

## Living unity? On the ecumenical movement and globalization<sup>1</sup>

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How is the ecumenical movement interpreting, evaluating and, where necessary, challenging globalization?<sup>2</sup> Equally, what is happening to ecumenism as a result of globalization? How is the ecumenical movement being challenged by globalization?

Ecumenism has always been concerned with the world, whether in earlier centuries or during the self-consciously ecumenical 20th century. The Greek word *oikoumene* means the whole inhabited earth: from its inception, therefore, the World Council of Churches (WCC) understood its focus as “everything that relates to the whole task of the whole church to bring the gospel to the whole world”.<sup>3</sup> This ecumenical concern for the world is based on a normative vision of what the world is, could be, should be, and will become. Its global concern is integrally embedded in its faith, in its convictions concerning the origin and destiny of the world.

In recent years, attempts have been made to use the metaphor of *oikos* (household) implied in the term *oikoumene* to develop this vision further.<sup>4</sup> Ecumenical leaders and theologians relate the *oikoumene* of the church to the *oikonomia* or fullness of the life of the trinitarian God, to be reflected in the life of the church;<sup>5</sup> the global political and economic realities, critically discussed from the perspective of the political economy of the Holy Spirit;<sup>6</sup> the habitable earth and, in fact, the whole of creation and ecology.<sup>7</sup> The *oikos* of church, political economy and earth all together form part of the *one household of life* in the economy of the living triune God.

### In search of koinonia

Throughout the 20th century, the two major ecumenical strands, Faith and Order<sup>8</sup> and Life and Work,<sup>9</sup> both attempted to give fuller content to the “household of life”.

In both cases, it is possible to trace successive visions, images, slogans and programmes.

### *Faith and Order*

The focus of Faith and Order, broadly speaking, has been on the visible unity of churches in the world, both globally and locally. The ecumenical vision of the unity to be achieved has, however, shifted over the years. Several descriptions of the goal (*Zielvorstellungen*) have replaced, complemented or contradicted one another, including “united, not absorbed”, “a communion of communions”,

“reconciled diversity”, “covenant”, “sister churches”, “organic union”, “conciliar fellowship” and “conciliarity”.<sup>10</sup>

For obvious reasons, Faith and Order always understood that “efforts towards manifesting the unity of the church” and “efforts towards common witness and service in the world” should be held together.<sup>11</sup> Several studies therefore sought to reflect on this relationship, including “The unity of the church and the unity of humankind” and “The community of women and men in the church”. Ongoing criticism prompted a study programme on “The unity of the church and the renewal of human community”, which led to the 1990 text *Church and World*.

This document begins with an analysis of the human situation and the Christian response, describing the world today in terms of opportunities and dangers, hopes and anxieties, both local and global. Living in this world, Christians and churches share in these anxieties and hopes. Called to “become what it is”, the church knows that “this striving is not for the sake of the church alone”: “it is in and for the world that God calls the church”.

The purpose of *Church and World* is therefore “to affirm and explore this interrelation of two fundamental ecumenical tasks: the search for the visible unity of Christ’s church, and the search for common Christian proclamation, witness and service as expressions of God’s mission and love for a world crying out for renewal”.

The guiding questions and the main argument of the document, however, remain ecclesiological. The (identity and task of the) church is understood within the perspective of the kingdom of God (as God’s creative, redeeming and sustaining rule), as both mystery (with emphasis on the reality of the church as body of Christ) and prophetic sign (with emphasis on the church’s role as instrument of God’s grace given to a world crying out for healing and renewal), pointing (doxologically) towards an eschatological realization of God’s saving purpose for all humankind.

### *Life and Work*

The focus of Life and Work, broadly speaking, has been on furthering justice in the world. Again we see a series of diverse and sometimes competing visions, including the idealistic and often activist symbol of “the kingdom of God in society” in the early years; the notion of “a responsible society” just after the second world war; the calling of the church “in periods of rapid social change” in the early 1950s, and in (technical and social) “revolutionary situations” during the 1960s; a church working with enthusiasm and optimism, together with the world, for “development” during the early 1970s, only to become disillusioned and therefore active in the struggles of “liberation ecumenism” from the underside of history; a church dedicated to a long-term just, participatory and sustainable society (JPSS) between 1977 and 1983; and since 1983 a

comprehensive church process to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC).

These successive visions for the struggle for justice in the world obviously depended to a large extent on the context in which the ecumenical church found itself. The changing nature of the world called for changes in the nature of the engagement and priorities of the church. It is therefore only to be expected that accelerating globalization should have a similar effect.

For those involved in Life and Work, ecclesiological issues, including the visible unity of the church, were often regarded as irrelevant, sometimes even obstructive, but in any case secondary. At most, ecclesial unity was sometimes regarded as necessary for practical reasons, to strengthen the collective efforts of the churches in the face of the enormous social, political and economic challenges they faced. The first Life and Work conference (Stockholm 1925) already admitted that “the sins and sorrows, the struggles and losses of the Great War and since have compelled the Christian churches to recognize, humbly and with shame, that ‘the world is too strong for a divided church’”.<sup>12</sup> Later, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu alluded to this when he said that “apartheid is too strong for a divided church”.<sup>13</sup> The interest in visible unity was functional and practical. The primary focus was ethical rather than ecclesiological.

A major meeting in the Life and Work tradition, aiming “to engage member churches in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation”, was held in Seoul in 1990.<sup>14</sup> The two expressions “conciliar process” and “covenant” are ecclesologically very significant and together demonstrate the underlying intention to commit churches in a unified and in some sense mutually binding manner to confront the life-and-death issues of the day. However, the result was again lack of integration between the two sets of concerns.

### *Koinonia*

During the last decade voices grew stronger – from both sides – that these two emphases belong together and that the tension between the struggles for unity and justice should be overcome. In different quarters the conviction grew that *koinonia* – the Greek word indicating communion, community, sharing, fellowship, society, participation, solidarity, *Gemeinschaft*, but precisely because of the crucial differences caused by any translation deliberately kept untranslated in the earlier study documents<sup>15</sup> – could serve as a vision integrating these two concerns.<sup>16</sup> In the Canberra statement, the seventh assembly of the WCC (Canberra 1991) already used the notion of *koinonia* to set the unity of the church in the broader context of God’s design.<sup>17</sup>

The fifth world conference of Faith and Order (Santiago de Compostela 1993) drew out and developed this Canberra vision.<sup>18</sup> The notion of *koinonia*

structured its proceedings, providing its overall theme – *koinonia* (understanding *koinonia* and its implications, including its biblical witness and perspectives from tradition) – and three subthemes – *koinonia* in faith (“confessing the one faith to God’s glory”), life (“sharing a common life in Christ”) and witness (“called to common witness for a renewed world”).

Two documents from this world conference are of special importance for understanding the role of *koinonia* as an overall and integrating vision: a preparatory document, widely discussed and often revised, but eventually called *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness*,<sup>19</sup> and the final message, “On the Way to Fuller *Koinonia*”.<sup>20</sup>

Describing the search for communion in a time of change, the preparatory text explains: “The pilgrimage towards *koinonia* in faith, life and witness takes place in an ever changing world and ecumenical situation... Some believe that the real global revolution of our epoch is only just beginning.” And this is followed by a detailed description of the phenomena usually understood as globalization.<sup>21</sup>

There can be little doubt that globalization played a major role in bringing the ecumenical movement to the point where it is seriously striving to combine ecclesiological and ethical concerns under the vision of *koinonia*.<sup>22</sup> There have always been those in ecumenism who suffered under this unresolved tension and often open – also bureaucratic – animosity, and who always wanted to bridge this divide.<sup>23</sup> The urgency of recent efforts, however, is due to “a fundamental shift in historical consciousness, felt in both spheres of ecclesiology and ethics... that presuppositions that have been taken for granted in the past, regarding both the church and its self-understanding as well as the forming of ethical judgments, are beginning to crumble”,<sup>24</sup> an awareness that changes are taking place in the world that challenge the ecumenical church in basic ways.

### Ecclesiology and ethics

The deliberate purpose behind this recent focus on *koinonia* is therefore the attempt to bring ecclesiological and ethical concerns together in a new and fruitful way. In the 1990s, Unit I (Faith and Order) and Unit III (JPIC) of the WCC jointly organized three consultations within the framework of an ecclesiology and ethics project. Since the three consultation reports are *Costly Unity*, *Costly Commitment*, and *Costly Obedience*, the project has been described as a litany of “costlies”.

#### *Costly unity*

The explicit purpose of the first meeting (Rønede, Denmark, 1993) was serious dialogue about “long-lived tensions and divisions”, this “cleft... exposing a history of differences which runs the length of the modern ecumenical movement”.<sup>25</sup>

To dissolve the tensions, the report proposes to see the church as *moral community*. “It all comes to the same point: the church not only has, but is, a social ethic, a *koinonia* ethic.”

“The being (*esse*) of the church is at stake in the justice, peace and integrity of creation process,” it argues, and “*koinonia* is an apt term for both”. The major part of the document consists of an exposition, under different headings, of the nature of such *koinonia* and its implications.

“Cheap unity” avoids morally contested issues lest they disturb the unity of the church. Costly unity is discovering the churches’ unity as a gift of pursuing justice and peace, and often exacts a price.

Church as moral community begins with the moral meaning of the sacraments themselves. The sacraments as people-shaping rites can lead into sacramental living. The bridge between ecclesiology and ethics is to be found in the experience of worship and the deepening of spirituality.

This report contributed to the important role as an integrating notion that *koinonia* would play a few months later at Santiago de Compostela. Already, however, a second joint meeting was planned, partly because the idea of the church as a moral community was unclear and led to many questions and criticisms.

### *Costly commitment*

This second meeting took place at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem, in 1994.<sup>26</sup> Part of the problem with the description of the church as moral community, it reported, is that this may seem like a description of what is already and always the case, particularly when it builds on the experiences of the sacraments, worship and spirituality. This would not sufficiently account for the many differences between churches, and for their lack of ethical involvement.

Accordingly, the report emphasizes the calling, the vocation, of the church. The churches – even as moral communities – are called to *commit* themselves to one another, recognizing that they need one another on their ecumenical journey. Such commitment is an essential foundation for their common reflection and action. It becomes increasingly clear – the report claims – that the road to costly unity leads necessarily through a *costly commitment* of the churches to one another. Those who have previously been wary of “moral reductionism” should commit themselves to the ethical character of the church. Those who have been deeply engaged in ethical praxis only should commit themselves also to church renewal.

The report emphasizes the crucial importance of this ecumenical commitment for being the church – and asks whether churches can still call themselves “church” if they are not committed to this joint process. To flesh out the too-abstract notion of a moral community, it suggests notions of moral

*formation* and moral *discernment*. Moral formation, as part of the churches' overall task of spiritual formation, would train church members in discernment, helping them to analyse ethical issues from the perspective of the gospel; preparing them best to participate in the light of their faith in the moral struggles, complexities and challenges of the present day; and thus making it possible for the churches to contribute to the moral wellbeing of the societies in which they live, for example through informed participation in public debate on specific ethical issues. The fraying of the moral fibre in many societies – says the document – makes this role all the more urgent today.

Although the major part of *Costly Commitment* is devoted to developing “the language” of moral formation and discernment and demonstrating in how many ways such language could prove useful to understand *koinonia*, it concludes that much more needs to be done in this regard. That happened at the third and final consultation.

### *Costly obedience*

The final meeting was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1996.<sup>27</sup> The theme of moral formation was further pursued by asking “what it might mean to speak of the church as a global communion of moral witnessing”.

The obedience to which the church is called is often costly, the reports says. It may require the churches to position themselves in relation to the issues of particular times and places in ways which call for courage, perseverance and sacrifice. Such faithfulness may even come to the point of martyrdom.

Again, the report finds it necessary, if difficult, to interpret the particular time and place, and does that in terms of globalization.<sup>28</sup> In the light of this description, it then discusses the meaning of moral formation in the world, the churches' moral failure in face of nationalistic, ethnic and economic violence, the grounding of the church's moral formation in baptism and the eucharist, and finally the idea of an ecumenical moral communion and the possible role of the WCC in such an endeavour.

In summary, this study – at least partly caused by the impact and challenge of globalization on ecumenism – sought to explore the link between what the church *is* and what the church *does*, and brought both these aspects under critical scrutiny and reflection. The *koinonia* to which the *oikoumene* is called, which involves communion in faith, in life and in witness, takes the form of costly unity (which means that faith involves discipleship) and calls the churches to costly commitment to one another, as well as to costly obedience, facing the struggles for life of every age.

### Matters arising

It has become clear that, in the face of globalization, the ecumenical movement is challenged to consider at least three sets of questions anew. They deal with

the nature and calling of the church, the nature of ethics, and the theological competence of the church.

### *The church*

It is still an open question whether the attempts to integrate ecclesiological and ethical concerns have been successful. It is understandable why criticism of the study and its achievements was forthcoming from different perspectives. More attention to the relationship between identity and responsibility is needed.<sup>29</sup>

It is helpful that the WCC has increasingly taken the different concrete forms (*Gestalten*) of the church more seriously, although not yet in a very systematic fashion.<sup>30</sup>

At least six forms should be distinguished when considering the identity and calling of the church and the relationship between the church and globalization: the church 1) as ecumenical church, whether global, national, regional or local, 2) as denomination or confessional tradition, 3) as (mostly local) congregations, 4) as worshipping communities, 5) as individual believers in the fullness of their personal, private and public lives and 6) as believers participating in initiatives and actions, together with others, whether Christian or not, committed to the same cause. All six have received attention in the recent studies and documents.

1. The impact of globalization has perhaps been the most dramatic on the understanding of the ecumenical church. A concrete illustration is “the several years of sustained theological reflection” as “an ongoing journey of self-reflection on the nature and purpose of the ecumenical movement”, leading to the comprehensive policy statement “Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches”, presented to the eighth assembly in Harare.<sup>31</sup> Ecumenism is most certainly in a time of transition.<sup>32</sup>

Among the many important issues to be considered here is “reception”,<sup>33</sup> sometimes called the single most difficult issue for ecumenism. When and how do churches, congregations and believers adequately receive the studies, documents, and decisions produced at the ecumenical level?<sup>34</sup>

2. The nature, role, importance and future of denominations and confessional traditions have been addressed in recent documents in new ways, with a new awareness of their significance. The visible structures of a church, its polity and order, its bureaucracy and everyday activities, can witness to or contradict the gospel. To take the actual church (*die wirkliche Kirche*) seriously, we have to take seriously the relationships between message and structure (*das Verhältnis von Botschaft und Ordnung – als Grundproblem evangelischen Kirchenverständnisses*), between truth-claims and forms of life (*Wahrheit und Existenzform*).<sup>35</sup> Indeed, a polity is already an ethic.<sup>36</sup>

3. In a time of weakening ecumenical and even denominational commitment, the role of local congregations has become extremely important. This is perhaps where the effect of globalization – called “glocalization” by leading theorist Roland Robertson<sup>37</sup> – is felt the most vividly. This is, however, at the same time the place where a sense of household and belonging could be fostered and where the spiritual and moral formation so sorely needed could take place, if at all.<sup>38</sup>

4. In a remarkable way, recent ecumenical reflection has emphasized the role of worship. Traditionally, the ecumenical and liturgical movements went hand in hand. Several essays by Methodist ecumenist Geoffrey Wainwright in *Worship with One Accord* tell the story of this close connection,<sup>39</sup> as does the rest of his theological work.<sup>40</sup> Worship also almost always played a major role in the activities of the ecumenical movement. In recent years, however, a new awareness of the importance of worship – the eucharist, but also understood in a broader sense – for formation has become visible.<sup>41</sup>

5. That the church also – ultimately, according to some Protestant views – consists of individual believers has seldom been the main focus of attention in the ecumenical movement, precisely because of its understandable concern with national and transnational involvement and activities. Under the impact of globalization and late modernism – in such forms as spreading secularization, radical individualism, and destructive pluralisms – the realization is growing that believers have important roles to play in building up (a diverse number of) households of life in the contemporary world.

6. Finally, several recent ecumenical documents raise serious ecclesiological questions regarding experiences – including those of real *koinonia* – while participating, outside the traditional spheres of the church, in diverse civil and public initiatives and activities,<sup>42</sup> together with people of other persuasions and religious convictions, but sharing the same moral commitments.<sup>43</sup>

### *Ethics*

It is also extremely helpful that the ecumenical movement has been challenged to consider the complexity of morality and ethics more fully than often before, when it seemed fairly clear what Christians, irrespective of tradition or confession (since “doctrine divides but service unites”), should be doing in the world.

Challenged to analyse and understand why Christians and churches disagree with one another on moral issues, the ecumenical movement has distinguished different moral quests and approaches – by way of vision, value, virtue, or obligation – and pointed to different moral environments, sources for and pathways to moral deliberation, and authoritative means of moral

discernment.<sup>44</sup> All these insights represent valuable progress on the way to responsible church life – including formation, decision-making, witness and involvement – in the new globalizing world.

### *Theological competence*

The church's involvement – particularly that of the ecumenical church – in public affairs, whether internationally, nationally or locally, is too often seen as merely endorsing or supporting specific ideological or interest groups. The church often lacks credibility. Many people, including church members, have become sceptical of its role in public life – whether it is supportive and legitimating, critical and prophetic, or activist and advocatory. Even theologians involved in ethics are often seen as nothing more than “social scientists with religious interest”.<sup>45</sup>

The church is, therefore, challenged to act on the basis of its own theological competence.<sup>46</sup> The church should rethink its contribution, its communication and its commitments.

1. What theological perspective and contribution can the church offer? What does the church as church *know*? However controversial they may be, recent attempts to link ethics to ecclesiology, even to Trinitarian theological insights and convictions, offer challenging beginnings.

2. How does the church speak about public – also “glocal” (Robertson) – issues? To whom does she speak? With what kind of authority? With what kind of expectation? Acknowledgement that the church is in the process of learning to speak in new, and more acceptable, responsible and hopefully meaningful ways in the new world is one of the valuable insights gained.<sup>47</sup> The thorny issue of teaching authority has always been on the ecumenical agenda, but its importance for ethics has suddenly become central.<sup>48</sup>

3. What does the church do about these challenging glocal issues? How does the church get involved? And even more fundamentally, how credibly does the church demonstrate its own convictions in its own structures, life and activities? Remarkably enough, a certain optimism regarding the ecumenical church precisely in the face of globalization can be detected. The North American Lutheran and ecumenical ethicist, Larry Rasmussen, reminds us that “few communities are better poised geographically or by virtue of their vocation. Spin the globe and stab your finger to stop it and you probably put your first digit through the roof of somebody's church somewhere. When we most need institutions that are as local as the neighbourhood and as global as the planet itself, we have at least one transnational body already on the job whose very calling it is to gather all, on equal terms, into caring community across barriers

that divide.”<sup>49</sup> In South Africa, it is often said that on the national level no organization has a greater potential than the church to play a meaningful role in civil society – in social welfare, education, and many other spheres of life.

### Globalization, community and ecumenism

It is widely held that modern societies often lack meaningful experiences of solidarity, fellowship, support and care. From different perspectives and for diverse reasons, social critics, commentators, analysts, politicians, philosophers, and sociologists since Tönnies and Durkheim have all bemoaned the lack of community in typically modern societies.

Globalization claims to produce a new experience of *Weltgemeinschaft*, a new sense of belonging and identity. Such slogans as “global village” and “world civilization” and descriptions of globalization as “the way in which relations of power and communication are stretched across the globe, involving compressions of time and space *and a recomposition of social relationships*”<sup>50</sup> point in this direction. What is at stake is the significance of our age for individual and social morality and its consequences for the formation, maintenance and alteration of personal identity.<sup>51</sup>

Robert J Schreiter, a North American Catholic scholar, explores the challenges and opportunities of globalization under the significant title *The New Catholicity*. Schreiter sees communication – including issues of culture, identity, and social change – as the new element in an enlarged concept of catholicity. The church should respond to globalization by adding communication to the two traditional elements of “extension throughout the world” and “fullness of faith”.<sup>52</sup>

*Katholikos* means “that which belongs to the whole” or “that which comprehends the whole or the totality”. One may argue that catholicity is the issue today precisely because globalization presents itself as a form of catholicity, claiming universality in space, culture and time; fullness of truth; unity and wholeness; and rule and authority.<sup>53</sup>

From a religious and moral perspective, one may argue that the real challenges embedded in globalization are not so much to what we *do*, but to who we *are*, who we are becoming, what the nature of the communion is that we experience. Are these the kind of people we want to be, the kind of communion we want to be part of? Ultimately at stake is the kind of *koinonia* we are, the nature of the household and the households we belong to.

It is precisely for this reason that globalization is challenging the ecumenical movement to rethink its traditional ecclesiological and ethical concerns in the perspective of *koinonia* and *oikos*. Outgoing WCC general secretary Konrad Raiser develops Paul’s image of *oikodomé*, mutual upbuilding:

The central challenge today, both for the understanding of the church and for ethics, is to promote the rebuilding of sustainable communities...

Underlying this is the quest for a new ethics of life in relationships, and the concept of *oikodomé* could give direction to this quest. *Oikodomé* as the building up of the community aims to strengthen the church as a fellowship of hope, solidarity and trust in which the rules of a new life-centred culture and ethic can be developed and practised.<sup>54</sup>

This challenge requires that ecumenism develop its own theological understanding of community, in order to analyse and where necessary engage the kind of community offered by globalization. The informative contribution by Heinrich Bedford-Strohm in which he attempts to do exactly this with regard to typically modern societies, especially Germany, serves as a helpful illustration of the task that lies ahead.<sup>55</sup>

### A South African postscript

In 1982, the (then) Dutch Reformed Mission Church drafted a confession of faith, rejecting the theology of apartheid in the light of its own understanding of the Christian gospel.<sup>56</sup>

The Confession of Belhar followed a threefold logic. God is praised as the giver of unity to the church who calls the church to practise this unity; as the reconciler of believers with Godself and with one another who calls them to practise this reconciliation; and as in a special way the God of the suffering, the downtrodden, and the oppressed who calls the church to follow him in this. Doxological statements about God thus lead to ecclesiology and then to ethics.

On the basis of convictions living in their hearts, these believers rejected apartheid theology, ideology and practice (although apartheid was deliberately nowhere mentioned) in the name of *living unity*, *real reconciliation* and *caring justice*, even if this should lead to costly obedience, as confessed in a concluding section.

Looking back, it is obvious that the remarkable impact of Belhar – at least amongst the members of what is now the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) – was due to the realization that living unity, real reconciliation and caring justice belong together integrally. We cannot achieve one without the others.

This is precisely the challenge that has confronted post-apartheid South Africa. It is even possible to argue that this society went through three successive phases of transformation in which these issues were at stake.

The first phase was the after-Babel period in which a deeply fragmented society had to establish and cement a newly found unity in the form of a constitutional democracy. The second phase was the Mandela period – a period symbolized by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its chair, Archbishop Desmond Tutu – in which people had to become reconciled with one another and themselves, and with their past memories, present situations and future expectations. The third and current phase is one of real

transformation and renaissance towards economic justice, self-respect and dignity.

It is also clear that the later phases did not replace the earlier ones. Living unity and real reconciliation remain just as urgent challenges as caring justice.

If the insights gained from the developments in the ecumenical movement in the face of globalization are valid, URCSA could contribute to ecumenical and public moral discourse in South Africa, in the first place, by making use of its own theological competence in speaking the language of unity, reconciliation and justice and reminding itself and others that these three belong together. URCSA should also address questions concerning its communication of these convictions and concerning its own life, witness and activities in the service of unity, reconciliation and justice.

URCSA has already contributed through the Belhar confession to ecumenical and public discourse on caring justice, both in South Africa and in the wider ecumenical movement.<sup>57</sup>

URCSA may also need on the basis of its own confession to witness to the continuing need for real reconciliation. In the ecclesiology and ethics study, some voices, particularly from the margins, reminded us from time to time that “costly reconciliation” should not be forgotten.<sup>58</sup> URCSA would agree. “You cannot aim at unity without working for reconciliation, you cannot expect reconciliation to happen without justice.”<sup>59</sup> The three belong together, and in situations with a history of oppression, exclusion, violence and suffering, working for reconciliation may be costly indeed.

Facing globalization and its own claims concerning community, however, it is perhaps time for URCSA to recall its own explication of living unity, of *koinonia*.<sup>60</sup> Living unity according to the Christian vision calls for more than globalization seems able to offer. Living unity calls for more than the unity of democratic structures, whether legal, political and bureaucratic, and the unity of globalization, whether driven by the market or by technology and communication. In themselves these structures and processes do not guarantee the kind of living unity, of *koinonia*, that the church longs for, the world is in need of, and we believe we are called to serve.

## Notes

1. This article is based on a paper read during an interdisciplinary consultation in Tutzing, Germany, in June 2000, on “Consequences of Globalization for Germany and South Africa”, jointly organized by the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa (EFSA) and the Evangelische Akademie, Tutzing. I focus mainly on the World Council of Churches, but a broader interpretation of the ecumenical movement would yield a similar picture.
2. The movement has engaged in several major projects on themes normally related to globalization: the dramatic worldwide shifts in economics, mass communication and technology; the integrity of creation; civil society; and respect for context,

culture, difference, and locality. On economics, see eg *Economics: A matter of faith*, CCPD Documents 11 (Geneva: WCC, 1988), *Christian Faith and World Economy Today* (Geneva: WCC, 1992), and “The Debt Issue” and “Globalization” in Diane Kessler, ed, *Together on the Way: Official report of the eighth assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC, 1999), pp.177-182, 183f.

3. See Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition* (Geneva: WCC, 1991), p.84 with reference in footnote 14.
4. According to Konrad Raiser, *ibid.*, p.87, Ernst Lange was the first to use “household” as a translation of “oikoumene”: Lange, “The Malaise in the Ecumenical Movement: Notes on the present situation”, *The Ecumenical Review* 23, 1971, p.8. Since then, many people and studies have done that in great detail, see eg Thomas F Best and Martin Robra, eds, *Costly Commitment: Ecclesiology and ethics* (Geneva: WCC, 1995), pp.43-45.
5. In his speech at the Vancouver assembly, general secretary Philip Potter explicitly linked the form of the church as a fellowship to the metaphor of “house” or “household”. Since then, many people have developed this idea further. In his important interpretative essay on the Harare assembly, Lewis S Mudge uses this as the key to unlock and understand the present state of the discussion: “Towards a Hermeneutic of the Household: ‘Ecclesiology and Ethics’ after Harare”, *The Ecumenical Review* 51, 1999, pp.304-314.
6. See eg Julio de Santa Ana, Konrad Raiser and Ulrich Duchrow, *The Political Economy of the Holy Spirit* (Geneva: 1990).
7. See eg the informative study by Ernst Conradie, *Hope for the Earth: Vistas on a new century* (Bellville, RSA: University of the Western Cape, 2000).
8. See eg the informative study guide by the Dutch Reformed and ecumenical scholar Martien E Brinkman, *Progress in Unity? Fifty years of theology within the World Council of Churches: 1945-1995* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1996).
9. For the early years before the formation of the WCC, see Paul Abrecht, “Life and Work” in Nicholas Lossky et al, eds, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC, 2002), pp.691f. After 1948 it continued as a separate unit of the council, with many desks responsible for a large number of important programmes and projects.
10. See eg Dirk J Smit, “Kerkeenheid in die Ekumene”, *Apologia* 7, 1992, pp.43-52; Harding Meyer, *Ökumenische Zielvorstellungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).
11. *Church and World: The unity of the church and the renewal of human community*, Faith and Order Paper 151 (Geneva: WCC, 1990), p.vii.
12. Edward Shillito, *Life and Work: The universal conference on life and work held in Stockholm, 1925* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1926), p.96.
13. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “Towards *Koinonia* in Faith, Life and Witness”, in Thomas F Best and Günther Gassmann, eds, *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia* (Geneva: WCC 1994), p.96.
14. See *Now is the Time: Final document and other texts* (Geneva: WCC 1990).
15. The Dublin text, a draft intended for discussion, still only transliterated the Greek “so as to avoid slanting its meaning” (p.4). For an excellent discussion of the different meanings and uses in biblical contexts, see John Reumann, “*Koinonia* in Scripture: Survey of biblical texts”, in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, pp.37-69.

16. For the recent popularity of the notion of *koinonia* in ecumenical circles, see George Vandervelde, "Koinonia Ecclesiology – Ecumenical Breakthrough?" *One in Christ* 29, 1993, pp.126-142; Susan Wood, "Ecclesial Koinonia in Ecumenical Dialogues", *One in Christ* 30, 1994, pp.124-145. Also very insightful is George Vandervelde, "Koinonia between Church and World", *Exchange* 26/1, pp.2-39.
17. See Günther Gassmann and John A Radano, eds, *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Ecumenical perspectives on the 1991 Canberra statement on unity*, Faith and Order Paper 163 (Geneva: WCC, 1993).
18. The official report: Thomas F Best and Günther Gassmann, eds, *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia* (Geneva: WCC, 1994).
19. Published separately as Faith and Order Paper 161 (Geneva: WCC, 1993), but also included in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, pp.263-295.
20. In *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, pp.225-227. The three section reports are found on pages pp.229-262.
21. *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness* (Geneva: WCC, 1993), pp.7-8.
22. Ecumenism is one facet of the integration and internationalization that have long been a feature of human history, most notably during the periods 1870-1920 (when such inventions as the steamship, telegraph, railroad and telephone eradicated natural borders) and from 1945 to the present (which has seen massive increases in the flow of goods and information). These were also the periods during which the activities of the ecumenical movement expanded most rapidly.
23. The metaphor of "bridging" is often used to describe the task ahead; see eg "Introduction" in Thomas F Best and Martin Robra, eds, *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical ethical engagement, moral formation and the nature of the church* (Geneva: WCC, 1997), pp.vii-xii.
24. See eg Konrad Raiser, "Ecumenical Discussion of Ethics and Ecclesiology", *The Ecumenical Review* 48, 1996, pp.3-10.
25. For a full report, Thomas F Best and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, eds, *Costly Unity: Koinonia and justice, peace and creation* (Geneva: WCC 1993).
26. For a full report, Thomas F Best and Martin Robra, eds., *Costly Commitment: Ecclesiology and ethics* (Geneva: WCC 1995); the papers are also available in *Ecumenical Review* 47, 1995, pp.127-187.
27. For the basis document discussed at the meeting, Lewis S Mudge, "Ecclesiology and Ethics in Current Ecumenical Debate", *Ecumenical Review* 48, 1996, 11-27; for the papers presented by John W de Gruchy, Margot Kässmann, Vigen Guroian and Duncan B Forrester, *Ecumenical Review* 49, 1997, pp.356-383; for the statement, *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, pp.50-89.
28. "We are rapidly becoming a global community, yet a community constituted by dehumanizing economic and political relationships... The planetary scale of our human struggle presents challenges beyond any the churches have faced before. Moral issues, formerly seen as having to do mainly with personal conduct within stable orders of value, have become radicalized. They have to do with life. Before we can speak of a 21st-century 'global civilization', life together on this planet will need shared visions and institutional expressions for which we have few relevant precedents. As Christians we speak of an *oikoumene*, or inclusive horizon of human belonging, offered by God in Jesus Christ to the human race. Following the

scriptures, we call this a ‘household of life’, a ‘heavenly city’ where justice, peace and care for creation’s integrity prevail. But what may it mean to live lives in the here and now which manifest the first fruits of these gifts and act in anticipation of their fulfilment?

“Christian faith, today as in the past, risks being captured for ethnic and nationalistic purposes. It risks being called on to help protect the privileges and ways of dominant classes. Our brief sojourn in South Africa has suggested to us that the former apartheid regime’s theologically constructed defence of racial separation could become an unacknowledged precedent for violence by the rich nations of the northern hemisphere, facing as they do immigration pressures and economic demands from the south and the continuing threat of counter-violence from multitudes of the still-wretched of the earth.

“If the church is to fulfil its calling to be a sign of God’s reign in such a situation, it is imperative that it begin to understand itself as an ecumenical moral community. Hence the importance of the theme of moral formation. The church needs to ask how – with all its theological, liturgical and sacramental resources – it can *be* a community of relevant moral witness for such a world.” *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, pp.51-52.

29. Several questions come to mind, eg whether churches can still call themselves churches if they do not engage themselves in ecumenical efforts, *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, pp.28-29; whether they are still churches if they do not follow their ethical calling in the world; whether it is helpful to speak of ethical heresy, eg *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, pp.5ff.
30. Wolfgang Huber, *Kirche* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag), pp.44-58.
31. The document and a discussion in *The Ecumenical Review* 51, 1999, pp.96-113.
32. See the title of Konrad Raiser’s essays, already published in German in 1989, on a paradigm shift in ecumenism, *Ecumenism in Transition* (Geneva: WCC, 1991). Since then Raiser has regularly made significant contributions in this regard, often in *The Ecumenical Review*, but also in the more popular work *To be the Church: Challenges and hopes for a new millennium* (Geneva: WCC, 1997).
33. See “The World Council of Churches as marker and space-maker for an ecumenical moral communion” in *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, pp.76-87.
34. Piet J Naudé and Dirk J Smit, “Reception – an ecumenical crisis or opportunity for South African churches?”, *Scriptura* 73, 2000/2, pp.175-188 (with literature).
35. The references in parentheses are to different essays by Wolfgang Huber in his collection, *Folgen christlicher Freiheit* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag 1983), all developed in conversation with Barmen and Bonhoeffer. These ideas have played a crucial role in the church order of the new Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, established on the basis of the Confession of Belhar (1986), in the tradition of Barmen.
36. *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, p.45.
37. Robertson preserves attention to both locality and globality, also called particularism and universalism, by arguing for “a massive, twofold process involving the interpenetration of *the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism*”. Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social theory and global culture* (London: Sage, 1992), p.100.

38. See eg the discussions of “the local and the global” and “diversity and unity” in *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, pp.13-15.
39. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord: Where liturgy and ecumenism embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
40. See Dirk J Smit, “Spirituality, Worship, Confession, and Church Unity: A story from South Africa” in David S Cunningham, Ralph Del Colle and Lucas Lamadrid, eds, *Ecumenical Theology in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: Essays presented to Geoffrey Wainwright on his sixtieth birthday* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.271-281.
41. For related discussions from a South African perspective, see Dirk J Smit, “The Church and Civil Society”, unpublished paper, EFSA conference, 1996, and “Liturgy and Life? On the importance of worship for Christian ethics”, *Scriptura* 1997/3, pp.259-280. Cf Duncan Forrester, *The True Church and Morality: Reflections on ecclesiology and ethics* (Geneva: WCC, 1997).
42. See eg the discussion of “relationships with movements and groups” in “Costly Unity”, *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, pp.15ff.
43. For many, the question is obviously whether these movements do not represent the *real* church. “It is an empirically verifiable observation that commitment to and working for particular moral causes creates community among people. The experience of JPIC again and again has been that people have been gathered into a fellowship which can be described as *koinonia*. Involvement in these struggles of human community generates this *koinonia* and often enlightens doctrine. An ‘ecclesiological’ power is at work here, frequently moving participants to rich liturgical expression and raising deep religious questions for them, questions of faith and commitment. The power of the Holy Spirit is present here – this is the testimony.” *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, pp.4, 33-36. During the struggle against apartheid, many South Africans, including ministers, had similar experiences and faced similar questions.
44. See *The Ecumenical Dialogue on Moral Issues: Potential sources of common witness or of divisions*. A study document of the joint working group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC (Geneva: WCC 1996); also published in *The Ecumenical Review* 48, 1996.
45. In the cynical words of Stanley Hauerwas, “On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological”, *Against the Nations* (Minneapolis: Winston-Seabury Press, 1985), p.28.
46. This is an underlying theme in Wolfgang Huber, *Kirche in der Zeitenwende: Gesellschaftliche Wandel und Erneuerung der Kirche* (Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung).
47. Cf eg the insightful study by British ecumenical theologian Keith Clements, *Learning to Speak: The church’s voice in public affairs* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995).
48. For an instructive overview of earlier discussions, see Anton Houtepen, “Teaching authority” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, pp.1093-7.
49. Larry Rasmussen, *Moral Fragments and Moral Community: A proposal for church in society* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), p.150.
50. Ali Mohammed, ed, *International Communication and Globalization* (London: Sage, 1997), p.3.
51. Chris Arthur, *The Globalization of Communications* (Geneva: WCC 1998), pp.1-3.

52. Robert J Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the global and the local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998).
53. For an excellent introduction to the traditional view of catholicity, see Willie D Jonker, "Catholicity, unity and truth", in Paul G Schrottenboer, ed, *Catholicity and Secession: A dilemma?* (Kampen: Kok, 1992), pp.16-27.
54. Konrad Raiser, "Ecumenical discussion of ethics and ecclesiology", *Ecumenical Review* 48, 1996, pp.9ff. Raiser is making use of Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *God's Spirit: Transforming a world in crisis* (Geneva: WCC/New York: Crossroad, 1995).
55. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, *Gemeinschaft aus kommunikativer Freiheit: Sozialer Zusammenhalt in der modernen Gesellschaft. Ein theologischer Beitrag* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999). In a first major part, he considers from a sociological perspective the often presumed lack or changed nature of community (*Gemeinschaft*) in modern societies. He discusses Tönnies, Durkheim, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim's theory of individualization and a wide variety of empirical surveys. In a second major part, he uses a theological-ethical approach, asking about the nature of Christian love as basis for community. Starting with the popular although now discredited distinction between *agape* and *eros*, he moves on to some burning questions. In a final section, he argues for a form of community in modern societies that builds on the notion of "communicative freedom" in dealing constructively with pluralism. In this way, he develops the ideas of civil society, reciprocity and public church, informed by theological competence but directed at urgent contemporary social questions.
56. For information, see Dirk J Smit, "Das Bekenntnis von Belhar: Entstehung, Inhalt, Rezeption, Relevanz", *Das Bekenntnis von Belhar und seine Bedeutung für die reformierten Kirchen in Deutschland* (Detmold: Lippische Landeskirche 1998), pp.17-33.
57. URCSA has for example been deeply involved in the study that led to the decision of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to initiate a *processus confessionis* regarding world economic injustice and ecological destruction at its 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997). See Dirk J Smit, "A time for confession? On the WARC project 'Reformed Faith and Economic Justice'", unpublished paper, Theological Society of Southern Africa, 1999. Several churches outside Southern Africa have also taken the Belhar confession seriously, including the Uniting Protestant Church in Belgium, the Reformed Church in America, the Reformierter Bund (and its members) and the Evangelische Kirche der Union. In 2003, the EKU became part of the Union Evangelischer Kirchen in der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (UEK).
58. See eg Elizabeth S Tapia's closing comment in "Reflections of a Filipina Christian", *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, pp.112-117.
59. Russel Botman, in his speech to the synod of the Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU), May 2000, in Berlin, on the theme "With Barmen beyond Barmen".
60. "We believe  
     that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;  
     that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously

a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;

that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe; that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the Church and must be resisted;

that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practise and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one Name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ; that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;

that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;

that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

*Therefore, we reject any doctrine*

which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;

which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace whilst believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;

which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin; which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be consideration in determining membership of the church."