

tion systems that developed later. Sunday schools constituted a major strategy of the world missionary movement. It is claimed that "Jesus Loves Me", the "song of the Sunday school", became the best-known hymn throughout the Christian world.

The Sunday school depended on lay volunteer teachers who used curriculum materials produced by church or religious agency publishers. It provided a significant place for the leadership of women. In many places it offered classes for adults. The official church organizations often gained control of the movement, although its identification with children and women continued to limit its stature within many churches.

In the late 1940s the change of name to World Council of Christian Education (WCCE) symbolized its expansion into youth activities and other field services. Reports of its work in different nations were made to its regular world meetings. From 1889 to 1958 the WCCE sponsored 14 world conventions, all but the first two registering more than 1000 delegates; they were held in London (1889 and 1898), St Louis, Jerusalem, Rome, Washington, Zurich, Tokyo (1920 and 1958), Glasgow, Los Angeles, Rio de Janeiro, Oslo and Toronto. World assemblies and institutes followed until the final assembly in 1971 in Peru, when years of cooperative work, frustrating relationships and negotiations led to a vote to integrate with the WCC. General responsibility for continuing its work was lodged in the newly established Office of Education of the WCC.

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## WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

THIS ENTRY deals with the origins, the basis, nature, purpose and functions, the organization and finances of the WCC. Several other entries deal with the developments in ecumenical thinking and activities which the

WCC has initiated and fostered through its programmes and personnel.

## ORIGINS

The WCC was constituted at the first assembly (Amsterdam) on 23 August 1948. It became the most visible international expression of varied streams of ecumenical life in the 20th century. Two of these streams – Life and Work\* (L&W) and Faith and Order\* (F&O) – merged at the first assembly. A third stream – the missionary movement, as organized in the International Missionary Council\* (IMC) – was integrated at the 1961 third assembly (New Delhi). And a fourth stream – Christian education – entered with the 1971 merging of the World Council of Christian Education.\*

Each of these movements is wider than any of its structured expressions, including the WCC fellowship of churches. "Applied" or "practical" Christianity, for example, had been institutionalized not only in the L&W movement but also in the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches\* (1914). Some world missionary bodies, such as the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization,\* still carry out many of the original evangelism aims of the IMC. The WCC youth department could never replace the YMCAs,\* the YWCAs,\* or the World Student Christian Federation.\* And no one would claim that F&O can gather and focus the whole bewildering variety of biblical/theological thinking.

In 1920, the Church of Constantinople (the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate) became the first church to appeal publicly for a permanent organ of fellowship and cooperation of "all the churches" – a "League of Churches" (*koinōnia tōn ekklesiōn*) similar to the proposal after the first world war for a League of Nations (*koinōnia tōn ethnōn*). Also calling for the same in the 1920s were church leaders such as Archbishop Nathan Söderblom (Sweden), a founder of L&W (1925), Bishop Charles Brent, a founder of F&O (1927), and J.H. Oldham (UK), a founder of the IMC (1921).

In July 1937, on the eve of the world conferences of L&W at Oxford and of F&O at Edinburgh, representatives of the two movements met in London. They decided to bring the two together and to set up a fully repre-

sentative assembly of the willing churches. The proposed new organization "shall have no power to legislate for the churches or to commit them to action without their consent; but if it is to be effective, it must deserve and win the respect of the churches in such measure that the people of greatest influence in the life of the churches may be willing to give time and thought to its work". Also involved should be laypeople who hold "posts of responsibility and influence in the secular world", and "a first-class intelligence staff". S. McCrea Cavert (USA) suggested the name "World Council of Churches".

Both Oxford and Edinburgh accepted the proposal and each appointed seven members to a committee of 14, which met in Utrecht in May 1938 and in turn created a provisional committee responsible for the WCC "in process of formation". William Temple (archbishop of York, later of Canterbury) was named chairman, and W.A. Visser 't Hooft (Netherlands) general secretary. The provisional committee established a solid foundation for the WCC by resolving constitutional questions concerning its basis, authority and structure. In October-November 1938, it sent out formal invitations to 196 churches, and Temple wrote a personal letter to the Vatican secretary of state.

At Tambaram (India) in 1938, the IMC expressed interest in the WCC plan but decided to continue as a separate body. A number of missionary societies in its constituency did not want to come under the control of the churches, and there was fear that the churches of North America and Europe would not give to the younger churches elsewhere the place they deserved. Nevertheless, the IMC helped facilitate the eventual entrance of these churches into the WCC, "associated" with it in 1948, and eventually integrated in 1961.

In 1939 the provisional committee planned the first WCC assembly for August 1941, but the world war intervened, and the period of formation lasted for another decade. Between 1940 and 1946, the provisional committee could not function normally through its responsible committees, but its members and others did gather in the USA, England and Switzerland. Under the leadership of Visser 't Hooft in Geneva during the war, several activities contributed to

the supra-national witness of the church: chaplaincy service, work among prisoners of war, assistance to Jews and other refugees, relay of information to the churches, and the preparation through contact with Christian leaders on all sides for post-war reconciliation and interchurch aid.

After the war the provisional committee met in Geneva (1946) and at Buck Hills, Pennsylvania (1947). The committee could affirm that the tragic war experience increased the churches' determination to manifest their fellowship of reconciliation. By 1948, 90 churches had accepted the invitation to join the WCC.

Second thoughts on representation and WCC membership\* resulted in careful regard for numerical size and adequate confessional and geographical representation. The principal membership requirement was agreement with the basis upon which the council would be formed; other requirements specified the autonomy of a church, its stability and appropriate size and its good relationship to other churches.

Although some favoured a council composed primarily of national councils of churches or of world confessional families (e.g. Lutherans, Orthodox, Baptists), the argument prevailed that the WCC should be in *direct* contact with national churches and thus would comprise the individual denominations at the national level, for instance the Methodist Church of Great Britain, the Methodist Episcopal Church, USA, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, etc. World confessional bodies, national councils of churches and international ecumenical organizations could be invited to send representatives to the first assembly but would have non-voting observer status.

Even with this arrangement, there was the danger that the WCC would be governed by majority votes in assemblies of an ever-increasing number of churches representing very unequal memberships. Could this "numerical democracy" not lead to the lukewarmness or even the defection of one of the large "core" church families, e.g. the Orthodox, the Lutherans, the Anglicans? The question began to emerge as the number of member churches increased steadily, and was a major issue raised by the Orthodox at the eighth assembly in Harare in 1998.

When the inaugural assembly convened on 22 August 1948, its 147 churches from 44 countries represented in some way all confessional families within the Christian world, except the Roman Catholic Church (see **RCC and pre-Vatican II ecumenism**). On the next day the assembly accepted the constitution of the WCC, and the newly organized fellowship of churches issued its message: "Christ has made us his own, and he is not divided. In seeking him we find one another. Here at Amsterdam we have committed ourselves afresh to him, and have covenanted with one another in constituting the World Council of Churches. We intend to stay together."

Amsterdam defined the WCC tasks in a general way in its constitution and more specifically in its decisions concerning policies, programmes and budget. The assembly authorized the WCC to make common pronouncements to the churches and to the world, but clearly defined the nature and limits of such pronouncements.

## BASIS

The 1948 inaugural assembly declared: "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour" (see **WCC, basis of**). Soon this formulation gave rise to requests for a clearer definition of the Christ-centredness of the churches' common calling, a more explicit expression of the Trinitarian faith and a specific reference to the holy scriptures. The resulting reformulation, adopted by the third assembly (New Delhi 1961), still stands: "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Less than a confession of Christian faith and more than a formula, the basis serves as a point of reference for WCC members, a source or ground of coherence. Since the WCC is not itself a church, it passes no judgment upon the sincerity or firmness with which member churches accept the basis or upon the seriousness with which they take their membership. Thus, the basis itself comes under William Temple's formula:

"Any authority the Council will have consists in the weight which it carries with the churches by its own wisdom."

## NATURE AND PURPOSE

In 1948 the member churches understood that the WCC was not a church above them, certainly not the church universal or incipient "world church". They understood the Council to be an instrument whereby the churches bear witness together in their common allegiance to Jesus Christ, search for that unity which Christ wills for his one and only church, and cooperate in matters which require common statements and actions. The assembly acknowledged Visser 't Hooft's description of the WCC: "an emergency solution, a stage on the road,... a fellowship which seeks to express that unity in Christ already given to us and to prepare the way for a much fuller and much deeper expression of that unity".

What was not clear in 1948 was how this spiritual nature of the fellowship should relate to member churches' understanding of the nature and limits of the WCC, and to their understanding of their ecclesial relation to other members. In short, did membership of a church in the WCC have any implications for the "self-understanding" or ecclesiological position of that church?

To clarify this position, the WCC central committee in 1950 adopted the Toronto statement\* on the church, the churches and the World Council of Churches. It was forged in "a debate of considerable intensity" (Visser 't Hooft), even though its contents "defined a starting point, and not the way or the goal" (Lesslie Newbigin). According to this statement, the WCC "is not and must never become a super-church". It "cannot and should not be based on any one particular conception of the church". Membership does not "imply that a church treats its own conception of the church as merely relative" or accepts a "specific doctrine concerning the nature of church unity". Nevertheless, the common witness of the members "must be based on the common recognition that Christ is the divine head of the body", which, "on the basis of the New Testament", is the one church of Christ. Membership of the one church of Christ "is more inclusive" than the membership in one's own

church body, but it “does not imply that each church must regard the other member churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word”. Yet common WCC membership implies in practice that the churches “should recognize their solidarity with each other, render assistance to each other in case of need, and refrain from such actions as are incompatible with brotherly relationships”.

While debates still continue on the status of both the basis and the Toronto statement, the functions and purposes of the WCC and its organs are changing, in statement and in fact. The present list of functions, approved in 1983 by the sixth assembly (Vancouver), reveals far less neutrality in the ecclesiological understandings of the churches than an impartial reading of the basis and of the Toronto statement would suggest, even if the functions are not binding upon the member churches.

A clear example of this shift is from the vague WCC purpose (1948) “to carry out the work of the world movements for Faith and Order and Life and Work” to the much more specific purpose in the present constitution (Harare 1998): the churches “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”. It would be hard to describe these changes as harmonious with Toronto’s conclusion that “membership does not imply the acceptance of a specific doctrine concerning the nature of church unity”. The churches may now be taking for granted what they might not have in 1948. Or are their representatives at assemblies only being swept up into verbal approvals while in fact their constituents back home hold different self-understandings?

This question itself may support the judgment that in many ways the Toronto statement is out of date. Many of its affirmations about what the WCC is *not* or about what WCC membership does *not* imply are indeed still valid and need re-affirmation. But can one expect a 1950 “emergency solution”, crafted in the nervousness of an infant taking its first steps, to do justice to the collective ecumenical and mis-

sionary experience of the churches in six continents over more than 50 years?

The present questions about the WCC’s identity and role in the ecumenical movement do not simply repeat those of 1950. What do the churches today see as the present status of the one ecumenical movement and its future? How “one” is it? What are the visions or images that are functionally alive in the member churches when one says “ecumenism”? Are the visions and images the same in non-member churches? What is the basis for a “common calling” of the churches and their members to a “common vision”, and how “common” is it? Who is excluded? What are the criteria for evaluating the development, standstills and setbacks of the ecumenical movement in the churches since 1948? Is the WCC the natural framework and context of witness in fellowship for the member churches, in particular in congregational thinking and acting? If not, why not?

The pressure of such questions prompted the WCC, in anticipation of its 50th anniversary, to undertake the most honest comprehensive examination ever of the ecumenical movement, the churches and the WCC. Adopted by the central committee in 1997 and commended for study to the member churches, the policy statement “Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC” (CUV) was presented to the 1998 Harare assembly which agreed on the following: (1) The member churches do not yet dare to speak of full consensus about a “common” understanding or a “common” vision: “towards” remains an honest preposition. It indicates “an ongoing journey of self-reflection on the nature and purpose of the ecumenical movement in general, and of the WCC’s vocation in particular”. (2) The renewal of the WCC cannot come about simply by re-arranging the general structures, the programmes and the Geneva office. Nevertheless, one should not rest in comfortable “institutional captivity”. The WCC does need “changes in structure, style and ethos” (see **criticism of the ecumenical movement and of the WCC**). (3) The core of what the WCC is meant to be is the *fellowship* of the churches, not the organization or the institution.

While reflection on the common understanding and vision was going on, the Or-

thodox churches, in a statement made at Salonika in April 1998, formulated several sharp questions regarding their participation and membership which had become increasingly serious for them. Harare responded by setting up the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, a parity body with equal numbers of representatives of Orthodox and other member churches. Many of the Orthodox concerns are now appreciated by other members as well. The quest is for more than "negotiated structural compromises".

## ORGANIZATION

Amsterdam defined the WCC tasks in its constitution and in its decisions concerning policies and programmes. WCC programmes are a service in the name of the member churches and a service to all the churches, members or not. The WCC discharges its legislative and executive functions through the assembly, the central committee and the executive committee, and through the officers and subordinate bodies of the general secretariat.

The *assembly* (see **WCC assemblies**) is the supreme legislative body which determines WCC policies and reviews their implementation in its programmes. Ordinarily meeting at seven-year intervals, it is composed of voting delegates elected by the member churches. It elects no more than eight WCC presidents for the presidium and, from the delegates, it elects not more than 150 members of the central committee.

The central committee allocates the assembly seats to the member churches on the basis of numerical size, confessional representation and geographical distribution. The following table indicates the growing participation in the assemblies.

<i>Assembly</i>	<i>Delegates</i>	<i>Churches</i>
1. Amsterdam 1948	351	147
2. Evanston 1954	502	161
3. New Delhi 1961	577	197
4. Uppsala 1968	704	235
5. Nairobi 1975	676	285
6. Vancouver 1983	847	301
7. Canberra 1991	842	317
8. Harare 1998	966	336

The rapid decolonization\* of the post-war world began in Asia with India and Pakistan becoming independent in 1947, and among majority-ruled states in sub-Saharan Africa with Ghana's independence in 1957. The subsequent growth of the national churches and the rise of indigenous clerical and lay leadership within them, and the increased number of Orthodox churches, are reflected in the regional representation at the assemblies. In 1948 the large majority of the 351 delegates of the 147 churches were in fact Western European and North American. At Harare 1998 the regional breakdown of the 966 delegates was much more balanced, demonstrating that the WCC has become a truly global body present in all major regions and cultures of the world. This geographical spread indicates a shift that is affecting the ecumenical movement as a whole. The traditional centre, which in 1948 embraced the areas of the North Atlantic, Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, is fading in its dominant influence over those centres in the southern hemisphere – Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and Oceania.

As both a geographical and a historical re-positioning, these areas are becoming the new centres of theological articulations, personal and social ethical stances, spiritualities, church disciplines, artistic expressions and interchurch cooperation in common witness. As R.D. Paul of the Church of South India said to the churches of the West at the 1954 Evanston assembly: "You have taught us how to think, but now that we are mature, we are trying to think the message of Christianity out for ourselves. We can now be trusted to look after our own affairs. We have become your partner in the great mission of the church to the world." Whether in the WCC assemblies or in its programmes, all voices have begun to receive an equal hearing. No one ecumenical story is privileged. The ecumenical movement has become polycentric. Nevertheless, the "contexts", no matter what their variety, still have the theatre of God's one church in God's one world as *the* context.

The more recent strong recommendations and negotiations (not always successful with some churches) to have an adequate cross-section of men and women, adults and youth, clergy and lay have produced changes in the composition of recent assemblies:

Assembly	Percentage of delegates who were		
	Women	Under 30	Lay
Uppsala 1968	9	4	25
Nairobi 1975	22	9	42
Vancouver 1983	30	13	46
Canberra 1991	35	11	46
Harare 1998	35	13	42

The delegates form the core of an assembly but do not by themselves shape the milieu. Even at Amsterdam, far more numerous than the delegates were alternates, WCC staff and co-opted staff, consultants, accredited visitors, media representatives, and youth delegates and stewards (two traditional breeding grounds for ecumenical leaders: William Temple had been a steward at Edinburgh in 1910, and Philip Potter, later WCC general secretary, was a youth delegate at Amsterdam).

Also growing is the number of other participants: delegated observers and observers from non-member churches and organizations (289 at Harare, including 23 Roman Catholics); delegated representatives from Christian World Communions\* and national and regional councils of churches; invited guests (of the 44 at Harare, 9 were Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh).

The *central committee* is the main continuation body between assemblies. Meeting every 12-18 months, it implements assembly policies by approving and reviewing programmes and determining priorities among them, adopts the budget and secures financial support, and elects the 14-16 non-ex-officio members of the *executive committee* (which normally meets twice a year). The central committee has grown from 90 members in 1948 to the present 150. The executive committee now has 24 members.

The general secretary is elected by the central committee and is accountable to it. He or she is the chief WCC executive and heads the staff comprising those who conduct the continuing operations. The following have served in this capacity: W.A. Visser 't Hooft (1948-66), Eugene Carson Blake (1966-72), Philip A. Potter (1972-84), Emilio Castro (1985-92), and Konrad Raiser (1993-).

## STRUCTURES

For some committed ecumenists, since the 1950s there has been too much preoccupa-

tion with structures in the churches and in the ecumenical movement, at first both reasonable and proper but over the years becoming "dangerously neurotic" (Max Warren, 1976). Most take for granted that effectiveness in church life, as in the world of business, requires that scarcely a decade passes without important organizational changes. Others judge that in fact the predominant Western "business management model" for churches and the WCC has hurt and dimmed more than fostered and expressed their nature and tasks. All agree there is no "right and perfect" WCC as an organization and that any decisions about structures, old or new, should be pragmatic.

The 1948 Amsterdam assembly set up 12 departments, on paper somewhat disparate and uneven, but in fact closely supervised and evaluated by the general secretariat. The number of the executive/programme staff was less than the authorized 36 until the Evanston assembly (1954). Several churches had made available the services of their own paid people to strengthen the staff for shorter or longer periods of time.

The experience of the first six years showed the necessity of more effective coordination of the various departments. Evanston provided the WCC with four divisions, each with departments: (1) *studies* – faith and order, church and society, evangelism and missionary studies; (2) *ecumenical action* – youth, laity, men and women in church and society, Ecumenical Institute; (3) *interchurch aid/refugees and international affairs*; and (4) *information*. This model continued through the New Delhi assembly (1961). The IMC-WCC integration in itself had brought about sufficient alterations. The large Eastern European Orthodox churches of USSR, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland had just become members. More drastic changes would not be wise.

The Uppsala assembly (1968) authorized re-organization for "simplification and coordination". Effective in 1972, it tried to reflect the WCC's main constitutional functions in three flexible administrative units with broad mandates: *faith and witness, justice and service, and education and renewal*. The units would overcome the noticeable separation between study and action and would encourage greater participation by

various segments of the WCC constituency through sub-units with specific programmes. Each unit had a committee of members from the central committee and from the governing bodies of the various sub-units. This overall structure remained in place, with some further adjustments, after the Canberra assembly in 1991.

After the Harare assembly, a new internal organization came into effect, based on the insights gained through the CUV process. The Council now has four "clusters", each made up of several teams: (1) *relations* (teams: church and ecumenical relations, inter-religious relations and dialogue, international relations, and regional relations and resource sharing); (2) *issues and themes* (education and ecumenical formation, faith and order, justice, peace and creation, mission and evangelism); (3) *communication* (public information, publications and documentation); (4) *finance, services and administration*.

Since the Nairobi assembly, WCC programmes have revealed a vast extension of activities with a large breadth of concerns and interests. The operational teams have a variety of histories, methods of work, even ways of receiving funding. The focus of some units is quite distinct; for others there is considerable overlap in the issues or constituencies. Few programmes have had built-in clauses for termination. Few can expect more staff and funding, even if new interest groups should ask for new programmes.

## FINANCES

The financial situation of the WCC is symptomatic of the strengths and weaknesses of programmes and church relationships, but it also mirrors world financial trends such as recessions, debt crises and inflation. The same factors also affect the member churches and donor agencies. Wide fluctuations in exchange rates of other major currencies against the Swiss franc (in which the WCC keeps its accounts) create problems, since even when churches increase their giving from one year to the next, the value of this income in Swiss francs may in fact decline.

Where does the money come from? The total income for 2001 was Sfr.47,091,000. About 95% came from member churches,

their mission and aid agencies, individuals and governments; the rest came from investments, property rentals, publications, etc.; 55% of membership fees (2001, Sfr.7.1 million) were from Europe and 31% from North America. Although only a small percentage of the total income came from churches in other regions, some of these contributed more per capita than did larger and wealthier churches. Churches are to make annual contributions "commensurate with their resources". Yet some of the members take no financial responsibility for the WCC, neglecting to pay the prescribed minimum membership fee of Sfr.1000.

The WCC receives money both to cover its operating budget and to be channelled to ecumenical programmes and projects around the world. The income for the WCC is either "undesignated" for the WCC's flexible use or "designated" for specific unit programmes. The "undesignated" portion of total funds is steadily declining, from 30% in 1981 to 15% in 2001.

Where does the WCC's budget go? The total of expenditures for 2001 was Sfr.58,588,000. The most expensive item in this operating budget was the payroll for total staff. In order to improve financial equilibrium, there had been a major reduction in staff from 369 people in 1990 to 201 in 2001. The 2001 payroll was Sfr.21.2 million.

No matter how diligently the WCC tries to increase income and decrease costs, its long-term projected general income and its careful stewardship will be more and more necessary considerations in setting priorities for support of limited programmes and competent salaried personnel. One can no longer reasonably expect, or demand, the WCC to carry out a sweeping ecumenical agenda.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Structure charts and budget sheets do not in themselves capture the new or growing demands for effective functioning of relationships between the WCC and member churches, non-member churches and groups, and other ecumenical bodies. Pertinent facts include the following. *Membership* has more than doubled since Amsterdam, from 147 churches to 342 in 2002. *National Christian councils* in association or "working relations" with the WCC now total over 100.

*Regional councils or conferences*, non-existent in 1948, have been established in Africa (1963), Asia (1959), the Caribbean (1973), Europe (1964), Latin America (1982), the Middle East (1974), and the Pacific (1966).

The structures of *Christian World Communions*\* have become more active, with larger scopes, as have other international organizations, such as the YMCAs, YWCAs, WSCF, and United Bible Societies. The *Roman Catholic Church*, though not a member, has active representation in nearly all WCC programmatic activities (see **Joint Working Group**). The RCC is a full member of over 60 national councils and of the Caribbean, Middle East, and Pacific regional conferences, and it has close working relations with the other national and regional councils.

The fastest-growing churches are in the *conservative evangelical* and *Pentecostal* families (see **Evangelicals**, **Pentecostals**). Most of these groups are not WCC members. Some are in dialogue with the WCC, others are explicitly anti-WCC or strangers to it (see **evangelical ecumenical concerns**). The Harare assembly authorized the formation of a joint consultative group with Pentecostals, which became operational in 2000.

This scenario of relationships requires "an open and safe ecumenical space" (K. Raiser) in which all willing partners in the one ecumenical movement can participate equally. This calls for a wider tent, an extended table, a more intentional, sustaining inclusive networking of member and non-member churches and their agencies, the Christian World Communions, regional and national conferences and councils of churches, and international ecumenical organizations with their specific focuses. In the post-Harare period discussion has developed around the so-called "forum proposal" which aims at establishing such a space for dialogue. There is a legitimate concern that this should not lead to a merger into one more world church bureaucracy or, worse, a substitute for the ecumenical accountability and responsibility of ongoing membership in the WCC.

Another recent development is the formation of several autonomous agencies dealing with certain areas of ecumenical work, in

which the WCC participates along with other ecumenical partners and churches. Examples are Action by Churches Together (ACT) for ecumenical response to emergency situations, Ecumenical News International (ENI) and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA). To each of these bodies the WCC has delegated tasks for which it used to assume direct programme responsibility in the past.

The numerical increase and geographical spread of the WCC's constituency in the widest sense does not in itself answer the question: What is the quality of fellowship? A greater cross-section of the churches' life is found in the representative participation in the work and decisions of the WCC constitutional bodies. Yet there are demands for greater involvement of more member churches in creating and reviewing WCC policies and programmes. There are also calls for "more deliberate use of staff travel and church visits, in order to listen to the needs and concerns of the churches, to share in their life, and to represent the Council as a whole and interpret its programmes and concerns" (central committee, 1989). Yet for all this, there is less money and fewer staff.

The member churches themselves vary widely in their own structures and personnel to receive WCC services – ranging from one person handling all communication for the WCC to the efficient communication within the appropriate constituency of a church and its follow-up by responsible study and action. Those churches that are seriously committed to the WCC are also ecumenically engaged in local and regional activities or in organized fellowships and bilateral dialogues; they often find too much on their ecumenical plates to digest. An overload of WCC programmes in service to the churches could thus be contributing to the headache of reception,\* i.e., the process of disciplined digestion and ownership at all levels of the churches' life, thought and practice.

The very success of the WCC in carrying out its various purposes over more than five decades has uncovered failures and weaknesses in both the WCC and member churches. The WCC is a servant to the churches who call each other to solidarity in mutual accountability regarding ecumenical goals and means. In the first decades of the



new millennium, the focus of ecumenical activity most likely will not be directed primarily on the WCC but on the churches themselves.

TOM STRANSKY

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