



Photo: Peter Kenny/WCC

Teaching Ecumenism in the context of World Christianity

International conference at the Ecumenical Institute Bossey

10-13 June 2020

Place: Ecumenical Institute, Château de Bossey
Chemin Chenevière 2, 1279 Bogis-Bossey, Switzerland

Contact: bossey_conference@wcc-coe.org

Web: www.oikoumene.org/bosseyconference

Overcoming the pain of division between churches across different traditions and cultural contexts and the walls that separate humanity is a core concern of the modern ecumenical movement. Ecumenism embodies the search for reconciliation and unity, the emancipation from oppression and the collaborative work for justice and peace. The most recent unity statement of the World Council of Churches at the Busan Assembly in 2013 outlines the planetary scope: "The unity of the Church, the unity of the human community and the unity of the whole creation are interconnected."

In the midst of this large scope, the ecumenical movement continues to uphold the call to visible ecclesial unity, mission in unity, embodied in the common confession of the apostolic faith, the mutual recognition of baptism, Eucharistic fellowship, the mutual recognition of ministry and members, and common witness and service.



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Recent decades have witnessed an increasing awareness of the diversity of Christianity. This has facilitated a shift in research and study of Christianity towards exploring and appreciating diversity, concomitantly resulting in the questioning of classical understandings of visible church unity. The recognition of the diversity and the shifting nature of the epicentre of Christianity in a post-colonial world towards the 'global South' also led to the emergence of World Christianity as an academic field that reflects on the complexity of Christianity as a pluricultural, global phenomenon.

World Christianity includes historiographic and ethnographic study to provide accounts of local Christianities around the world. It pays specific attention to how local Christianities shaped themselves in critical and creative tension and interaction with local religious and cultural realities. Furthermore, it provides space to examine the changing roles of religion in fostering identity at the intersection of faith, politics and culture. It opens opportunities for critically addressing questions of power relations, not the least in contexts of the colonial entanglements of Christianity – both past and present. Focus on mission and interreligious dialogue have become integral, and often indispensable, to the study of world Christianity.

Therefore, some have pointed out that the genealogy of world Christianity is related to the way in which the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century linked the search for unity, mission and interreligious dialogue. However, others rather see a difference if not tension in perspective and focus between "ecumenism" and "world Christianity".

The conference will focus on what it means to teach ecumenism and World Christianity in the twenty-first century. How does academic teaching today deal with the overlapping areas of ecumenical studies, ecumenical theology, world Christianity, mission studies, and interreligious studies? How does the confluence of ecumenism, mission and interreligious dialogue impinge upon Christian self-understanding today that teachers of ecumenism need to be perceptive about? In looking at the interrelationship as well as the tensions between these fields in academic teaching, fundamental methodological, epistemological and theological issues will be addressed.

The conference will bring together senior and as well emerging scholars of diverse disciplines within the field of theology and religious studies who have an interest in ecumenism and World Christianity. Speakers from a broad range of different church traditions and regional contexts will engage on the topic together.

The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey is the international centre for encounter, dialogue and formation of the World Council of Churches. Founded in 1946, the Institute brings together people from diverse churches, cultures and backgrounds for ecumenical learning, academic study and personal exchange.

Each year, the Ecumenical Institute welcomes students from around the world for periods of residential academic study, specializing in ecumenical theology, missiology and social ethics. The diverse teaching faculty is made up of staff from diverse theological, cultural and confessional backgrounds. The Institute and its diplomas are recognized by the University of Geneva.

The "Teaching Ecumenism" conference is organised by the Ecumenical Institute together with related programmatic areas in the World Council of Churches: Ecumenical Theological Education, Faith and Order, Mission and Evangelism, and Interreligious Dialogue and Collaboration.



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