has nothing to share. But, perhaps, in this story the Gospel writers are inviting us to imagine otherwise. Perhaps the people in the crowd have little. They may, like the disciples, think that what they have is not enough for themselves, let alone for others. But the story of the child with the fish and bread tells us otherwise. Some people may still have some food, but, indeed, it is not sufficient. Some people may only have small snacks left that will not be enough for a big meal. The miracle that Jesus performs remains veiled in the story. It is only told that the staples—the broken loaves of bread and the fish—are distributed. The groups share among themselves, and everyone is able to eat and to have more than they would have had. Often, we pay attention only to the distribution of resources. We forget the human experience—the trust, the sharing, and the capacity to save, to sustain—that creates resources enough for everyone.

This is why the child with the staple foods is an important biblical metaphor for a theology of enough. The child represents the most vulnerable part of the community that holds the resources of the household. Acknowledging the presence and the gift of the child, Jesus gestures toward a different principle in managing the household: the principle of enough. This is a risky principle in the context of a global landscape of capitalism, the Capitalocene, and an economy that is oriented toward goods and production and not toward the sustainability of the whole creation. The story in John is also a reverse model of an economy that may be regarded as irrelevant in the context of a global economy of fear and hatred. The child with the staple foods is a metaphor for an economy of life—a praxis that is embedded in the ethics of life and sharing instead of fear, hatred, and the voracious desire to have it all for oneself or for the group of the world's richest, the "one percent."

In Matthew 14:16, Jesus says to the disciples, "You give them something to eat." This ministry—managing, sharing, the reciprocity of giving and receiving, sustaining, and being accountable to the future and the life of the community—is imperative in the economy of life. Instead of absorbing all the resources for themselves, the disciples are trained to trust the ability of the crowd to receive and to give.

But the child in the story is not from Gaza, nor from any of the many places of hunger and famine in today's world. Rereading the story of this child in light of the ruptured bodies of children in Gaza and other places of hunger and

desperation unmasks the failure of our ecumenical fellowship if we refuse to unmask the power that is violating the most basic right of humans—the right to have enough nutritious food and clean water.

## "Dancing on the water" (Matthew 14:22–33): "A messy theology"[35]

> And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid" (Matt. 14:25–27).

Have you ever imagined that the Lord not only walked on the water but also *danced* on the water? The last part of my presentation is about reimagining an ecumenical site from the context of the climate emergency, particularly the oceanic crisis of maritime countries like Indonesia, a country with more than 17,000 islands. As I wrote recently,

> The story is surrounded by water, by the stormy sea. If Jesus walked on the water and Peter sank into the water in today's world, what kind of water would we imagine as the setting? The ocean and oceanic communities across many parts of the world are suffering today because of the climate crisis. With more than 60 percent of its area covered by water, and comprising more than seventeen thousand islands, Indonesia is in great danger of losing its oceanic habitat. What kind of water, of ocean, would Jesus and Peter encounter today?[36]

We are all familiar with the disciples' reaction to the walking-on-the-water Lord. We know about their fear and how Peter overcame his fear to approach the Lord, who reached out to him saying, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." But often we forget to imagine what kind of water—seas, rivers, or lakes—the Lord would walk on today amid the oceanic crisis.

The archipelago of Raja Ampat in West Papua is the easternmost area of Indonesia, known for its rich and beautiful biodiversity. Nickel mining in Raja Ampat has damaged the coral reefs, reduced biodiversity, led to deforestation, and impacted the broader ecosystem of the surrounding community. Similar cases of mining and the exploitation of the ocean, such as in East Halmahera

35. This title is based on my article "Dancing on the Water: A Story of a Messy Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 41, no. 2 (Fall 2025): 121–23.

36. Lakawa, "Dancing on the Water," 122.

of North Maluku, Indonesia, also reflect the conflict between economic investment, political regulation, and the sustainability of the environment.

Rereading the story of the Lord walking on the water from the perspective of Raja Ampat's community is a testimony to the destructive and corrupt political and economic powers that exploit nature and ignore the urgent need to be ethical as one of the simplest ways to sustain the life and the future of the environment, of the ecological community in West Papua and the rest of the world.

Imagining the Lord dancing on the sea, on the waters of Raja Ampat, is a challenge and an invitation to the ecumenical fellowship to dance, to weave together change, resistance, and resilience. It is also to reclaim the voice of the Lord: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid"—amid the risks of advocating for sustainability and the flourishing of all. The Commission on Faith and Order, in the document *Cultivate and Care*, reminds us that "if the churches are to be in pilgrimage together, it can only be in the context of journeying toward the unity of the church within creation."[37]

Dancing on the water is a different kind of ruptured posture—a compassionate posture. As I have stated elsewhere, "[It] is the posture of a compassionate dancer who has messy yet beautiful movements, who follows Jesus 'in the midst of a marine ecological crisis [and who resists] the power that discriminates against, violates, and harms the sea."[38] The sea is a ruptured site since it is "the landscape where the marginalized refuse to be silent, dancing the dance of the sea to challenge the powers that be in the struggle for transformation, justice, and healing. ... Dancing on the water mirrors a different kind of ruptured posture."[39] Dancing on the water needs to become dancing *with* the water to create a messy narrative where hope becomes a risky practice amid ecological destruction.

These three analogies—the breaking of bread, a child with fish and loaves of bread, and dancing on the water—project a kind of ecumenical posture, an ecumenical presence today, as a ruptured posture, a ruptured presence. It is a witnessing posture that says not what we churches *are*, but what we *are not*

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37. *Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and Within Creation*, Faith and Order Paper No. 226 (WCC Publications, 2020), 5, quoting from *Come and See: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, Faith and Order Paper No. 224 (WCC Publications, 2019), §25.

38. Septemmy E. Lakawa, "Toward a Blue Missiology: Theological Education as Eco-Missional Formation," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 40, no. 3 (2023): 242.

39. Lakawa, "Dancing on the Water," 123.

amid the kind of interlocking yet contesting global powers that take all of us in the direction of despair, not hope; of destruction, not life; and of darkness that denies the presence of light. The *via negativa* is the path of our ecumenical journey now, as it is in the lands of brokenness everywhere in our world today.

Finally, as the focus of this panel is addressing how to be church today, I turn to the Benedictine nun Joan Chittister, a great spiritual figure of our time, who responds to the question of how to be human today, providing insight into a practice relevant to being ecumenical today. She says that to be human today is to "listen to the rest of the world with a tender heart, and learn to live life with our arms open and our souls seared with a sense of responsibility for everything that is."[40] This means seeing with compassionate eyes so that we may see and hear the ruptured faces, voices, and bodies of all the victims and survivors—touching with a passionate and healing touch so that we may feel the ruptured body of the resurrected Lord in the bodies of the broken and the violated. For 1700 years, the Church has seen humanity fail, be glorified, be broken, but it has survived and flourished. For centuries, the Church has heard—and now is being called to listen with a tender yet broken heart, a vulnerable yet resilient body, which is the afterlife posture—Jesus' words, "Do this in remembrance of [ruptured] me."

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# Keynote Address—Nicaea, Decolonization, and the Inner Journey of the Church: A Caribbean Observation

*Rev. Canon Dr Carlton J. Turner*[41]

## Greetings

To Your Holiness, Eminences, Excellencies, and to the entire World Council of Churches (WCC) family, it is a privilege to be here in Egypt at this time, where we meet to reflect on our common holy faith. I come to you as an African Caribbean person. I stand with my brothers and sisters here to offer our reflections on mission as we respond to the theme "Where Now for Visible Unity?"

We are in Egypt and remember this land as the place of refuge for the Holy Family. But this is not just a holy trip, it is a time of persecution, infanticide, imperial rule, colonial rule, and utter violence.

For us in the Caribbean, Egypt is also the site of another key biblical moment. It is the place of forced labour, exploitation, and imperial domination: one in which we learn the name and power of God to deliver. It is where we hear the words "Let my people go." In these lands we learn of the divine name: "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14).

It is the land of the Exodus. And we sing it! We hear it in the haunting words of Bob Marley:

41. The Rev. Canon Dr Carlton Turner is a theologian and priest in the Anglican Church in the Province of the West Indies.

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery
None but ourselves can free our minds
.....
Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs.[42]

It is the place and the context that inspires the liberation theologians to see that God has a preferential option for the poor. And it is the place in which Caribbean theologian Kortright Davis reminds us that emancipation is still coming.[43] It is by no accident that we're here; Egypt is the place where we first learn about the processes of empire and colonization, and of the God who stands in the midst of it all and declares his name and his nature.

These are also the lands that have taught us to find God in the desert. In the earliest memories of the Church, you have taught us to guard the divine mystery, the incredible site of the mystics, the desert fathers and mothers—the ones who remind us that God is a living God, not far removed nor remote, but here and now, and for ever!

And it is here that I want to unpack for us this idea of decolonization, and the need to always make an inward journey to resist the destructive, mammonic, alienating, numbing, dehumanizing, insidious, and idolatrous legacies of power that we call colonialism. I offer you a Caribbean perspective, for we have come to see that even the Church, even the holy faith, is not immune from the destructive powers of colonization; that we must delink, disentangle, and decolonize from our multiple perpetrations of violence. Before I explore the experience of the Caribbean, let me take us to the one upon whom our common faith is built.

## Let's begin with Jesus

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world,

42. Bob Marley, "Redemption Song," track 10 on Bob Marley and the Wailers, *Uprising*, Tuff Gong/Island, released 10 June 1980.

43. Kortright Davis, *Emancipation Still Comin': Explorations in Caribbean Emancipatory Theology* (Orbis, 1990).

to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" (John 18:36–38).

Firstly, we cannot escape the drama of violence within the text. This isn't just a story; this is a detailed description of a public state execution. Jesus is a first-century Palestinian Jew under Roman colonial rule. The stakes are high here, and he offers something other than the brutal violence of colonial rule. He embodies a different way that Pilate cannot understand.

Secondly, the question is no longer about Jesus—his nature and his person. The drama reflects on and exposes the kind of kingdom that sought to displace Jesus' kingdom of peace. In John's narrative imagination, Jesus exposes both the futility and the preposterous attempts at power and control: the heartbeat of colonial rule.

Finally, the writer of John's Gospel even leaves a question hanging in the air: "What is truth?" When we read the Gospel, truth has always been a person—Jesus, God Incarnate, the hope of salvation.

We must also wrestle with the biblical text as the place in which colonial forces play out. Jesus cannot be considered apart from Roman colonial rule. Colonization does not begin with the expansion into the New World Americas. It is fundamentally the context of the biblical world. It is the context in which prophets proclaimed God's justice. It is the context in which the Nicene Creed develops. It is, without question, the context in which we now live. It is always in the room in every religion, in every denomination, and in every church; wherever power is used to exploit, to alienate, to silence, to intimidate, to ignore, to ridicule, and to, as my Palestinian friend Fr Ashrif reminds us, to dehumanize! Same power! Same process! Same motivation! Same kingdom! And it is NOT the kingdom of God!

## About Nicaea

The common faith in the revelation of the triune God, as agreed in Nicaea, remains an enduring, beautiful, and good summary of the faith that we should rejoice in. However, the truth of God's revelation does not need defence here, unlike the ancient controversies over Arianism. What needs assessment and exploration are the kinds of Christianity that have always sought to defend the truth of Nicaea. Thinking from the global South—particularly the African Caribbean, where the mission of the Church proceeded through colonial violence—a decolonial approach to our common Christian inheritance requires a deep inward look.

Perhaps we might learn from those who have had to navigate the shadow side of the Church in Christian history. I find no better example than the region where Christopher Columbus first made landfall—on an island in the Bahamas that he named San Salvador, but which originally had its own name, Guanahani. With him, the Church came, more than a thousand years after Nicaea. With him also came the genocide of Indigenous peoples, and eventually the horrors of the trafficking of Africans and their descendants to work plantations in the New World Americas through the institution of enslavement.

## Decolonization and violence

Decolonization must be an uncomfortable term for us, and it might be confusing since we hear of similar terms. And in the politics of our time, it is not a word or a movement that can be easily adopted in our current political environment. Colonization can be considered, as Marcella Althaus-Reid states, "a method of physical and symbolic control characterized by the act of settling a community into a region or country of a different cultural, religious, and political ethos."[44] In the history of Christianity, as well as the history and geographical landscape of the biblical world, colonial processes have been at play. Violence has been germane to this process as it requires "the active control and dominion of cultures by the incoming power, which by means of superior military and political force can effectively exercise substantial power over others." The processes of colonization are complex, and thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Sylvia Wynter, and Aimé Césaire (three of whom are Caribbean!) have highlighted the inherently complex and often interdependent violence between oppressed and oppressor.[45] I tend to look at decolonization through reflecting on what is a fundamental aspect of it ... violence!

This violence is anthropological in how human beings are framed theologically, more often conforming to European biases. Non-Western and global South people and their theologies, amongst many other academic disciplines, have noted the ways in which human beings have been framed along racial and ethnic categories that justified and served the purposes of European expansion into the non-Western world. For example, Noel Leo Erskine's formative work on decolonizing theology within the Caribbean context begins with an examination of the framing of the Indigenous "other" beyond the pale

44. Marcella Althaus-Reid, "Colonization," in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, ed. Virginia Fabella and R. S. Sugirtharajah (Orbis Books, 2000).

45. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove Press, 1967); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Penguin, 1967); Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Orion Press, 1965); Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *The New Centennial Review 3, no. 3* (Fall 2003): 257–337; Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Monthly Review Press, 1972).

of civilization, immediately designating them as subhuman.[46] Similar reflections have flooded the theological landscape from other parts of the global South—Asia, Oceania, Latin America, North American Indigenous Peoples, and Africa, amongst others. If you're othered, then you're considered non-human, a beast of burden, the epitome of sinfulness. If you consider me a thing—then you can beat me, and rape me, and kill me, without conscience.

This violence is epistemological in how the knowledge systems of the non-Western world are disparaged and ignored. Walter D. Mignolo's exploration of Western modernity and its epistemological implications is particularly important here. He calls for "epistemic disobedience." A decolonial option requires an intentional "delinking" (Mignolo's word) from the processes of coloniality. This epistemological delinking or disobedience is necessary because "coloniality had its foundation in theology, that is, in the theo-politics of knowledge."[47] In his estimation we must look directly at the fact that Western modernity has shaped our epistemologies so profoundly that we need a decolonial freedom in order to think about "how" we think theologically. The very ways that our thought, words, and knowledge systems operate have been shaped by coloniality.

This violence is cultural. Ways of life by cultures existing before Europe by millennia are often minimized and supplanted. Missionary Christianity in its many guises proceeded by cultural suppression and its own ethnic and cultural exceptionalism. Contextual theologies of the global South consistently challenge the cultural appropriation of the biblical world into contemporary empires: that is, through supersessionist thought, Euro-American exceptionalism, or the total disregard for non-Western expressions of theology, such as Oceanic, Pacifica, Black, Caribbean, Asian, African, Native American, Latinx, Indigenous South and North American, and Aboriginal ones. This is not an exhaustive list. So, we demonize Obeah, Vodou, Myal, Rastafari, and the Spiritual Baptist faith, but fail to see that the most demonic and destructive force was the version of the church in plantation societies.

This violence is ecological. Coloniality is not simply an anthropocentric endeavour that has implications solely for the political interactions between human beings and their systems of power. It has implications for land, air, and sea, and all creatures of God's bounteous creation. Thinkers such as Malcolm Ferdinand remind us that events such as the transatlantic slave trade did not

46. Noel Leo Erskine, *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective* (Africa World Press, 1998).

47. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations (Duke University Press, 2011), 15.

simply affect human bodies, they significantly reshaped the land and the animals.[48]

This violence is existential. By this I mean that literal bodily violence is still perpetuated in the name of God, especially the God of the Bible. Perhaps the most glaring outworking of the colonial agenda is the persistent physical violence towards the marginalized and colonized. From a Caribbean context, the relationship between the extraction of capital, the civilizing and evangelizing of the Indigenous, and the expansion of Christendom-like European nations into new territories led to the decimation of the original inhabitants of the New World and the subsequent engineering of the project of African enslavement and genocide. When we trace war and violence across the globe, we undoubtedly encounter some form of coloniality—whether religious, political, ideological, or economic, or a combination of all four.

This violence is theological. Ultimately, the decolonial turn suggests that theology itself, as it has been formulated, inherited, perpetuated, and exercised, is often colonized and colonizing. Theology and theological stances must be continually interrogated for their deeply embedded reliance on systems of power and violence originating from imperial, economic, nationalist, and political systems (to name but a few). Slavery in the Caribbean was undergirded by a theology that saw blackness as vile and whiteness as holy!

The list above is not limited to the aspects mentioned here. We have not considered, for example, economic dimensions or psychological ones. Regarding the latter, please see work I've done suggesting that decolonial and postcolonial approaches can benefit from further and consistent engagements with psychological theory.[49]

In preparing for Nicaea 2025, big questions come to the forefront about doctrine, or the current importance and use of the Nicene Creed in contemporary conversation around unity. Susan Durber reminds us of the multiple legacies of the creeds that must still be deeply considered. To even speak of a creed—of how it functions and who it includes or excludes—necessitates a conversation around colonization and decolonization. Creeds are about faith but they are also about power!

48. Malcolm Ferdinand, *Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith (Polity Press, 2022).

49. Carlton Turner, "Deepening the Postcolonial Theological Gaze: Frantz Fanon and the Psychopathology of Colonial Christianity," *Modern Believing* 62, no. 4 (Autumn 2021): 340–48.

## The Caribbean experience

The faith that has been handed down to my beloved region is not, nor has ever been, innocent or neutral. It has been violent—and where uninterrogated and unconfronted, this violence is perpetuated. Perhaps a brief historical survey can begin with Christopher Columbus and his first landfall in the New World in 1492. This is what he wrote in his journal as he described the pre-Columbian Indigenous peoples he encountered:

> It appears to me, that the people are ingenious, and would be good servants and I am of opinion that they would very readily become Christians, as they appear to have no religion. They very quickly learn such words as are spoken to them. If it please our Lord, I intend at my return to carry home six of them to your Highnesses, that they may learn our language. I saw no beasts in the island, nor any sort of animals except parrots.[50]

This was the first meeting of Europe and the New World, amid a time when fiery embers of the Reformation were beginning to ignite within Western Christianity. The region that was to become the Caribbean was the first meeting point between what I refer to as missionary Christianity or European imperialist Christianity, and the various Indigenous cultures that had populated the lands and seas of the New World many millennia before the birth of Christianity in the New Testament. Columbus' journal entry revealed some troubling assumptions. Firstly, the non-Europeans he encountered were considered godless and in need of the Christian religion, as if it were a remedy. Secondly, as non-Europeans and non-Christians, it would be appropriate for them to be servants, since, for Columbus, they were a different or lesser class of human beings. And, thirdly, with agency and power in the hands of the Europeans, the Indigenous were rendered powerless and at the mercy of the dictates of the colonizers.

I often make the distinction that what came into the region beginning with Columbus was not *the* Church, but a version of it, one that hid deeply violent tendencies as much as it carried the Christian revelation revealed through Nicaea. What entered the region was a form of Christianity built upon the credal formulations of Nicaea, but one that was also deeply imperial, and as such, deeply violent to those deemed marginal to the European imagination. All the denominations and all of Christianity represented here are also in the region, and more than likely, most of the languages represented here as well. Yet, the very shaping of the region was violent, with the formation of plantation societies in the colonies. Caribbean sociologist Orlando Patterson described such societies

50. Christopher Columbus, Journal, October 11—12, 1492.

as non-societies.[51] The legacies and effects of missionary Christianity in its violent forms have yet to be resolved in the region. What is needed is a decolonial perspective on the theology and praxis of the Church: in this instance, the Church coming into the African Caribbean. The unconscious seedbed of violence within the emergence of the Church in the region necessitates a deep inward gaze at the pernicious nature of colonial violence, regardless of the truth of the Gospel that it, the Church, proposes to carry.

## Conclusion: An introspective comment

For me, decolonization is meant to be an inner process of awareness of the complex legacies of colonialization in shaping the present world in which we live. As part of a world marked by violence, religions in general and the Church in particular—no matter their historical roots—bear much responsibility for colonial violence. To be clear, the Church, no matter the denomination, has done great good in the world. However, it is neither innocent nor neutral and must be subjected to decolonial scrutiny for its own sake. I liken this process to that of therapy against psychopathologic tendencies. While we function in the world, it does not mean that we are not in need of healing and wholeness so that we might be agents of healing and wholeness in return, and not perpetrate violence in its many forms. Decolonization is a means of bringing hidden and unconscious (often not so hidden and unconscious!) colonial traumas and tendencies to the conscious mind so that they may be addressed.

I have explored the relationship between coloniality and violence, using the African Caribbean as an example. The region, and the formation of the Church within it, was shaped by imperialist European expansion, or coloniality. We must bear in mind that the ancient credal affirmations of Nicaea made little difference in the face of the violence meted out across the New World, firstly on the Indigenous pre-Columbian peoples, and latterly, on enslaved African people and their descendants. This calls for a way of doing theology and a way of engaging in ecumenical dialogue that takes this pervasive reality seriously. I argue for a decolonial approach. I suggest that such an approach can function psychotherapeutically to help the Church encounter deeper and often unaddressed and unresolved violence. This approach would help the Church make an inward journey of self-analysis and repentance. A decolonial approach seems a precondition for more fruitful ecumenical conversations.

51. Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (MacGibbon & Kee, 1967).

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# Questions from the Floor

## Question from the floor to both speakers

### What does unity look like in the light of the issues raised in our three presentations?

### The Very Rev. Fr Dr Evangelos:

We are going through very challenging times globally and we can see what politics is doing to every single nation either near or distant from us. Those who already have political theologies and those who do not are finding the same challenges. Maybe unity would be coming up with a new political ecclesiology: a new political theology covering east, west, south, and north—one that all churches would think about so that we can be assisted on the way forward.

### Rev. Canon Dr Carlton Turner:

I was so pleased to encounter brother Moses the Black and to learn of St Marius. I've read of these things in history, and I am happy and privileged to encounter so many different people. I start there because unity means that I don't need to be you, but we can find each other in the depths of who we are. It is a humility to bring me into you even though you feel I may threaten you. I think this is the Jesus way. I think this is the trinitarian way. Unity does not mean uniformity. Uniformity is a colonial construct. May we find ways to deeply encounter each other. That's what I hope for.

## Summary of the Panel on Mission

Rev. Dr Michael Blair (United Church of Canada), moderator of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), opened the panel by commemorating Rev. Dr Peter Cruchley, former CWME director, who passed away in 2025. Dr Blair highlighted the CWME's thematic focus on decolonizing mission, mission from the margins, and transforming discipleship, which will frame the 2028 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism. The panel featured diverse voices from Christian traditions, each addressing the relationship between mission, unity, justice, and decolonization.

Rev. Kendrick Kemp (American Baptist Churches, EDAN) emphasized the primacy of liberation mission rooted in Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:18), focusing on

oppressed people, especially those experiencing racism and ableism. Mr Kemp argued that mission of liberation must precede unity, as the church's role is to empower the oppressed to lead and define their own reality. He underlined that unity is impossible without justice and freedom from oppression.

Rev. Rebecca Folkesten (Church of Sweden) shared a personal testimony as a displaced adoptee from Ethiopia. She criticized the colonial dynamics of mission, which erases cultures and imposes control. Ms Folkesten highlighted the challenges faced by persecuted churches in Ethiopia, including burdensome administrative demands and competition among mission organizations. She called for mission rooted in restorative justice, grace, and respect for local agency. She urged the churches to repent for past failures and embrace a faith that heals rather than controls.

Rev. Prof. Dr Bryan Lobo (Society of Jesus) raised the question of whether justice exists within oppressed communities themselves, acknowledging injustice as a pervasive reality that challenges unity. He shared personal experiences illustrating the tension between denominational "truths" and the need for openness and dialogue in ecumenism. He suggested that miracles and shared spiritual experiences could serve as spaces for ecumenical dialogue despite theological differences, while acknowledging risks of misuse. Dr Lobo noted that persecution in India has fostered ecumenical unity among churches seeking justice and mentioned examples of marginalized voices in ecumenical discourse.

Rev. Dr Felipe Buttelli (Lutheran) emphasized that liberating education must not replicate oppression. He then discussed decolonization as an inward process, requiring self-reconstruction alongside critique of external systems. He echoed the importance of justice as foundational for unity. He presented a hopeful vision of visible unity grounded in decolonial praxis, including inclusive eucharistic celebration embracing diversity of gender, sexuality, culture, and ecological concerns. He concluded by calling for letting go of political and economic control in the churches, envisioning a church unified by love and justice.

Fr Dr Jacob Joseph (Syrian Orthodox Church) explored the Orthodox theology of mission from the margins, rooted in the Syrian Orthodox tradition with historic marginalization and exile. He introduced the concept of *patristic symbiosis* (relational vitality rather than synthesis) to engage multiple theological voices dynamically. He emphasized liturgical embrace as a metaphor for unity, calling for inclusivity and reconciliation in worship reflecting the cosmic vision of the Eucharist. Dr Joseph highlighted the theology of the Cappadocian fathers, connecting care for marginalized bodies with Christological witness. He urged

the churches to embrace the margins and work toward visible unity through liturgical and missional engagement.

Rev. Tara Tautari (Methodist Church of New Zealand) reflected on the deep connection between land, identity, and faith from a Pacific perspective. She critiqued the churches' failure to live rightly with the land and called for a return to the "soil" and Indigenous wisdom as part of mission. She described mission as a call to communion and repentance rather than conquest. She highlighted the emerging eco-relational faith, linking unity in Christ with care for all creation as essential to apostolic discipleship. Ms Tautari concluded by calling for walking humbly upon the earth and embodying reconciliation as foundational for true unity.

# Keynote Address—Living and Visible? The Contribution of the Commission on Faith and Order to the Quest for Visible Unity

*H. E. Metropolitan Dr Job of Pisidia*

Where Now for Visible Unity? This is the question addressed here at this Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt. I would like to address this question by highlighting the considerable contributions of the Commission on Faith and Order over almost a century, since the First World Conference on Faith and Order held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1927.

It is worth recalling from the outset that the question of the visible unity of Christians was at the origin of the ecumenical movement, which sought to respond to a major problem of the Church's mission. Indeed, the division of Christians is an obstacle to the mission: How can we bear witness to Christ in an effective and plausible manner if we present ourselves as divided? The recent Faith and Order convergence document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV) rightly points out the importance of Christian unity to the mission and nature of the Church, and how already in the New Testament, since the apostolic times, the mission to the Gentiles gave birth, alas, to tensions and divisions between Christians.[1]

Thus, the question of maintaining the visible unity of Christians is not a new one, since it was already addressed in apostolic times. Nevertheless, it has become throughout the centuries even more complex because of different visions and understandings of this visible unity. I will outline this by asking three fundamental questions.

## 1. Should unity be institutional?

A fairly widespread view of Christian unity implies the union or fusion of different churches or Christian groups into a single institution. At one point,

1. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV), Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/The_Church_Towards_a_common_vision.pdf.

some considered that the World Council of Churches (WCC) could be the institution capable of uniting divided Christians into a single institution. Against such a perception, the Toronto Statement, adopted by the WCC's central committee at its meeting in 1950, affirmed that "the World Council of Churches is not and must never become a superchurch. It is not a superchurch. It is not the world church. It is not the Una Sancta of which the Creeds speak."[2]

Such a conception of institutional unity is often linked to the fact that some identify the Church of Christ exclusively with their own community, as stated in TCTCV. This view was held, among others, by the Roman Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council and led to the policy of uniatism as a method to reach unity. Indeed, it believed Christian unity to be the result of the return of Christian "dissidents" to the fold of the Roman Catholic Church, which was considered to be the *Una Sancta*. However, following the Second Vatican Council, the method of uniatism was rejected, as stated in the famous Balamand Statement, where one reads: "With regard to the method which has been called 'uniatism,' it was stated at Freising (June 1990) that 'we reject it as method for the search for unity because it is opposed to the common tradition of our Churches.'"[3]

But TCTCV then adds: "others would acknowledge in communities other than their own a real but incomplete presence of the elements which make up the Church."[4] This is indeed the case today with the Roman Catholic Church, which, in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium,* adopted during the Second Vatican Council in 1964, recognizes that the Una Sancta "subsists" in the Roman Catholic Church, "although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure."[5] This is also the case with the Orthodox Church, which in the document of the Holy and Great Council of Crete of 2016 entitled "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World" states that: "The Orthodox Church, as the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, in her profound ecclesiastical self-consciousness, believes unflinchingly that she occupies a central place in the

2. *The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches: The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches* [Toronto Statement] (WCC Publications, 1950), §3.1.

3. Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, "Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion" (Balamand Statement), Balamand, Lebanon, 23 June 1993, https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-lingua-inglese.html.

4. TCTCV, para. 10.

5. Pope Paul VI, *Lumen gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), 21 November 1964, §8, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

matter of the promotion of Christian unity in the world today." The document then affirms that she

> accepts the historical name of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her, and believes that her relations with them should be based on the most speedy and objective clarification possible of the whole ecclesiological question, and most especially of their more general teachings on sacraments, grace, priesthood, and apostolic succession.[6]

For this reason, TCTCV suggests that:

> Visible unity requires that churches be able to recognize in one another the authentic presence of what the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381) calls the "one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church." This recognition, in turn, may in some instances depend upon changes in doctrine, practice and ministry within any given community. This represents a significant challenge for churches in their journey towards unity.[7]

## 2. Does unity imply uniformity?

This leads us to a second, very important question: Does unity imply uniformity? Certainly, some have such an idealistic view of things, but the reality, attested by historical facts, is quite different. For example, if we look back at Christian antiquity, we will discover that within the "undivided" Church there existed a great variety of liturgical traditions: the liturgy in Rome was not the same as that of Milan; the liturgy in Antioch was not the same as that of Alexandria—but this in no way affected the unity of the Church. Even today, if we carefully observe what is happening within the Roman Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church, not to mention the various communions of churches that emerged from the Reformation, we can notice many regional peculiarities that do not result only from linguistic or cultural differences, but can even influence the very administration of these churches. Thus, diversity should not necessarily be considered an obstacle to unity.

This is acknowledged by TCTCV, which states:

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6. Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World," Crete, Pentecost 2016, paras. 1, 6, https://orthodoxcouncil.org/decisions/-/asset_publisher/f1JDEVkdg6TH/content/rest-of-christian-world/357453249a7.html.

7. TCTCV, para. 9.

> Cultural and historical factors contribute to the rich diversity within the Church. The Gospel needs to be proclaimed in languages, symbols and images that are relevant to particular times and contexts so as to be lived authentically in each time and place. Legitimate diversity is compromised whenever Christians consider their own cultural expressions of the Gospel as the only authentic ones, to be imposed upon Christians of other cultures.[8]

However, this same document warns us that there are limits to diversity:

> There are limits to legitimate diversity; when it goes beyond acceptable limits it can be destructive of the gift of unity. Within the Church, heresies and schisms, along with political conflicts and expressions of hatred, have threatened God's gift of communion. Christians are called not only to work untiringly to overcome divisions and heresies but also to preserve and treasure their legitimate differences of liturgy, custom and law and to foster legitimate diversities of spirituality, theological method and formulation in such a way that they contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole.[9]

The document points out that ecumenical dialogue ought "to discern, with the help of the Holy Spirit, what is necessary for unity, according to the will of God, and what is properly understood as legitimate diversity."[10] But it recognizes at the same time that we are lacking common criteria, or means of discernment, and mutually recognized structures to use these criteria effectively.

Nevertheless, within the bilateral theological dialogues established between the churches, we do find, fortunately, at least two fine examples of the recognition that terminological diversity is not necessarily an obstacle to ecclesial unity. The first example can be found in the Second Agreed Statement of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, agreed in Chambésy-Geneva in 1990, which recognized that "both families [of Churches] have always loyally maintained the same authentic Orthodox Christological faith, and the unbroken continuity of the apostolic tradition, though they have used Christological terms in different ways."[11] Of course, this courageous statement may sound revolutionary for

8. TCTCV, para. 28.

9. TCTCV, para. 30.

10. TCTCV, para. 30.

11. Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, "Second Agreed Statement," Chambésy-Geneva, 23–25 September 1990, para. 9, https://www.ecupatria.org/documents/second-agreed-statement-1990/.

some since it recognized the validity of both the non-Chalcedonian terminology and the Chalcedonian terminology on Christology and did not require any changes to the terminology used by either side to reach unity.

The second example is the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, agreed by the Roman Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999, which states that

> a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics. In light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification ... are acceptable. Therefore, the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding the basic truths.[12]

The methodological novelty of this declaration lies in the recognition that the unity of faith can be carried by a difference of languages, theological forms, and particular emphases, and one can therefore speak of a "differentiated consensus."

## 3. Unity in space or unity in time?

Another vision of unity is to view the various Christian churches and denominations as pieces of a puzzle that need only be put together to achieve Christian unity. This vision is similar to what the late Father George Florovsky, a worker of the first hour in the ecumenical movement and Faith and Order, called *ecumenism in spac*e. In 1961, at the Third WCC Assembly in Delhi, he led the Orthodox representatives in a statement sometimes referred to as the "Florovsky statement," which criticized this *ecumenism in space* for aiming at an agreement between the denominations that would consider Christian unity simply as an interdenominational adjustment. Instead, Florovsky advocated for *ecumenism in time*, which would seek the common ground among the Christian denominations in their common history and in the common ancient and apostolic tradition from which all of them derive their existence. The Florovsky statement declares that the Orthodox Church is willing to participate in this common effort as a witness, since it believes it has preserved continuously the deposit of apostolic faith and tradition. For this reason, the immediate objective of the ecumenical search is, according to this perspective, a recovery of the

12. The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,* 1999, §5, para. 40, https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/joint_declaration_2019_en.pdf.

apostolic tradition and of Christian vision and belief in agreement with all the ages. Therefore, a third question that still can be raised is whether we are seeking unity in space or unity in time.

This conference commemorates the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. As noted in the study document *Confessing the One Faith*, Faith and Order recognized at its first conference in Lausanne in 1927 that "the Nicene Creed is a conciliar creed which, through its wide reception, became the ecumenical symbol of the unity of the Church in faith." [13]

*Confessing the One Faith* raises at the same time the question

> as to what degree and in which form the fundamentals of the apostolic faith as witnessed by the Holy Scriptures, proclaimed in the Tradition of the Church, and expressed in the Creed, can be commonly understood and expressed by churches of different confessional traditions, living in different cultural, social, economical, political, and religious contexts.[14]

In order to achieve this unity in time, *Confessing the One Faith* suggests that each church ought to recognize the apostolic faith in its own life and practice and to repent if that is not the case. It invites each church to recognize other churches if they confess the same apostolic faith. It acknowledged that "the Nicene Creed remains a most appropriate text to help every church to recognize, in the particular situation of its own time and circumstance, the unchanging faith of the Church." [15]

According to the same study document, the common confession of the apostolic faith is one of the three essential conditions of visible unity. It opens the way to the next two, which are the mutual recognition of baptism, Eucharist, and ministry, and the mutual recognition of common structures for decision-making and teaching authoritatively. The document affirms that when the churches can confess the apostolic faith together, it will constitute one essential and integral expression of the visible unity we seek.

This understanding of unity in time, grounded on the apostolic tradition formulated by the Nicene Creed, is at the heart of the Canberra Statement on unity, produced by the Commission on Faith and Order and adopted by the

13. *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as It Is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, Faith and Order Paper No. 153 (WCC Publications, 1990, rev. 1991), para. 16, https://ia600403.us.archive.org/28/items/wccfops2.160/wccfops2.160.pdf.

14. *Confessing the One Faith*, para. 17.

15. *Confessing the One Faith*, para. 21.

Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1991. The statement underlined that "the unity of the Church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith" and which underlined that "diversity is illegitimate when ... it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Savior ... as proclaimed in Holy Scripture and preached by the apostolic community."[16] For this reason, it also pointed out the importance of bilateral and multilateral dialogues. Such dialogues have already reached many significant agreements and thus have borne considerable fruit these last decades on the way toward visible unity. But still more has to be done!

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16. *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling* (Canberra Statement), adopted by the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Canberra, Australia, 1991, para. 2.2, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-unity-of-the-church-as-koinonia-gift-and-calling-the-canberra-statement.

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## Keynote Address—Living and Visible Unity in Community

*Rev. Prof. Dr Jacqueline Grey*[17]

This plenary presentation offers some reflections on the challenges and opportunities for living visible unity in the contemporary context. It primarily considers the topic of unity for the global church through the lens of community. To do this, the presentation utilizes the approach of testimony. For the Pentecostal community, testimony is a key method to introduce and address a topic of importance among community members.[18] Testimony incorporates personal experience, theological reflection, and practical insight. Testimony aims to challenge and encourage the community through the sharing of personal narrative. My testimony begins with my own story of living in an intergenerational home. Some challenges and opportunities experienced in communal living are then highlighted as analogous for the church today as we journey towards *koinonia*. Of course, such analogies are limited; however, the purpose of this presentation is to consider the perspective of a younger church tradition in fostering living and visible unity for the global church today.

For the past year my family has been living in a multigenerational house. The purpose for us living together is to provide care for our ageing parents. Previously, we had each lived in three separate dwellings. My parents had been living in their house, my sister and her family in a different house, and I was in

17. Jacqueline Grey is professor of biblical studies at Alphacrucis University College, Australia.

18. For a discussion on testimony in the Pentecostal tradition, see Mark Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology* (Routledge, 2016); Tony Richie, "Translating Pentecostal Testimony into Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 20 (2011): 155–83; James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Eerdmans, 2010).

an apartment. But in coming together for our common purpose, we all moved into one house and became one household. Our household now comprises my parents (mother and father), my older sister and her husband and two teenage children, and myself. So, there are seven of us living in one house together, from three different generations, as well as three sausage dogs. Our diversity of ages and experiences is a gift. I realize that multigenerational living is common in many of our global communities, but in my context of Sydney, Australia, it is somewhat unusual.

After just one year of living together, I have some reflections as a type of analogy for our theme of visible unity. But first, let me tell you a little more about our actual house and the layout of our building structure. Bear with me. We are fortunate to have space so that each person has their own bedroom and each family group has their own little living area. My sister's family lives in one part of the house, our parents have a different section (with their bedroom, small kitchen, and TV area), and I have another section with my bedroom and study. We share a common main kitchen, dining, and lounge area. So, we all live in one building but we have our own personal spaces.

How does this relate to visible unity in the church, you ask? Our multigenerational house symbolizes a vision for visible unity. There are many models for visible unity and meanings of what visible unity is, but this image of an intergenerational house can help us explore the opportunities and challenges of visible unity in the church today.

Ultimately the definition of visible unity is what our churches agree is our goal. What visible unity looks like, and means, is what we agree to do together to overcome divisions and foster fellowship and mission. We must discern together what the Holy Spirit is saying to our churches.[19]

Yet, like our multigenerational house, visible unity must allow space for the diversity of each unique family. Each church tradition must have and maintain their own theological and physical spaces. So, my parents have their section of the house, and—like the Catholics and the Assyrian Church, and the Anglicans—their space provides a place for them to flourish in their distinctiveness. My sister and her husband and children have spaces that allow their family unit to grow—like spaces for the Lutherans or Baptists, or the Reformed traditions. This includes an area for the noisy teenagers (I guess they are the Pentecostals,

19. Ge Wen and Sotiris Boukis, "Faith and Order Study Group Focuses on Meaning of Visible Unity," interview, World Council of Churches, 6 October 2025, https://www.oikoumene.org/news/faith-and-order-study-group-focuses-on-meaning-of-visible-unity.

my own tribe). And there is a study space for the quieter traditions—like the Quakers.

Yet, our multigenerational home houses all three family groups. We all live within the common structure of the building. In this analogy, the building structure could refer to our common lived faith, found in common creeds and the Nicene Creed, which we celebrate at this event. The building structure could also refer to institutional agreements and mutual recognition between institutions. Our institutions agreeing to a common date for Easter is an example of this.

With this in mind, I have three observations from my own admittedly limited experience of multigenerational living that are analogous to the challenges and opportunities for visible unity in the church today. After all, our goal is for "the visible unity of the entire household of God in the world."[20] My observations are that living together harmoniously requires: 1) common values; 2) meaningful relationships; and 3) a common mission.

## Observation 1: Living together harmoniously requires common values.

To live together in unity, each family unit must know and articulate what they value. While our broader Christian household finds commonality in the structure of credal theology (such as the Nicene Creed), we know there is still much variation among our traditions in terms of our unique spiritualities and theological distinctives.

Many traditions are able to draw on a wealth of theological reflection. I think of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox families, drawing on centuries of historical theological reflection that has shaped their identity and distinctives. However, other newer traditions are still in the process of articulating their spirituality and theological distinctives. This is another reason why bilateral dialogues are so helpful: they cause newer groups to grapple with their own theology.

For example, my own tradition is classical Pentecostalism. Pentecostals emerged from the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. We emerged from revival movements across the world, most notably Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906—but there were also Indigenous revivals in Korea and India.[21] These were mostly ecumenical renewal movements driven by a restorationist impulse, nurturing a desire to retrieve the dynamism

20. Frank D. Macchia, *The Spirit-Baptized Church: A Dogmatic Inquiry* (T&T Clark, 2020), 204.

21. Jacqueline N. Grey, "Make Azusa Great Again," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 44, no. 3–4 (2022): 345–62.

of New Testament Christianity.[22] The emerging Pentecostal fellowships shared an emphasis on the active experience of the Holy Spirit and the present-day manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As Wolfgang Vondey observes, "Beginning as a fringe movement at the margins of the Christian world, the modern-day Pentecostal movement has become one of the fastest growing religious movements of the twenty-first century."[23] So Pentecostalism is relatively young, very diverse, and growing predominantly in the global South.[24] We are still in the process of articulating our theological distinctives. Initially, most Pentecostals rejected creeds and refused even to formalize their theology. We rejected tradition for the "new" work of the Spirit, not appreciating the value of ancient wisdom. But now, we are developing and maturing like teenagers, experimenting with different ways to (re)capture our tradition and values.[25]

This description reminds me of the teenagers in my home. They are young, energetic, and playful. Sometimes when they talk it's like they are speaking in tongues: I don't know what they're saying! They are discovering their own beliefs, not their parents' beliefs. They are experimenting with ideas and are particularly sensitive to issues of justice. But these teenagers are bold. They don't just accept what they are told by the older generation. They want to participate in decision-making. The teenagers in our house question the rules; they critique behaviours. My 14-year-old niece said to me the other day: "That's a bit passive-aggressive, Auntie Jacqui." My jaw nearly hit the floor. But she was correct and right to correct me.

Such honesty can create tension because the older generation is not used to being questioned, especially by their children and grandchildren—or nieces. The older ones are often shocked that their authority is challenged with questions like Why do we do it this way? Who decides? The younger ones ask: "Why don't we get a voice?" Or even: "Why can't we change the tradition?" As a household, it is crucial that we confront these difficult questions about power, authority, and gatekeeping if we are to be truly unified.

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22. Wolfgang Vondey, "Pentecostals and Ecumenism: Becoming the Church as a Pursuit of Christian Unity," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 4 (2019): 319.

23. Wolfgang Vondey, *The Liturgy of the Gospel: Theological Hermeneutics in Pentecostal Perspective* (Cascade, 2025), 25.

24. Mookgo S. Kgatle, "Peculiarities in the Pentecostal Tradition: Disciplinal and Decolonial Perspectives in a South African Context," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (July 2022): 1, https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2519.

25. Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 24.

Post colonial and decolonial approaches ask similar questions of powerholders and former powerholders: Whose interests are being served? Who decides? Who has a voice? These questions are very pertinent to the church in the global South (where the majority of Pentecostals live), especially considering that the South is now the centre of gravity for Christianity.[26] Ideological challenges, both historical and contemporary, that inhibit unity in the church must be boldly addressed for healing and reconciliation.

There are also theological disagreements that prevent unity and full communion among Christian churches. There are ecclesiological issues we face as we call one another to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship. Many of these challenges are well-rehearsed.

However, when we look closely, are these only theological questions? I'll play the role of a questioning teenager again. Are not many of these theological issues also issues of power? Whose baptism do you recognize? Who decides and on what basis? Who makes the rules? Who decides that hierarchical communion must prevail? Frequently, the emerging church groups and Christian communions in the global South do not get a voice in this decision-making. These decisions are already made. No discussion. Again, this is not to disregard or abandon the ancient wisdom of our traditions, but to consider new ways of living together that include the whole family of God's household, young and old.

Despite these obstacles and restrictions, our task is to identify and foster our common values amidst our diversity so we can live together harmoniously: to affirm in one another our common beliefs based on the abiding headship of Christ over his body, the Church (Eph. 5:23). In unity, we say together: "For us all, and for our salvation he came down from heaven." For each church to see in one another the "one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church."[27] The Commission on Faith and Order and the other commissions seek to foster such theological unity. Our common values—particularly love and justice—based on our common faith, are treasured and must be protected.

26. Kgatle, "Peculiarities in the Pentecostal Tradition," 1.

27. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision,* Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), para. 9, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/The_Church_Towards_a_common_vision.pdf.

## Observation 2: Living together harmoniously requires meaningful relationships.

This is crucial: relationality is at the heart of visible unity. In fact, any activity undertaken toward visible unity must foster a deepening of relationships among our churches. Any activity must foster love.

What I have observed in our home is that we can have structural unity—we are literally living under one roof—but never develop our relationships with one another. We can live together in one house and yet stay in our silos, isolated, never interacting with one another in a meaningful way. Living together in one house might look to an outsider like we have relationship with one another because we have functional unity, but the reality inside the house may be different. Inside, we may squabble—or worse, ignore one another; our only interaction may be a roster for cleaning the kitchen. Unless our multigenerational community deliberately fosters genuine relationships with one another—sharing a meal, talking with one another over a cup of tea—we are not really unified.

This is also true, I believe, for churches today as we work towards our goal of visible unity. Using this analogy, we can seek opportunities for institutional unity—we can recognize one another's baptism, share resources, have mutual recognition of ordained leaders and ministries, even participate in ecumenical dialogue—but unless these activities foster *koinonia*, true fellowship, they are shallow undertakings.

For example, imagine if we all shared a common date for Easter every year. It would be wonderful if corporately we agreed to celebrate Easter on the same day. But if it doesn't facilitate relationships between our churches, what does it really achieve? If our churches celebrate the Easter season in isolation from one another behind our sectarian fences (albeit on the same day),[28] have we really achieved visible unity? Of course, there are some valuable benefits to a common date. There is a measure of unity in our witness if we all celebrate the resurrection of Christ on the same day. But surely such a structural change at a global level should facilitate change at a local level as well. Shouldn't it also facilitate interaction between local churches? While each local church must have their own worship services and liturgies over Easter to serve their communities, churches across local communities can gather for prayer, find opportunities to worship together, and importantly, come together for shared missional activities over Easter. However, this can only happen if there is trust and relationship among local churches at the grassroots, parish level as well as at the global level.

28. Vondey, "Pentecostals and Ecumenism," 320.

Visible unity among churches, in terms of functional unity—our structures, hierarchies, and organization—must foster relational unity at the local level. Fostering grassroots relational unity does not undermine the vision for visible unity. In fact, I believe it enhances it. Our vision for visible unity must have two hands: local and global.

Local churches worshipping together and joining together for mission is very visible to the local community. Such *koinonia* among local churches, parishes, and dioceses points those outside the church to Christ Jesus. The love we demonstrate among our local Christian communities testifies that we are together one body, disciples of Jesus. In *koinonia* we discover a unity that lies deeper than our divisions.[29] Yet, the nurturing of local relationships needs the encouragement of their institutions and global leaders. Local Christian leaders—pastors, priests, even bishops—need to see *koinonia* modelled by global Christian leaders.

The biblical concept of *koinonia* provides the foundation for our fellowship and unity at local levels. The term *koinonia* has an abundance of meanings, including communion, fellowship, mutuality, and participation.[30] Yet, each nuance of meaning provides insight that helps us to build genuine relationships together and to test our resolve for unity. Lorelei Fuchs notes that *koinonia* has a relational quality.[31] I would add that the biblical concept also has a quality of relationship. *Koinonia* is more than friendship or even the bond of human family. It has a quality of relationship because it is rooted in the life of the trinitarian God. Yet, the quality of our *koinonia* also witnesses to the world, which provides our common mission.

## Observation 3: Living together harmoniously requires a common mission.

While the mission of my multigenerational home is to care for those who live within our house, particularly our ageing parents, the mission of the church expands this hospitality to also care for others, those outside the household of God. This is our shared mission. Together, we witness to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. As Frank Macchia says: "There is no credible witness to the world if the church is not meaningfully embodying the love of God by serving one another in the unity of love."[32] We are to embody Christ's presence

29. Macchia, *Spirit-Baptized Church*, 211.

30. Lorelei F. Fuchs, *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology: From Foundations Through Dialogue to Symbolic Competence for Communionality* (Eerdmans, 2008), 10.

31. Fuchs, *Koinonia and the Quest*, 13.

32. Macchia, *Spirit-Baptized Church*, 320.

in the world as a sign of the salvation found in Christ alone. We are one in Christ; we must be one in our love and fellowship, and one in our mission. This includes opening the door of our house to welcome the stranger.

As Christ's body, we are not of this world. We do not serve the powers of this world but subvert the world by exposing its destructive ways and offering reconciliation and healing.[33] We are to seek truth, righteousness, and justice, envisioned by Christ in his missional statement "to proclaim good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18, based on Is. 61). So, Christ sends us, a prophetic people, to set the captives free and announce jubilee for all creatures and all creation. We are to continue the mission of Christ to witness to the good news of Christ by the empowering of the Holy Spirit, in word, deed, and sign, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). This is our common mission. May we join together in actions of visible unity, at the global and grassroots levels, to work toward the transformation of our world. As we pray together: Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Thank you.

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33. Macchia, *Spirit-Baptized Church*, 330.

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# Keynote Address—The Unity of the Church in the Third Article of the Creed

*Sr Prof. Dr Susan K. Wood*[34]

The third article of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is not merely a doctrinal formula. It is a confession of the church's deepest reality: the Spirit as the source of life and unity; the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic; and the acknowledgement of one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. These affirmations echo and effectively serve as an exegesis of Ephesians 4:4–6: "There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." Unity is not a separate addendum to Christian faith. Its very texture is woven sacramentally into the church's life by the Spirit who gathers, sanctifies, and sends. Baptism initiates believers into this Spirit-filled communion, and the church is unified through this shared sacramental life. Consequently, unity is not an achievement, but a gift already given in Christ and made sacramentally present in baptism. Our task is not to create unity but to manifest and safeguard it in our ecclesial relationships.

## Baptism: The foundation of unity

Baptism is not merely an entry rite for an individual into the church; it is the foundation of ecclesial communion because it incorporates us into Christ's paschal mystery and the Spirit-filled people of God. In baptism, believers become temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), members of Christ's body (1 Cor.

34. Susan K. Wood SCL is professor of systematic theology at Regis College, Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto.

12:13), and participants in the divine life. The unity and communion formed in baptism makes the people of God one in grace with the Father, Son, and Spirit, and one with all other Christians baptized in water in the triune name. There is but one baptism and one communion as attested to in Ephesians 4:4–6, and therefore, one communion of the baptized, who are equal in dignity, before any distinction of state of life or ministry. As *Lumen gentium* teaches, the church is a "sacrament of saving unity," and baptism is its seed.[35]

Ecumenically, this means that unity is not the fruit of dialogue but its presupposition. The 1982 Lima Statement, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), affirms that baptism conveys forgiveness, new birth, and incorporation into Christ's body. There is only one baptism because there is only one Lord and one paschal event.[36] Thus, the question is not how we achieve unity but how we account for our disunity—a paradox that the soteriological unity grounded in baptism exposes.

A significant ecumenical agreement has been achieved on the meaning of baptism and the bond of unity it establishes, to which BEM bears witness: its dominical institution, its meaning as participation in Christ's death and resurrection, its effects as implying conversion and conveying pardoning and cleansing, its nature as a sign of the kingdom of God, its identity as a gift of the Spirit, which incorporates us into the Body of Christ.[37] This unity precedes the unity of the churches, ecclesial unity finding its basis in the sacramental and soteriological unity of baptism. The unity of Christians in one baptism is not the result of ecumenical efforts but is a gift to be received and recognized prior to those efforts. We do not "achieve" one baptism upon mutual recognition of one another's baptisms; that unity already exists now among those who baptize in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. There is one baptism because there is only one Lord and one event of his saving death and resurrection. The unity experienced in this one baptism is a unity in Christ. Consequently, the burden should be to account for our disunity rather than to account for our unity.[38] This disunity is most evident as the disunity among ecclesial communities.

Incorporation into the Body of Christ in baptism is inseparable from entrance into an ecclesial community. In broad strokes, this initiation consists

35. Paul VI, *Lumen gentium* [Dogmatic constitution on the church], 21 November 1964, §9.

36. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (WCC Publications, 1982).

37. BEM, paras. 1, 3–7.

38. See Susan K. Wood, "I Acknowledge One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins," in *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism,* ed. Christopher R. Seitz (Brazos Press, 2001), 193.

in formation in the faith, baptism in water, and participation in the life of the community. This follows the pattern of Acts 2:41–42: "So those who welcomed his [Peter's] message, were baptized. ... They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." That local community is where the faith is professed, where the local church receives the baptized, and where the Eucharist celebrates and proclaims the presence of Christ sacramentally within the community. The rites of initiation are unthinkable apart from a local community. These local churches throughout the world are where the one Church of Christ is present and manifested.[39] The relationship between the Church universal and the local churches is simultaneous and mutually reciprocal: the universal Church exists in and through the local churches. Thus, we are baptized both into the universal Church of Christ and into a local church. One only occurs in and through the other, with the result that we are baptized both into the universal Church of Christ and into a local church with a denominational identity. It is within this relationship between the universal Church of Christ and local churches that the paradox of a soteriological unity and an ecclesial disunity becomes evident.

## Naming the paradox: Soteriological unity and ecclesial disunity

The very word *paradox* sets up a dialectic between the two realities, soteriological unity and ecclesial disunity. In ecumenical language, the more common term *imperfect communion*, while more irenic and positive in terms of acknowledging a real relationship between churches not in perfect communion, risks obscuring the rupture and tearing asunder that disunity entails, thereby sanitizing the scandal of Christian disunity. The danger is that the churches become complacent with the status quo of the imperfect unity already achieved. They may weaken in their desire for an ecclesial unity within the diversity of their particular histories and turn away from the hard work of ecumenism. This ecclesial rupture is most painfully evident at the eucharistic table, especially in those traditions such as Roman and Eastern Catholics and the Orthodox, whose eucharistic discipline requires established ecclesial unity for participation in the sacrament that signifies and effects unity. Other traditions, appealing to the instrumental value of the Eucharist as a means toward unity, have more inclusive practices of hospitality. Nevertheless, both practices—whether exclusion from eucharistic sharing or inclusion as a means toward further unity—indicate that baptismal unity is insufficient for full communion.

This division is not soteriological but ecclesial: one enters a divided church through baptism because one enters simultaneously into the one Body of Christ

39. Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *The Church: Local and Universal* (WCC Publications, 1990), §2.

and into a particular ecclesial communion that is not in communion with other ecclesial communities of the baptized. This results in the paradox of Christians being in communion with each other in baptism and at the same time finding themselves in a state of ecclesial disunity. The unity established in baptism does not extend to the visible elements of communion, such as the common celebration of divine worship and the bonds of ecclesiastical governance described in section 14 of *Lumen gentium* and section 2 of *Unitatis redintegratio*.

## From baptism to Eucharist: Communion and its wounds

Baptism's place within the pattern of Christian initiation shows that it is a beginning oriented towards eucharistic communion. This is broadly recognized ecumenically. For instance, the Lutheran theologian Gordon Lathrop observes that "the water leads to the meal" as the "primary form of 'participation in the life of the community.'"[40] This resonates with the Catholic teaching that the Eucharist is "the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows."[41] Likewise, the Decree on Ecumenism notes that baptism is only a beginning, a point of departure directed toward a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation and complete integration into eucharistic communion.[42] Baptism deputes us for eucharistic worship, which is the birthright of the baptized, for baptism gives us a place (*ordo*) in the eucharistic assembly. For this reason, the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults dismisses catechumens before the Liturgy of the Eucharist since they have not yet received this deputation. Yet again, herein lies the paradox: united in baptism but divided at the eucharistic table. Both baptism and the Eucharist are sacramental celebrations of the one paschal mystery of Christ's dying and rising—one employing the real symbolism of womb and tomb, rebirth and dying and rising with Christ, the other the real symbolism of his body broken and blood poured out for us and our salvation.[43] Yet, within this one mystery of Christ we are divided in its eucharistic realization.

It would be incorrect to claim that there is one *koinonia* established in baptism and another in the Eucharist. Section 22 of *Unitatis redintegratio* does speak of the beginning represented in baptism as directed towards a unity complete in the visible elements of unity represented in a "system" of salvation

40. Gordon Lathrop, "The *Ordo* of Baptism and Its Ecumenical Implications," in *Becoming Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism*, ed. Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller, Faith and Order Paper No. 184 (WCC Publications, 1999), 17.

41. Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum concilium* [Constitution on the sacred liturgy], 4 December 1963, §10.

42. Paul VI, *Unitatis redintegratio* [Decree on ecumenism], 21 November 1964, §22.

43. See Jean Daniélou, "Le symbolisme des rites baptismaux," in *Dieu Vivant: Perspectives religieuses et philosophiques* 1 (April 1945), trans. Robert Taft, S.J., cited in Robert Taft, S.J., *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (The Pastoral Press, 1984), 11.

and Eucharistic communion. The following paragraph, however, asserts that the ecclesial communities separated from us lack "the fullness of unity with us which flows from baptism," implying that the completeness achieved in the Eucharist itself flows from baptism. Participation in the death and resurrection of Christ signified in baptism finds ongoing sacramental expression in the Eucharist: eucharistic communion flows from and makes visible baptismal communion.

## Reframing recognition of ecclesial communities: Apostolicity in a broader key

How, then, can we be united in baptism while being separated at the eucharistic table? The problem is not soteriological, but ecclesial, especially at the level of the local community that baptizes in view of the division experienced by these local communities. For Catholics, what is required is recognition of another ecclesial community as church. Here, the ecumenical linchpin is apostolicity.

Historically, apostolicity has often been reduced to ministerial succession identified through a succession of laying on of hands in the rite of episcopal consecration and ordination. In this way, recognition of an apostolic ministry leads to the recognition of an apostolic community and a positive judgement on its ministry and eucharistic liturgies. The succession of the laying on of hands traditionally associated with apostolic succession is certainly a sign and instrument of apostolicity, as well as a conferral of responsibility to maintain the church in apostolicity. In Catholic theology, however, it is not in and of itself a guarantee of apostolicity, except under very specific conditions—as when the bishops teach infallibly in an ecumenical council in union with the Pope, or when dispersed throughout the world, they are in agreement that a teaching is definitively to be held. [44]

To reduce apostolicity to such a material succession in ministry does not do justice to the Second Vatican Council or subsequent ecumenical dialogue. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum,* acknowledges a broader transmission of the apostolic tradition: "Now what was handed on from the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes."[45] Thus, apostolicity is first of all an attribute of the church, broader and more extensive than apostolic ministry, even though

44. *Lumen gentium*, §25.

45. Paul VI, *Dei verbum* [Dogmatic constitution on divine revelation], 18 November 1965, §8, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

that apostolic ministry is an essential component of the church's apostolic character. While ministry certainly bears responsibility for the continuity of apostolic teaching, it is not the sole bearer of apostolicity. Nor is ordination within apostolic succession a guarantee that a church will remain faithful to every aspect of apostolic faith, life, and witness, as church schisms have sadly demonstrated. For Catholics, the succession of the laying on of hands is a sign of "a connection with Christ, of continuity of gospel proclamation effected by the Spirit, and of the unity of the church over time."[46]

Consequently, a reframing of the criteria for apostolicity is now called for—one that correlates apostolic ministry and the apostolicity embodied in the life, teaching, and worship of the church. We are called to discern evidence of apostolicity in one another's churches, which will also give us a new perspective in assessing one another's ministries overseeing that apostolicity. This necessitates an assessment of how these communities live as baptismal communities following the pattern of Christian living set out in Acts 2:38–47: reception of the apostolic testimony, repentance, baptism, forgiveness of sin, reception of the Holy Spirit, life in accordance to the apostolic teaching, prayer and the breaking of bread, generosity to those in need, and praise and thanksgiving. Recognition of the apostolicity of an ecclesial community must include discernment of an apostolic, baptismal life along with the identification of ministerial structures that witness to and oversee apostolicity.

## Reframing divisions of status within the church: Unity before diversity

Baptism not only requires a reframing of how to assess the apostolic status of other communities; it also necessitates a reframing of divisions of status within a particular ecclesial community—especially the relationship between ordained members and the laity. Because a baptismally-based ecclesiology emphasizes what is shared in common before considering what is distinctive in terms of charisms and ministries—as compared to, for example, a eucharistic ecclesiology with its focus on the role of the ministry of the ordained in the eucharistic liturgy—it bypasses the binary pair "hierarchy-laity" in order to consider the community first as a whole. Secondarily, it takes into account the roles of the distinctive charisms and ministries within it—what Bruno Forte identifies as the binary "community-charism/ministers."[47] The eucharistic model emphasizes the distinction between the laity and the clergy—even though they are fundamentally united in baptism. In contrast, the baptismal model highlights the unity of the

46. Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Apostolicity of the Church: Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (Lutheran University Press, 2006), §182.

47. Bruno Forte, *Laïcat et laïcité* (Médiaspaul, 1986), 116; and Bruno Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity: A Brief Study*, trans. Robert Paolucci (St Paul Books and Media, 1991), 38–61.

baptized without denying their variety, represented by the charismatic gifts of the Spirit and the ecclesial repositioning established by the sacrament of Holy Orders. This represents a subtle but important difference. Unity comes before distinction. Baptism establishes the communion of the Christian faithful who are equal in dignity before any division in status, all called to holiness.[48] This reflects the structure of *Lumen gentium* where the chapter on the people of God as a whole, the *Christifideles,* precedes the chapters on the hierarchy, the laity, and the religious.

This diminishes neither the importance of the ordained ministry nor the importance of the Eucharist: rather, it recognizes that all ministry is first baptismal. The minister is neither above nor outside the community of the baptized, but is a member of the baptized. Equality of dignity established in baptism does not result in a monochromatic community in which everyone possesses the same ministry or charism. Nor does it presuppose a democratic egalitarianism along political lines. A baptismal community is a differentiated community, an ordered communion, with each person occupying a particular *ordo* in the eucharistic community. Some members of the community are ordained and, therefore, occupy the *ordo* of presider over the eucharistic assembly.[49] The diversity of the Spirit's gifts and the sacraments that confer status, such as ordination and matrimony, ensure a rich variety of functions and responsibilities.

A baptismal ecclesiology reframes our understanding of ministry and governance. Unity comes before distinction. All ministry is first baptismal; the ordained are not above the community but within it. Augustine's words remain both poignant and accurate: "What I am for you terrifies me; what I am with you consoles me. For you I am a bishop; with you I am a Christian. The former is a duty; the latter a grace. The former is a danger; the latter, salvation."[50] Ordination does not diminish the baptismal identity of the ordinand.

## Baptism and synodality: Walking together in mission

Synodality flows from baptismal equality and charismatic diversity, for in synodality, baptismal communion becomes a lived reality. Ecclesiology in a baptismal key highlights the charismatic dimension of the entire people of

48. *Lumen gentium*, §9.

49. See Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 24; John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (St Vladimir's Press, 1997), 216.

50. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo* 340, 1, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 38, 1483; the English translation is from *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (New City Press, 1994), 292.

God. Each person is endowed with charismatic gifts for the upbuilding of the church, all sharing according to their different gifts and ministries in the priestly, prophetic, and servant kingship of Jesus Christ.

A synodal church is the church walking together, in a shared journey of faith with the "full, active, conscious participation" of all, mirroring their participation in the liturgy.[51] The principles of good liturgical participation become the principles of participation in the life of the church. Synodality is not a mere process of governance but a modality of being church, mirroring the trinitarian communion of mutual love and dialogue. The diversity of charismatic gifts along with the basic equality in dignity conferred in baptism constitutes the theological and soteriological foundation of the structures and practices of synodality in the church. Here, the "sense of the faith" shared by all the baptized allows them to be attuned to the promptings of the Spirit, to contribute to the church's understanding of the faith, and to discern the signs of the times and how the church can best carry out its mission in its contemporary context.

The participation of all baptized persons, including those at the peripheries, in deep listening to one another and in intentional, courageous speech is necessary for the church. Each person has a role in the church's mission and is, in the words of Pope Francis, a "missionary disciple."[52] All are responsible for evangelization through witness to the faith through a gospel-oriented life; each person actively contributes to the mission of the church. The teaching church is no longer set against the learning church, for all teach by speaking from their Spirit-inspired faith experience and all learn through deep, mutual listening. In this way, those responsible for making a final decision—whether that be at the local, regional, or churchwide level—do so in communion with and informed by all the people of God. In this way, synodality is an expression of the catholicity of the church.

Synodality represents a broadening of the collegiality of bishops by strengthening the bond between episcopal leadership and the community through mutual discernment and consultation that inform episcopal decisions, without negating the governing function of pastors. The Synod on Synodality has distinguished between "decision-making" and "decision-taking." The first is the result of broad participatory discernment; the second, the decision of the final

51. See *Sacrosanctum concilium,* §14.

52. Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* [The joy of the gospel], Apostolic exhortation, 24 November 2013, §§24, 120–21.

responsible authority.[53] This is similar to the distinction between consultative and deliberative votes but gives more weight to what mere consultation might otherwise be. In a synodal process, the community attends to what the Spirit is saying to the church through the word of God, through attention to the signs of the times, and through the eyes of faith within an attitude of prayer.

Synodality is not just an institutional process or instrument of governance, but an expression of the church's nature, form, style, and mission—a modality of being church.[54] It mirrors the primordial synodality of the trinitarian communion of Father, Son, and Spirit, who, living in perfect unity and mutual love as a model of dialogue and mutual listening, provide the theological foundation for the church's communal discernment and shared mission.[55] Appropriately, synodality grows from the Nicaean confession: catholic in its inclusivity; one in the unity of communion forged in baptism; holy because it is the work of the Trinity made holy because of the grace of Christ. The Church is both a communion of holy people (*communio sanctorum*) and a communion made holy in the sacraments (*communio sanctorum*). Finally, the synodal Church is an apostolic community insofar as it hands on the apostolic teaching in its life, teaching, and worship, and proclaims the saving mercy of Christ.

## Baptism "for the forgiveness of sin"

The Creed's phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" is not incidental. Sin wounds communion—within communities and among them. Thus, "forgiveness of sin" is associated with the work of the Holy Spirit, baptism, and the unity of the church. Baptism is associated with the forgiveness of sin from the earliest days of Christianity. In Acts 2:38, Peter exhorts: "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Romans 6 interprets baptism as a baptism

53. Synod of Bishops, 16th Ordinary General Assembly, *Instrumentum laboris for the First Session* (October 2023), 52, https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/universal-stage/il/ENG_INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS.pdf.

54. Francis, "We Are Church Together," address to the Faithful of the Diocese of Rome, 18 September 2021, in *Walking Together: The Way of Synodality*, ed. General Secretariat of the Synod (Orbis, 2023), 152.

55. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html. See also Robert Józef Woźniak, "Dialogical Nature of the Synodal Church: Toward a Trinitarian Consideration of the Theological Roots of Dialogical Synodality," *Annales Theologici* 36 (2022): 385–400, https://www.academia.edu/101290922/DIALOGICAL_NATURE_OF_THE_SYNODAL_CHURCH_TOWARD_A_TRINITARIAN_CONSIDERATION_OF_THE_THEOLOGICAL_ROOTS_OF_DIALOGICAL_SYNODALITY.

into the death of Christ Jesus so that we will walk in newness of life, be united in a resurrection like his, and be freed from sin.

Even apart from baptism, forgiveness of sin is associated with the Spirit, for in John 20:22 the risen Jesus appears to the disciples who are in a locked room, shows them his wounds in his hands and side, breathes on them the gift of the Holy Spirit, and commissions them: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." With the gift of the Spirit, Christ commissions his disciples—all of them and not just ordained ministers—to unbind their fellow human beings, to set them free from everything that enslaves them, and to forgive. This injunction to forgive pervades the scriptures: we are given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor.5:18–19) and where we are forgiven as we forgive (Luke 6:37; 17:3–4).

Forgiveness restores broken communion—communion with God, with other people, within factions within a community, with other communities. In short, forgiveness is essential for the unity and communion of the church and is also required for her catholicity and holiness. As long as we are divided—acknowledging that all sides bear responsibility—we are not fully catholic within the historical, concrete reality of our ecclesial lives. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "The ruptures that wound the unity of the church ... do not occur without human sin" even though "one cannot charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities ... and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ."[56] Divisions among Christians prevent the church from realizing in practice the fullness of catholicity.[57] While these divisions occurred historically, contemporary sins against unity that harm catholicity include certain exclusions which seriously harm fraternal charity: refusals to forgive, pride, an unevangelical insistence on condemning the "other side," or a disdain born of an unhealthy presumption.[58] The path to ecumenical unity, therefore, is one of repentance, forgiveness, and conversion.

Forgiveness in baptism extends beyond the once-for-all forgiveness of sins in the person being baptized or even the forgiveness of someone who has wronged us. The forgiveness of sin in baptism initiates a person into a lifestyle of conversion. Although baptism is an event in the life of a Christian and the church, the conversion and life in the Spirit begun in baptism are ongoing. Because ecclesial divisions persist because of pride, exclusion, and refusal to forgive, church disunity is a call to Christians to return to their baptism and to forgive as they have been forgiven. Ecumenism, therefore, is a penitential path.

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56. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§817–18.

57. Paul VI, *Unitatis redintegratio*, §4.

58. John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint* [Our commitment to ecumenism], 25 May 1995, §15.

Repentance and reconciliation are not optional but constitutive of catholicity. Forgiveness restores communion and makes visible the unity already given in baptism.

## The eschatological horizon of unity

Unity is both already and not yet. Sacramentally, in baptism, the unity of the Church is real and operative; historically, it is wounded and obscure. The Church lives in the tension between the gift received and the fullness awaited. The Creed's confession of one baptism for the forgiveness of sins places unity within the economy of grace: it is given by the Spirit, grounded in Christ's paschal event, and oriented toward the Father's kingdom. Ecclesial structures and dialogues serve this mystery; they do not create it *ex nihilo*. The church, as *Lumen gentium* suggests, is sacrament—sign and instrument—of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity.[59] In this sacramental identity, the Church groans and hopes (Rom. 8:22–25), manifesting unity imperfectly yet truly, awaiting eschatological consummation.

Consequently, the ecumenical vocation is intrinsically eschatological: patient, penitent, persevering. It refuses triumphalism and despair alike. It holds together realism about wounds and confidence in grace. It embraces a path of conversion and dialogue in charity and truth. The unity given in baptism is both criterion and compass: criterion by which practices are discerned (Do they manifest the communion of the baptized?) and compass, which orients the Church's journey toward the eucharistic fullness it seeks.

## Practical pathways for manifesting baptismal unity

If unity is a gift already given, what practices manifest that gift? Several pathways—liturgical, catechetical, pastoral, and structural—can help the baptized make visible the unity they possess.

- Liturgical catechesis on baptism and the Eucharist. Catechesis should recover the intrinsic link between baptism and Eucharist, presenting initiation as a single, coherent sacramental journey. In parishes and congregations, homilies on readings such as Ephesians 4:4–6 and Romans 6 can be paired with instructional moments showing how baptismal grace finds its weekly nourishment and visible expression at the eucharistic table. Mystagogical catechesis after baptism can deepen awareness that the Eucharist both presupposes and perfects baptismal communion.

59. *Lumen gentium*, §1.

- Renewal of baptismal promises and annual baptismal festivals. Many communities already observe the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord and the Easter Vigil as privileged times to renew baptismal promises. Intentional use of these annual rites—joined to processions with baptismal candles, thanksgiving over the water, and intercessions for the unity of the baptized—can foster a spirituality of baptism that is ecumenically minded without erasing doctrinal differences.
- Joint diaconal projects. Service to the poor, refugees, and the marginalized manifests the church's unity in mission. Cooperative projects, whether food pantries, shelters, tutoring programmes, or advocacy for justice, offer concrete expressions of communion in the one Lord. Baptism deputes the faithful not only for worship but also for witness and service; therefore, shared *diakonia* both arises from and expresses baptismal unity.
- Pastoral care for families in mixed marriages and for those baptized in one faith tradition and seeking communion in another requires sensitivity to baptismal identity.[60] In cases of baptism with water in the name of Father, Son, and Spirit, re-baptism should be avoided.
- Structures of listening and discernment. Synodal structures at the parish, diocesan, and regional levels should include intentional listening to ecumenical partners. Councils and assemblies can reserve seats for observers from other communions. Patterns of consultation—such as before major pastoral decisions—can be widened to include nearby churches, especially where joint witness is planned. In this way, synodality becomes ecumenically porous, learning from and with other communities about the Spirit's promptings.
- Formation for the ministries of the baptized. A baptismal ecclesiology requires formation for diverse ministries—catechists, lectors, musicians, evangelizers, pastoral associates, lay ecclesial ministers—without collapsing the distinction of orders. Cultivating gifts among the baptized strengthens the whole body and avoids clericalization of mission. At the same time, formation for ordained ministry should explicitly integrate baptismal identity so that presiders understand themselves as members of the baptized who preside in service.
- Healing of memories. Where historical wounds persist (caused, for example, by polemical narratives inherited from confessional histories), communities can organize "healing of memories" initiatives: shared study days, pilgrimages to sites of division, and public services of lament

60. See Susan K. Wood, "Reception of Baptized Christians into Full Communion of the Catholic Church: A Historical, Theological, and Liturgical Commentary," in *A Pastoral and Theological Commentary on the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults,* ed. Victoria M. Tufano (LTP, 2024), 143–53.

and hope. Such practices re-situate memory within the paschal mystery, allowing grief to become seedbed for reconciled unity.

## Conclusion

Our shared confession of one baptism and one church is not just a line in the Creed—it is a living call to unity and mission. In baptism, we are joined to Christ and to one another, forming a communion that no division can erase. Yet, we know the reality: this unity is wounded by our separations, and the church struggles to show the fullness of her catholicity. The good news is that baptism gives us a starting point and a promise. It reminds us that unity is not something we create—it is a gift we receive. Our task is to make that gift visible through dialogue, forgiveness, and a spirit of synodality, where all the baptized walk together, listening to the Spirit and to one another.

In a world fractured by conflict and isolation, the Church's unity is a sign of hope. When we live our baptismal call—sharing in Christ's mission, practising mercy, and working for reconciliation—we become what the Creed proclaims: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. This is not an abstract ideal but a concrete witness that the Spirit is still at work, healing wounds and drawing us into communion for the life of the world.

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# Questions from the Floor

## Question to Sr Prof. Dr Susan Wood

You spoke much about baptismal ecclesiology. Is the mutual recognition of baptism complete without being able to share also in the common eucharistic fellowship or would it also be a good starting point just to refrain from re-baptizing?

### Sr Prof. Dr Susan Wood

I think we are challenged as churches: If the Eucharist is the birthright of baptism, we really need to reconsider our eucharistic practices. And I say to my own communion, which, as you know, has been somewhat restrictive in the practice, that I think too often we've separated the sacraments of initiation. Now

part of this has happened historically when the ancient catechumenate became separated in terms of the Eucharist occurring much later and confirmation being way out of whack in terms of its sequencing. I think that, actually, the Orthodox get it right in terms of the sequence. I think we should seriously consider that if we do not admit the baptized to the Eucharist, we are depriving them of what they deserve. Now the problem has been that we consider the Eucharist as a sacrament both as a means and a sign and we've emphasized the sign value of unity over the means. That's not true of all denominations; some have gone the other direction.

## Question to H.E. Metropolitan Job

You spoke about these different languages which have been practised concerning recent bilateral dialogues. Could you expand a bit on the question of how, today, we can find new languages for ancient problems—for example, in expanding our Christological language beyond a non-Chalcedonian view, and including other churches?

## H.E. Metropolitan Job

In my presentation, I repeated what had already been said by our Faith and Order documents. Legitimate diversity is, of course, a big problem because, perhaps, we don't have enough criteria or instances to decide what is legitimate diversity. But I think we have at least one common denominator: the Council of Nicaea. Through its formulation of the trinitarian dogma, Nicaea also recognized baptism outside the limits of the church when it was performed in a trinitarian way. So, we see one criterion already there in the Council of Nicaea. Of course, is this criterion of Nicaea enough for us or not? Do we need more criteria? This is the problem. The problem is to see what is necessary.

With regard to theological language, I think that we have to look for the meaning and not only for the wording. And I think this is true with the two examples I gave of the bilateral dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox and between the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics. We are, in fact, saying the same things: we are expressing the same belief, the same truth, although using different vocabularies.

## Question to Rev. Prof. Dr Jacqueline Grey

You addressed the issue of diversity with the question of who is included and who has the power to speak: Who has a voice in this discussion? You asked us

this question—and also you referred to the Creed. So how would you look at the Creed and the credal language and interpret it for today as a legitimate diversity?

### Rev. Prof. Dr Jacqueline Grey

I think because many of the newer Christian groups did not initially embrace the Creed, we don't use it in our services or in our liturgy. As you heard the other day, many Pentecostals only encounter it when they go to Bible college or do some formal study. That's the first time they've heard the Creed. But I think that there is a great interest in the creeds, in Patristic theology, among Pentecostals and the newer churches. And I think that Pentecostal churches are rediscovering the old traditions and the language that is there. And so, I think there's hope that we're actually going to find a common language as the newer traditions discover the older language—and perhaps the older traditions discover some of the newer language as well. Then we can no longer be divided by a common language.

## Panel: "Living Visible Unity"

On the second panel related to the topic of unity, the moderator was Dr Johannes Oeldemann, director of the Johann Adam Möhler Institute for Ecumenism in Paderborn, Germany, and Roman Catholic member of the Commission on Faith and Order. He invited five representatives from different regions and denominations to a conversation about how unity becomes visible and tangible in their respective contexts.

Suk-Yi Pang, director of ecumenical relations for the Hong Kong Christian Council and member of the Program Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia, talked about the understanding of visible unity in the Chinese context. She highlighted the importance of harmony for Asian cultures and underlined the importance of respect for the otherness of each tradition. From an Asian perspective, the starting point for reflection about Christian unity is not ontology, but ethics. Unity becomes visible and tangible through our actions.

Prof. Dr Athanasios Despotis, a Greek Orthodox theologian teaching New Testament at the University of Bonn in Germany, explained how unity is becoming visible from an Eastern Orthodox point of view. He underlined the importance of fostering unity through both theological reflection and shared worship, embodying the integration of intellect, faith, and culture in the pursuit of Christian communion.

Prof. Dr Mano Emmanuel is a senior lecturer for systematic theology, Bible, and applied theology at Colombo Theological Seminary in Sri Lanka, an interdenominational and multi-ethnic theological school. Dr Emmanuel brought in an Evangelical perspective, drawing on her teaching experience with students from traditional churches as well as from numerous newer Pentecostal and Charismatic communities growing rapidly in Sri Lanka.

Rev. Prof. Dr Teddy Sakupapa, coming from Zambia but now teaching at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, and currently serving as deputy moderator of the WCC's Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation, talked about the importance of a decolonial approach to the understanding of unity from an African perspective.

Finally, Rev. Prof. Dr Charlotte Methuen, professor of church history at the University of Glasgow and member of the Commission on Faith and Order, explained characteristics of visible unity from an Anglican perspective. Dr Methuen referred to her expertise as a member of both the international Anglican-Lutheran as well as the Anglican-Old Catholic commissions.

After the initial statements, the moderator invited the panellists to reflect on the strengths of the others and the weaknesses of their own denomination, following the method of receptive ecumenism. The panellists also discussed the barriers for visible interdenominational unity in their cultural context and how they could be overcome. The final question the moderator posed to all five representatives was what the first step towards making Christian unity more visible and tangible should be in their respective contexts. Remarkably, all five panellists highlighted the importance of personal encounter, friendships, and deepening relationships. Thus, the panel discussion underlined that visible unity is not a goal in the distant future, the end of the path toward Christian unity. It is, rather, something that arises while walking together, and it continues to grow with every step on the ecumenical journey.

A video recording of the panel is available here: https://www.youtube.com/live/Ee0lki7YqRY.

## Report from the Ecumenical Future Panel

The panel on ecumenical future served as the concluding session of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. It was moderated by Emma van Dorp (Switzerland). After five intense days of dialogue, prayer, and discernment, the panel aimed to "broaden the table" by bringing together three kinds of voices: present voices from the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2025 cohort, future-oriented youth commissioners, and seasoned ecumenical leaders. The panel concluded with a symbolic message of hope linking the entire conference to the biblical image of the mustard seed.

The session opened with two GETI students, Su San (Myanmar) and Rev. Miles Baker Hunt (USA), who read the official GETI 2025 message. This message, historic in being the first ever addressed to a Faith and Order conference, begins by acknowledging the global "poly-crisis" in which the churches now live: ongoing colonial and neocolonial legacies, violence against Indigenous peoples, climate catastrophe, war, persecution, inequality, femicide, forced displacement, nationalism, authoritarianism, and the misuse of artificial intelligence. According to GETI, the Church must respond not with abstractions but with lament, anger, courage, and solidarity. Participants lament the widening gap between doctrinal discussions and practical reception of ecumenical work and call for unity that is not only conceptual but embodied.

The message articulates a strong kenotic vision of Christian unity, rooted in Christ's self-emptying love (Phil. 2). Unity, according to GETI, is formed in shared suffering, honest memory, and courageous compassion. They call Faith and Order to engage the lived theologies of communities on the margins, to ground ecumenical reflection in real human struggle, and to develop creative, participatory methods such as "healing solidarity circles," where diverse voices from refugees, youth, women, and people with disabilities shape theological reflection. True unity, they argue, takes place not merely in agreements but in embodied solidarity, where the Church becomes a wounded healer in a wounded world.

The next youth voice came from Mawuli Assimadi (Togo), who delivered a speech projecting himself into the year 2050. He envisioned tangible progress in six areas: 1) gender and racial justice, with women and underrepresented groups

fully included in church leadership; 2) intergenerational leadership, where young people share responsibility in governance; 3) church structures that have been reformed to confront injustice; 4) a deepened theological understanding of humanity shaped by a positive and critical understanding of the digital age and artificial intelligence; 5) open, stigma-free engagement with mental health; and 6) perseverance amid continuing crises such as war and violence. Even with ongoing struggles, he insisted that young people refuse to give in to despair: their hope and faith remain the greatest forces pushing the ecumenical movement toward visible unity.

This was followed by Rev. Jackeline Makena (Kenya), who issued a call to action. On behalf of the young people in the ecumenical movement, she called for justice over comfort, truth over silence, and love over fear. Unity, she said, "is not a distant dream but a living commitment": one requiring listening, learning from the wounded, and acting together. Young people, she insisted, are already moving and they call the churches to move with them.

The panel then heard from three senior ecumenical leaders: Rev. Prof. Esther Mombo (Kenya), H.E. Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Coorilos (Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church [Mumbai Diocese, India]), and Rev. Dr Angelique Walker-Smith (United States). Each reflected on the future of visible unity in areas such as mission, education, social justice, and renewing structures for leadership and dialogue. Rev. Prof. Esther Mombo reminded us that ecumenism should come from collaborative mission and shared spirituality. Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Coorilos presented a shift from ecumenism of the heart to ecumenism of the feet, meaning from the margins. Rev. Dr Angelique Walker-Smith called the participants of the conference to come as they are to continue the deep and meaningful ecumenical pilgrimage. With a shared vision for the future, the three esteemed speakers generously imparted their hard-earned wisdom on ecumenism to our gathering.

The session concluded with Dr Tijana Petković-Bertsch (Serbia), who offered the image of the mustard seed as a symbol of hope. She stressed that the future of ecumenism will grow not from grand strategies but from small, courageous gestures of trust, honesty, and relationship. Unity emerges as these seeds take root, becoming, in time, a living tree offering shelter, belonging, and hope for generations to come.

## GETI Message

A Message from the World Council of Churches' Fourth Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2025 to the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order at Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, 15 September–29 October 2025

1. Preface

1.1. The Fourth Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2025 brought together emerging ecumenists and theologians at Saint Bishoy Monastery in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, at the invitation of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order gathered under the theme of "Where Now for Visible Unity?"

1.2. This conference provides a capstone moment to what has been called an "ecumenical year." This message itself holds a distinct and historic place within the ecumenical movement, being the first of its kind to be presented to the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order World Conference. In many ways, this presents a distinctive starting point for deep listening and intentional intergenerational dialogue.

2. The Issues Facing the World and the Churches

2.1. We live in an intersectional reality of multi-crisis, including but not limited to ongoing colonial and neo-colonial legacies, violence against Indigenous peoples, discrimination, persecution, climate catastrophe, gender-based violence, sexual abuse and femicide, human trafficking, injustices against children, economic injustice, famine, war, genocide, forced displacement, authoritarianism and nationalism, fundamentalism, and the misuse of artificial intelligence. These crises are compounded by delayed justice and the paralysis of words without effective redemptive action. This reality requires the Church to respond with lament, anger, and courage, asking: How do we embody our unity in diversity as we respond to the multi-crisis of our world across our varied contexts?

2.2. We celebrate the work of Faith and Order while also lamenting the expanding gap between dialogue and praxis, manifested in the lack of robust reception of ecumenical texts. Ecumenical theology often seeks unity through doctrinal coherence, and yet, we must also explore how unity becomes visible through our embodied experience. So, we ask, what does it mean to be truly ecumenically and prophetically courageous in our world, offering glimpses of

hope in the brokenness of our world? We call the Church to locate itself centrally within the continuous sufferings of humanity and all of creation rather than standing apart from it.

3. Prophetic Duty and Kenotic Embodiment

3.1. We call the Church to live its prophetic duty to speak truth to power in all its forms, standing in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. Following in the incarnational way of Christ, who entered into human reality, the Word made flesh (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο), dwelling in solidarity with the downtrodden (John 1:14). This solidarity requires fearless unity in our shared witness and resistance to unjust systems rather than placating and conforming to them. "There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth" (Amos 5:10). Our shared ecumenical theology cannot be only abstract in nature. Rather, it is our imperative to kenotically embody Christ, emptying ourselves for the other.

3.2. This proposed theological turn to kenosis is understood as the humility and love to willingly relinquish power and privilege in order to form mutual relationships of equality and compassion with the marginalized (Phil. 2:5,7a). In our kenotic embodiment, we offer service with open hands to the other, working together towards life and the unequivocal promotion of human dignity alongside the dignity of all creation, knowing "that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now" (Rom. 8:22). This kenotic approach invites embodied interaction and mutual vulnerability as paths toward overcoming division.

3.3. As we embody a living and breathing faith, we are called to be faithful interpreters of Church memory, including the councils and creeds, proposing faithful ways rooted in our rich Christian tradition, and which yet remain both living and accessible for our diverse contexts today. Faithfully interpreting theology in our diverse contexts does not limit or somehow change our one, holy, catholic, and apostolic nature; no, it rather expands our faithfulness, speaking into our present contextual realities.

3.4. Such a way of reading allows our ancient confessions to speak anew in contexts of marginalization and hope. For this, we need to cultivate wounded discipleship, glimpsed at GETI, where we learned to share pain and remember truthfully together. Unity emerges as the Church learns to stay when it is hard, listen when it costs, remember what hurts, and hope against the odds. Unity becomes visible when the Church prophetically shares pain, remembers truthfully, and lives the hope of abundant life together in Christ.

4. Reimagining Faith and Order for the 21st Century

4.1. GETI's hope is in shared humanity and an ecumenism born of pain and promise. We call Faith and Order to deepen its engagement with the lived theologies of people at the margins. Visible unity cannot be achieved solely through institutional or doctrinal dialogue but must additionally engage the realities of displacement, poverty, and pain in refugee camps, migrant shelters, in the exploited earth, and in communities where unity is practised daily through survival, reconciliation, and solidarity. If ecumenical councils such as Nicaea stood to articulate our shared, common faith, what will Faith and Order do to protect justice, human dignity, and the integrity of all creation?

4.2. The Church participates in the life of Christ when we embrace an embodied Christian theology. This is the "solidarity of the shaken," where unity arises through shared vulnerability and compassion. As such, we cannot neglect Jesus' passion for it embodies God's solidarity with suffering humanity. If the Eucharist signifies the broken body of Christ, then our communion as Christ's body is called to share in that same suffering, sent into the world as wounded healers. GETI showed us that unity is God's gift, received when we are brave enough to be wounded together and discover we have always been one body. In a world of graves, broken bodies, and defiled creation, we envision a new, contemporary visible unity arising from recognition of our shared pain and our mutual commitment to action. Indeed, we are "longing for an ecumenism in which we bring all of ourselves to the journey and to the table, not separating thought from prayer, prayer from action, or action from thought."[1] When we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8), we come to smell the sweet scent of resurrection.

4.3. Theology that only intrigues the mind while neglecting wounded bodies is complicit in injustice; we need a kenotic Church that empties itself in service, presence, and concrete solidarity. We therefore call for healing solidarity circles, community-based theological gatherings where refugees, women, people with disabilities, youth, and grassroots leaders contribute to theological reflection. Our hope is not abstract optimism, but a call to embody the abundant life Christ promises (John 10:10), even amid disorder and uncertainty. Unity takes shape in acts of solidarity, shared lament, and collaborative service.

4.4. In the face of diverse contexts and the loss of credibility of the Church in many spaces across the world, the Church's witness and engagement is

1. World Council of Churches, "Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity: The Unity Statement of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches," adopted at the WCC 11th Assembly, Karlsruhe, Germany, 8 September 2022, https://www.oikoumene.org/node/73249.

contingent upon its willingness to widen the ecumenical table. It must open itself to new generations, digital spaces, and creative forms of theology reflecting the Church's diversity and vitality. As churches continually expand the table and grow in hospitality into these new, shared realities, these spaces will respond with engagement. By embracing participatory and imaginative methods, Faith and Order can reclaim its prophetic vocation as a movement where theology is not only articulated but lived and shared.

4.5. Indeed, churches are confronted with a world faced with intersectional multi-crisis. "As the crisis deepens day by day, what both the oppressor and the oppressed can legitimately demand of the Churches is a message of hope."[2] The Church then is called to proclaim eschatological hope amidst global suffering and injustice, and to make the Church credible in its practices, its economy, and its internal life. GETI urges Faith and Order to employ a theological language that speaks meaningfully into today's wounded world, calling the churches to embody the kenotic self-emptying love of Christ. Let us act with humility, walk in unconditional solidarity, and announce with prophetic courage the hope which dwells within us.

2. Kairos Theologians, *Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1985).

## Readers' Guide

The four final addresses of the Sixth World Conference were delivered by key leaders who helped to bring the conference to fruition. They included words of reflection, thanks, hope, and blessing.

## Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich, Moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order

Five days ago, I stood here and welcomed all of you to this world conference.

A lot has happened during these five days.

We have asked: Where Now for Visible Unity?

In my opening address on visible unity, I was pointing to this broadened understanding of unity, where both faith and Christian doctrine, witness and service to the world are parts of our journeying together towards visible unity.

How was our journey here together toward visible unity? I assume that if I was asking all of you about your impressions, how we experienced these days, we would have 300 different answers.

We are placed in the middle of the desert, at Wadi El Natrun at St Bishoy Monastery. We might have experienced moments where we felt like being in a desert, thirsty, left behind, not knowing how to survive the difficult discussions and encounters with people very different from what we are used to.

Biblically, the desert is both judgement and promise—the place where Israel's infidelity was exposed and yet where God renewed covenant love—and in Christ's own sojourn, the wilderness and desert is transfigured into a school of discernment and a site of victory, where trial becomes the proving ground of fidelity.

In our worship during these days, we have shared much wisdom from the desert fathers. As Abba Anthony the Great observed, "Who sits in solitude and

is quiet has escaped from three wars—hearing, speaking, seeing—yet one war remains: the war of the heart," reminding us that the desert does not remove struggle; it concentrates it to the one battle that finally matters. An ecumenism of the heart.

In the middle of what we sometimes might experience as a desert, when we strive for visible unity, maybe also during this Faith and Order World Conference, we are in need of places where we can recover, quench our thirst, and stand together in fellowship.

We need an oasis, where we drink the water our bodies need and also partake in the living water coming from the triune God.

We have received living water through the spiritual life every morning and evening—what a gift that has been to us! Thank you to the whole team, and a special thanks to Mikie Roberts and all other WCC staff involved in prayer life, to the participants of the spiritual life planning team, and to all who have been involved in worship life.

We have enjoyed the company and companionship of many young people, from GETI, young delegates and members of the commission, and all the local stewards. We are extremely grateful for your presence here in this oasis.

For me personally, the cooperation with the WCC and especially the Faith and Order staff has been a wonderful experience. What a team, what a spirit, so much love and dedication! Your restless work during not least the last year was just incredible! I want to especially mention the director of Faith and Order, Andrej Jeftić. What a gift you are to the ecumenical movement and to all of us! Thank you!

We have received everything and more than that from the local hosts. It has been a true experience of an oasis, where everything is taken care of. What a place, what a hospitality. The way you received us and accompanied us was just extraordinary.

Thank you!

I am convinced that the extraordinary outcome of this conference, the steps we have taken toward visible unity here, will have lasting impact. May the triune God bless you and keep you all, and give you strength to continue with all your efforts to pursue the paths towards visible unity.

What do we take from here? I hope and pray that the days here have given us all courage and hope to continue our journey towards visible unity. Among the many things I am taking from here is the little cross we were given at Anafora by His Eminence Metropolitan Thomas. Boys from a training programme for dropout children made them. They are made out of branches that would have been thrown away. We can take them with us as a reminder that the triune God can transform us, as the boys transformed the small branches to become a precious gift to all of us, and as a reminder of Christ being truly human and truly divine.

I will keep my little cross with me every day reminding me of our sisters and brothers here in Egypt and in the Middle East, at this world conference, and all over the world, reminding us of our friendship and companionship.

Thank you to each and every one. God bless you all.

## Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftić, Director of the Commission on Faith and Order

Moderator, Your Holiness, your Eminences, your Excellences and Graces, dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

As we come to the close of these remarkable days together, I would like to begin with something small, simple, yet something very and deeply symbolic. When you first arrived here, you received a conference bag. And that bag was lovingly crafted by women, mostly widows, who are part of the women's empowerment programme run by the papal office for projects of the Coptic Church. I found this to be very symbolic. Over these five days, we too have been weaving something together: our words, our actions, our prayers, and our pilgrimage into the beautiful fabric of this conference. Each of us has brought a different thread, a different colour, a different story. And together, by the grace of God, we have created something far greater than any of us could have done alone.

In what follows, I would just like to express what I can feel in this moment, and that is a deep feeling of gratitude. To our former moderator and now WCC president from Europe, Dr Susan Durber, and our former director, Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus, I wish to say thank you for your courage and your envisioning this conference as a living commemoration of Nicaea. To our exceptional moderator Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich, thank you for your leadership, your collaboration, your gracious spirit, and your friendship. None of this

would have been possible, Stephanie, without your tireless commitment and your calm guidance.

To our dear wise moderators of the commission who have faithfully led us over the past days and guided the commission since its constitution in 2023: Thank you for your steady hands and wise hearts. To the steering group that led the preparations for this conference, led by Rev. Dr Sandra Beardsall: Thank you for your countless emails, online meetings, and hard work of shaping the vision that has come to life here.

I also wish to thank our commission study group co-conveners for preparing the commission and shaping the sections of the conference for workshops, moderating discussions, and giving intellectual and spiritual depth to our conversations. To all our speakers and church leaders: Your insights, prayers, and presence have made this gathering truly global, diverse, and inspiring.

My deepest gratitude goes to my dear colleagues in the Faith and Order secretariat who have worked tirelessly for years, and especially in these recent months, to make this conference possible. Rev. Prof. Dr Martin Illert, Rev. Dr Mikie Roberts, Rev. Prof. Dr Vasile Octavian Mihoc, Rev. Prof. Dr Henco van der Westhuizen, Rev. Ingrid Noren-Nielsson, and Ms Jacqueline O'Neal: Thank you for your extraordinary dedication, your creativity, your friendship, your faithfulness. God bless you.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank our director, Rev. Dr Kuzipa Nalwamba, our patient and firm leader, whose wisdom and steady support have been a source of strength for all of us.

To our general secretary, Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, for his vision, leadership, and for being such a strong advocate of this conference and of our work: Thank you for standing with Faith and Order; for guiding the wider fellowship with clarity and conviction.

I wish to thank all the GETI participants and my colleague Dr Ani Ghazaryan-Drissi, with whom we collaborated, for making this collaboration possible. To all my dear colleagues from across every department and programme of the WCC who have journeyed with us: Thank you for your partnership, collaboration, your patience, and your trust.

We are also profoundly grateful for all the financial and institutional and other kinds of support that made this event possible. First and foremost, I want to thank the Coptic Orthodox Church and His Holiness Pope Tawadros II.

Your Holiness, dear Coptic sisters and brothers, my words are sure to communicate the depth of gratitude that I feel for you and what you have done for us in preparation and in the execution of this conference.

I want to thank also all the churches and organizations who have contributed to this event: the Evangelical Church in Germany and its member churches in Württemberg, Norddeutschland, and Baden, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Foundation for Aid to Reformed Protestantism, the Nathan Söderblom Fund, the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church USA, Church in Action, the United Church of Christ, the German Bishops' Conference and the Dioceses of Munich, Baden, and Paderborn, the Church of Norway Council for World Mission, the Protestant Church in Switzerland, the United Church of Canada, the Nikon Ecumenical Trust, International Orthodox Christian Charities, the Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, the Worldwide Protestant Mission, and the Moravian Church Foundation: Your generosity has made this gathering not only possible but beautiful.

Finally, to all of you participants in this exceptional conference, both here in the room but also online, I wish to thank you for your wisdom, your courage, the joy that you bring, and above all your love. Over these days, I have witnessed God's love flowing among us in prayer, in disagreements, even in laughter, and in silence.

For that love, for the gift of being here together, and for the gift of each other, I give my final gratitude to our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## His Holiness Pope Tawadros II

Good evening, beloved in Christ, Your Eminences and Your Graces, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the moderator of the central committee of the WCC, the moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order, the director of the Faith and Order secretariat, distinguished guests, and dear participants,

On behalf of the Coptic Orthodox Church, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and a deep appreciation to all who have participated in and contributed to the success of this conference held on the occasion of the 17th century of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, that historic event which

shaped the foundation of our common Christian faith and laid the basis of the sound doctrine we have received from the fathers.

This gathering unites us in the spirit of Nicaea—a spirit of faith, reflection, and a continual call to cooperation and love among all churches. Our meeting is not merely a commemoration of a historical event, but one whose light continues to shine through the centuries, reminding us that true faith is the foundation of our unity and that the unity of church is the gift of the Holy Spirit, which we are all called to preserve through the bond of peace and love.

This unity can only be achieved through theological dialogue among the churches. We thank the World Council of Churches and the Commission on Faith and Order for organizing this important conference, and for their great efforts in bringing together such a large number of church leaders, theologians, and servants from around the world—from 100 countries and nearly 500 participants—to reflect together on the message of Nicaea to the church and to the world today.

The Coptic Orthodox Church takes pride in having been a participant from the very beginning of that great council through its St Athanasius, the Apostolic, the faithful defender of the true faith. Today, 17 centuries later, the church is still called to bear witness to the same faith it received at Nicaea and to proclaim the voice of truth and love in a world filled with challenges and changes.

Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, as we conclude the work of this conference, we pray that God may bless all that has been shared through and through in theology and in dialogue, and we pray that it may be transformed into living action and witness in our world.

I would like also to present you, all of you, a gift that expresses our Egyptian identity. This gift is from our ancient heritage and the spirit of our beloved Egypt to which you have come and especially the city of Alexandria from which the Christian faith spread throughout the land of Egypt. This gift represents the lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and also symbolizes St Athanasius, the hero of Nicaea and the beacon of faith to the whole world. On its four sides are inscribed the Nicene Creed in 20 languages, representing the entire Christian world.

Each phrase of the creed is written in a different language. This means all Christians say the same creed but in different tongues. This is a good expression of unity.

This gift was designed and crafted by the priests and youth in Alexandria.

Finally, I thank you and pray that you may return to your churches and countries with joy and peace and a new experience from Egypt and the church of Egypt, carrying with you the spirit of Nicaea and its true faith, so that together we may continue our common journey, bearing living witness to our risen Christ, so that all who see us may glorify his holy name. Thank you so much and God bless you.

## General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay

As we come to the conclusion of this particular gathering, before I say the appropriate thank yous, I would just like to say a few words about the gathering itself during these few days.

We're now committed to visible unity framed in the context of the Nicaea celebration of 1700 years. We were able to explore this question in these past days.

The conversation was not just restricted to these past few days but started a long while back. In fact, already in November of last year, the Commission on Faith and Order had engaged in a number of different activities to have deeper conversations on this specific question.

But in this particular gathering that we've had in these few days, we have encountered and experienced a rich variety of inputs capturing a variety of themes and topics—admittedly, some old but yet some new. We have found one another in the bond of unity and in the spirit of Christ that comes to us to bring us together in that bond of unity.

The way we have worked together has shown itself for what it truly is. And in fact, the display of that was just seen in the discussion we had in the previous session where we received the message. Coming together as different churches, 356 member churches, is no easy task. There are great complexities involved when we try to come to consensus, especially on theology and doctrine, ecclesiology and church tradition.

But yet in the World Council of Churches, we have repeatedly expressed the ability that we are able to do this together. And the only reason we are able to do this together is because we are led by Christ and we are led by the Spirit who helps us in the midst of all of these complexities to navigate our path in working

together toward unity. And that is a clear indication. The fact that we could eventually approve and receive the message and the statement that came out of this particular gathering speaks for itself that we were able to work through that and come up with something that we can give to all Christians and to the world at large.

And so we have come together, we have explored together, we have searched together, we have prayed together, we have engaged theological discussions, we have received great depth of spirituality. And now the question is, What do we do with it? The question has already been asked, What do we take back with us? And it would be good for each of us to explore in our own hearts and minds that specific question of what we take back from these days.

But not only the question of what we ourselves take back. What do we take back to share with our constituencies, to share with our denominations, to share with our congregations, to share with other Christians?

Ecumenism does not stop at a conference door. Ecumenism must reach the pews, reach the people, and speak into every life to proclaim and profess Jesus Christ to the world. So the question is, What do you take back and how will you share that? But perhaps the more important question is, How will we continue to move forward toward the quest for unity, for visible Christian unity in the world? Through our discussions in these days, we have noted the fact that the world is in crisis, and that the global challenges call us to work together, to walk together, to witness together, to pray together.

And therefore, it is imperative for us as Christians to be able to take that mantle of responsibility seriously. For Christ calls us to go out into the world and heal and restore a broken world.

Our task is to go back into the places from which we have come and to proclaim Christ wherever we are, as we take seriously the prayer of Jesus, Father, that they may be one.

And so, I trust and pray that our gathering in these days has enabled us, excited us, and inspired us to go back to reignite and recommit ourselves to visible unity as Christians and perhaps to recommit ourselves to the pilgrim process that we have embarked upon as the World Council of Churches since the 2013 WCC assembly in Busan, but even more so since the 2022 assembly in Karlsruhe, where we talked about the pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity. I trust that these days and all the things that we have explored and

worked through together will enable us with inspiration and joy to go forward and recommit to this particular journey of pilgrimage together.

And let us in this process be transforming disciples holding out hope, faith, and love in a broken and suffering world—yet a world loved and reconciled by God.

And so may it be our joy to go out and be the disciples we are each called to be as we serve Christ in the world.

I've been given the task to say thank yous to a number of people. I'm going to try to keep this as short as possible.

It is an extensive list because going through a particular gathering like this does not come easy and indeed there are many people who have worked tirelessly to make this a great success.

But I begin by extending the World Council of Churches deepest gratitude to His Holiness and to the Coptic Orthodox Church for going beyond measure in such wonderful generosity in hosting GETI and also the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. Your living witness of faith has been expressed through joy, hospitality, and tireless service. Your Holiness has moved us deeply and will leave an indelible mark on all our hearts. Earlier this morning, we met with the president of Egypt, and he spoke in absolute admiration and fondness of His Holiness and of the Coptic Orthodox Church in this country of Egypt. He told us quite strongly how His Holiness plays a very strong role in keeping the balance in this country. His very calm and graceful presence brings peace into this context.

The president spoke about the relationship of different religions and, in particular, Christians and Muslims, and how the presence of His Holiness and the Coptic Church helps this country to have stability and peace among religions. We acknowledge His Holiness with joy and thanksgiving and we are pleased that the president of this country can say that in a very strong and powerful way, affirming the presence of the church and its contributions in this land. It made me think how wonderful it is when we work together as Christians, to have such a wonderful impact in transforming society in contributing to peace, security, and the stability and safety of all people in the land itself. And today, when we walked away from that hour-and-a-half meeting with the president, we walked away with such joy, such pride, and such admiration to know that the Christian witness in this country is strong, not only through the Coptic Church but through all our churches that serve in this land. And for that we say thank you.

We wish to thank the many volunteers and stewards who have served us in these days. And while they're coming up forward, for the sake of time, I'm going to move on. We thank two people who provided the leadership for the stewards: Sam Salib and Marian Bashara. Thank you for your leadership.

We thank the project management office led by Antoine Dawood and Nadin Nada.

We thank the transportation team for ensuring our safe, timely, and efficient travel between Cairo and the Logos Centre. And in particular, we thank Nada Amir for her leadership of this team. You will see the names on the screen. There are quite a few names. We're not mentioning them aloud, but you can take a glance on the screen and see the names of the people. And if your name is on the screen, you should be walking to the front as well.

We'd like to thank the hospitality team led by Yusef Midat and all the people we have worked with. We'd like to thank Mina Magdi and his team for arranging all the meeting rooms and the tent and all the equipment. That's a big team. We thank the communications team for keeping us informed, connected, and inspired throughout the week.

We thank the Middle East Council of Churches for providing a communications person for us onsite. Thank you to the Coptic Orthodox Church Media Center for providing so many people who've been helping us all through the conference as well with our communications.

We say thank you to the entertainment team for bringing joy to our evenings at the Agapi Plaza and ensuring that our visits to the monasteries and pyramids were truly memorable. Betty Wagdi and team: you have led us well.

We thank the Logos facility staff for their attentive care.

We now want to say thank you to the local host committee led by His Grace, Bishop Abraham. Bishop Abraham, would you come to the top of the stage here, along with Fr Macarios, Barbara Soliman, Irini Wagdi, Sam Salib, and Ramy Hanna.

And the engineer who was responsible for all the construction of everything we saw: Solby.

We also want to say a very special thank you to His Grace Metropolitan Thomas.

I know that in his words to us, Andrej has expressed already our thanks to some people—such as the spiritual life team led by Mikie Roberts and all the people who have been involved with him. We want to say thank you to some of the WCC staff, Kuzipa who has led the team in terms of a division. We want to say a special thank you to the GETI team.

We want to say thank you to Ani who has led this team and all the people with her as well. We want to say thank you to all of you for your incredible work with the GETI conference. I must say I found it an absolute pleasure and joy to spend time with the participants at the GETI. I spent the last day with them and I thought, wow, if this is the ecumenical present and future, our ecumenical future is in good hands. Well done to our GETI participants.

We thank Teddy Sakupapa, who has worked as the vice-moderator of the Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation, leading the working group on GETI and also the incredible team of facilitators who have served the GETI in the last three weeks.

Andrej has already expressed thanks to some of the people who have been on the Commission on Faith and Order, but I want to reiterate our thanks to the commission moderator, Stephanie Dietrich. Thank you so much for all that you've done and for the leadership you've provided. Many thanks also to the vice-moderators and to the entire team who have been involved with us through these days.

I want to say a very special thank you to Andrej, the director of our conference, for your stellar work, for the spirit in which you have brought us all together, and for the things that have been done and coordinated so that this could be a great success. We say thank you.

Andrej has mentioned the secretariat of Faith and Order who have helped with this. I won't repeat that, but we want to say thank you to the team. Again, we want to say thank you to the WCC communications team led by Marianne Ejdersten and all the people who are part of that team.

We say thank you to the WCC events and conference team and several people in particular. Charlie Bellot and Marc-Henri Heiniger have been involved with all the stage productions and logistics and they were supported by Patricia Bruschweiler and Daniel Sanchez.

We also want to acknowledge that not only has the staff of WCC been present here on site to help us, but perhaps unknown to many of you, there are

many supporting staff working from Geneva. And we want to say thank you to them as well.

And so, in closing, I'd like to say thank you to all of you who are participants, who have been present with us at this particular conference. Your presence has made it what it is. Your participation has given us the richness of contribution. You have stayed with us these days. You have walked with us. You have journeyed with us. And you have discerned with us what God is saying to us about visible unity. I want to say a special thank you to all of you.

All the participants have come from the different communions, from different sectors, and different organizations. We say a great thank you to you and all those who have come as delegates.

We trust that all that we have received here in this place will continue to stay with us. And that we will indeed continue to find ways to take what we have received and to impart it to others. If we have missed out anybody, just a very general thank you to all our volunteers and stewards and to all our people who have made this a great gathering.

## Readers' Guide

The closing prayer of the Sixth World Conference featured the voices of four persons from differing traditions sharing their reflections on the faith and witness they had experienced at the conference.

## Reflection Shared by Rev. Fr Jibin Thomas Abraham, (Malankara [Indian] Orthodox Syrian Church)

Glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One True God, Amen!

Reserved, uncertain, and isolated—these are the three words that I would use to describe me as I stood in Frankfurt Airport, waiting for my flight to Cairo, exactly 17 days ago! Today, as I stand before you, I would like to use a different set of three words: humbled, committed, and connected! On the first day, most of you were strangers and foreigners to me, and I to many of you. Today, I look at you with the conviction that we are fellow "citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19).

Now, the question is, What caused this transformation? I want to highlight three aspects from my experience over the last two and a half weeks, which, I believe, contributed to this transformation.

Prayer that unites. Though we pray differently, the content of our prayers often overlaps. We were united in our prayers for the poor and the oppressed, for victims of genocide, for peace, for justice, and for unity. I, an Oriental Orthodox priest from India, stood alongside my friend from the island country of Kiribati (in the Pacific Ocean), belonging to the Kiribati Uniting Church, united in our prayer for unity. In the rhythm of our shared prayers, we discovered that unity is not an achievement of human effort, but a gift of God!

In the last couple of weeks, I have heard many asking the question, "Is visible unity really possible?" An answer to this question can be found in the Holy Scripture, at the scene of annunciation, where St Mary, the *Theotokos*, asks the angel of God a similar question: "How can this be?" And the angel answers her, saying, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High

will overshadow you. ... For nothing will be impossible with God!" (Luke 1:35, 37).

Love that embraces. What motivates us to accept the other and work for unity? It is the love of Christ.

And during these days, we all have experienced that love in the hospitality extended by the Coptic Orthodox Church and in the friendship and fellowship that we built. This hospitality that we enjoy is much more than generosity; it is a witness to the love of Christ that is alive in the life of the Church.

I have experienced this love on multiple levels—in the words of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of the Coptic Church, who reminded us that "love never fails"; in the sense of belonging extended by a group of young Coptic Orthodox GETI participants, who adopted me as one among them and started calling me *abouna*!; and in the service extended by the volunteers and staff here in the Logos Papal Centre.

It is this love, which is reflected on the faces of all those whom I have met here, that I find an answer to the question, Where Now for Visible Unity?

The shared dream of unity: Through our conversations and dialogue, I came to see that the longing for unity is not merely an activity carried out by theologians and institutions. Rather, this is a dream shared by the whole body of Christ. I know an architect here who shares this dream; I know a financial analyst, a pharmacist, and a teacher of psychology who also share this dream. I listened to a mother who called on the Church leaders to agree on the date of Easter, so that her family can celebrate Easter together on the same date! Above all, this dream is shared by our Lord Jesus Christ, who prayed for our unity, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

Unity is not a distant dream or an impossible goal. It is the living will of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one True God, Amen!

# Reflection Shared by Alberte Vind

As a young Christian, I have always been fascinated by this idea of visible unity: that somehow, across all our differences, we are all called to be one body in Christ. But these past weeks' experience at GETI and now at the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order has given that idea a new living meaning to me.

We are gathered here around the question, Where Now for Visible Unity?: a question that perhaps for many, at first felt far too large for any of us to answer. But over the weeks and the past days, discussions, laughter, and prayer have been heard throughout the Logos Centre, and what for me started as an abstract theological goal has turned out to be much, much more than that. It is a lived experience. It is what happens when we meet across our confessional, cultural, and linguistic borders, and dare to listen to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. To listen to each other, whether creed or confession. Whether GETI participant, delegate, or commissioner.

I have met people whose stories have profoundly shaped my heart—people who live in contexts of persecution, people who fight for justice in their local societies, people whose faith shines even in hardship. Their courage and hope have expanded my world and made me look differently at the privilege many of us live with. I have realized how easy it is to take freedom and freedom of faith for granted. Visible unity for me, I realized, begins when we recognize one another's pain and joy as our own—when the suffering of the church and its people in one place becomes a call to compassion and solidarity for the rest of us. And I am being reminded that "if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

As I return home, I carry with me not just new knowledge, but new relationships—friendships that cross oceans and confessions. I will carry the stories I have heard and the hope. Like, perhaps, many of you, I carry a new sense of responsibility to pray, to listen, and to fight for this visible unity, not just in documents and theory but in practicality: in a shared fight for justice.

Let us pray as Jesus did, that we may all be one, so that the world may believe. At the world conference I have seen glimpses of this prayer fulfilled, not a perfect unity, but the beauty of people staying at the same table, even when differences become difficult. So as Christians honouring the one body in Christ, may we keep that table open; may we continue to listen and to share.

# Reflection Shared by Rev. Prof. Dr Christian Tsekpoe, from an African Pentecostal Perspective

My name is Christian Tsekpoe, an African Pentecostal pastor-theologian and a member of the Commission on Faith and Order. I feel greatly honoured to participate in this historic event, the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, which also commemorates the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. I express my profound gratitude to God for the success of the conference. I also extend my gratitude to the Commission on Faith and Order and our gracious hosts, the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, for their exceptional organization, reception, and hospitality.

Reflecting on the theme "Where Now for Visible Unity?" as an African Pentecostal pastor-theologian, I find inspiration in the reflections of Athanasius of Alexandria, which have been read to us, right here at the closing prayer, on this historic land of Egypt, where both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible have a lot to say. I recognize that we may all have diverse answers to the question of where now for visible unity. I also propose my own answer: Here now is visible unity. I see this unity manifesting in the various activities of the conference. For me, the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order is reminiscent of the day of Pentecost, where people from various nations under heaven—"'Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene; and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'" (Acts 2:9–12). And I answered, Here now is visible unity.

As part of the conference activities here in Egypt, we visited the Anaphora, where I was among people from different nations, walking together through the "Garden of Eden." I must be honest; I searched for the Tree of Life. Although I couldn't find it, I discovered something significant: a gathering of people from diverse church traditions, including an African Pentecostal like me, beautifully hosted by the Coptic Orthodox Church. Amazed and perplexed, I asked myself, What does this mean? and I answered, Here now is visible unity.

The moderator of the Faith and Order Commission, Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich, correctly noted in her opening speech that visible unity "is not about what we confess together, but how we walk together." Although we may hold differing doctrinal positions, we are united like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, filled with doubt and confusion. They walked together with

Christ himself in an invisible unity until their eyes were opened to see the beauty of that journey. O Lord, I pray, open our eyes to see the beauty of this unity!

Listening to the presentation of my brother, Dr Victor Lee, a fellow Pentecostal theologian from Malaysia, I was reminded of how deeply relevant the Nicene Creed is to me as a Pentecostal. Though we do not recite the Creed in our church liturgy, its essence is woven throughout our statements of faith.

Through the various activities of this conference—the morning and evening prayers, the shared meals, the plenary sessions, the group sessions, and the visit to the pyramids and the monasteries—I have come to the conclusion: Here now is visible unity.

Let me close my reflection with a slight remix of this evening's prayer in the resource book: "Holy Trinity, one God, you are the treasure of blessings and the giver of life. We praise you for the faith that you have revealed to us in Scripture and in the living tradition of the church. We give you special thanks for the witness of those gathered at [the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order], who articulated this common faith for the church. Keep us ever faithful to this inheritance into which we were baptized, that we too may be united to you and to each other." Amen.

## Reflection Shared by Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt

> God is not a God of war and fighting. Make war and fighting cease, both that which is against him, and that which is against your neighbour. Be at peace with all people, consider with what character God saves them. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." Such people always imitate the Son of God: imitate him also. Be at peace.—John Chrysostom

When I hear these words of John Chrysostom, when I think about this beautiful place—an oasis of peacefulness where we have been gathering during the past days—and about the sometimes heated yet still peaceful conversations, I think about *shalom*, *salaam*, God's all-encompassing peace that is God's will for the people of God.

In so many places across the globe today, societies and families are so deeply divided over socio-ethical questions, from the wars in Gaza and Ukraine to questions about the roles of men and women, etc. And politicians too often only fuel these disagreements and increase polarization.

Where is our reaction, our counterreaction to this, as churches? Are we able to remain respectful toward each other while disagreeing on a number of issues? Are we able to listen to one another, trying to understand where the other comes from, while not losing sight of the search for truth, mercy, and justice? Or will we follow the countless examples of digging trenches on opposite sides of the road, when the road between us could lead us forward?

This might be something that we can offer to the world today: respect for each other's dignity as for the dignity of God's beloved children. We know that siblings can sometimes be tiring—but they are siblings!

From the way we treat one another, from the way we relate to one another, the world should know that we are disciples of Christ—and not only from this but also from the way we treat our non-Christian fellow humans and of course the whole creation.

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which has been the centre of our focus in these days, invites us to reflect on who God is and who church is. The Creed in fact invites us to think about relationality.

The Triune God calls us into communion. The Trinity itself is our model of communion and therefore, trinitarian theology is constantly a reminder and a call to communion—the perfect example of three persons sharing one essence, distinct yet without hierarchical relations among them. Each person fully existing in relation to the others, for God is relational and the ultimate expression of love that seeks also expression in community. Church is thus about being in communion with God and with one another, about sharing the love and grace of Jesus Christ with others. About lifting up those who are bowed by burden.

Yet how can we live it out, this reality of communion? How can we make our unity visible? At this conference, we have been reminded again that *koinonia*, communion, is both gift and calling, a gift and a task. We cannot create unity ourselves; God is the source of unity. Through Jesus Christ, God reconciles human beings to God and to one another. This is the gift. Our task is to make this unity, this reconciliation visible. It does not happen when we start from what divides us, but when we begin with what unites us.

Our striving for unity is always anchored first and foremost in our oneness in Christ through baptism. Our lives then are to be, as Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism, a daily practice of our baptism. But this "daily practice" is the striving to come always closer to Christ, or rather, to say: to let Christ come

closer to us; to be conformed to Christ both as individuals and as communions. This "daily practice" is taking the risk of being transformed by the other, by our neighbour, who also follows Christ, who is with us on the journey.

## Readers' Guide

Faith and Order invited four participants in the Sixth World Conference to offer their reflections on the conference. Representing differing Christian traditions, global regions, and life experiences, they offer diverse initial perspectives on the content, processes, and outcomes of the World Conference.

## Spiritual Life at the Conference

*Alick Chirwa*

Being a member of the Spiritual Life Team has restored the desire for serving the Lord wholeheartedly. We blended well regardless of differences in backgrounds. The Spiritual Life Team was comprised of individuals with professional competence in the field of worship leadership. Our work was based on the framework for common prayer. Despite the diversity in our traditions, members blended their expertise well in church music and worship emanating from various cultural, regional, confessional, and language backgrounds. The team's role was to provide spiritual guidance and support to the participants of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. We were responsible for organizing and leading daily prayers and arranging worship sessions and other spiritual activities for the conference. Our job was to create an enabling environment for spiritual reflection, growth, and fellowship among participants from diverse Christian traditions. This provided opportunities for delegates to share their experiences and insights on spiritual life and ecumenism. Further, we made sure to create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere that nurtured a sense of community and belonging among the delegates.

"Where Now for Visible Unity?" Truly, this was the theme that lingered within almost every participant at the conference. "Where Now for Visible Unity?" kept burning in the hearts of many theologians and laypeople. This is the quest a few believers started 1700 years ago and it is still pursued today.

The conference theme "Where Now for Visible Unity?" emphasized the urgent need for Christian unity in the world where suffering, division, and

conflict are the order of the day. Theologians, church leaders, and laypeople came together to assess progress on Christian unity and map the way forward.

The conference theme was derived from acknowledging that visible unity is not just a desirable goal but a pressing necessity for Christian unity and community. The meaning of visible unity was derived from biblical reflection; steps were then taken toward achieving the goal. The conference goal was to inspire and equip participants to work toward unity so that the world can see the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The relationship between mission and unity was explored to highlight the need for Christians to work together in sharing the gospel. Participants explored the implications of the conference theme for the church's mission and witness. The conference provided a platform for sharing experiences and perspectives from diverse global contexts, highlighting the importance of ecumenism in different parts of the world. Unity is not uniformity but is rather embracing our diversity and working together toward a common goal. I will work to promote dialogue, understanding, and cooperation with other Christian denominations and traditions, inspiring others to work toward unity and creating a sense of shared purpose and mission.

The conference produced powerful experiences that deepened my understanding of the importance of unity and ecumenism. It reminded me that despite our differences, we are all part of the Body of Christ, and that our shared faith in Jesus Christ is the foundation of our unity. Worship sessions in particular were a highlight of the conference. The diversity of Christian traditions and expressions of worship was a beautiful reflection of the global Church and it challenged me to be more inclusive and open to different ways of expressing my faith. The conference also encouraged me to be more intentional about spiritual practice, prioritizing prayer, reflection, and service to others. It was a reminder that our faith is not just about personal devotion, but about living out our faith in community with others. Overall, the conference was a spiritual recharging that has left me feeling inspired and motivated to continue working toward unity and ecumenism in my local church and community.

## Memorable moments or encounters I had during the conference

My first glance at the venue of the conference, Logos Papal Centre in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, sanctified me. I was amazed to see the way we were welcomed. Everywhere I went, I was confronted by a smiling face saying a greeting to me. I immediately turned into one of them, echoing the environment, smiling and greeting everyone I met. The ambience of the conference was truly inspiring. The Logos Papal Centre provided a relaxing and peaceful setting for the conference, with its beautiful architecture, desirable gardens, and tranquil atmosphere. The

conference itself was marked by a sense of cordiality, hospitality, and cohesion among participants from diverse Christian societies.

The worship sessions were intensely moving, with the reciting of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in different languages, filling the environment, and generating a sense of unity and shared piety. The kind of hosting and welcoming of the participants demonstrated by the Egyptians just made everyone feel like they were coming home. It was an expression of the unity and diversity of the global Christian community and I loved being a part of it. The opening worship service set the tone for the conference and brought participants together in a spirit of unity and prayer. The daily prayers were eloquent and depicted the rich spiritual tradition of the Christian faith. I had the opportunity to pray and worship with participants from different cultures and languages, which was a powerful experience of unity in diversity. The communion and friendship that developed among the team members was on its own a testimony to the power of shared spirituality and purpose.

A visit to Anafora in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, is a spiritual experience. The monastery we visited there dates back to the 4th century. It is one of the oldest still operating today. The monastery features architecture, including the Church of the Virgin Mary, dating back to the 4th century. There I also saw the frescoes and icons. The monastery displays a sense of peace and tranquillity that permeates the entire complex.

I was also deeply moved by the sense of unity and shared purpose that characterized our team and the conference in general. Delegates were very passionate about and committed to ecumenism and working toward visible unity. This inspired me and I began to be quickly moved by the same spirit that emanated from the participants. I quickly noticed the importance of the prayers and worship sessions that were instrumental in bringing us into one spirit and guiding us toward visible unity. I am very grateful for the opportunity I had to serve in this role. I look forward to continuing work toward Christian unity in my local church and ecumenical community.

I express my heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity to attend the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. It was an enriching experience that expanded my understanding. I now know the importance of working towards visible unity among Christians. Now that I am back to my local church and community, I pledge my commitment to applying the insights and lessons I have gained to promote visible unity, ecumenism, and communalism. I promise to work towards dispelling misunderstandings and disunity.

## Conclusion

The conference concluded by emphasizing the importance of visible unity. Participants were urged to reaffirm their commitment toward visible unity among Christians in their local churches and community. Churches were encouraged to engage in tangible steps toward the attainment of visible unity. The importance of prayer and worship as a stimulus to dialogue and cooperation was stressed. In celebrating the diversity of Christian traditions and the importance of unity in diversity, we should also not lose focus on mission and service.

# Between Consensus and Difference: An Observer's Report on the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order

*Dr Tijana Petković-Bertsch*

My participation in the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order in Egypt was shaped by several overlapping roles: organizational responsibility, generational perspective, and ecclesial identity. Since 2023, I have served as a commissioner of Faith and Order. Our commission met once in person in February 2024 in Tondano, Indonesia, and in this physical meeting we assumed the responsibility of hosting the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. These overlapping roles placed me within the internal life of the conference, not as a neutral observer but as a participant shaped by the structures and tasks which most of the commissioners carried in order to make this conference a real theological encounter.

As commissioners—and especially as youth commissioners—many of us carried responsibilities. I served on the drafting committee, moderated one panel and participated in another, co-led a workshop with two fellow commissioners, and acted as rapporteur for the work of the sections. Youth commissioners were not present merely as symbols; our work extended across the full procedural and intellectual life of the conference.

I entered the conference as a commissioner representing youth. This position carried its own epistemological weight: it sharpened my sensitivity to questions of generational imagination, the temporal horizons implicit in ecumenical discourse, and the degree to which younger voices were invited to shape—not merely witness—the Church's search for unity. The perspective of youth is not simply chronological; it functions as a hermeneutical lens through which the

present (and not, as is too often claimed, some deferred future) ecclesial life is negotiated and contested. This generational standpoint attuned me to the procedural undercurrents of the event: how consensus was constructed, how authority circulated, and how the conference attempted to embody its own understanding of unity.

My identity as a representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church further informed my engagement. This ecclesial tradition, with its particular liturgical, theological, and historical consciousness, shaped how I perceived the conference's language of unity, its theological method, and its assumptions about continuity and change. My observations were therefore grounded in the theological imagination of my own church, which both enabled and limited the interpretive possibilities available to me.

This report therefore comes from a specific position: youth, conciliar involvement, and Orthodox ecclesial identity. It does not aim to be neutral, but interpretive.

## Procedural theology: How the conference "did" unity

The World Conference on Faith and Order presented itself as a space or platform where theological reflection and ecclesial encounter converged; yet its most revealing theological statements were not made through resolutions or prepared texts but through its choreography of procedure. Unity was expressed through procedure: who spoke, how disagreement was handled, and how conversations were concluded. An implicit ecclesiology emerged through habits of listening, responding, and managing tension.

Across the programme, the conference moved back and forth between doctrinal engagement and diplomatic ritual. Certain sessions allowed for honest theological wrestling, exposing divergences in sacramental theology, ecclesiology, and hermeneutics. These moments demonstrated that the conference could confront difference—at least provisionally. Yet more commonly, disagreement was acknowledged but not further explored. As conversation neared sensitive areas, the tendency was to move toward general language that allowed conflicting positions to appear compatible. The outcome was a form of doctrinal diplomacy: a shared vocabulary that signalled unity without requiring theological convergence.

This dynamic was most visible in plenary sessions, where the pressure to maintain cohesion often outweighed the desire for deeper theological interrogation. In contrast, the section groups proved more hospitable to real

difference. Participants there were able to articulate disagreements openly and accept that some differences would remain without undermining mutual respect.

The conference's treatment of difference disclosed its operative ecclesiology. Difference was treated neither as tragic nor dangerous; it was welcomed in principle but domesticated in practice. When difference enriched the plurality the conference wished to display, it was celebrated. When it threatened to unsettle that plurality, it was rendered politely invisible. The underlying hermeneutic—one that recast diverging doctrinal claims as complementary perspectives—preserved a sense of unity but risked flattening theological seriousness.

One procedural moment revealed this instinct with particular clarity. The sections were the one venue structurally capable of articulating the future work of Faith and Order. Yet the time for their reports was impinged upon by an extended plenary on the conference message. The signal was quiet but unmistakable: summarizing the conference's past days felt safer than opening a vulnerable space for imagining what comes next. The movement appeared more at ease crafting retrospective coherence than discerning future responsibility.

Such procedural unity has value, but it also has limits. By translating tension into general language, the conference risked avoiding the deeper work of theological engagement. I was also left with the impression that not all participants arrived equally prepared for this kind of work. Many delegates lacked a clear understanding of the specific mandate of Faith and Order, at times conflating this world conference with a general WCC assembly, which suggests that future conferences would benefit from a dedicated pre-assembly space offering basic orientation to the history, task, and theological vocation of the commission. Unity was enacted not through resolving differences, but through maintaining a careful style of interaction. This procedural approach shapes the ecumenical imagination, but it raises an important question: Can ecumenism move beyond managed coexistence toward a form of unity that can sustain real disagreement?

## Youth presence: Token, protest, or prophecy?

Youth participation functioned as a revealing indicator of how the ecumenical movement understands its future. Youth were present in large numbers, well prepared, and actively involved in the work of the conference. The inclusion of GETI for the first time at a Faith and Order world conference added further theological energy. Having participated in GETI 2022, I could see that this group was much better integrated into the conference than in previous settings.

Taken together—youth delegates, youth commissioners, and GETI participants—young people made up roughly one-fifth to one-quarter of those present. Yet this numerical presence did not translate into equal institutional authority, since GETI participants did not have voting rights. In this context, the act of voting itself did not appear to carry much weight for many young participants. Because the plenary sessions were largely frontal in structure and offered limited space for interaction or shared discernment, even formally participatory moments—such as the vote on the final message—were widely experienced by young participants as procedural rather than consequential, with little expectation that they could meaningfully shape the future of the ecumenical movement.

Youth were frequently affirmed in speeches and presentations. They were described as essential and as signs of renewal. In practice, however, youth contributions were often confined to personal testimonies or experiential reflections. These moments were valued, but they were usually placed at the margins of the conference's main theological work. Youth were repeatedly described as "the future of the Church," a phrase that unintentionally removes them from the present.

In the few moments when youth contributions pushed beyond the testimonial frame, they raised questions that the procedural culture was less comfortable entertaining: the credibility of ecumenism in conflict zones, the urgency of ecological collapse, the fragility of inherited institutions. These interventions disrupted the gravitational pull toward consensus and invited a more eschatological imagination.

This was most evident in the final plenary on the future of the ecumenical movement. The room was sparsely filled—perhaps from fatigue, perhaps because the future demands a kind of imagination that cannot be domesticated. Youth voices dominated that space not because they were loud, but because they were willing to articulate what the moment required: unity cannot survive as nostalgia; it must become ethical, urgent, and risky.

From a youth standpoint, the conference oscillated between aspiration and hesitation. Youth participation was celebrated, but the deeper generational challenge—whether ecumenism can imagine forms of unity adequate to rapid cultural and theological shifts—remained open.

## From my Eastern Orthodox position

Approaching the conference as a Serbian Orthodox delegate meant inhabiting a particular theological sensibility—one shaped by liturgical life, conciliar imagination, and a historically layered sense of ecclesial continuity. This sensibility both enriched the ecumenical space and exposed its limits.

A clear enrichment emerged through the emphasis on the embodied dimensions of faith. Orthodox delegates often located unity not in abstract formulations but in liturgical practice, in the performative rhythm where theology becomes prayer and synaxis. The shared recitation of the Creed became a bridge—not an erasure of difference, but a reminder of a deeper common grammar that precedes our divisions.

Yet there were also moments of strain. The conference's preference for consensus sometimes flattened the specificity of Orthodox theological vocabulary. Discussions of Tradition, conciliarity, or authority were occasionally translated into conceptual languages more familiar to Protestant or Western Catholic frameworks. These translations were not hostile, yet they risked misrepresenting the Orthodox imagination by smoothing its sharper contours.

Thus, the Orthodox encounter unfolded as a negotiation. There were moments of deep resonance, and moments of clear distance. These tensions should not be seen as failures. They reflect the reality of an ecumenical movement still learning how to hold difference without absorbing it.

## Addition: Egypt as place of encounter

The choice of Egypt as the site for this conference carried with it more than logistical or aesthetic significance; it exerted a theological pressure that shaped the rhythms and tone of our conversations. Egypt, as a locus of Christian memory and practice, functions almost as a palimpsest of ecclesial identity: the desert fathers' rigourous pursuit of ascetic life, the enduring presence of Coptic monasticism, and the layered, often fraught history of Christianity under postcolonial conditions all hovered around our deliberations as a silent interlocutor.

Being in Egypt reminded participants that Christianity did not originate in Geneva, London, or New York. It emerged in spaces where faith was lived under conditions of minority, marginalization, and enduring cultural memory. This sense of historical rootedness subtly informed our approach to unity. Difference was not merely an abstract theological problem but a lived reality, a reminder

that doctrinal convergence must respect the richness of embodied ecclesial traditions. Moreover, the physical and symbolic presence of Coptic Christians shaped the conference's rhythm: their liturgical attentiveness, monastic ethos, and persistence in the face of social pressures created a horizon against which all dialogue unfolded. Unity, here, was not only an intellectual achievement but a performative act attuned to the weight of history and place.

In Egypt, the very air seemed to insist that our work be humble, attentive, and historically conscious—a reminder that the pursuit of ecclesial concord is inseparable from the geography and memory that bear witness to the faith.

## Conclusion

The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order revealed the contemporary ecumenical movement in its layered complexity. Seen through the interwoven lenses of commissioner, youth, and Serbian Orthodox delegate, it became clear that unity is not a singular accomplishment, but a disciplined practice shaped by procedure, memory, identity, and place.

The conference fostered genuine encounter yet often relied on procedural harmony to manage tension. It affirmed the richness of diverse traditions while smoothing their sharper edges.

These dynamics portray a movement still learning how to inhabit the space between aspiration and reality. The pursuit of Christian unity emerges not as a project to be completed but as an ongoing ecclesial discipline, requiring continual openness to difference, history, and the unpredictable presence of the other. The durability of this work will depend on whether future assemblies allow the full breadth of voices to reshape the imagination of what unity might yet become.

Even if future conferences introduce structural changes—and hopefully take place sooner than another 30 years—the most widely appreciated moments of this gathering were those of genuine connection and interaction. This should be read as a clear signal that future assemblies need to prioritize more time for discussion, shared discernment, and the freedom to disagree without treating disagreement as a threat to unity.

# Observations from a Roman Catholic Perspective: Where Now for Visible Unity? A Critical Evaluation of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order

*Rev. Fr Prof. Dr Lawrence Iwuamadi*[1]

## Introduction

The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order convened at the Logos Papal Centre, St Bishoy Monastery, Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, from 24–28 October 2025, under the theme "Where Now for Visible Unity?" I was privileged to attend this gathering, hosted by the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order, as an official delegate of the Roman Catholic Church.

This work seeks to offer a scholarly and constructive evaluation of the 2025 conference by addressing three interrelated questions: (1) To what extent did the conference advance theological and ecumenical scholarship on visible unity? (2) How inclusive and accessible were the themes and events across dimensions such as geography, denomination, gender, and career stage? (3) What processes were in place or notably absent and could be introduced, to translate conference dialogue into sustained collaborative outputs and measurable impact? These questions respond both to the stated aims of the conference and to broader debates about the capacity of large ecumenical gatherings to generate durable theological insight and institutional change. Focusing on the third question, I intend to address the importance of "ecumenical hermeneutics" and how that could contribute to determining how effectively the conference articulated and could pursue its vision of visible unity.

## Scholarly quality of the world conference

The world conference demonstrated a high level of scholarly quality, reflected in both its preparatory processes and its core programme. The evaluative starting point is the pre-conference webinars organized by the secretariat of the Commission on Faith and Order. These included regionally-focused sessions. They did more than advertise the event; they cultivated public awareness, invited diverse perspectives, and broadened the conversation beyond a single

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cultural or theological milieu. By convening voices from different continents and contexts, the webinars expanded the conference's intellectual horizon and set a tone of openness to plural insights. These sessions demonstrated that theological reflection is not monolithic but is inflected by culture, history, and social realities.

The plenary sessions were a highlight of the conference, anchored by strong keynote addresses that combined historical depth with contemporary relevance. These presentations revisited classical ecumenical questions through modern lenses, offering substantive theological reflection on unity and ecclesial identity. The plenaries succeeded in providing a shared intellectual framework for subsequent conversations, enabling participants to engage with complex doctrinal issues from a common starting point. Thematically, the keynotes balanced doctrinal precision with pastoral sensitivity, demonstrating that rigourous scholarship and ecclesial concern are mutually reinforcing. This balance helped to move the conference beyond abstract theorizing toward proposals that have practical implications for how churches relate to one another and to the world.

A particularly notable contribution was the keynote by His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch.[2] This address offered a scholarly and theologically robust argument that the identity, unity, and mission of the Church must be understood through the confession of the triune God as articulated at the Council of Nicaea. Cardinal Koch challenged readings that treat the Nicene formula as a foreign Hellenizing imposition on biblical faith. Instead, he argued that the Nicene affirmation of *homoousios* expresses the scriptural revelation of Christ's eternal filial relationship to the Father and represents a decisive Christian transformation of classical monotheism. By introducing relationality as an ontological category, trinitarian doctrine reconfigures divine unity and supplies the theological grammar for conceiving of the Church as a communion of unity in diversity.

This trinitarian ontology undergirds an ecclesiology in which the universal Church and local churches exist in mutual interiority. Such a model resists both centralizing uniformity (*return ecumenism*) and loose federation (*federation ecumenism*). Cardinal Koch further argued that ecumenical models that mirror modalism—which reduces unity to absorption—or tritheism—which reduces unity to mere coexistence—fail to reflect the trinitarian structure of communion. His keynote therefore provided participants with a theologically

2. Kurt Cardinal Koch, "The Triune God and the Identity of the Church," keynote presentation at the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, Logos Papal Centre of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, 25 October 2025, https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/cardinal-koch/2025/Conferenze/en6.html.

sound basis for revisiting the Nicene Creed as a privileged locus for renewed ecumenical convergence. Hence, the 1700th anniversary of Nicaea was framed as a theological *kairos* for deepening reception of the Nicene faith and advancing toward visible unity grounded in shared apostolic confession.

The conference's ecumenical affirmation, titled *Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope: Ecumenical Affirmation*,[3] functions as a manifesto for Christian unity in the 21st century, blending scholarly reflection with pastoral sensitivity. This 12-page document links faith, mission, and justice to the ecumenical journey and honours the legacy of Nicaea and prior ecumenical milestones. It reaffirms convergence documents from Faith and Order, including *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*,[4] and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.[5] The affirmation frames unity in sacramental, doctrinal, and missional terms rather than as mere institutional merger. It emphasizes mutual accountability and the role of the whole people of God, not only ecclesial leaders, thereby signalling a commitment to shared responsibility across different levels of church life.

The document's strengths lie in its integrative vision. It refuses to reduce unity to administrative arrangements and instead situates unity within the life of worship, confession, and common witness. By doing so, it provides a roadmap for churches that seek to move beyond polite coexistence toward deeper forms of communion that are both visible and transformative.

The scholarly quality of the conference is equally evident in the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2025, implemented under its Ecumenical Theological Education framework of the World Council of Churches alongside the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. The GETI programme convened a diverse cohort of emerging theologians and church leaders for a blended learning experience combining online seminars with residential formation. It strengthened participants' theological competence, ecumenical leadership skills, and contextual awareness, while deepening engagement with

3. *Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope: Ecumenical Affirmation of the World Council of Churches Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order*, 24–28 October 2025, Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/deepening-unity-journeying-in-love-restoring-hope-ecumenical-affirmation.

4. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (WCC Publications, 1982), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/FO1982_111_en.pdf.

5. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/The_Church_Towards_a_common_vision.pdf.

foundational Faith and Order texts and the contemporary significance of the Nicene heritage in addressing global challenges to unity, justice, and peace.[6]

## Programmatic coherence and conceptual framing

Across the conference, the theological emphases displayed a notable degree of programmatic coherence and conceptual framing. On the core theme of visible unity, discussions repeatedly returned to the question of what visible unity means in practice (shared witness, sacramental life, mutual recognition of ministries, justice, reconciliation), and the capacity to speak with one voice in matters of faith and public concern. Speakers in plenaries, workshops, and thematic sessions drew deeply on the Nicene legacy as well as on local Christian traditions and contexts. They argued that unity work must be both historically rooted and contextually relevant, refusing any dichotomy between fidelity to the early councils and attentiveness to contemporary realities. Rather than treating Nicaea as a commemorative milestone, the conference used it as a model for how doctrinal clarity and conciliar decision-making can serve present ecumenical negotiation. Scholars presented conciliar discernment and patristic theology as legitimate resources for addressing doctrinal differences today.

This framing allowed the conference to articulate unity not as an abstract aspiration but as a lived ecclesial practice. The programmes and sections consistently showcased the contextual and global emphasis that has become characteristic of contemporary ecumenism. Various speakers at plenaries, sections, and workshops, along with those preaching during prayers, stressed that unity must be attentive to local contexts and to churches in every part of the world, and that theological formulations must be lived out amid concrete social, political, and cultural realities. The concluding message, for example, names concrete areas for joint action, such as public witness, theological study, and liturgical sharing, and invites churches to adopt and follow up on these processes at national and regional levels.[7] This insistence on contextuality prevented the conference from drifting into purely academic or commemorative modes; instead, it grounded the theological reflections in the lived experience of Christian communities.

6. Ani Ghazaryan Drissi and David Montealegre, eds., *Where Now for Visible Unity? Curriculum and Methodology Booklet GETI 2025* (WCC Publications, 2025), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/GETI%202025%20Curriculum%20and%20Methodology%20Booklet%20Final%205.pdf; Ani Ghazaryan Drissi and Lawrence Iwuamadi, eds., *Where Now for Visible Unity? An Ecumenical Reader* (WCC Publications, 2025), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/GETI%20Reader%202025%20Web.pdf.

7. *Deepening Unity*, paras. 26–27.

In connection with conceptual framing, one of the key strengths of the conference was in its presentation of unity as inseparable from mission and justice. This reframed ecumenism as lived discipleship. The conference rightly insisted that unity is both God's gift and human responsibility, expressed in daily practices rather than merely in formal agreements. This approach enabled the gathering to address themes such as persecution, war, fragmentation,[8] and secular pressures using the language of the "walk by faith."[9] It also allowed the conference to insist that unity must be seen equally in shared witness to the marginalized, making clear that ecclesial reconciliation cannot be separated from solidarity with those who suffer. In this way, the conference positioned unity as a dynamic, ethical, and missional reality rather than a static institutional goal.

Within this perspective, the major sections on "Being Church on the Way to Visible Unity," "Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God," and "Being Church in and for the World," reflected the conference's overarching theme with considerable consistency. Each section approached the theme from a distinct angle, with the conviction that unity is both theological and practical, both spiritual and structural. The workshops, though more varied in focus, generally echoed these concerns, even if some sessions were more explicitly aligned with the theme than others.

The Commission on Faith and Order played a central role in ensuring this coherence. It carefully framed the gathering as a focused attempt to move from conversation to common witness or at least to hold these two dimensions together. This intention is particularly evident in the "Call to All Christians," which forms part of the ecumenical affirmation approved at the end of the conference. The call articulates a vision of unity that is both aspirational and actionable, inviting Christians to deepen their commitment to one another and to the world. It also reflects the commission's long-standing commitment to grounding ecumenical work in theological clarity while remaining open to the diverse experiences of the global Church.

At the same time, the conference's programmatic coherence was not without its weaker points. The workshops, in particular, revealed some fragmentation. While many workshops were thematically aligned with the conference's central concerns, others appeared only loosely connected, addressing specialized topics without clearly articulating their relevance to the theme of visible unity. This is not unusual in large conferences, where the desire to include a wide range of voices and perspectives can lead to a proliferation of parallel sessions. Yet the result was that some workshops felt more like stand-alone academic presentations

8. *Deepening Unity*, paras. 13–14.

9. *Deepening Unity*, para. 8.

than contributions to a shared ecumenical project. This fragmentation did not undermine the overall coherence of the conference, but it did highlight the challenge of maintaining thematic focus across a diverse and global gathering.

## Diversity and inclusion

One of the most remarkable aspects of the conference was its deliberate and carefully articulated approach to "widening the table," a mark of the current Commission on Faith and Order's methodology. Diversity and inclusion were not treated as peripheral considerations but as essential criteria for evaluating the conference's integrity and effectiveness. The measure of this widening was visible in the geographic spread of participants, the range of career stages represented, denominational breadth, and gender balance. The presence of nearly 400 participants, both theologians and non-theologians, church leaders and emerging ecumenists, academics and practitioners, signalled a renewed momentum in ecumenical engagement. This breadth of participation was not merely numerical. It reflected a genuine attempt to gather voices from across the Christian world, including those who have historically been underrepresented in global ecumenical conversations.

High-level institutional engagement further underscored this commitment. Senior church leaders and major ecumenical actors were present throughout the conference, offering both symbolic and substantive contributions. The opening address by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II was particularly significant, signalling strong host church involvement and highlighting the importance of the Oriental Orthodox tradition within the wider ecumenical landscape.[10] His presence, along with that of other prominent leaders, lent weight to the gathering and affirmed the seriousness with which the host churches approached the event.

It is important to note, as many participants did, that hosting the world conference in Wadi El Natrun was itself a powerful act of inclusion. It represented an intentional centring of Eastern Christianity, the Oriental tradition, Africa and the Middle East, and the broader global South within the ecumenical narrative. This geographic and symbolic shift challenged the longstanding Eurocentric orientation of many ecumenical processes. It also allowed participants to encounter the living traditions of the desert monastic heritage, grounding theological reflection in a place that has shaped Christian spirituality for centuries. In this sense, the location of the conference was not merely logistical but theological, embodying the conviction that ecumenical

10. His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark, "Address at the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order," Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, 2025, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/PLENARY_01_02_Tawadros.pdf.

dialogue must be rooted in the diverse memories and experiences of the global Church.

Generational and methodological shifts were also evident. The conference saw stronger involvement of younger ecumenists and a more intentional mix of academic, pastoral, and grassroots voices. This signalled a shift in how ecumenical work is being done, moving away from a model dominated by senior theologians and institutional representatives toward one that values intergenerational collaboration and methodological plurality. Younger participants brought fresh perspectives, often emphasizing contextual realities, intersectional concerns, and the need for ecumenism to engage contemporary social challenges. Their presence helped broaden the methodological landscape, incorporating narrative, experiential, and community-based approaches alongside traditional theological discourse.

Diversity and inclusion also extended to the themes discussed throughout the conference. Building on a shared trinitarian and patristic foundation, the gathering linked theological affirmations to ethical and public witness. The discussions moved beyond classical ecumenical topics such as baptism, Eucharist, and ministry to engage issues of justice, reconciliation, decolonization, and the churches' common social witness.[11] This thematic expansion reflected a growing recognition that doctrinal convergence must be accompanied by shared ethical commitments. The *Ecumenical Affirmation* made this explicit, linking theological agreement to joint action on behalf of persecuted and marginalized communities. In doing so, it integrated theological and ethical priorities, presenting visible unity as a holistic reality encompassing belief, worship, and public engagement.

At the same time, the conference was not without critical commentary on diversity, inclusion, and the broadening of the ecumenical conversation. Some aspects of the conference still revealed a structural limitation that merits attention, as it appears that the "widened table" remained largely populated by theologians and church leaders. In relying on the expert voices, while indispensable for rigourous theological reflection, there is always the risk of excluding the lived questions and priorities of everyday Christians. A more inclusive future approach, for instance with the pre-conference webinars, would intentionally create spaces where laypeople, grassroots leaders, and those on the margins can frame the questions themselves, shifting some of the agenda-setting power away from academic norms and toward communal concerns. To deepen

11. "Call to All Christians: Message of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order," Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, 24–28 October 2025, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/call-to-all-christians-message-of-the-sixth-world-conference-on-faith-and-order.

democratic participation, future pre-conference programming could include open forums where non-specialists are invited to present testimonies, questions, and priorities. Such formats would enrich scholarly debate by grounding it in the concrete experiences that theology seeks to interpret.

Secondly, as is common in ecumenical circles, some participants, particularly those attentive to confessional boundaries, expressed scepticism. They worried that the language of inclusion might blur doctrinal distinctives or sidestep contentious moral and ecclesial issues. These voices insisted on theological clarity and cautioned against equating dialogue with agreement. They also expressed concern that linking doctrine and ethics too closely might pressure churches into positions they are not prepared to adopt. Such critiques, while sometimes uncomfortable, are part of the ecumenical reality and reflect the ongoing tension between openness and confessional integrity.

## Impact and subsequent implementation

Even with discussions in certain quarters about an ecumenical freeze, it is clear that the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order profoundly influenced the refocusing and re-energizing of ecumenism and its perceived significance. The conference did not emerge in a vacuum; rather, it was preceded by a carefully cultivated process that generated momentum long before delegates arrived at the gathering itself. As mentioned earlier, pre-conferences created a significant buzz around the ecumenical questions at stake, becoming spaces where churches, theologians, and ecumenical practitioners could articulate their hopes, frustrations, and expectations. They were impactful in bringing regional concerns and contextual theological insights to the fore, helping to ensure that the conference was not shaped solely by voices from the traditional centres of ecumenical discourse.

Similarly, theological institutions like the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey contributed to the momentum by organizing international conferences exploring the ecumenical significance of the Council of Nicaea.[12] Events such as these provided opportunities for what I refer to as alternative spaces for reflections on the meaning of Nicaea. These reflections that did not simply rehearse the doctrinal formulations of the 4th century but instead asked how Nicene faith might speak into the fractured, plural, and often wounded realities of contemporary Christianity. This underscores the value of an ecumenical theology that is not solely dictated from above but diligently accounts for

12. The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, in collaboration with the secretariat on Faith and Order, organized an international ecumenical conference entitled "Towards Nicaea 2025: Exploring the Council's Ecumenical Significance Today," at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland, 4–8 November 2024. See: https://oikoumene.org/events/towards-nicaea-2025-conference.

grassroots insights into Christian unity. It also highlights the importance of creating spaces where lived experiences of local communities can inform the broader theological imagination of the universal church.

One of the conference's key impacts is its grounding of its vision in the Council of Nicaea and the broader Faith and Order tradition, framing unity in terms of Nicene faith and *koinonia*. This grounding is not merely historical but theological and spiritual. It frames unity as participation in the life of the triune God, a participation that necessarily shapes how Christians relate to one another. In presenting unity as inseparable from mission and justice, the conference reframes ecumenism. Unity becomes something embodied in shared commitments to the flourishing of communities, the pursuit of justice, and the healing of creation.

That the ecumenical affirmation names Christian complicity in oppression and calls for repentance, decolonization, and care for creation adds moral credibility and aligns unity with the healing of wounded communities and the planet, not just interchurch harmony. The call for repentance echoes a recent reflection by Pope Leo XIV who wondered if those Christians who bear serious responsibility in armed conflicts have the humility and courage to make a serious examination of conscience.[13] This moral dimension is not an optional addition but a necessary component of any credible ecumenical vision today. By acknowledging the church's failures, its implication in colonialism, racism, environmental degradation, and other forms of injustice, the conference situates unity within a framework of truth-telling and transformation. Repentance becomes a pathway to deeper communion, and decolonization becomes a theological imperative rather than a socio-political slogan. This shift is significant because it challenges the notion that ecumenism is primarily the domain of theologians and church leaders. Instead, it becomes a calling for the whole people of God, thereby expanding the reach of theological conversations on unity.

The practical implications of the conference for the ecumenical movement would include renewed energy for theologians, theological institutions and commissions, study groups, and dialogues, both bilateral and multilateral. The conference's themes provide fertile ground for new research, fresh conversations, and innovative forms of collaboration. Yet, to maintain the conference's momentum, it will be imperative to devise strategies for actively involving national churches and denominations in considering practical measures. This

13. Leo XIV, "Address to Participants in the 36th Course on the Internal Forum," speech, Vatican, 13 March 2026, https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2026/03/13/260313g.html.

requires intentional communication, sustained engagement, and structures that facilitate the translation of theological insights into ecclesial action. From this perspective, a renewed impetus for Faith and Order study processes emerges as a significant opportunity for engaging churches and ecumenical bodies. Such projects can function as vital mediating spaces between the conference's theological vision and the lived realities of church life.

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance and impact of the space the conference created for lay and youth engagement by explicit proposals to resource grassroots ecumenism and to integrate younger leaders into ongoing theological work. Young people, in particular, often approach ecumenism with fewer historical burdens and a greater openness to collaboration. Their involvement can help reimagine what unity looks like in a world shaped by digital communication, artificial intelligence, cultural diversity, and shifting religious landscapes. Similarly, lay participation ensures that ecumenism is not confined to academic or ecclesial elites but becomes a shared responsibility of the whole church. The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order was unquestionably impactful. The task now is to build upon it with creativity, courage, and commitment.

## Conclusion

The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order was a theologically rich, institutionally significant gathering that renewed global ecumenical conversation on visible unity. It reasserted the WCC's convening power and produced substantial theological engagement. Yet its long-term impact will depend on the willingness of churches and ecumenical bodies to translate its vision into sustained action, based on the theological scaffolding it provides.

No ecumenical document or gathering is without points of critique, and the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order is no exception. The reflections emerging from this work are intended to advance ongoing conversations among the churches and within the wider ecumenical movement. While invoking Nicaea lends considerable historical and theological legitimacy, adequately addressing the question "Where Now for Visible Unity?" also requires acknowledging, rather than glossing over, the contested reception of the Nicene tradition across different churches. Divergent ecclesiologies and sacramental theologies mean that the same Nicene language can be interpreted in markedly different ways. Consequently, future work would benefit from more explicit proposals for engaging and addressing these persistent disagreements.

A second critique concerns participation. The Commission on Faith and Order must be commended for "broadening the table." However, while the conference's intellectual rigour was a strength, there was still a predominance of theologians and church leaders. To remedy this, future conferences should design participatory tracks that empower lay leaders, youth, women, and marginalized communities to contribute substantively to theological reflection. Doing so will produce scholarship that is more attentive to the lived realities that theology seeks to interpret.

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## Introduction to the Section Reports

The conference planners assigned all the "voting" participants—that is, members of the Commission on Faith and Order and church-nominated delegates—to one of six sections: two sections for each of the three study groups of the commission. Study Group 1 addressed "Being Church on the Way to Visible Unity." Study Group 2 focused on "Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God"; it took forward previous work on moral discernment and on theological anthropology. Study Group 3, on "Being Church in and for the World," focused on questions of peace, violence, and reconciliation. The sections met in three afternoon sessions during the world conference.

Using various processes, the co-convenors of each section invited participants to respond to the day's plenaries and asked them to relate their reflections to the context of their section's particular study group's work. The following section reports represent the summaries of these responses and discussions, as observed and collated by the section rapporteurs. These reports, along with all the proceedings of the world conference, will help to shape the ongoing work of the Commission on Faith and Order.

## Report of Section 1: Ecclesiology Study Group

Section 1 dealt with two subthemes: baptismal ecclesiology (Groups 1A and 1B) and visible unity (Groups 1C and 1D). The report below reflects some key points from the conversations and insights they provided for the future work of Study Group 1.

### Baptismal ecclesiology (Groups 1A and 1B)

The Sections 1A-1B meetings provided the opportunity to learn about the recent work of Faith and Order on baptismal ecclesiology (presentation by Stephanie Dietrich), as well as to reflect on the gifts and implications of baptism, and the involvement of all the baptized in leadership and decision-making (presentations in panels).

Which are the insights the Faith and Order commission has gained in the period leading up to the conference on the issue under discussion?

*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), *One Baptism*: *Towards Mutual Recognition*, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV), as well as the analysis of the responses to TCTCV, offer the grounds to reflect on opportunities and challenges for baptismal ecclesiology:

- Baptism provides a common theological ground for unity in Christ.
- It offers a shared entry point for mutual recognition across churches.
- Yet differing views on meaning, subjects, and effects of baptism may still limit visible unity and shared sacramental life.
- Baptism opens space for recognizing the ecclesial reality of other traditions; yet full recognition is hindered by open questions on apostolicity, ministry, and sacramental theology.

The principle of the priesthood of all believers can effectively address the dynamics of authority and charisma within ecclesiastical structures. When the entire congregation is viewed as empowered individuals—prophets, priests, and kings—it promotes the recognition of the role of each person in building the body of Christ.

Thus, baptismal ecclesiology offers both a unifying foundation and a set of unresolved theological questions. It connects issues of identity, authority, and vocation to the core meaning of belonging in the church and calls for deeper engagement with pneumatology, spirituality, and ecclesiology.

### *Present: What are the present challenges?*

- The study of pneumatology, spirituality, and ecclesiology reveals a significant tension between institutional authority and charismatic expressions within various Christian traditions. This fundamental clash poses challenges in navigating the relationship between the established church order and many charismatic claims. Consequently, there is a need to seek a nuanced balance that honours both institutional integrity and the vibrant, dynamic expressions of faith that characterize charismatic movements.
- Discernment. The necessity for discernment within religious contexts is a critical area of inquiry, particularly when multiple individuals assert charismatic authority. Determining the legitimacy of such claims often requires careful examination. From our discussion, we observe that this is a real challenge in different regional contexts and church traditions.

Consequently, it raises essential questions regarding the sources and criteria of authority that should guide the discernment process.

- Issues of identity and belonging. A central theological challenge is the definition of baptismal identity. Are Christians baptized into the body of Christ, or into a particular church? This question shapes dialogue about Christian unity. If baptism is understood as incorporation into Christ, it can provide a common foundation across denominations. However, divergent practices—such as differing understandings of the connection or disconnection of baptism-communion-confirmation, the recognition of baptism between traditions, or practices of rebaptism—continue to fragment this unity.
- Pastoral and practical challenges. Churches also face pastoral dilemmas: Is baptism alone sufficient or must it be followed by confirmation? How should churches respond to rebaptism? In many contexts, baptism has become a cultural or social ritual detached from (lifelong) faith formation, with declining participation and weak theological understanding. This has created a disjunction between the theology of baptism and its lived expression.
- Accountability and mutual recognition: The group also explored baptismal ecclesiology as a "hook of accountability." Recognizing one another's baptism implies recognizing one another as authentic expressions of the church.
- Synodality and participation. The dialogue on baptism inevitably intersects with synodality—the participation of all the baptized in discernment and decision-making. Different traditions interpret this differently: some view lay participation through sacramental theology rather than democratic representation. The group examined how ecclesial decision-making reflects baptismal identity, noting the distinction between "making" and "taking" decisions. Synodality, properly understood, involves collective discernment in the Spirit, not mere procedural democracy. Nevertheless, in practice, many synods risk bureaucratization, which can silence rather than empower the baptized faithful.
- Relationship between baptism and Eucharist. Baptism and Eucharist remain deeply intertwined. Baptism is initiation; the Eucharist is communion. Yet their relationship varies by tradition, often complicating ecumenical understanding. Some traditions baptize children but delay communion, while others integrate both sacraments in one celebration. The challenge is to articulate an integrated ecclesiology—one that views the church as an ordered communion of diverse charisms and ministries, reflecting both baptismal initiation and eucharistic fellowship.

- Terminology. During the discussions it was understood that the term *baptismal ecclesiology* was not at first clear to all the participants. The clarification that it is an account of the church from the perspective of baptism helped both clarify the task and make clear that this work does not replicate the work of BEM, but extends it. This is a clarification that will probably be needed in the future as well. It must also be acknowledged that the participants wanted more time for conversation and further exchange.

### *Future: What steps would the section recommend the study group take in the future?*

- The ecclesiological dimension of baptism is closely related to the authority of all the baptized and to the priesthood of all believers. It is, therefore, necessary to further understand how this "royal priesthood" is described and experienced in the churches.
- Baptism is understood as the gift of the Spirit. How do pneumatology, spirituality, and ecclesiology relate?
- The priesthood of all the baptized might imply their inclusion within leadership and decision-making structures of the churches. How can this be related to synodality and the role of the laity?
- Integrating baptism and Eucharist. Future theological work must affirm that baptismal and eucharistic ecclesiology are not alternatives but complementary dimensions of Christian life. Baptism marks initiation into Christ, while the Eucharist sustains and expresses that unity. An integrated approach can illuminate how the church is both a spiritual and institutional communion, ordered yet dynamic, united yet diverse.
- Baptismal ecclesiology shifts discussions centred on the table and ministry toward the entrance and starting point: what does it mean to be a Christian? What constitutes a believer? Participants discussed how baptismal ecclesiology invites reflection on the theology of the church itself. Baptism is the door of entrance to the church, and is also a mystery—not exclusive, but rather constitutive of ecclesiology. The group suggested that this approach calls for returning to fundamental theological understanding of the church, recognizing that after 50 years of discussion focused on the Eucharist without reaching full agreement, a step back to baptismal foundations may offer new pathways forward towards visible unity.
- Promoting formation and ongoing baptismal living. The group emphasized that baptism is not a single moment but a lifelong process of formation. Future reflection could explore how catechesis, discipleship, and community life can nurture this identity. Baptismal formation

(both before and after baptism) must be reclaimed as an ongoing journey of transformation, linking believers to their identity in Christ and equipping them for ministry and witness.

- Encouraging ecumenical dialogue. Baptism remains one of the most promising foundations for visible Christian unity. Despite divergent practices—such as infant versus believer's baptism—the shared confession of baptism "in water and in Spirit" offers common ground. Continued dialogue could focus on mutual recognition, theological convergence, and contextual pastoral solutions.
- Contextual and synodal development. Future work should explore how baptismal identity shapes synodal participation in different contexts.
- Strengthening awareness and accessibility. Finally, one indirect observation during the section conversations was that many participants were unfamiliar with recent Faith and Order work. This suggests two main challenges: 1) Faith and Order needs to "map" its work in a way that is more easily accessible to everyone, and 2) Faith and Order needs to find ways to further communicate its work in clear, accessible formats to reach wider audiences.

## Visible unity (Groups 1C and 1D)

The former moderator of Faith and Order, Rev. Dr Susan Durber, gave the section a panoramic view of various understandings of visible unity in the past years. She not only introduced to us different models of unity but also described some contemporary challenges. On Saturday and Monday afternoon, two groups of panellists talked about different visions of visible unity and future steps toward visible unity from their own perspectives. Then participants of the subsection had warm and lively discussions on topics related to visible unity. We all believe that unity is the Lord's calling and the churches shall continue to walk on the way to it. On the other hand, global changes and challenges, such as climate crisis and violence, still require churches to be united. Therefore, churches should work together to confront these challenges and contribute to the common good of humankind. In the following, the report on visible unity will be divided into three parts.

### *Insights from the participants' discussions*

First of all, our group fully affirms the achievements of BEM and TCTCV and regards them as points of departure for future development of visible unity.

Secondly, it is suggested that we should no longer talk about models of visible unity. As churches in the world are so diverse, promoting a certain model may seem as imposing a uniform structure on all churches in different contexts.

Thirdly, the present-day churches should search for concrete signs of visible unity. Some group members argued that the practical dimension of visible unity must be highlighted. John's teaching of loving one another is an important sign. By practising mutual love, the spiritual bond of unity is established and manifested. The visible unity of churches should also go beyond the institutional level, reaching out with Christ's love. Furthermore, churches should be engaged in common witness and service to and advocacy for fellow human beings, especially for those marginalized. Love can serve as the sign of visible unity of the churches in the world. In places where there is lack of love, that is, without gender justice, solidarity with the suffering, and hospitality to the strangers, there cannot be visible unity. In addition, participants also proposed that, in relationship to the Council of Nicaea, a common date for Easter can also be a common denominator.

Fourthly, ecumenical formation should be carried out at the grassroots level, especially in the younger generations. Although academia and church leaders have talked a lot about ecumenism for many years, some Christians at the grassroots level still hold high their own traditions that exclude other Christians. Younger generations growing in this tradition also tend to identify unity with uniformity. The task of seeking visible unity is not limited to clergy. Lay and young Christians can also contribute to it.

Fifthly, visible unity is indeed God's gift when Christians all walk together in this dynamic pilgrimage journey. For Christians of Pentecostal background, it is important to listen to the Spirit and discern God's will in this process. The stories of common witness can encourage us to trust in God's guidance and providence.

### *Basic challenges of visible unity facing us today*

Participants in our discussion group indicated that mutual recognition of baptism should be achieved in the first place. Baptism marks not only the beginning of the reborn new life in Christ but also our union with Christ. Only by affirming we Christians are all members of the same body of Christ, can we accept the fact that we are also united with each other. This has something to do with apostolicity and the recognition of the historic episcopate. The second challenge is that even today full intercommunion is not possible. Christ is the real host of the last supper, and his radical inclusive love does not exclude anyone.

Yet the Lord's communion seems still ecclesiasticalized. The vision of eucharistic fellowship is yet to be fulfilled. To use the phrase of the late American theologian William Placher, we as the church need to learn how to eat gracefully. Thirdly, related to the failures of the first two recognitions, ministry has also not been recognized among the churches.

Furthermore, a group member thinks that tension between unity and diversity still exists and cannot be easily solved. It is hard to define the limit of legitimacy.

In addition, the Protestant churches also need a universal ministry. It is not in the sense of authority. Neither does it intend a super church. Symbolically, the common prayer and witness, as well as the brotherhood in Christ in the world can demonstrate Christians' oneness.

### *Three important topics the study group may choose to address*

First, visible unity is never an abstract concept; it needs to take a concrete form of life. As the body of Christ, the church does not have its own life but repeats Christ's life. Therefore, the subgroup 1 on visible unity may seek to give a thick description of Christ's life based on the New Testament, especially the gospel narratives. This is the foundation of our common apostolic faith which we must not deviate from.

Secondly, visible unity should be seen in the framework of Christ's cosmic mission. Eschatologically speaking, unity is fully visible when the cosmic *shalom* is fulfilled. In order to restore the harmonious relationship between God, human beings, and nature, the subgroup may take the subject of visible unity and holistic salvation into consideration and see how God is transforming the world through the mission of the church.

Finally, as Christ comes in order that we can get abundant life, the church that pursues visible unity shall also be committed to the fullness of life. Thus, visible unity is also closely related to an ecumenism of life. In other words, where we find the flourishing of life, we can discover the authentic presence of Christ through the church's spiritual and social ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. The fullness of life results from Christ's continuous creative and redemptive action in the world. It would be good to organize consultations to learn how visible unity is lived out from cross-cultural and contextual perspectives.

The present-day landscape of the ecumenical movement has indeed changed because of the shift of geographical gravity of Christianity to the global South.

The ecumenical movement today has become polycentric and hence we need to highlight more the connectedness and cooperation of different churches in the world from a cross-cultural perspective. Multilateral dialogues and cooperation become extremely relevant for our understanding of visible unity. Today we need to emphasize a holistic vision of church unity that encompasses the whole of God's creation. That is, the church with its purpose of visible unity is a church for all.

## Report of Section 2: Theological Anthropology/Moral Discernment

Participants in this section met in smaller groups to reflect on the conference plenaries and to share experiences, challenges, and resources from our context.

While discussion has been wide-ranging, this report summarizes the key emerging points and themes that are relevant to the work of Study Group 2, working on theological anthropology and on moral discernment.

- Being images of God. Affirming the human person as *imago Dei*, *imago Trinitatis*, means more than simply affirming the dignity and worth of each human being. It refers to the relational nature of human being, grounded in the triune God. It also points to Christ as God incarnate, fully human, becoming human so that we might become divine. Understanding the full humanity of Christ is a way to understand what it is to be human.
- The image of God. Shared ground for moral discernment recognizing and honouring the image of God in ourselves and in one another involves practices of welcoming each other, of generous listening, of resisting dehumanization of ourselves or others, and of solidarity with those who are not like us. Reflecting together on the image of God and what it means for moral life has shown us that Christians have much in common as we engage in moral discernment. Although moral issues are sometimes divisive, we are called to look for what we can say in common.
- Being vulnerable human creatures. Vulnerability is part of our lives as human creatures among other creatures; we are made to be interdependent, and not simply independent. Our vulnerability is not something to be escaped or feared. Our existence in interdependence with each other, with humanity and with the whole of creation is a gift of divine love that calls us into a communion of love; to say that we are created out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) is also to say that we are created out of love (*creatio ex amore*). Human beings are part of creation and

have a responsibility to care for creation; theological anthropology thus cannot be separated from theological thinking about creation as a whole.

- Visible unity of the Church; visible unity of humanity. Seeking the visible unity of the Church draws us toward Christ, who became human for the sake of all humanity and through whom the whole of creation is drawn into a reconciled unity with God. The visible unity of the Church, as a community of love and justice grounded in the triune God, does not separate the Church from the world, but rather always directs us outwards to the neighbour or the stranger in whom we see God's image. Theological anthropology and moral discernment are thus not just questions that might divide the churches or obstruct visible unity—they are subjects on which we will have more to say in common as we come to understand and live our unity.
- Moving forward together, working with our history. The ecumenical movement is a movement, a journey together. We carry our histories with us as we move forward. Honest conversations about our complex histories—for mourning, celebration, repentance, learning, and reflection—can help to enable the next steps on the journey. This is one of the possibilities offered by the work on moral discernment already undertaken, looking at examples of moral discernment in the history of the churches.

Looking honestly at the past and the present, and moving forward together, will involve conversion, *metanoia*—turning towards God, towards God's image in humanity and towards the whole of creation. The work on theological anthropology and moral discernment can help to bring us towards this *metanoia*.

## Report of Section 3: Being Church in and for the World

### Introduction

Group 3 reflected on the theme "Being Church in and for the World" in the light of the conference question, Where Now for Visible Unity?

Across diverse contexts and traditions, participants affirmed that visible unity is inseparable from justice, peace, reconciliation, and decolonial transformation. Unity is not an abstract goal but a lived witness to Christ's reconciling love in a divided and wounded world.

Three strong threads emerged:

- Decolonizing ecumenical method: questioning inherited frameworks and power relations that shape theological dialogue.
- Contextual and local expressions of unity: recognizing polycentric, contextual ways of confessing faith and living communion.
- Justice, peace, and reconciliation: affirming that there can be no authentic unity without truth, repentance, and love made visible in action.

## Decolonization and the renewal of ecumenical method

Group 3A began by asking how decolonization might serve as a running thread through Faith and Order's theological work. Decolonization and decoloniality were seen as interrelated: the former a process of letting go of power and privilege; the latter a way of living and thinking in equality and mutuality. Together they call for a transformation of how theology itself is done.

Participants asked whether the methods of ecumenical theology—its languages, forms of reasoning, and institutional practices—still reflect colonial patterns. Have local or Indigenous ways of knowing been muted by dominant Western frameworks? If so, what would it mean for Faith and Order to engage other epistemologies—oral, narrative, liturgical, communal—as legitimate theological sources?

Subgroup 3B echoed this concern, observing that colonial dynamics persist even within ecumenical structures. Decolonial work requires self-critique within the movement itself: What does it mean to leave the centre of the table for others to sit down? Decolonization is not about exclusion but transformation of relationships and redistribution of voice. The colonized too must engage in self-liberation to avoid reproducing new hierarchies.

Participants noted that Europe is attempting to decolonize largely on its own terms; genuine change demands dialogue with other centres of experience. The group underlined that decoloniality extends beyond history; it addresses the continuing systems of knowledge, authority, and liturgy that define who speaks and who is heard in the churches.

## Contextual theology and local expressions of unity

Discussions in 3A stressed that visible unity cannot be uniformity. Expecting unity to look the same in every context is a colonial tendency. Churches must discern what unity means within their own histories and cultures. Structural,

cultural, and denominational barriers remain real; practical cooperation often lags behind verbal commitment.

Participants examined a case study from the Gereja Kristen Pasundan (Indonesia), which developed a local confession of faith shaped by its own narratives. The confession sought to counter patriarchy, emphasize creation, and reflect egalitarian social realities. Differences in emphasis—such as limited reference to eschatology or baptism—provoked constructive dialogue on the nature of contextual creeds.

The group asked: Is it fair to impose other versions of the Creed on local churches? A shared insight was that linguistic or cultural differences in confession do not necessarily break spiritual communion. There can be a spirituality of the Creed—a unity of faith expressed through diverse forms.

This led to a reflection on method. Should creeds and confessions emerge "from the ground up" through contextual discernment, or "from the top down" through official sanction? Historically, even Nicaea began from pastoral and theological concerns within local communities before imperial ratification. The question remains vital: How can Faith and Order encourage confessional processes that honour both catholicity and contextual authenticity?

Participants also observed that morning plenary sessions analysing the Nicene faith were dominated by Western male voices. Even when speakers were regionally diverse, Europe seemed to define the conversation. The group called for more balanced representation to ensure that theological leadership mirrors the world's plurality.

## Structural and methodological transformation

Further reflection in 3A considered how decolonial perspectives might reshape the practices of ecumenism itself. The way the churches conduct dialogue—through writing, speech, and publishing—remains largely European in style. Faith and Order is invited to create space for other forms of communication and discernment.

The group proposed that future messages and reports of Faith and Order must emerge through inclusive processes where each section's insights genuinely shape the whole. As a practical example, the churches' participation in establishing the Feast of Creation was cited as a step toward redressing colonial liturgical patterns: Southern churches, more attuned to ecological realities, are leading this initiative, offering a model of shared ownership.

## Unity, justice, and reconciliation

Groups 3B and 3C together affirmed that unity without justice is hollow. "A proposal for unity without justice is the elephant in the room." The church's credibility depends on embodying love and truth in relation to the suffering of the world.

Participants warned against prioritizing doctrinal or moral disputes while ignoring injustice. Faith without love is dangerous. The search for visible unity must include repentance for complicity in systems of oppression—racial, gendered, economic, and ecological.

Members expressed concern that even within the conference, experiences of veiled gender violence and silencing occurred. Such incidents reveal deeper structural issues. Unity requires the creation of spaces where violence and power abuse can be named, lamented, and transformed. Reconciliation demands truth-telling and confession; it cannot be forced where wounds remain unhealed.

Violence was discussed in many forms: sexual violence, war, ecological destruction, and institutional complicity. Participants stressed that churches often speak about violence yet hesitate to expose it, fearing damage to reputation. The opposite of peace, it was said, is not war but injustice. Preaching the cross, therefore, is an act of resistance: to proclaim Christ crucified is to stand with the victims of violence and empire.

The churches were urged to find a prophetic voice concerning ongoing conflicts such as Gaza and to speak against the abuse of power wherever it appears. Environmental exploitation was also recognized as violence against creation. Climate change reveals how reluctance to relinquish comfort perpetuates harm.

A vivid metaphor emerged: When the house is on fire, we can work together to put it out. Unity often becomes tangible in crisis: the challenge is to sustain solidarity once the emergency has passed.

## Justice, youth, and hope

Group 3C drew attention to the crisis of hope among young people. Many youth are deeply concerned about injustice but feel powerless and fatigued by the lack of genuine change. The ecumenical movement must, therefore, help restore faith in justice—trust that God's justice is real and that human participation in it matters.

The group suggested that having faith in justice inspires participation in justice. Churches should create opportunities for young people to act together across traditions, linking spirituality with social transformation.

Justice itself was recognized as complex and subjective. Human understandings are partial and shaped by culture and history. Because human beings can both cause and heal suffering, justice must be continually discerned in light of the gospel. The ecumenical movement must help churches ask whether their own actions—sometimes undertaken in the name of justice—might in fact obstruct it from another perspective. Self-examination is part of visible unity.

Participants insisted that justice cannot exist without truth and love. There is no peace without justice, and no reconciliation without truth. Churches are often tempted to move too quickly to reconciliation, avoiding the discomfort of truth-telling. Authentic reconciliation, however, requires honesty, repentance, and the costly love that gives up privilege for the sake of communion.

### Authority, conscience, and mutual accountability

A central question in 3C concerned ecclesial authority and obedience in relation to justice. In many traditions, hierarchy is seen as sacramental: a sign of divine order within the Body of Christ. Obedience to spiritual authority can express humility and love. Yet when leaders act unjustly, discipleship may call for resistance.

The group reflected on how to hold together obedience and conscience through prayerful discernment and dialogue. Both leaders and the faithful must remain accountable to the will of God as revealed in justice, mercy, and truth. Unity is not mere conformity to authority but a communion of persons guided by the Holy Spirit. This mutual accountability was identified as a crucial aspect of visible unity in practice.

## Ecumenism today: Contextualization and *koinonia*

In the closing reflections, participants discussed the current state of global ecumenism. Some felt that ecumenical dialogue has lost momentum; others noted new initiatives and communities joining the journey. There was agreement that contextualization is essential for the future. The message of unity must be translated into the idioms and challenges of different contexts.

The language of *koinonia*, communion, remains foundational. It names both the theological ground and the practical form of visible unity. *Koinonia* calls churches to shared life, mutual learning, and "charitable curiosity" toward one another. The Spirit sustains communion through repentance, hospitality, and ongoing conversion of hearts.

Participants encouraged Faith and Order to continue fostering polycentric, participatory processes that reflect the world's diversity and nurture trust among traditions. Ecumenism is not "stuck" when it deepens relationships, renews hope, and models the reconciliation it proclaims.

## Directions for Faith and Order and the churches

Across the three subgroups, several convergent insights emerged as directions for the continuing work of Faith and Order and for the churches seeking visible unity:

- Unity and justice belong together. The pursuit of one without the other distorts the gospel.
- Truth and repentance are conditions for reconciliation. Churches must name their complicity in colonial, patriarchal, and ecological violence.
- Decolonial self-examination is integral to method. Faith and Order should model polycentric participation and inclusive communication.
- Contextual theologies enrich catholicity. Local confessions and creeds, shaped by lived experience, witness to the same faith in diverse forms.
- Youth and marginalized communities are agents of renewal. Their leadership restores vitality and hope to the ecumenical movement.
- The theology of the cross grounds unity in solidarity. To share in Christ's suffering is to share in God's reconciling mission to the world.
- *Koinonia* as communion in truth and love remains the heart of visible unity and the horizon for ecumenical engagement.

## Conclusion

The discussions of Group 3 reveal that visible unity today must be more than structural agreement or institutional convergence. It must be a transformative communion—a unity that lives through justice, repentance, and love.

To be Church in and for the world is to witness to God's reconciling grace amid violence and division, to unmask the powers that wound creation, and to embody an alternative community where dignity and mutual care flourish.

The way forward for visible unity is therefore a pilgrimage of shared conversion: from privilege to partnership, from uniformity to diversity, from silence to truth, from dominance to service, and from despair to hope.

In walking this path together, the churches may rediscover that unity is not only an ecumenical task but a gift of the Holy Spirit—already given, yet always calling us deeper into communion with God, one another, and the whole creation.

## Readers' Guide

Participants had the opportunity to attend two of the 22 workshops on offer during the Sixth World Conference. The workshops were organized by Faith and Order commissioners and church partners. They offered spaces to explore and expand upon Faith and Order themes and issues and fostered dialogue among conference delegates and other participants. Their discussion and outcomes will assist the Commission on Faith and Order in its ongoing work.

## W01: Towards a Common Date for Easter

### Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 1

In the synodal letter after the First Council of Nicaea in 325, it was stated that Easter should be celebrated jointly on the Sunday following the first vernal full moon. When calculating the date, the best available astronomical knowledge should be used. In 2025, Easter was celebrated on the same day in Eastern and Western churches. The 1700th anniversary of the council gives an additional reason to ecumenically revisit the old dispute between churches in the East and West regarding the exact date of Easter. From the perspective of joint witness, a future joint date would be beneficial. Could we overcome the challenges to setting a permanent common date? Our task now is to frame a joint process toward that aim.

The well-attended workshop continued the discussion initiated in the Faith and Order paper *Towards a Common Date for Easter* (2025). The session was chaired by H.E. Metropolitan Dr Job of Pisidia. Perspectives were offered from three traditions: an Orthodox perspective by Prof. Dr Vladimir Khulap; a Roman Catholic perspective by Dr Johannes Oeldemann; and a Lutheran perspective by Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen.

Prof. Dr Khulap emphasized the deep historical and technical complexity surrounding the calculation of Easter. The Council of Nicaea called for a common celebration but did not issue a binding canonical rule. Instead, it modelled unity as a consultative and non-coercive process. Dr Khulap stressed that any movement toward a common date must proceed with pastoral sensitivity,

avoiding new divisions and recognizing that true unity does not require absolute uniformity. Dr Oeldemann highlighted a pragmatic and ecumenically open Roman Catholic stance. The Catholic Church is willing to accept any solution leading to a common Easter date. He pointed to recent Catholic statements reflecting such openness and described the current moment as a *kairos*. Dr Oeldemann called for decisive, structured steps, such as appointing an expert commission and using the Aleppo proposal—based on astronomical calculation in the spirit of Nicaea—as a promising foundation.

Rev. Dr Karttunen offered a Lutheran perspective grounded in historical diversity and practical experience. The Finnish context, where Lutherans and Orthodox already celebrate Easter on the same day, illustrates the pastoral benefits and public witness of a shared celebration in a secular society. He noted that the Lutheran tradition is open to an astronomically determined date consistent with the Nicene vision.

Across their different perspectives, the presenters clearly shared several convictions:

- Unity is pastorally and missionally essential.
- Nicaea provides a theological foundation but not a ready-made technical solution.
- Astronomical calculation is the most promising ecumenical path.
- The Aleppo 1997 proposal remains the strongest shared reference point.

Rev. Dr Karttunen posed two guiding questions for the workshop participants:

- Why not adopt an astronomically calculated calendar as our common basis for determining the Easter date, following the Aleppo proposal?
- What non-theological factors (historical, cultural, or political) lie behind the Julian/Gregorian calendar divide, and how might trust be built to overcome them?

The discussion affirmed the importance of recovering the ethos of the Council of Nicaea to celebrate Easter together and of further explicating and refining the Aleppo proposal.

## W02: Previous Faith and Order Work on Moral Discernment (History, Tool, and Reception)

*Study Group 2*

This workshop explored how earlier Faith and Order initiatives on moral discernment can help to shape ecumenical engagement today.

The session began with a presentation by Prof. Myriam Wijlens who, in the previous Commission on Faith and Order, was co-convener—together with Prof. Fr Vladimir Shmaliy and H.E. Metropolitan Vasilios of Constantia-Ammochostos—of Study Group 3 on Moral Discernment in the Churches. Following on from the publication of *Moral Discernment in the Churches: A Study Document* (Faith and Order Paper No. 215, 2013), the study group commissioned essays on how different churches engage in moral discernment (*Churches and Moral Discernment, Vol. 1: Learning from Traditions,* Faith and Order Paper No. 228, 2021). A second volume explored how moral discernment had actually occurred in history (*Churches and Moral Discernment, Vol. 2: Learning from History,* Faith and Order Paper No. 229, 2021). Based on these studies, Study Group 3 produced a third document, *Churches and Moral Discernment, Vol. 3: Facilitating Dialogue to Build Koinonia* (Faith and Order Paper No. 235, 2021).

The workshop then focused on this latter document, which constitutes a significant step in thinking about moral discernment, as well as a development in Faith and Order methodology because:

- It demonstrates the importance of recognizing the sincerity of the other partner's desire to be faithful to the Gospel as the starting point for authentic dialogue that seeks to understand in the first instance rather than to condemn.
- It introduces to ecumenism the idea of the "conscience of the church" as a way to think about what's happening when churches approach moral problems.
- Through an analysis of historical cases, it demonstrates some of the different ways in which moral discernment may result in changes to teaching or practice.
- Finally, it presents a tool for facilitating dialogue on moral issues. The tool can be used to understand the theological and philosophical differences that might underpin moral disagreements within or between churches and also offer a means to explore pathways to agreement on emerging moral issues.

Prof. Rachel Muers presented on the notions of sincerity and the conscience of the church. The *Facilitating Dialogue* document states: "This study uses the term 'conscience of the church' to refer to this *dynamic corporate engagement of a church with the moral challenges it confronts* ... put another way, the 'conscience of the church' is *everything in that church's life that can be, and is, brought to bear on the task of moral discernment by and for the people of God*" (12–13, emphasis added).

The tool was then presented by Prof. David Kirchhoffer. The tool offers a structured way of analysing how churches deploy their consciences in processes of moral reflection based on their understandings and use of moral norms, their understandings of authority and purposes of a discourse, their understanding of salvation history, their ecclesial predisposition to change, and how these theological conceptions interact with moral reasoning and circumstances in reaching moral decisions.

Finally, Prof. Marc Boss, reflected on the reception of this tool and other Faith and Order work on moral discernment in scholarly engagement, academic teaching, and bilateral dialogues, and posed the question as to how participants might use the tool moving forward.

## W03: Decolonizing Ecumenical Methodologies—Reimagining Unity Through Local Epistemologies

### Rev. Canon Dr Carlton Turner, Rev. Dr Tat Yan Lee, Prof. Dr Kristine A. Culp, Mawuli Assimadi

As part of Study Group 3 of the Commission on Faith and Order, our workshop invited participants to critically examine the epistemological foundations of ecumenical theology and practice. Historically, ecumenical reflection has often privileged Eurocentric frameworks, marginalizing the theologies and methods of communities shaped by colonial histories and Indigenous worldviews. As we gathered from diverse ecclesial and cultural contexts, the workshop offered space to reimagine the Church's unity through the lens of local theological reasoning. Participants were introduced to decolonial and Indigenous theological methods—not as supplementary perspectives, but as foundational to a renewed ecumenical methodology. The aim was not just inclusion, but methodological transformation.

This was a popular session as the idea of decolonial methodologies was popular with conference participants. Some 40 people attended. To access

decolonial epistemologies, as we framed it, participants were able to hear four different understandings and contexts responding to decolonial thinking. We organized the workshop to have two speakers, then participant small group discussions, followed by another two speakers and then ending with small group discussions and a plenary conversation. The four members of the team were the speakers and reflected on what decoloniality means in our different contexts and the main questions and challenges our contexts pose to ecumenical conversations. Carlton Turner spoke from the Caribbean region; (Victor) Tat Yan Lee presented from the Malaysian context; Mawuli Assimadi from the context of Togo; and Kristine Culp spoke from the context of the central USA. Participants were given QR codes to access a document giving access to the full presentations of the speakers.

The workshop was successful with rich engagement amongst persons from radically different cultural, religious, and denominational contexts. Many of the participants resonated with the different contexts introduced and were quite comfortable with the use and possibility of decolonial approaches. Many offered their own assessments of coloniality and the ways in which it continues into the present in the backgrounds they come from. There were also helpful discussions on the need to be cautious about any theological approach, even a decolonial one. While colonization might be a good way of understanding the history of the Church, caution is needed in applying the framing to all the Church. There must be a consideration of the different experiences between the Eastern and Western Church. While the team offered reflections from denominations with origins in the Western Church, much more exploration is needed in how decolonial methodologies might relate to Eastern contexts.

## W04: Nicaea—A Renewed Call to Unity

### Workshop Summary Together with Feedback on the World Conference by Commissioner Jane Paone, Secretary for International Ecumenical Relations, The Salvation Army International Headquarters

The First World Conference on Faith and Order was held in 1927 in Lausanne, Switzerland, with a predominantly male attendance. In 2025, there was a greater diversity and for the first time it was hosted in Africa (the Egyptian Coptic Church offered warm hospitality).

Although the Nicene Creed is part of regular Sunday liturgy for many Church traditions, others, like The Salvation Army, Pentecostals, Mennonites, and Quakers do not recite this creed, yet are aware of its impact on their beliefs.

Salvation Army doctrines (articles of faith) reflect this creed, based on the Scriptures. Along with other traditions, our theology is sung as well as taught through preaching and Bible study. Our theology is practical, as we aim to live out our faith through loving actions towards our neighbour in many different contexts.

I appreciated the time spent in the smaller section meetings, with time to unpack and digest what had been stated in the larger forum. For us, it became clear that the Nicene Creed had to be lived out in a way that demonstrates faith in action, through love. Belief must be contextualized in order to have meaning at grassroots level. The Nicene Creed is a living document, not something static.

Two speakers in particular impacted my thinking:

Rev. Dr Susan Durber spoke about the need for radical and mutual dependency. She challenged those who had made ecumenical bilateral and multilateral agreements, stating that the signing of those documents is not enough—there must also be a willingness to receive gifts from one another.

Bishop George Kyrillos (Syrian Orthodox Church, serving in India), shared that in 1927 there had been an ecumenism of the head; then it became ecumenism of the heart. He believed that future ecumenism must be one of the feet. Feet represent the marginalized in the Indian caste system. He stated that when Jesus washed his disciples' feet it was much more than a humble gesture: it was a countercultural act, a subversive act. He turned to the lowest. At the foot of the cross, all ground is level. It speaks of an egalitarian movement—unity with justice.

During an afternoon workshop, General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay invited nine representatives of the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions for an exchange on "A Renewed Call to Unity." Some communions, through bilateral and multilateral dialogues, try to embody and promote the spirit of Nicaea in today's world. For me, unity through prayer is key: prayer transcends barriers. In a country where violent persecution had been experienced, Salvation Army leaders joined with other church leaders to unite in prayer. A line of a Salvation Army song asks: "What is divine about my creed, if I am blind to human need?" Love and belief in a God of love must be translated into daily actions.

It was a huge privilege to be part of this global gathering with rich theological inputs, giving an overview of the Church's diversity, historically and today. I learned much also during conversations during mealtimes or whilst travelling

to venues. Overall, I sensed a strong desire to worship the one true God, follow in the footsteps of Christ—even if that means sacrifice—and go forward in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Salvation Army has a role to play in sacramental incarnational ministry around the world, as we unite with the family of God.

## W05: The Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity and Its Theological Roots in Faith and Order

### Facilitator: Rev. Dr Hyo-Jin Kim, Coordinator for the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity, World Council of Churches

The workshop, attended by 26 participants, provided an interactive and reflective space to explore the theological and practical dimensions of the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity (PJRU) within the ongoing work of Faith and Order.

The session, with a prior handout and PowerPoint slides, sought to deepen the understanding of how theological reflection and faith-driven action can be mutually enriching in the context of contemporary peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts.

The workshop began with a concise introduction to the historical development of the pilgrimage concept within the WCC framework, highlighting its evolution from the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP) to its current phase, the PJRU. Participants were then introduced to the ongoing development of the Pilgrimage Toolkit, a methodological resource designed to translate theological insights into practical frameworks for local and global engagement. This toolkit aims to assist churches and partners in contextualizing the pilgrimage approach within diverse settings, bridging reflection and praxis.

A key part of the discussion centred on how the pilgrimage paradigm—grounded in justice, reconciliation, and unity—can serve as an alternative model for peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Rather than approaching reconciliation as a post-conflict activity, the pilgrimage model emphasizes an ongoing process of accompaniment, mutual vulnerability, and transformative encounter. This integrative approach was recognized as particularly relevant in contexts of polarization, fragmentation, and structural injustice.

Participants engaged actively throughout the session, contributing insights from their own theological, social, and regional contexts. Many were already involved in areas related to peace and conflict studies, reconciliation ministries,

or ecumenical formation, which enabled a high level of conceptual and practical engagement. The interactive component encouraged participants to reflect on how pilgrimage as a theological paradigm could inspire renewed approaches to ecclesial mission, interfaith dialogue, and public witness.

Feedback from participants indicated a strong appreciation for the workshop's dynamic structure, its theological depth, and its potential applicability to various forms of ecclesial and community engagement. Several expressed interest in further collaboration or in contributing to the ongoing development of the Pilgrimage Toolkit.

Overall, the workshop reaffirmed that the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity offers not only a theological vision but also a transformative praxis—an approach that integrates faith, reflection, and action as mutually reinforcing dimensions of Christian witness in a fragmented world.

## W06: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea, Racism, and the Dismantling of Patriarchy

### Hosts: Just Community of Women and Men (T3) and Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia, and Related Discrimination (T6)

Workshop W06 during the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order was a collaborative workshop between two transversals (T3 and T6), held on 25 October. It was attended by more than 30 participants, including Faith and Order commissioners and members of the reference groups accompanying T3 and T6. The workshop was moderated by Dr Mutale Kaunda, co-moderator of the T3 reference group. The panel was made up of Rev. Dr Angelique Walker-Smith, Prof. Marilyn Naidoo, Rev. Dr Amica Liburd-Beckford, and Rev. Dr Seoyoung Kim. The major highlight of the workshop was its remembering of the close working relationship between the Commission on Faith and Order and Gender Justice and the Programme to Combat Racism departments in the WCC. This close work produced two historic and groundbreaking documents, *Sexism in the 1970s: Discrimination Against Women* (1974) and *Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism* (1975). The panellists shared experiences of the impact of these documents in making churches critical players in their different contexts, especially towards contributing to decolonization and social justice transformations.

In opening the workshop, the moderator, Dr Kaunda, acknowledged the fact that our partnership with Faith and Order is not as it was in the 1970s, even

as she acknowledged that contemporary experiences show that the inequalities of today—such as the climate emergency, forced migration, conflicts, and the weaponization of sex in many parts of the world—are gendered and racialized. She commended the WCC of the 1970s for taking up difficult challenges, going through processes of theological and ethical discernment, and arriving at deep theological and ethical positions, seen in the publication of the two reference texts for this workshop. Rev. Dr Walker-Smith spoke of the participation of women in the rise of the modern ecumenical movement before the launch of the WCC in 1948, showing that even in a world that was still rigidly patriarchal, ecumenical actors were among the first to open up to working with women. She also touched on the openness of the ecumenical movement toward the agency of Africans and People of African Descent, which has immensely enriched ecumenism. Prof. Naidoo spoke of the manner in which the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism and the joint report *Racism in Theology* legitimized and reinforced the role of churches in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Rev. Dr Liburd-Beckford spoke of the fluidity of oppressive structures and ideologies, especially the capacity to house oppressive and liberative impetuses. Nicaea provides both liberative and oppressive impetuses, depending on how one approaches its processes and outcomes. Nicaea did not stop churches from entanglements with racial capitalism and colonialism, white supremacy and whiteness, yet the churches were critical in consciousness-raising among enslaved and colonized communities. Rev. Dr Seoyoung Kim spoke of the transformative power of Nicaea, which speaks of three persons without implying, or even while resisting, hierarchy, domination, or asymmetrical power—instead coupling multiplicity with care, companionship, equality, and relationship. She exhorted the church to hold on to this radical approach to addressing gender and racial injustice.

Questions on the participation of young people and backlash on gender justice and racial justice within the ecumenical movement were discussed. Overall, the workshop called for more intentional collaboration between Faith and Order and the transversals on gender and racial justice.

## W07: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea, Healing, and Communal Transformation

This workshop explored how the Nicene Creed—confessed for 1700 years—can be rediscovered as a living pathway of healing, mental wellbeing, and communal transformation. In a world marked by trauma, loneliness, stigma, and fragmentation, the Creed offers not only doctrinal clarity but a vision for compassionate presence, justice, and restored relationships. Each article of faith

becomes an invitation for communities to nurture dignity, confront exclusion, and stand with those who suffer.

Affirming "one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth" grounds mental health in God's creative intention for wholeness. Every person, including those living with mental illness, trauma, or disability, bears the divine image. Confessing the Creator challenges cultures of shame and exclusion and calls churches to become places where every story and wound is taken seriously, and where belonging is genuine and unconditional.

The Creed's proclamation that Christ came down "for us and for our salvation" highlights God's solidarity with human vulnerability. The incarnation reveals a God who experiences stress, rejection, loneliness, and suffering. Jesus' ministry models practices essential to mental health care: accompaniment, listening, non-judgement, and affirming agency. Discipleship, therefore, requires entering places of pain, resisting prejudice, and creating space for the voices of those often unheard.

The article, "He was crucified ... suffered and was buried," reminds the Church that trauma and injustice are not foreign to God. The Cross exposes the realities of violence, humiliation, and systemic harm. Today, individuals and communities carry wounds shaped by conflict, poverty, discrimination, and abuse. To live this confession, churches must become spaces for truth-telling, lament, and restorative healing—rejecting denial, addressing burnout, and confronting structures that damage mental wellbeing.

The resurrection, "He rose again on the third day," centres the Christian calling to hope. Resurrection hope empowers communities not to abandon anyone to despair, addiction, or loneliness. It nurtures resilience, fosters joy, and affirms that healing—emotional, spiritual, and relational—is possible. Every act of care becomes a sign of God's rising life amid brokenness.

Belief in "the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life" underscores the Spirit's work of renewing fearful, anxious, or divided communities. The Spirit is present wherever stigma is challenged, compassion overcomes fear, and people feel safe to share their stories. Listening—to God and to one another—becomes essential for mental health ministry, especially listening to those long silenced by suffering.

The confession of "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church" frames the Church's identity as inseparable from healing. Unity affirms full inclusion; holiness calls for compassion and safety; catholicity embraces diverse experiences and cultures; apostolicity sends the Church to advocate for justice, dignity,

and accessible care. A healing Church integrates worship, service, and pastoral accompaniment so that no one is forgotten or unseen.

Finally, the hope of "the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come" provides an eschatological vision of restored creation and peace. This hope strengthens present commitments to justice, mental wellbeing, systemic care, and the pursuit of peace. It becomes an anchor for individuals and communities amid suffering.

### Conclusion

The workshop affirmed that the Nicene Creed, when lived rather than merely recited, becomes a transformative force that nurtures mental wellbeing, confronts stigma, strengthens community bonds, and embodies the healing love of Christ in today's world.

## W08: Indigenous Peoples in the WCC

### Facilitated by Ms Mikenzie Ling of Wiradjuri Nation (Australia), joined by panel presenters Rev. Dr Brian Kolia of Samoa and Ms Lori Ransom of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation, Canada

This session explored a broad global Indigenous response to the conference's overarching themes of "Where Now for Visible Unity?" and "Living the apostolic faith today." Mikenzie Ling, an Indigenous consultant with the WCC and Uniting Church in Australia, offered an overview of key emerging themes from a project currently underway within the Ecumenical Indigenous Peoples Network (EIPN). This project seeks to engage and amplify Indigenous commentaries, critiques, and contributions within the global ecumenical movement, as it marks the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea and considers how unity across church and faith might be understood, embodied, and practised in the years to come. Some of the motifs emphasized included culture and context as source and grounding for Indigenous theology and praxis; unity across, within, and through diversity; decolonization within theology and discipleship requiring full Indigenous representation, participation, and voice at every level of the church; the "kinship of all Creation" as a theological reality for Indigenous Peoples and as central to praxis formation; and addressing the colonial legacies of Nicaea as experienced by Indigenous Peoples, including the theft of land and bodies, economic and theological disenfranchisement, spiritual violence, and deliberate systemic assaults upon culture and identity.

The contribution and impact of this workshop were shaped and significantly deepened by the dialogue of Rev. Dr Kolia, an Old Testament scholar and lecturer at Malua Theological College, and Ms Ransom, an esteemed Indigenous consultant with the WCC and United Church of Canada. Storytelling is widely practised among Indigenous Peoples as a fundamental relational space for sharing knowledge, exchanging truth, fostering learning, and addressing communal matters. Through modes of "yarning" and "storying," the panel drew from their respective Pasifika and First Nations identities, cultures, theologies, and lived experience. In this way, they brought instrumental grounding and contextual meaning to the focuses of the session. Furthermore, by offering their different stories, the panel was able to exchange distinct perspectives whilst also engaging the shared experiences running through their contexts. This practice, so natural to Indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing, was a profoundly beautiful embodiment of what it is to find unity in the midst of diversity.

As the workshop wrapped up, some participants raised questions about navigating the tensions and implications that decolonization can bring within and between different communities. One line of dialogue explored how embracing the theologies and practices of marginalized groups in substantial and "centred" ways might leave room for those contexts to be inappropriately transferred to, or even uncritically forced on others. Encountering this line of thinking is not new for Indigenous Peoples, whether it be in theological and ecumenical spaces, academic discourses, or wider society itself. As such, the EIPN's Nicaea Project intends to address these concerns and looks forward to continuing the conversation within its finalized work.

## W09: Unbelievable? Witness to the Faith of Nicaea from a Contemporary Perspective

As the longest-running bilateral dialogue group between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church—initiated in May 1965 in Bossey—the Joint Working Group (JWG) has consistently addressed the topic of common witness to the apostolic faith.[1] Recognizing the thematic connections to Faith and Order, the JWG offered a workshop at the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, facilitated by Rev. Dr Kuzipa Nalwamba and Prof. Dr

1. Studies on witness were published in 1971 (*Common Witness and Proselytism: A Study Document*); 1979 (*Common Witness: A Study Document of the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church*); 1995 (*The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness*); and 1996 (*The Ecumenical Dialogue on Moral Issues: Potential Sources of Common Witness or of Division*). A 1978 joint consultation with Faith and Order on the apostolic faith in Venice resulted in *Towards a Common Profession of Faith* (Faith and Order Paper No. 100). Since 2024, work on salvation has been underway in the JWG.

Annemarie C. Mayer. This workshop explored the challenges and opportunities of bearing witness today to the faith articulated in the Nicene Creed, framing it as a foundational outline of Christian belief originally intended for pastoral and catechetical purposes. On the occasion of the Creed's 1700th anniversary, the central question posed was: What does it mean to profess this creed in the modern world? Has it become unbelievable?

The workshop began by examining the diverse realities of faith in Europe and Africa. A 2023 German opinion poll revealed that only 32 percent of Catholics and 19 percent of Christians affirm belief in "a God who has made Godself known in Jesus Christ,"[2] with Austria reporting only 16 percent adherence. These findings reflect a growing trend of "belonging without believing" among nominal Christians. Conversely, Africa demonstrates a "rising centre of global Christianity," where the Nicene Creed serves as a pastoral framework offering hope and a foundation for social justice. Participants were prompted to consider these contrasting contexts, discussing with a partner the state of faith in their own region or tradition.

The discussion then turned to the historical context of Nicaea. The early church grappled with fundamental Christological questions: the relationship of Jesus Christ to God (addressed at Nicaea) and the relationship between divinity and humanity within the person of Jesus Christ (addressed at Chalcedon). Two extreme tendencies emerged—denying or diminishing Christ's divinity and denying or diminishing his humanity. The bishops formulating the Nicene Creed were guided by two key soteriological principles: *only God can effect salvation*, and *that which is not assumed is not healed*. Recognizing the intellectual coherence of Arianism from a philosophical and monotheistic standpoint, the workshop (taking place in the neighbourhood of Alexandria, after all) emphasized Athanasius' critical response: "God became man so that man might become God"—a created saviour is no saviour at all. As Athanasius argued, denying the full divinity of Christ is stripping the gospel of its power. The Nicene Creed, therefore, defends the very meaning of salvation, because only the true God who entered our world could truly save it.

To bridge the historical and contemporary, the workshop featured an interview conducted by Kuzipa Nalwamba with H.E. Kurt Cardinal Koch on the topic of "'Jesus yes—Son of God no'—a modern revival of Arianism?" The cardinal was challenged with the proposition that, for many today, recognizing Jesus as a religious genius and inspiring preacher is more appealing

2. *Sechste Kirchenmitgliedschaftsuntersuchung 2023*, commissioned by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Catholic Bishops' Conference, 34, https://www.ekd.de/ekd_de/ds_doc/07490_EKD_KMU_Web_neu.pdf.

than confessing him as the Son of God. The question was raised: Has Arius, in effect, prevailed? And how can one respond to Christians who connect with the human Jesus but struggle to accept him as the divine Son of God? The cardinal also answered questions from the audience. The workshop concluded with groups sharing responses to two pivotal questions: "Who do *you* say that Jesus of Nazareth is?" and "How can each one of us offer a trustworthy witness to the hope that is within us (1 Pet. 3:15)?"

## W10: Welcoming the Stranger in a Time of Anger and Anxiety

### Facilitator: Rev. Nathan Day Wilson

This workshop explored how communities of faith can respond to today's climate of fear and division with courageous hospitality and spiritual clarity.

Drawing from religious and humanistic traditions and framed by the current context of anger about the present and anxiety about the future, Wilson began the workshop with a paper. In it, he noted that welcoming strangers is both an ethical injunction that recognizes our shared humanity and a sacramental act that points toward God's promised future. He also highlighted how encountering those who see the world differently challenges our assumptions and expands our understanding. He utilized texts from Matthew and Mark, where Jesus suggests that welcoming the stranger is, in fact, welcoming Christ himself.

Three respondents contextualized the framing paper: John Klassen from South Africa; Man Hei Yip from the United States (originally Korea); and Maria Mountraki from Finland. Following small group conversations, the 45 or so participants shared insights and curiosities:

- Anger and anxiety are manipulated by political and religious leaders to provoke fear, particularly fear of the unknown person and the uncertain future.
- Radical welcome carries both risk and reward.
- There are tools for navigating fear-based narratives and cultivating inclusive spaces, even in polarized environments.
- Some communities have intentional practices that foster trust, curiosity, and mutual respect.
- Rather than potential threats, strangers—those strange to us—can be sources of inspiration.

The workshop concluded with a collective reflection on how welcoming the stranger can lead to a future more hopeful than the present. Many participants expressed renewed commitment to embodying this call in their congregations, organizations, and personal lives.

This session affirmed that in a time of anger and anxiety, the spiritual practice of welcome is not only countercultural—it is transformative.

## W13: Breathing Together—Synodal Discernment and Christian Witness in a World of Growing Polarization

### Prepared by Study Group 1

The workshop started with the prayer *Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus* ("We stand before you, Holy Spirit"), which invites the Holy Spirit to work within us so that we may become one community of grace. The prayer is attributed to Isidore of Seville (560–636). It was prayed at the opening of each of the sessions of the Second Vatican Council.

Rev. Dr Emma van Dorp, who moderated the discussion, introduced the speakers.

The Roman Catholic theologian Prof. Myriam Wijlens, professor of canon law at the University of Erfurt and co-moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order, presented her input on synodality. Prof. Wijlens described the development of synodality in the Roman Catholic Church from Vatican I to today. She emphasized that synodality means walking together with baptismal ecclesiology as the foundation of synodality (see *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. *A Catholic Response*, 16–17, 42) and the Holy Spirit as the protagonist. Catholicity means receiving from the other for the good of the mission of the church (receptive ecumenism). Churches are mutually accountable for who we are, what we do, and what we teach. Key concepts are the *sensus fidei* and the magisterium (*episkopé*; see *A Catholic Response*, 52). The key questions she brought to the table were: What is a synod? What are synodal structures? Is it a gathering of bishops or of local churches represented by the bishop? What does representation mean? Is witness to the faith of the church entrusted to them? What about the other baptized? What authority do synods have in the Roman Catholic Church? Should it only be consultative to the papacy? Closely related is the question: What is the task of the Bishop of Rome? Here, according to Prof. Wijlens, a re-lecture of Vatican I is imperative because primacy, collegiality, and synodality must be related. The generative tension between unity and

diversity must be maintained. There is a continuous flow between the acting subjects: the church local, the church regional or continental, and the church entire (see Ravenna document and *A Catholic Response*, 29). Summing up, Prof. Wijlens emphasized that the development went from a static model with periodic changes to a process of continuous reform.

The participants were asked to reflect in silence on the three questions: "What did I hear?" "What struck me?" and "What moved me?" and they were asked to open themselves to the action of the Holy Spirit.

After the silence, three responses from different denominational and contextual perspectives were shared by H.E. Metropolitan Theophilose, Rev. Dr Glenroy Lalor, and Rev. Dr Daniel Andrew. H.E. Metropolitan Dr Kuriakose Mor Theophilose from the Syrian Orthodox Church shared an Oriental-Orthodox perspective on synodality. It was emphasized that common worship, common witness, and common service are closely interrelated. Rev. Dr Glenroy Lalor, who is an ordained minister of the Jamaica Baptist Union and who teaches historical theology at the United Theological College of the West Indies, shared his impressions from a meeting of his church with Pope Francis in Rome. He illustrated his remarks with a picture of the group of visitors from his church with the pope and pointed out similarities and differences in the understanding of synodality and ecclesiology between his own denominational tradition and the Roman Catholic Church and its ecclesiology, which became clear to him during the visit.

Rev. Dr Daniel Andrew lectures in missiology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. He is also an ordained pastor in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of South Africa, where he serves in the Doctrine, Ethics and Liturgy Committee, and as director on the board of the AFM Theological College. Daniel Andrew shared his thoughts from a Pentecostal perspective. He related the title of the workshop to John 20:22 and emphasized that from a Pentecostal perspective the Holy Spirit can very well be defined as "breath." He then described synodality as the pilgrimage of the people of God as a missionary community led by the Holy Spirit to communal discernment, to inclusive participation, to the value of charisms and ministries, and to the missionary focus of the church.

The responses were followed by a time of reflection in small groups, in which participants shared their thoughts on the question asked after the presentation by Prof. Wijlens.

The workshop ended with a plenary sharing of questions and reflections from both the panellists and the audience.

## W14: Theological Responses to Violence (from Domestic Violence to Wars)

### Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 2

This workshop addressed the moral issue of violence in our contemporary world, focusing on domestic violence and war/global violence. Its purpose was to provide theological resources to affirm the dignity and value of all people. The workshop was based on the foundational priority of seeing the face of Christ in others as a countercultural message in a world that seeks to dehumanize others.

The workshop began by exploring the narrative of 2 Samuel 13:1–22 as a text of terror, led by Rev. Prof. Jacqueline Grey from the Pentecostal tradition in Australia. Participants met in groups to discuss key questions of power and justice. The reflection began with consideration of the personal factors that might influence one in reading the Bible (such as sex/gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, church denomination, age, and family background). Questions asked of the text included: Who has power in this text? How do they use power? What are the responses of the characters to the family violence? What issues of justice do their responses raise for today? How do we read this text in the light of Christ? The significance of these responses for addressing domestic and family violence for today was highlighted.

The workshop then explored theological responses to war and global violence, led by Rev. Ashraf Tannous from the Lutheran tradition in Bethlehem. Rev. Tannous shared from his first-hand experiences of living and ministering in a region of conflict, including seeing the Bible co-opted for unjust agendas, including the legitimization of genocide and ecocide. He emphasized the need for the global Christian community to speak up for justice, and to also work toward peace. Rev. Tannous reinforced the message that all human beings are created in God's image and worthy of God's grace rather than undermining the humanity of the "other." Key biblical texts and theological foundations for addressing global violence presented included Leviticus 19:1–3,13–18, 33–34; Mark 3:35; Psalm 112:10. This was followed by a robust time of question and answer with Rev. Tannous.

# W15: The Use and Inculturation of the Nicene Creed Across Diverse Traditions

**Rev. Prof. Dr Heike Walz, Dr Caroly Rosalee Ewell, and Dr Andrés Pacheco Lozano**

This workshop explored the theological tension between tradition and contextualization in relation to the current use of the Nicene Creed. The 15 participants discussed the languages, hymns, and liturgies in which the Nicene Creed is prayed, sung, and theologically reflected upon in their respective Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Mennonite, and Lutheran traditions. Delegates from Brazil, Russia, Taiwan, Mexico, Jamaica, Syria, Australia, Poland, Finland, Romania, Samoa, Colombia, the Bahamas, and Germany were present.

The "*Credo Salsero*" composed by Horacio Vivares from Argentina ("*Creo en un dios poderoso*," or "I believe in a powerful God") served as a vivid example as it expresses the belief in the triune God in the popular salsa rhythm, which is part of everyday life throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The lyrics emphasize the commitment to peace and justice, as well as the pneumatological aspect that the Spirit speaks through the voices of the prophets.

The exciting roundtable discussion revealed what had been observed in many places during the Ecumenical Year of Nicaea: in Orthodox churches, the Nicene Creed has a firm place in the divine liturgy and in daily prayer; while in many other churches, it is used alongside the Apostles' Creed, usually on high feast days like Easter Sunday. While Orthodox believers are far less familiar with the Apostles' Creed, in other churches, the Nicene Creed is often only encountered in theological studies, revealing a gap between academic theology and church life. Pentecostal and non-denominational churches, which place more emphasis on spontaneous, self-formulated creeds, seem to have moved closer to the Nicene Creed. The ecumenical year encouraged reflection on theological interpretations of the Creed, whereas until then it had simply been used. For example, creation theology in Taiwan was linked to Aboriginal mythology. Some churches, in Indonesia and the Pacific Church Council, for example, formulate their own creeds based on a contextualized trinitarian theology.

As far as visible unity is concerned, the Nicene Creed is a bond that is passed on as a living tradition through liturgical and theologically inculturated interpretations, but ecumenical theological exchange on this subject could be intensified. For example, Indigenous churches in Australia incorporate the

decolonizing perspectives of First Nations on non-human creation as part of the Nicene Creed.

It seemed that elements of aesthetic-performative theology (such as songs, rhythms, and dances) could be incorporated more strongly into dogmatic and ethical considerations as "ecumenical-theological embodiments." The study group "Being Church in and for the World" considers this to be a dimension of incarnational ecclesiology that could inspire the vision of a living visible unity.

Overall, there was discussion about counterbalancing tradition and contextualization. At 60 minutes, the workshop was considered to be too short.

## W16: A Way of Togetherness—Lessons on Ecumenical Dialogue from the Joint Consultative Group

Shared prayer, Scripture study, personal testimonies, theological dialogue, and local church engagement have been the pillars of an experience of unity as togetherness at the core of the Joint Consultative Group for Dialogue between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF). In the workshop, facilitated by co-moderators Dr Jean-Daniel Plüss and Rev. Dr Jennifer S. Leath, participants discussed and practised parts of the theo-ethical methodology of togetherness that have guided the JCG since the WCC 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre—with emphasis on personal testimonies. In this way, participants experienced and became part of JCG liturgy.

Having assembled participants in a circle, the workshop began with prayer and a reading of John 10:16: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." Dr Leath and Dr Plüss introduced the JCG, underscoring the ways the JCG has helped the WCC to affirm "the visible contribution of Pentecostal churches in the dynamically changing Christian landscape, and the importance to the ecumenical movement of engaging in mutual learning and sustained dialogue with the Pentecostal churches" (from the resolution adopted by the WCC Porto Alegre Assembly). The JCG has also engaged in fruitful dialogue on the marks of the church affirmed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and has studied the Holy Spirit and discipleship.

Following this brief JCG introduction, an invitation was extended to those gathered: "Share a story about a way the Holy Spirit spoke to you through an encounter with someone who is not in your tradition—and how that enriched your faith." As each participant shared, we could feel the stirring of the Holy

Spirit in our midst. Some accounts evoked tears, others evoked awe. Though each story was distinct, everyone was able to relate to the stories of others. Through this workshop, we shared "a way of togetherness."

The workshop concluded with an articulation of the gifts, fruits, and learning we have received through this methodology in the JCG:

- Realizing that there is more that unites us than separates us through our different histories and spiritual practices
- Experiencing the benefits of encounters with people at various types of ecclesial involvement
- Building on our common proclamation of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour and our common faith as it is expressed in the Nicene Creed
- Deepening personal engagement reflecting lived theology
- Growing trust in each other's calling and faith
- Humanizing encounter with people whose lives intersect at points we tend only to encounter in theoretical ways
- Discovering ways in which we could witness together—practising "a way of togetherness" in Christ

Those gathered were gratified to affirm that at St Bishoy Monastery in Wadi El Natrun we enjoyed a taste of the harvest of gifts, fruits, and learning the JCG has enjoyed. It was a blessing to be together.

## W17: Nicaea 2025—Exploring the Council's Ecumenical Significance Today

The workshop celebrated the forthcoming volume *Towards Nicaea 2025: Exploring the Council's Ecumenical Significance Today*, edited by Benjamin Simon, Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, Andrej Jeftić, and Vasile-Octavian Mihoc. The volume contains the proceedings from the hybrid conference held at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute from 4–8 November 2024, organized jointly by the Bossey Ecumenical Institute and the Commission on Faith and Order. With over 100 participants and approximately 60 presentations, the conference brought together both emerging and established scholars from diverse Christian traditions. Students of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute (Academic Year 2024–25) played an active role through session moderation, technical support, and academic contributions. Comprising 44 essays, the book explores the enduring relevance of the Council of Nicaea—a landmark event that has shaped Christian doctrine, ecclesial identity, and ecumenical engagement throughout

history. The volume seeks to highlight Nicaea's ecumenical significance, assess its impact on doctrinal development and interchurch relations, and propose ecumenically accountable approaches to teaching about the Council of Nicaea in contemporary theological education.

Across six thematic sections, the book presents a remarkable breadth of perspectives. Contributions explore Nicaea's historical and political context, including its relationship to empire and questions of coloniality. Essays on theology and doctrine revisit Christological and trinitarian foundations, integrating Orthodox, Evangelical, and global South viewpoints. Contextual readings of the creed—from African Pentecostal interpretations to Chinese pneumatology and Ghanaian Okra Christology—demonstrate the Creed's resonance across cultures.

Further sections address gender, justice, and liberation, offering insights from Indigenous communities in India, liberation theologians, and interreligious scholars. The chapter on unity, apostolicity, and ecumenical dialogue features contributions from theologians examining Nicaea's implications for contemporary ecclesiology, Christian doctrine, ecumenical dialogue, and ecumenical pedagogy. The final section links the Creed to liturgy, worship, and ecological reflection, highlighting how Nicaea continues to shape Christian spirituality and practice.

In his reflections, WCC General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay emphasized four invitations arising from Nicaea today: moving from creed to deed through shared witness; journeying together as a fellowship; seeking unity through conciliarity; and embracing visible signs of unity, particularly through a shared celebration of Easter.

Overall, the workshop underscored that the Council of Nicaea remains a unifying point of reference for Christian identity in an increasingly fragmented world. The forthcoming volume offers fresh and diverse scholarship that not only re-engages Nicaea's theological legacy but also inspires deeper ecumenical dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaboration among churches today.

# W18: Nicaea 325–2025—Intra-Christian and Interreligious Dialogue on a Pilgrimage Toward Peace

## *Organized by Prof. Dr Angeliki Ziaka, Programme Executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, World Council of Churches*

We remain grateful to the churches that nominated representatives and to all who supported the realization of this workshop. The gathering, which took place on 27 October 2025, brought together representatives from the churches of Egypt and the wider region, demonstrating the significant role these churches continue to play in building bridges between East and West, the Middle East and Africa.

The session was moderated by the intellectual Dr Samir Morcos, representing the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and underscoring the significance of the Egyptian Christian presence as a bridge of dialogue, particularly through the church's long-standing communication with Al-Azhar and its participation in national interfaith encounters. With his extensive experience, Dr Morcos guided a fruitful conversation focused on the contemporary relevance of Nicaea as a symbol of unity and as a point of departure for a renewed ecumenical and interreligious vision.

Rev. Dr Refat Fathy, general secretary of the Synod of the Nile of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt, together with Rev. Eid Beshara, highlighted the church's ongoing efforts to promote peace and social cohesion, emphasizing the sustained communication channels and locally rooted cooperation initiatives developed with Muslim partners in communities across the country. They noted that these initiatives include joint neighbourhood committees, shared educational and social programmes, and regular platforms for civic dialogue, all of which contribute to strengthening trust and fostering a culture of mutual respect within Egyptian society.

Representing the Episcopal and Anglican Province of Alexandria, Mr Seleem Wassef, the diocesan interfaith coordinator, presented the province's ongoing efforts to promote peaceful interreligious cooperation, highlighting its regular dialogue with Muslim leaders, joint community service projects in mixed neighbourhoods, and participation in national platforms addressing social cohesion and religious literacy. Mr Wassef also referred to the province's educational and youth-focused programmes, which bring together Christian and Muslim students to cultivate mutual understanding as a foundation for long-term societal harmony.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa was represented by Fr Dr Evangelos Thiani, serving the African Orthodox Church of Kenya within the Orthodox Archdiocese of Nairobi. He highlighted the pastoral challenges of East African Orthodoxy within Kenya's culturally diverse context, marked by strong oral tradition, ethnic plurality, and community-based social structures that shape interreligious relations. He noted the church's involvement in community mediation and various local initiatives where Christians, Muslims, and Indigenous groups collaborate in addressing shared social needs. His contribution underscored the patriarchate's longstanding commitment to dialogue and reconciliation across the African continent.

Adding an international dimension, Mr Andrew James Boyd, senior programme manager of the KAICIID Fellows, underscored the global relevance of structured interreligious cooperation and emphasized the importance of building sustainable networks capable of supporting coordinated action. He highlighted the Fellows programme, which trains religious and community leaders and equips them to foster mutual respect and social-cohesion initiatives in their local contexts.

Overall, the workshop highlighted the depth and diversity of the churches of Egypt and Africa, whose presence at a significant geopolitical crossroads offers enduring examples of coexistence and ecumenical vision. Participants reflected on how intra-Christian collaboration can support wider interreligious cooperation and contribute to the prevalence of peace on earth, echoing the gospel call for peace on earth and goodwill among all people.

## W19: Revisiting *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* in *Light of The Gift of Being*

### *Organized by Rev. Dr Arne Fritzson of the WCC Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN)*

The workshop took place on 27 October. About 15 persons attended.

The workshop was about the article "Disability as an Ecclesiological Concern," written by Arne Fritzson and published in *The Ecumenical Review* (vol. 77, no. 1–2, 2025).

The article was a comparison between two texts published by the World Council of Churches (WCC). The first is *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV), a 2013 convergence text (Faith and Order Paper No. 214).

The other text is *The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church of All and for All* (TGB), published in 2016 as a joint venture of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network, Faith and Order, and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism.

Both TCTCV and TGB begin in the belief that humans are created in the image of God. According to TGB, human life is created as part of the economy of grace. The Christian tradition confesses that creation is a wilful act of love. Life is a gift, and every human being has received life as a gift from God. As a result, all humans are gifts to their fellow human beings.

How shall we interpret the fact that some of us live with impairments? Is it a sign of the tragedy in this world or is it a sign of the beautiful plurality that God has intended for his creation? When we put this question, it is important to remember that the language of impairments and disabilities comes from a socio-political discourse.

Both texts refer to chapter 12 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and the image of the church as the body of Christ. To be saved by God is to be invited to a web of caring and loving relations that is God. We are invited to God's community, God's *koinonia*, which is a key concept in both texts.

TGB discusses the words about the necessity of the parts of the body that seem to be weaker. What are the special contributions by the parts of the body that seem to be weaker? TGB suggests that it has to do with vulnerability. In Jesus Christ, in the incarnation, God embraces human vulnerability.

Arne Fritzson's presentation was followed by a conversation. Rev. Karin Wiborn, Rev. Kendrick Kemp, and Prof. Helen Ishola gave their responses to the article. It was stated that these questions are relevant to every church community.

Rev. Kendrick Kemp said during the workshop: "To discriminate against a certain expression of the *imago Dei*, to treat specific bodies as lesser, or weaker, or other in any way, is to deny the gift of life that God has given freely to each of us."

## W20: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea, the Climate Emergency, and the Integrity of Creation

This workshop reimagined the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea as a *kairos* moment for ecological repentance. It framed the climate crisis—driven by extractive economic systems and sustained by global indifference—as a violation of creation and a threat to the most vulnerable. The session had the aim of catalysing unity in defending and restoring the integrity of creation for present and future generations.

The workshop explored how the commodification of nature undermines both justice and creation's wholeness. It featured Indigenous and marginalized eco-theologies that centre the sacred interconnectedness of land, water, and life. It also examined the role of the churches in the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action—Moving Together in Ecological Metanoia for Transformation (2025–34), emphasizing how theological hope can be translated into community-based ecological action.

To set the stage, Athena Peralta, director of the WCC Commission on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development, introduced the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action, approved and launched at the WCC central committee meeting in June 2025 in Johannesburg. The Decade seeks to mobilize churches, communities, and partners worldwide to confront the moral, spiritual, and systemic dimensions of the climate crisis.

Rev. Dr Brian Kolia from the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa and lecturer at several theological colleges in New Zealand, highlighted the contribution of Indigenous theologies to climate and ecological justice. "For Pasifika people," he explained, "*Moana* is not merely "ocean." It is *moa*—the "heart" or "centre." It is the space that connects lands, sustains life, and shapes identity. It gives life, and in tragic circumstances, it can take life. Yet the *moana*, like much of creation, is increasingly commodified—reduced to a marketable object for profit rather than recognized as a living relative to be cared for."

Pasifika eco-theology affirms the interconnectedness of land, ocean, and life. The *moana* is not a backdrop but a participant in the story of creation. This worldview resonates with global eco-theological movements that understand Earth as alive and sacred. Humanity's calling, Rev. Dr Kolia stressed, is to listen to creation rather than dominate it—and to pursue justice that includes Earth itself. He emphasized that the church has a unique vocation to turn theological conviction into ecological action. In this regard, the Decade offers an opportunity to:

- Reclaim theological language that speaks of *moana*, land, and creation as sacred and alive.
- Stand with Indigenous and marginalized communities most affected by climate injustice.
- Lead locally-rooted, community-based initiatives such as restoring mangroves, protecting reefs, resisting deep-sea mining, and incorporating creation care into liturgy and discipleship.
- Advocate globally for climate justice policies that honour the rights of creation rather than the interests of corporations.

Mr Tomás Insua, co-founder of the Laudato Si' Movement and chair of the Laudato Si' Research Institute in Oxford, introduced the Feast of Creation initiative and its potential for fostering unity among churches in caring for creation. While many churches now observe the Season of Creation (1 September–4 October), the Feast of Creation remains absent from most liturgical calendars. This gap has inspired a proposal to "upgrade" Creation Day into a formal liturgical feast in non-Byzantine calendars—an accessible step toward visible unity. The Feast of Creation would express the Nicene faith in the triune God as Creator: the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth; Christ, "through whom all things were made"; and the Holy Spirit, the giver of life. Mr Insua posed the critical question of how churches might come together and celebrate this trinitarian and Christological mystery more intentionally through the liturgical year.

Rev. Jackline Makena Mutuma, vice-moderator of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order and a member of the Methodist Church in Kenya, offered a concrete example of translating creed into prophetic action: climate litigation. She described the WCC initiative, Legal Action for Intergenerational Climate Justice, as grounded in three key motivations:

- Saving human lives. The initiative seeks to mitigate the devastating impacts of global warming by urging financial institutions to stop funding large-scale fossil fuel extraction projects—so-called "carbon bombs"—that drive global $CO_2$ emissions.
- Commitment to children and future generations. Embedded within the WCC's Churches' Commitments to Children programme, the project affirms the responsibility to protect the rights, wellbeing, and future of children and young people, who will bear the long-term consequences of climate breakdown.
- Mobilizing faith-based action. By equipping churches and partners to use legal tools to confront climate injustice and challenge harmful

financial systems, the initiative seeks systemic change and upholds intergenerational equity.

Rev. Mutuma noted that strategic climate litigation is a crucial tool for enforcing intergenerational justice by holding governments and corporations accountable for inaction or damaging practices. Drawing on national regulations and international agreements, such cases ensure that the rights and interests of younger and future generations are represented in environmental decision-making—an essential response to both the climate crisis and the eco-anxiety it generates.

## W21: Theological Anthropology, Science, and Technology

### Facilitators: Rev. Dr Carmelo Santos, Dr Mihail Comanoiu, and Dr Tijana Petković-Bertsch

In an age increasingly shaped by digital presence, the Christian understanding of the incarnation—God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ—challenges us to reflect on what it means to be truly human in both physical and virtual spaces. As embodied beings formed from the dust (Gen. 2:7) and made in the image of God, our humanity carries sacred weight, yet today we extend ourselves into digital realms where presence, prayer, and community take on new forms. This workshop explores how digital spirituality, human identity, and our relationship with the cosmos are being challenged by technology. Are online liturgies and prayers genuine encounters with the divine? How does digital life affect our sense of self and responsibility toward others? And does our growing digital footprint deepen or diminish our role as stewards of creation? Rooted in incarnational theology, we seek to discern how to live faithfully and responsibly as humans—embodied and digital—in a world that God has called good.

## Report

### 1. Embodiment and the human person

The discussions across all study groups revolved around the theological and anthropological significance of embodiment in an increasingly digital and disembodied world. Participants reflected on the incarnational dimension of human presence—how bodily existence grounds relationality, ethics, and ecclesial life. Drawing from biblical, patristic, and modern sources, several

participants emphasized that embodiment is not accidental but essential to being human; it shapes how we relate, learn, and believe.

A recurring concern was the instrumental use of artificial intelligence (AI) and the loss of bodily presence in religious and communal life. The danger is a shift from being present to performing presence. Participants wondered: If the Church becomes mediated primarily through technology, what becomes of its incarnational witness?

Theological anthropology, it was noted, never experienced the digital world before—our inherited frameworks struggle to define what it means to be human in digital space. How does one speak of "communion" in an era where communication has moved from oral and textual traditions to immersive, multimedia environments? Are we deepening connection, or merely simulating it?

## 2. Artificial intelligence and humanity

AI was examined both as a tool and as a mirror. Participants explored what happens when we anthropomorphize AI—especially when it is embodied in humanoid or relational forms (such as digital assistants or robots designed to evoke empathy). This imitation of embodiment raises theological and ethical questions: If AI mimics human presence, does it also imitate personhood?

The paradox surfaced that while humans seek to perfect AI, we ourselves are imperfect creatures. Some argued that our drive to create perfect, error-free systems mirrors the ancient temptation of original sin: the desire to be "like God." Others countered that striving for excellence in AI is part of humanity's God-given creativity; yet, they also warned against idolatry of technological perfection.

Participants discussed how AI challenges our understanding of virtue and wisdom. A "perfect" machine lacks the formative dimension of moral failure and growth—virtues require embodied struggle and imperfection. Thus, a world run by AI may be more efficient but less humane.

## 3. Work, value, and human identity

As automation advances, traditional forms of labour—and the dignity and community they confer—are increasingly displaced. Participants asked: If work is not merely economic but a locus of identity and vocation, what happens when machines perform it better?

The conversation touched on the biblical notion of stewardship versus domination. If humans are co-creators with God, then technological creation should serve relational and ecological wholeness, not human pride or profit. Several noted that the Church might need to function as a countercultural community, embodying alternative values of relationship and care amid the dehumanizing trends of digital capitalism.

## 4. Digital presence and disconnectedness

While digital technologies can connect people across distances—even offering communal experiences such as online worship or virtual funerals—they can also intensify loneliness and disconnection. Participants called this the paradox of digital connection: being "together" while profoundly apart.

The phenomenon of "fake embodiment" was raised: the illusion of relational presence without the substance of mutual vulnerability or touch. This condition not only alters human communication but reshapes theology itself—especially ecclesiology and sacramentality, which depend on physical, embodied interaction.

## 5. Theological reflections

Several theological motifs emerged:

- Incarnation as a model for digital ethics. Christ's embodied presence stands as a critique of purely virtual existence.
- Perfection and imperfection. Salvation is not digital optimization; it is the transformation of imperfection through grace.
- Justice and justification. Both theological and social justice must be rethought in light of algorithmic biases, technological inequality, and digital exclusion.
- Transhumanism. Some participants identified it as a new form of the original sin—a desire to transcend human limits instead of redeeming them.
- Human responsibility. The call to co-create with God implies discerning the boundaries between human agency and divine sovereignty.

## 6. Emerging questions

- How do we cultivate community and communion in disembodied digital spaces?
- Can AI complement rather than compete with human community?

- What virtues must be cultivated in a technologically saturated age?
- How do we retain the incarnational heart of Christian faith amid the abstraction of digital mediation?

### Conclusion

Across the groups, there was a shared conviction that humanity's relationship with technology—especially AI—must be shaped by a renewed theology of embodiment, relationality, and creation. The Church, as both community and counterculture, is called not to reject technology but to re-humanize its use: to ensure that in the pursuit of visible unity, we do not lose sight of the incarnate reality of being human before God.

## W22: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea and the Defence of Human Dignity and Rights

***Organized by the programme on Life, Justice, and Peace of the World Council of Churches, and facilitated by Peter Prove, director, WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs***

The workshop was configured as a discussion based on a series of guiding questions.

On the question of the connection between the Nicene Creed and human rights, the following connections were observed:

- Foundations of human dignity. The Nicene Creed affirms that all human beings are created by one God, implying the intrinsic dignity and value of every person irrespective of status, race, or background.
- Universality and equality. The ecumenical nature of the Nicene Creed reflected and reinforced a universal outlook that echoes the modern human rights movement's emphasis on equality across races and nations. It contributed to the Christian understanding that societal norms and legal frameworks should be built on justice, mercy, and equity for all.
- Influence on legal systems. The affirmation of universal human dignity influenced laws, social norms, and later theological reflections that would ultimately support the rise of human rights discourse in Christianized societies. Moreover, key figures in the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) drew on Christian theological traditions championing dignity and equality.

In summary, workshop participants recognized that the Nicene Creed's core affirmations laid essential theological groundwork for later philosophies that shaped the modern conception of universal human rights.

The workshop acknowledged the coincidence of Nicaea 1700 with the centenary of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, held in Stockholm in 1925, and that Life and Work and Faith and Order constitute the two streams of ecumenical thought that merged in the formation of the WCC. The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) is a key expression of the Life and Work tradition, which focuses on human rights; justice and peace; and the development of international law and international institutions.

The CCIA Life and Work Centenary Consultation, held in Athens in May 2025, reflected *inter alia* on the theological bridges between Nicaea and Stockholm: in particular, on the basis of a keynote address presented by Prof. Em. Dimitra Koukoura. (H.E. Metropolitan Gabriel of Nea Ionia, CCIA member and host of the CCIA Conference in Athens, joined the workshop to introduce the outcomes of that conference.)

The workshop participants were invited to reflect on where they saw the closest alignment between Christian faith principles and human rights (as articulated in the UDHR) as well as on differences and divergences.

In conclusion, the workshop discussed issues on which it would be relevant for the Commission on Faith and Order and the CCIA to work together—including proposals made by H.E. Metropolitan Job (on behalf of the Faith and Order Commission at the CCIA Conference in May) for:

- A joint CCIA/Faith and Order study process on Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God (in cooperation with Faith and Order Study Group 2); and
- A joint CCIA/Faith and Order study process on unity and multilateralism and synodality for both ecclesial and international engagement (in cooperation with Faith and Order Study Group 1).

## Readers' Guide

The Commission on Faith and Order is one of seven commissions of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Its work is guided and directed by a set of bylaws, occasionally updated and approved by the central committee of the WCC.

## Commission on Faith and Order Bylaws

As approved by the central committee, July 2014, Geneva, Switzerland.

1. Meanings

1.1. Faith and Order means the Commission on Faith and Order hereinafter defined.

1.2. The Executive of the Commission means the Moderator and Vice-Moderators of the Commission, the members of the Council's Staff, the Executive Group leading the programme area to which Faith and Order belongs, and the Director of Faith and Order. The Executive of the Commission functions as an executive body.

1.3. The Leadership are the Moderator and the Vice-Moderators.

1.4. The Secretariat means the Staff Members of the World Council of Churches (hereafter WCC) assigned to work in the Commission on Faith and Order.

2. Introduction

Faith and Order represents an historic, founding movement of the WCC and incorporates the participation of the Roman Catholic Church and other non-member churches of the WCC in the organizing and staffing of its activities within the overall framework of the WCC.

3. Purpose and Functions

3.1. The primary purpose of the Commission on Faith and Order is to serve the churches as they call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.

3.2. The functions of the Commission are:

a) To study such questions of faith, order, and worship as bear on this purpose and to examine such social, cultural, political, racial, and other factors as affect the unity of the church;

b) To study the theological implications of the existence and development of the ecumenical movement and to keep prominently before the WCC the obligation to work towards unity;

c) To promote prayer for unity;

d) To study matters in the present relationship of the churches to one another which cause difficulties or which particularly require theological clarification;

e) To study the steps being taken by the churches towards closer unity with one another and to provide information concerning such steps;

f) To bring to the attention of the churches, by the best means available, reports of Faith and Order meetings and studies;

g) To provide opportunities for consultation among those whose churches are engaged in specific efforts towards unity.

3.3. In pursuing these functions, the following principles shall be observed:

a) Faith and Order, in seeking to draw the churches into conversation and study, shall recognize that only the churches themselves are competent to initiate steps towards unity by entering into negotiations with one another. The work of Faith and Order is to act, on their invitation, as helper and adviser.

b) It shall conduct its work in such a way that all are invited to share reciprocally in giving and receiving and no one shall be asked to be disloyal to his

or her convictions nor to compromise them. Differences are to be clarified and recorded as honestly as agreements.

c) Faith and Order is committed to the ethos of fellowship, consensus and common witness as essential to its work.

4. Organization

4.1. The Faith and Order Commission is constitutionally responsible to the Central Committee of the WCC.

4.2. The Commission shall be responsible for initiating, implementing, and laying down general guidelines of the programme of Faith and Order within the framework of the policies of the WCC as established by the Central Committee. It shall engage in theological debate and be a source of membership for participation in study groups and consultations. It shall guide the staff in the development of the Faith and Order programme, and supervise the ongoing work. It shall report annually to the Central Committee.

In exceptional circumstances the Commission, in consultation with the leadership of the WCC, shall be permitted to place an issue on the agenda of the Central Committee. The members of the Commission shall share in communicating the programme of Faith and Order to the churches.

4.3. The Commission shall consist of no fewer than 40 members and no more than 60 members (including the Moderator and Vice-Moderators).

4.4. When necessary, the Commission may in addition appoint consultants to assist in its studies when outside expertise and balances within the Commission are required.

4.5. The Executive of the Commission shall provide oversight of and give direction to the Commission. It is also responsible for carrying out the direction set out by the Commission and will work closely with the Secretariat. The Executive will normally meet once a year. In the year of a Commission meeting, the Executive will meet before or after the Commission.

4.6. The Commission, by its last meeting before each assembly of the WCC, shall appoint a nominations committee to prepare a list of names, from those nominated by their churches, for the election of the new commission by the Central Committee at its first full meeting after the Assembly. The members will hold office until the appointment of a new commission.

4.7. The Commission, at the last meeting of its mandate after each assembly, shall nominate a person as moderator of Faith and Order for election by the Central Committee at its first full meeting after the assembly. The moderator will hold office until the appointment of a new commission.

4.8. At the first meeting of its mandate the Commission shall elect not more than five Vice-Moderators from among its members.

The Vice-Moderators will hold office until the new commission is appointed.[1]

4.9. Vacancies on the Commission shall be filled by the Central Committee on the nomination of the Commission.

4.10. As an expertise-based theological commission, members and consultants of the Commission shall hold either a doctorate in theology or at least a master's degree in theology, or comparable expertise. Competence in English is required. International experience is a desirable quality.

4.11. Since the size of the Commission precludes full representation of all member churches of the WCC, appointment shall be made on the basis of personal qualifications of the individual to serve the purposes of Faith and Order. At the same time, care shall be taken to secure fair and adequate confessional, geographic, and cultural representation on the Commission and among the executive and secretariat. The membership of the Commission shall include adequate representation of men, women, younger theologians, and lay and ordained persons.[2] Additionally, care shall be taken to nominate members from the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network and the Indigenous Theologians Network.

4.12. Persons who are members of churches which do not belong to the WCC, but which confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, can be appointed.

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1. Since the Roman Catholic Church became a full member of the Commission on Faith and Order, it has been the case that one officer is a Roman Catholic nominated by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and confirmed by the Commission.

2. See the "Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches" as amended at the 9th Assembly, 2006, XX Conduct of Meetings, section IV.4.c. Since this document does not govern the participation of members of the Roman Catholic Church, it is determined that at least 10 percent of the members of the Commission shall be Roman Catholics (this includes the officer).

4.13. Only a person whose name is acceptable to the church to which he or she belongs can be appointed as a member by the Central Committee.

5. The Secretariat

5.1. The Faith and Order Secretariat shall be the members of the staff of the WCC who are assigned to work in Faith and Order. The person appointed in order to give leadership to the Secretariat of Faith and Order will hold the title of "Director of Faith and Order."

5.2. The staff will be appointed in accordance with the normal procedure for appointment of WCC staff. The General Secretary of the WCC shall, after due consultation with the executive of Faith and Order, nominate for appointment or re-appointment members of the executive staff of the Secretariat by the Executive Committee of the WCC. In the case of the director of Faith and Order, nominations will be submitted by the General Secretary to the Executive Committee after consultation with the leadership of Faith and Order and according to the memorandum of understanding.

5.3. The Secretariat shall be responsible for ensuring the continuation of the work of Faith and Order in accordance with the decisions agreed by the Commission, approved in accordance with the policy of the Central Committee. The Secretariat will keep in regular contact with the executive and members of the Faith and Order Commission.

6. World Conferences

6.1. World Conferences on Faith and Order may be held when, on the recommendation of the Commission, the Central Committee so decides.

6.2. The invitation to take part in such conferences shall be addressed to the churches throughout the world which confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

6.3. World Conferences shall consist primarily of delegates appointed by the churches to represent them. Members of Faith and Order are ex officio participants in such conferences. Youth delegates, special advisers, and observers may also be invited.

6.4. Careful attention shall be given to the communication of the reports and recommendations of the world conferences to the churches.

7. Faith and Order Meetings

7.1. The Commission shall meet at least every two years. An additional meeting may be convened by the Moderator in consultation with the executive of Faith and Order or at the request of not less than one-third of the members of the Commission.

7.2. Faith and Order working groups, consultations, and other smaller meetings of members of the Commission shall take place at least in the years that the Commission does not meet.

7.3. The Secretariat shall be responsible for giving due notice of meetings of the Commission, for keeping its minutes and other records and, in consultation with the Moderator, for preparing its agenda.

7.4. In consultation with his or her nominating body a member of the Commission may name a person to represent him or her at any meeting at which the member is unable to be present. Such a substitute shall have the right to speak and to participate in decision making in accordance with WCC Rules.

7.5. Other persons may be invited to be present and to speak, if the moderator so rules, but not to participate (see 7.4) in decision making. In particular, in order to secure representation of its study groups, members of these may be invited to attend as consultants. (See 4.4.)

7.6. In the absence of the Moderator, one of the Vice-Moderators shall preside at such meetings. In the absence of any of these Leaders, the meeting shall elect one of its members to take the chair. This shall be by simple majority of those members present.

7.7. Fifty percent plus one member of the total membership constitutes a quorum for conducting a meeting and making decisions.

7.8. Decisions will normally be made by consensus, unless otherwise specified by the rules, according to the WCC rules on the Conduct of Meetings: consensus shall be understood as seeking the common mind of the meeting without resort to a formal vote, in a process of genuine dialogue that is respectful, mutually supportive and empowering, whilst prayerfully seeking to discern God's will. A consensus decision shall mean that there is agreement about the outcome of a discussion. This may mean agreement to accept a proposal or a variation of a proposal; it also may mean agreement about another outcome, including agreement to reject a proposal, to postpone a matter, that no decision can be

reached, or that there are various opinions that may be held. When consensus has been reached that various opinions can be held concerning a matter, those various opinions shall be recorded in the final wording of the minutes and the report and the record of the meeting.

7.9. If, at any time when it is inconvenient to hold a meeting of the Commission, the Leaders of the Commission and Secretariat shall decide that there is business requiring immediate action by the Commission, it shall be permissible for them to obtain by post, fax, or any other electronic means the opinions of its members and the majority opinion thus ascertained shall be treated as equivalent to the decision of a duly convened meeting.[3]

8. Faith and Order Studies

8.1. The Commission shall formulate and carry through the study programme.

8.2. The Secretariat, as authorized by the Commission, shall invite persons to serve on the study groups and consultations. Due regard shall be paid to special competence in the fields of study concerned and to the need for the representation of a variety of ecclesiastical traditions and theological viewpoints.

8.3. Study groups shall normally include both those who are and those who are not members of the Commission.

8.4. In planning such studies all possible contacts shall be sought or maintained with allied work already in progress under such auspices as those of regional or national councils or of individual churches or of ecumenical institutes and theological faculties or departments.

8.5. Study groups shall prepare reports, as requested, for discussion in the Commission, at World Conferences on Faith and Order or at assemblies. Any such report should bear a clear indication of its status.

8.6. The Commission on Faith and Order appraises the results of its own work, and decides when its studies have reached the status of a study text or a convergence statement. The work of Faith and Order may be adopted and commended by the Central Committee or the Assembly.

3. See the Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches, as amended at the 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, February 2006, XX Conduct of Meetings, sections 8 and 9.

8.7. The publication of such reports and of other Faith and Order papers shall be the responsibility of the Secretariat as authorized by the Commission.

9. Finance

9.1. The financing of the work of Faith and Order will be undertaken in the normal way as part of a project area of the WCC. The Secretariat, in consultation with the Leadership of Faith and Order, shall be responsible for working with the Associate General Secretary and finance officer of the programme area preparing a budget for the activities of Faith and Order.

9.2. The Leadership of Faith and Order will receive reports on the budget and funding of the work of Faith and Order and will provide oversight of the detailed planning and policy in relation to the funding of activities (e.g., studies) of Faith and Order within the overall policies and budget of the programme area approved by the Central Committee.

# Programme of the Sixth World Conference

## Friday 24 October

*07:45–08:45* **Opening Prayer**

*09:00–10:30* **Opening Plenary**

Welcoming addresses from representatives of Faith and Order, the WCC leadership, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and member churches in Egypt.

*11:00–12:30* **Plenary: Where Now for Visible Unity?**

*Speakers:*

Current and former members of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order

*14:30–16:00* **Sections**

**Section 1:** Being Church on the Way to Visible Unity

**Section 2:** Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God

**Section 3:** Being Church in and for the World

*16:30–18:00* **Plenary: Faith in the Middle East**

Reflections from Faith and Order on the theme of the World Conference.

*17:45–18:45* **Business Session**

*19:00–19:30* **Evening Prayer**

## Saturday 25 October

*07:45–08:45* **Morning Prayer**

*09:00–10:30* **Plenary: The Triune God and the Identity of the Church**

*Keynote Speakers:*

- Very Rev. Archbishop em. Dr Antje Jackelén (Church of Sweden)
- H.E. Dr theol. habil. Kardinal Kurt Koch (Roman Catholic Church)
- H. G. Bishop Dr Kyrillos (Coptic Orthodox Church)

*Moderators:*

- Dr Maria Munkholt Christensen (Lutheran Church of Denmark, Commission on Faith and Order)
- Rev. Dr Sotiris Boukis (Evangelical Church of Greece, Commission on Faith and Order)

*11:00–12:30* **Plenary: Unpacking Apostolic Faith—Living the Nicene Creed in Context**

*Panellists:*

- Rev. Prof. Dr Sandra Beardsall (United Church of Canada)
- Prof. Dr Tamara Grdzelidze (Orthodox Church of Georgia)
- Dr Victor Lee (Assembly of God Church, Malaysia)
- Dr Mutale Mulenga Kaunda (Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies)
- Prof. Dr Miroslav Volf (Episcopal Church USA / Evangelical Church in Croatia, Yale Centre for Faith and Culture)

*Moderator:*

- Rev. Dr Mercedes García Bachmann (United Evangelical Lutheran Church [Argentina–Uruguay], WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

### *14:30–16:00* Sections

**Section 1:** Being Church on the Way to Visible Unity

**Section 2:** Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God

**Section 3:** Being Church in and for the World

### *16:30–17:30* Workshops

**W01: Towards a Common Date for Easter.** Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 1.

**W02: Previous Faith and Order Work on Moral Discernment (History, Tool, and Reception).** Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 2.

**W03: Decolonizing Ecumenical Methodologies—Reimagining Unity Through Local Epistemologies.** Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 3.

**W04: The Nicene Creed—A Renewed Call to Unity.** Led by WCC General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, in collaboration with representatives of Christian World Communions.

**W05: The Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity and Its Theological Roots in Faith and Order: How Do Theological Reflection and Faith-Driven Action Relate?** Organized by Rev. Dr Hyo - Jin Kim, Coordinator for the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity, World Council of Churches.

**W06: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea, Racism, and the Dismantling of Patriarchy.** Organized by the Programme on Life, Justice, and Peace of the World Council of Churches.

**W07: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea, Healing, and Communal Transformation.** Organized by the Programme on Life, Justice, and Peace of the World Council of Churches.

**W08: Indigenous Peoples in the WCC.** Organized by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches. (Facilitator: Mikenzie Ling).

**W09: Unbelievable? Witness to the Faith of Nicaea from a Contemporary Perspective.** Organized by the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC (Facilitators: Right Rev. Te Kitohi Pikaahu and Prof. Dr Annemarie C. Mayer).

**W10: Welcoming the Stranger in a Time of Anger and Anxiety.** Organized by the World Council of Churches (Facilitator: Rev. Nathan Day Wilson).

**W11: Workshop offered by the Coptic Orthodox Church.**

**W12: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea and the Defence of Human Dignity and Rights.** Organized by the programme on Life, Justice, and Peace of the World Council of Churches.

*17:45–18:45* **Business Session**

*19:00–19:30* **Evening Prayer**

## Sunday 26 October

*10:00–12:00* **Confessional Services**

Oriental and Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant churches offer worship in chapels and conference rooms onsite.

*14:00–16:00* **Pilgrimage to Coptic Monasteries**

Visit to the four ancient monasteries of the Wadi El Natrun desert: the Monastery of Saint Macarius the Great (Dayr Al-Anba Maqar),

the Paromeos Monastery (Dayr Al-Baramus), the Monastery of Saint Pishoy (Dayr Al-Anba Bishoy), and the Syrian Monastery (Dayr Al-Suryan).

### *17:00–20:00* Pilgrimage Encounter at Anaphora Monastery, Dinner, and Cultural Evening

Hosted by the Coptic Orthodox Church.

### *20:30–21:30* Evening Prayer

## Monday 27 October

### *07:45–08:45* Morning Prayer

### *09:00–10:30* Plenary: The Church in and for the World

*Keynote Speakers:*

- Rev. Dr Septemmy Lakawa (Protestant Church in South-East Sulawesi)
- Very Rev. Dr Evangelos Thiani (Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria)
- Rev. Dr Carlton Turner (Church in the Province of the West Indies)

*Moderators:*

- Rev. Prebendary Dr Isabelle Hamley (Church of England, Commission on Faith and Order)
- Rev. Jackline Makena (Methodist Church in Kenya, Commission on Faith and Order)

### *11:00–12:30* Plenary: Mission—Common Witness and Apostolic Discipleship

*Panellists:*

- Rev. Rebecka Folkesten (Church of Sweden)
- Rev. Dr Jacob Joseph (Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East)

- Rev. Kendrick Kemp (American Baptist Churches in the USA)
- Rev. Dr Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli (Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil)
- Rev. Prof. Dr Bryan Lobo (Roman Catholic Church)
- Rev. Tara Tautari (Methodist Church of New Zealand)

*Moderator:*

- Rev. Dr Michael Blair (United Church of Canada, Moderator, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism)

### *14:30 –16:00* Sections

**Section 1:** Being Church on the Way to Visible Unity

**Section 2:** Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God

**Section 3:** Being Church in and for the World

### *16:30–17:30* Workshops

**W13: Breathing Together—Synodal Discernment and Christian Witness in a World of Growing Polarization.** Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 1.

**W14: Theological Responses to Violence (from Domestic Violence to Wars).** Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 2.

**W15: The Use and Inculturation of the Nicene Creed Across Diverse Traditions.** Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 3.

**W16: A Way of Togetherness: A Joint Consultative Group Ecumenical Model.** Organized by the Joint Consultative Group between the WCC and Pentecostals.

**W17: *Nicaea 2025—Exploring the Council's Ecumenical Significance Today.***

**Book Launch:** Proceedings of the conference at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, 4–8 November 2024. Presentations by Rev. Prof. Dr Octavian Mihoc, Prof. Dr Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftić.

**W18: Nicaea 325–2025—Intra-Christian and Interreligious Dialogue on a Pilgrimage Toward Peace.** Organized by Prof. Dr Angeliki Ziaka, Programme Executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, World Council of Churches.

**W19: Revisiting The Church: Towards a Common Vision in Light of The Gift of Being.** Organized by the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) by Rev. Dr Arne Fritzson.

**W20: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea, the Climate Emergency, and the Integrity of Creation.** Organized by the programmes on Life, Justice, and Peace of the World Council of Churches.

**W21: Theological Anthropology, Science, and Technology.** Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 2.

**W23: Workshop organized by the Coptic Orthodox Church.**

**W24: Workshop organized by the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria.**

*17:45–18:45* **Business Session**

*19:00–20:00* **Evening Prayer**

## Tuesday 28 October

### *07:45–08:45* Morning Prayer

### *09:00–10:30* Plenary: Unity—Living and Visible?

*Keynote Speakers:*

- Rev. Prof. Dr Jacqueline Grey (Australian Christian Churches, Commission on Faith and Order)
- H. E. Metropolitan Dr Job of Pisidia (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Commission on Faith and Order)
- Prof. Dr Susan Wood (Roman Catholic Church, Toronto School of Theology)

*Moderators:*

- Prof. Dr Angela Berlis (Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands, Commission on Faith and Order)
- Dr Tijana Petković-Bertsch (Serbian Orthodox Church, Commission on Faith and Order)

### *11:00–12:30* Plenary: Living Visible Unity

*Panellists:*

- Prof. Dr Athanasios Despotis (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Bonn University)
- Dr Mano Emmanuel (World Evangelical Alliance)
- Rev. Canon Dr Charlotte Methuen (Scottish Episcopal Church, Commission on Faith and Order)
- Ms Suk Yi Pang (Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China)
- Rev. Dr Teddy Sakupapa (University of the Western Cape)

*Moderator:*

- Dr Johannes Oeldemann (Roman Catholic Church, Commission on Faith and Order)

### *14:30–16:00* Sections

**Section 1:** Being Church on the Way to Visible Unity

**Section 2:** Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God

**Section 3:** Being Church in and for the World

### *16:30–17:30* Plenary: Ecumenical Future

*Speakers:*

- Youth representatives and established ecumenical leaders

### *17:45–18:45* Closing Plenary

*Speakers:*

- Representatives of host churches, representatives of World Council of Churches, guests from Christian World Communions

### *19:00–20:00* Closing Prayer

## Delegates

H.G. Bishop ABRAHAM, USA, Coptic Orthodox Church

H.G. Bishop Toma ADLY ZAKY, Egypt, Coptic Catholic Church

Dr Mercy AH SIU-MALIKO, New Zealand, Methodist Church of Samoa

Dr Mor Severius Roger AKHRASS, Lebanon, Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch

H.G. Bishop Damaskinos ALAZRAI, Egypt, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Dr Daniel Nicolaas ANDREW, South Africa, Apostolic Faith Mission

Fr Dr Joseph G. ARYANKALAYIL, India, The Syro-Malabar Church, India

Most Rev. Prof. Johnson ASAMOAH-GYADU, Ghana, Methodist Church Ghana

Mr Atsutse Kodzotse Mawuli ASSIMADI, Germany, Église évangélique presbytérienne du Togo

Rev. Prof. Gregorios AVA MINA, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church

Assoc. Prof. Girma Batu AYANO, Ethiopia, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

H.E. Archbishop Dr Vicken AYKAZIAN, USA, Armenian Apostolic Church (Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin)

Rev. Marika BALEIDELABACI, Fiji, Pasifika Communities' University / Methodist Church in Fiji

Rev. Dr Amantha BARBEE, USA, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Rev. Prof. Dr Sandra Lynn BEARDSALL, Canada, United Church of Canada

Prof. Souraya BECHEALANY, Lebanon, Maronite Church

Very Rev. Bishop Prof. Dr Heinrich BEDFORD-STROHM, Germany, Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland

Rev. Yashou BEKHEET, Egypt, The Episcopal / Anglican Province of Alexandria

Rev. Prof. Dr Angela BERLIS, Switzerland, Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht

Rev. Evelyn Ruth BHAJAN, United Kingdom, Methodist Church in Britain

Rev. Anthony BORISOV, Russian Federation, Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)

Rev. Dr Marc BOSS, France, Église protestante unie de France

Rev. Dr Sotirios BOUKIS, Greece, Evangelical Church of Greece

Rev. Daniel CABRAL, Brazil, Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil

Rev. Deacon José CERQUEIRA, Portugal, Lusitanian Church (Anglican Communion-Portugal)

Prof. Dr Stylianos D. CHARALAMBIDIS, Greece, Ecumenical Patriarchate

Rev. Dr Gianluca CHEMINI, Italy, Diocese of Milan

Rev. Qirui CHEN, Republic of China, China Christian Council

Rev. Prof. Dr Yang-en CHENG, Taiwan, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

Rev. Adinas CHIRWA, Zambia, Council of Churches in Zambia

Rev. Andrzej CHOROMANSKI, Vatican, Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity

Dr Mihail COMĂNOIU, Romania, Romanian Orthodox Church

Prof. Dr Kristine A. CULP, USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada

Bishop David Rwhynica DANIELS JR. USA, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie DIETRICH, Norway, Church of Norway

Archimandrite Andreas DIMITRIOU, Egypt, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Dr Margaret DOWNER-MESSIAS, Jamaica, United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

Bishop Peter EATON, USA, The Episcopal Church (USA)

Dr David FIELD, Switzerland, United Methodist Church

Rev. Dr Michael R. FISHER JR., USA, United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr Israel FLORES OLMOS, Spain, Iglesia Evangélica Española

Rev. Dr Arne Elis Leonard FRITZSON, Sweden, Uniting Church in Sweden

Rev. Prof. Szilveszter FÜSTI-MOLNÁR, Hungary, Reformed Church in Hungary

H.E. Metropolitan GABRIEL OF NEA IONIA, Greece, Church of Greece

Rev. Prof. Dr Pawel Andrzej GAJEWSKI, Italy, Evangelical Waldensian Church (Chiesa Evangelica Valdese)

Rev. Dr Mercedes GARCÍA BACHMANN, Argentina, IELU

Abba Abraham Geremew GEBREMARIAM, Ethiopia, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Rev. Dr Refat Fathy GERGES, Egypt, Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt (Synod of the Nile)

Prof. Theodoros GIAGKOU, Greece, Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Protopresbyter Prof. Dr Athanasios GKIKAS, Greece, Ecumenical Patriarchate

Rev. Arisbe GÓMEZ DE RAUDA, El Salvador, Sinodo Luterano Salvadoreño

Rev. Amber-Leigh GORDON, South Africa, Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

Rev. Prof. Dr Jacqueline GREY, Australia, Pentecostal World Fellowship

Rev. Preb. Dr Isabelle HAMLEY, United Kingdom, Church of England

Rev. Canon Dr Jamie HAWKEY, United Kingdom, Church of England/ Anglican Communion

Dr Jelisei HEIKKILÄ, Finland, Orthodox Church of Finland

Rev. Merlyn HYDE RILEY, Jamaica, Jamaica Baptist Union

Rev. Alison INFANTE ZAMORA, Cuba, Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba

Rev. Prof. Helen ISHOLA-ESAN, Nigeria, Nigerian Baptist Convention

Fr Prof. Dr Lawrence IWUAMADI, Switzerland, Roman Catholic Church/ World Council of Churches

Archbishop Emerita Dr Antje JACKELÉN, Sweden, Church of Sweden

H.E. Metropolitan Dr JOB OF PISIDIA, Türkiye, Ecumenical Patriarchate

Dr Georgios KAKKOURAS, Cyprus, Church of Cyprus

Rev. Ilya KAPLAN, Switzerland, Old Catholic Church of Switzerland

Rev. Dr Tomi KARTTUNEN, Finland, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Very Rev. Prof. Dr Jack KHALIL, Lebanon, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

Rev. Dr Vladimir KHULAP, Russian Federation, Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)

Rev. Dr Seoyoung KIM, Republic of Korea, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea

Dr David G. KIRCHHOFFER, Australia, Roman Catholic Church

Rev. John KLAASEN, South Africa, Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Cardinal Kurt KOCH, Holy See (Vatican City State), Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity

Rev. Dr Felipe Gustavo KOCH BUTTELLI, Brazil, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB)

Rev. Dr Brian KOLIA, Samoa, Congregational Christian Church Samoa

Assistant Prof. Charidimos KOUTRIS, Greece, Church of Greece

Vicar/Pastor Anna KÜHLEIS, Germany, Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland

Metropolitan Dr Mor Theophilose KURIAKOSE, India, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

H.G. Bishop KYRILLOS, USA, Coptic Orthodox Church

Rev. Dr Glenroy Michael LALOR, Jamaica, Jamaica Baptist Union

Rev. Dr Chanseok LEE, Republic of Korea, Korean Methodist Church/ Hyupsung University

Rev. Dr Tat Yan LEE, Malaysia, Pentecostal World Fellowship

Rev. Dr Francisco LEITE, Brazil, Igreja Presbiteriana Unida do Brasil

Rev. Susanna LEPPÄLÄ, Finland, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Rev. Dr Amica LIBURD, Virgin Islands, US Caribbean, Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas/University of Birmingham

Rev. Marta LÓPEZ BALLALTA, Spain, Iglesia Evangélica Española

Dr Allison MACGREGOR, Canada, Pentecostal World Fellowship

H.E. Metropolitan Abraham MAR STEPHANOS, United Kingdom, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

Most Rev. Dr K. Reuben MARK, India, Church of South India

Fr Aashu Alexander MATTACKAL, Belgium, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

Prof. Dr Anna Maria Cäcilia MAYER, Germany, Joint Working Group between WCC and the Catholic Church

Rev. Prof. Dr Charlotte METHUEN, United Kingdom, Scottish Episcopal Church

Rt Rev. Ingeborg MIDTTØMME, Norway, Church of Norway

Prof. Dr Krzysztof MIELCAREK, Poland, Roman Catholic Church

Prof. Esther Moraa MOMBO, Kenya, St Paul's University

Prof. Dr Dimitrios MOSCHOS, Greece, Church of Greece

Ms Maria MOUNTRAKI, Finland, Orthodox Church of Finland

Prof. Rachel MUERS, United Kingdom, Friends World Committee for Consultation

Dr Maria Louise MUNKHOLT CHRISTENSEN, Germany, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

Mrs Ulka MURMU, India, Bengal-Orissa Bihar Baptist Convention

Rev. Jackline Makena MUTUMA, Kenya, Methodist Church in Kenya

Rev. Dr Ngoy Leita MWAKILIMA, Germany, EKvW

Ms Zipporah MWAURA, Kenya, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Prof. Paul NIMMO, United Kingdom, Church of Scotland

The Rt Rev. Dr Renta NISHIHARA, Japan, The Anglican Church in Japan

Dr Johannes OELDEMANN, Germany, Roman Catholic Church

H.H. The Most Rev. Dr Rufus OSITELU, Nigeria, The Church of the Lord (TCL) Worldwide

Dr Andrés PACHECO LOZANO, Netherlands, Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany

Rev. Dr Nicholas PAPANTONIOU, Cyprus, Church of Cyprus

Fr Gregory (Robert) PELUSHI, Albania, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania

Dr Tijana PETKOVIĆ-BERTSCH, Germany, Serbian Orthodox Church

Bishop Tiran PETROSYAN, Austria, Armenian Apostolic Church

Mrs Ronja PFAU, Austria, Evangelische Kirche A. und H.B. in Österreich

Ms Dominika PRUSZCZYŃSKA, Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw / OPEN DOORS

Dr Audeh QUAWAS, Jordan, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem

H.E. Bishop of Moravica, Tihon RAKIĆEVIĆ, Serbia, Serbian Orthodox Church

Rev. Dr Jordan REDDING, New Zealand, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Archpriest Alexander RENTEL, USA, Orthodox Church in America

Rev. Canon Dr Gale RICHARDS, United Kingdom, Baptist Union of Great Britain

Dr Ann RIGGS, USA, Friends United Meeting and Friends General Conference

Rev. Eid SALAH, Egypt, Presbyterian Church-Synod of the Nile

Rev. Dr Carmelo SANTOS, USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Dr Monica SCHAAP PIERCE, USA, Reformed Church in America

Minister Bettina SCHALLER, France, Union des Églises Protestantes d'Alsace et de Lorraine

Most Rev. Dr Samy Fawzy SHEHATA, Egypt, The Episcopal / Anglican Province of Alexandria

Archimandrite Barouyr SHERNEZIAN, Lebanon, Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia)

Rev. Dr Jaeshik SHIN, Republic of Korea, Presbyterian Church of Korea

Archdeacon Edward SIMONTON, Canada, Anglican Church of Canada

Ms Nadezhda SKVARNIK, Czech Republic, Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands and Slovakia

Rev. Dr Adrian SMITH, Barbados, Caribbean, Moravian

Fr Prof. Dr Cristian SONEA, Romania, Romanian Orthodox Church

Moderator Sanjee A. D. STEPTER, Liberia, Presbyterian Church of Liberia

Rev. Marit Sofia STRINNHOLM, Sweden, Church of Sweden

Rev. Ashraf K. TANNOUS, Palestine, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

Dr Irini THABET GEORGE, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church

Very Rev. Dr Sham P. THOMAS, India, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church

H.E. Metropolitan THOMAS, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church

Rev. Prof. Dr Christian TSEKPOE, Ghana, The Church of Pentecost

Dr Victoria TURNER, United Kingdom, The United Reformed Church

Rev. Canon Dr Carlton TURNER, United Kingdom, Anglican Church in the Province of the West Indies

Rev. Prof. Dr Upolu Luma VAAI, Fiji, Pasifika Communities University

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Rev. Prof. Dr Ge WEN, China, China Christian Council

Rev. Karin WIBORN, Sweden, Uniting Church in Sweden

Prof. Dr Myriam WIJLENS, Germany, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

General Secretary Ka Fai WONG, Hong Kong China, HKCCCC

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Ms HyeLim YOON, Canada, The United Church of Canada

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## Advisors

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H.E. Archbishop ANGAELOS, United Kingdom, Coptic Orthodox Church

Brother Idris Omobemi BALOGUN, Nigeria, The Church of the Lord Prayer Fellowship

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Prof. Andrew BOYD, Portugal, KAICIID – International Dialogue Centre

Rev. Dr Anne BURGHARDT, Switzerland, Lutheran World Federation

Fr Dr Nicolas BUSTROS, Lebanon, Middle East Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Gordon COWANS, Jamaica, United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

Prof. Dr Athanasios DESPOTIS, Germany, Ecumenical Patriarchate

Rev. Dr Susan DURBER, United Kingdom, United Reformed Church

Dr Mano EMMANUEL, Sri Lanka, Kolupitiya Methodist Church

H.G. Anba ERMINA, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church

Rev. Refaat FIKRY, Egypt, Synod of the Nile

Rev. Rebecka FOLKESTEN, Ethiopia, Church of Sweden

Rev. César GARCIA, Canada, Mennonite World Conference

Prof. Dr Paul GAVRILYUK, USA, International Orthodox Theological Association

Dr Mathews GEORGE CHUNAKARA, Thailand, Christian Conference of Asia

Rev. Dirk GEVERS, South Africa, United Bible Societies

Dr Mary GHATTAS, USA, Coptic Orthodox Church

Dr Tamara GRDZELIDZE, Orthodox Church of Georgia

Mr Michael HABASHI, USA, Coptic Orthodox Church / University of Cambridge

Prof. Marlene HAYDAR, Lebanon, Middle East Council of Churches

Mr Tomás INSUA, Italy, Laudato Si' Research Institute

Rev. Karl JOHNSON, Jamaica, Baptist World Alliance

Fr Dr Jacob JOSEPH, Australia, The Syrian Orthodox Church

Dr Mutale KAUNDA, United Kingdom, Europe, Pentecostal

Rev. Kendrick KEMP, USA, American Baptist Churches

Dr Natasha KLUKACH, United Kingdom, Global Christian Forum

Prof. Dr Dirk LANGE, Switzerland, Lutheran World Federation

Rev. Dr Reynaldo Ferreira LEÃO NETO, United Kingdom, World Methodist Council

Rev. Dr Jennifer S. LEATH, Canada, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Dr Hanns LESSING, Germany, World Communion of Reformed Churches

Fr Bryan LOBO, Italy, Society of Jesus

Prof. Marilyn NAIDOO, South Africa, University of South Africa

Ms Riina NGUYEN, Finland, Orthodox Church of Finland / Orthodox Church Aid and Missions Filantropia

Commissioner Jane PAONE, United Kingdom, The Salvation Army

Rev. Prof. Dr Keith F. PECKLERS, S.J., Vatican, Pontifical Gregorian University

Ms Katerina PEKRIDOU, Belgium, Conference of European Churches

Dr Jean-Daniel PLÜSS, Pentecostal World Fellowship Christian Unity Commission

Rev. Prof. Dr Neal D. PRESA, USA, Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr Karam SHAMASHA, Iraq, Middle East, Catholic University in Erbil

Rev. Tara TAUTARI, New Zealand, Methodist Church of New Zealand

Rev. Paul S. TCHÉ, USA, North America Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council

Very Rev. Dr Evangelos THIANI, Kenya, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Rev. Dr Hana TONZAROVA, Czech Republic, Czechoslovak Hussite Church

Dr Rosalee VELLOSO EWELL, United Kingdom, United Bible Societies

Prof. Dr Miroslav VOLF, USA, Yale Divinity School

Fr Moussa WAHIB, France, Coptic Orthodox Church

Rev. David WELLS, Canada, Pentecostal World Fellowship

Dr Christopher WELLS, United Kingdom, Anglican Communion Office

## Accompanying

Brother Dewan PITTS, USA, New Fellowship Church

Mr Mattias RHODIN, Church of Sweden

## Choir

Dr Marina AMIN, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Mr Steven AMIR, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Fr Domadius ARCHIE, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Dr Amira ASHRAF, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Mrs Mariam ATEF, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Ms Mariam, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Ms Nardeen AYOUB, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Ms Mariam BASSEM, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Ms Olivia BASSILY, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Ms Rana DOSS, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Ms Nancy ELAGIZI, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Mr Bassem ELAGIZI, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Mrs Marina EMAD, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Mr Mina ESSAM, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church

Ms Patricia FAHMY, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Marina FARAG, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mr Philopateer, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Dr Mina Youssif GEORGE, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Shery GEORGE, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mr Ramy GHALY, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Dr Remon GHOBRIAL, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Miray GOBRAN, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Mariam HANNA, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Mary HANY, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Rogina HANY, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mr Daniel JOSEPH, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Mirna Wafaa KHALIL KHALIL, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Fr Youssef KOSMAN, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Ms Mariam MAGDY, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Dalia MAGDY, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Mira MAGDY, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Marina MAGED, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Nivine MICHEL, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mr Andrea MORCOS, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mr Poula MORIES, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mr Mina MOURAD, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Ms Meriam NABIL, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mr Karim NAGI, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mrs Maria NAGY, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Marina NAZIH, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Marianne NOSSEIR, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Orchid OSAMA, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Christine RAAFAT, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Ms Mariam RAOUF, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Marina SAMEEH, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mr Mark SAMY, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

Ms Monica SEDHOM, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Maria SEDRAK, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Mirette SHENOUDA, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mr Mina TADROS, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mrs Sally TAKLA, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Ms Sara WAFIK, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf
Mr Wassim YASSA, Egypt, St Mary's Choir Ard El Golf

## Day-Visitors

H.G. Bishop Makary, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Makar, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.E. Metropolitan Daniel, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Youannes, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Estifanos, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Yolios, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Markos, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Ghobrial, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Mark, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Gabriel, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Agabious, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Governor Jackleen, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Mikhael, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Athanasious, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Bavly, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Hemina, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Bigol, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Eklimandos, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Sawirus, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Ologios, Ain Shams, Mataria, and Helmeyat Al Zaytoun in Cairo, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Bishop Elarion, Behira, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Raphael, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church

H.G. Bishop Theophilus, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Elarion, Red Sea Diocese, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Philopateer, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Axios, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Bishoy, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Dioskorous, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Domadios, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Nofar, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Fr Nabil, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Aghantious, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Makarious, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.E. Metropolitan Antonious, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.E. Metropolitan Demtrious, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Dina ABDELKARIM, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Dr Maged ABDELMALAK, Coptic Orthodox Church
Essam ADEL, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Mr Essam ADEL, Coptic Orthodox Church
Sherif ADLY, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Michael ADLY, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Ambassador Nabil AL HABSHI, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Mr Khaled ALASIOUTY, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Mr Kirolos AMGAD, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Fr Wisa ANBA BISHOY, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
H.G. Bishop Daniel ANBA PA, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Dr Adly ANIS, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Dr Shady ANS, Anglican Province of Alexandria
Mr Riad ARMANIUO, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Dr Ihab ATEF, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Tamav ATHANASIA, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Fr Endraws AVA MINA, Coptic Orthodox Church
Fr Bakhomious AVA MINA, Coptic Orthodox Church
Fr Yostos AVA MINA, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church

Fr Tadros AVA MINA, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Fr Misael AVA MINA, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
Fr Andrew AWAD, Egypt, Coptic Orthodox Church
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In the Egyptian desert where Christian monasticism emerged, people of faith from various denominations gathered to ask an ancient question: what does it mean to pursue visible unity in Christ? The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order brought representatives from Christian traditions worldwide to Wadi El Natrun in 2025, where the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea lent particular theological weight to their deliberations.

This volume documents the rigorous theological work of the conference as well as the lived spiritual communion that sustained it. Through keynote addresses, plenary sessions, and regional perspectives, participants explored how faith, mission, and unity shape the Church's witness in a fractured world. The contributions reflect the breadth of contemporary ecumenism: voices from the Global South, young theologians bringing fresh questions, ancient traditions offering wisdom, bringing together WCC member churches with Roman Catholic and Pentecostal representatives.

The conference's ecumenical affirmation, *Deepening Unity, Journeying in Love, Restoring Hope*, is both thanksgiving for the journey travelled and a renewed call to the still outstanding task of visible unity.

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