



BEYOND BOUNDARIES

The newsletter of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey

www.bossey.ch



November 2020

Greetings by the Director

Greetings from the Bossey Ecumenical Institute. It has been a year unlike any other at Bossey due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In these uncertain times, we are very thankful for the prayers and support of many people who feel close to the Ecumenical Institute: students, alumni, friends, donors, guests.

By God's grace, our students and faculty are safe and healthy. We made sure that from early on we follow the new national and cantonal regulations to protect students, staff and clients in Bossey. We have been able to continue our mission, providing ecumenical formation and leadership development for young pastors and theologians from around the world.

What is clearer now than a year ago is that the world is in state of rapid change. We can hardly predict what tomorrow will bring. Reading the signs of our times is more challenging because of the speed of change. More and more we need to anticipate what is coming so we are prepared to address it. No matter how extraordinary the times, our faith in God and our commitment to our important work can keep us focused on what matters most.

It is a great joy to note that 29 students have started the new academic year in September 2020. These young women and men have come to the Ecumenical Institute despite all odds in order to study ecumenism and to live ecumenism together in the residential programme in Bossey.

After I was appointed as Interim General Secretary of the WCC earlier this year, I received many emails with greetings from former Bossey students. I have been



profoundly touched by their continuous commitment to ecumenical relations. It is a blessing to see the seeds sown in Bossey grow in many parts of the world.

May the Church continue to be a beacon of transformation reflecting the 'Peace and Justice' of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, amidst the global reality of a raging pandemic, as well as the long-continuing pandemics of inequity and injustice and extensive ecological and economic devastation. Let our unity and action reflect God's hope and love.

*Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Sauca
Director of the Ecumenical Institute
Interim General Secretary of the WCC*

Contents

Greetings by the Director	2	Ecumenical Education and Formation (EEF) Commission's Third Meeting	6
The Ecumenical Institute at the Time of COVID-19 Crisis	3	Jürgen Moltmann Lecturing at Bossey	7
Applications open for academic year 2021/22	4	Appreciating Benjamin Simon's time at Bossey	8
Graduation Ceremony, January 2020	4	Martin Robra: Ecclesiology and Ethics	8
Graduation Ceremony, June 2020	5	Bossey Remembers John Mbiti	9
Esther Mombo Gives Keynote Address at <i>Dies Academicus</i>	5	Hans-Ruedi Weber dies at 97	9

The Ecumenical Institute at the Time of COVID-19 Crisis



As we prepared for the graduation of the CAS and CC students in January 2020, we could not have imagined what the rest of the year would look like. The news of the new coronavirus was echoing in Europe, as in the rest of the world. It was not long before things changed, lockdown, physical distancing, wearing of masks and the actual world became "virtual".

The Ecumenical Institute had to adapt to the new reality. The faculty chose the path of hope and courage by opting to keep the students in the Masters program instead of sending them back to their countries. The decision to keep the students at Bossey also meant adjusting to a new style of life. While the Château was closed and most WCC activities either were postponed or cancelled, the students continued their studies and worked on their thesis.

The Institute took measures to guarantee a healthy and safe environment and provided a hybrid of virtual and in-person accompaniment. It filled our hearts with joy to see the six students from Georgia, India, Nigeria, Serbia and Switzerland graduate on 17 June 2020 in a ceremony which marked the first in-person prayer

at the Bossey chapel since the pandemic started in March.

Our attention was at the same time on the 2020/2021 academic year. As a faculty, we met several times via Zoom during the spring, to deliberate on what options there are for September - distance learning, blended learning and other alternatives to our preference of a regular academic year.

We postponed or cancelled the summer programs including Bossey Interfaith Summer course (Certificate of Advanced Studies in Interreligious Studies), the planned international conference on "Teaching Ecumenism in the Context of World Christianity" and the Bossey English summer course. The ray of hope emerged when we realized that the English course could take place for at least one month in August 2020 with seven students.

As the lockdown of a number of countries and international travel restrictions eased, we thought having a modest number of 15 to 20 students would be a tremendous success for the 2020/2021 academic year. Far beyond our expectation, the academic year has started with 29

out of the 34 admitted students. The students come from China, Egypt, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mexico, Myanmar, the Philippines, Romania, Russia, Sierra Leone, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Zimbabwe.

One of the remarkable things about the current group of students is the composition of the student body. Among them are 14 women and 15 men, coming from 22 countries and 19 different church traditions.

Ecumenical formation and education continue to be at the heart of our mission at Bossey. On account of the pandemic, we have taken all necessary precautions to nurture a healthy environment so that our students remain in good health during their stay at Bossey including more emphasis on physical distance, wearing of masks, and reserving rooms for the quarantine should the need arise. We hope that the success story of this year will continue to serve as a sign of hope in our time.

*Fr Prof. Dr Lawrence Iwuamadi
Academic Dean*

Applications open for academic year 2021/22

Apply for the academic year 2021-2022. The deadline is 30 November 2020!

For more information, application forms and guidelines, please visit: www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/the-ecumenical-institute-bossey or contact: Bossey_Admissions@wcc-coe.org



Graduation Ceremony, January 2020

The graduation ceremony for the students of the Complementary Certificate and of the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies took place on 28 January 2020.

Members of churches from nearby local communities and supporters of Christian unity, as well as WCC staff, attended the ceremony.

Fr Prof. Dr Lawrence Iwuamadi, dean of the Ecumenical Institute, noted that since his joining the Institute, the 2019/2020 students were "the most diverse group – 32 students coming from 23 churches and from 19 countries, with almost equal numbers of women and men."

The students belong to different Christian traditions, including Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Pentecostalism and they came from China, Cuba, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Korea, Madagascar, Nigeria, Romania, Serbia, Sierra Leone,



Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, and the United States of America.

At the ceremony, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, underlined that the world needs "those people who have faith" and that Bossey is the place where the students have strengthened their faith and where they could move forward in faith.

The dean of the University of Geneva's Faculty of Theology, Prof Dr Ghislain Waterlot, spoke about Bossey as "one of the places par excellence" where God's love can be manifested. He added that "this is one of the reasons why the Faculty of Theology of the University of Geneva believes that what links it to the Bossey Institute is very precious".

Graduation Ceremony, June 2020

After a yearlong period of intense study and after a successful defence of their Master thesis, on 17 June 2020, six students, coming from Nigeria, India, Georgia, Switzerland, and Serbia, graduated from the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey.

Being well equipped with the unique theological training and ecumenical experience of Bossey, they are now ambassadors of Christian unity in their specific contexts.

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, WCC interim general secretary and director of the Ecumenical Institute, highlighted what the graduated students are bringing to their churches: "Your impact in your local churches could be great; be prepared that you will be given important responsibilities."



Photo: Grégoire de Fombelle/WCC

One of the graduated Master students, Emma Van Dorp, from Switzerland, shared a message on behalf of the group: "We all feel that we have had an eschatological foretaste of the eternal community of the Kingdom of God through

our community life at Bossey. This is why for us it is clear that Bossey goes beyond divisions. It is an oasis and safe place where one can easily feel the invisible unity among us that has become visible. Unity is possible, it is livable."

Esther Mombo Gives Keynote Address at *Dies Academicus*

The *Dies Academicus* is a highlight during the autumn semester as all students and faculty jointly engage with a topical theme. The *Dies Academicus* on 4 November 2019 focused on diversity of World Christianity and discussed its social, theological and spiritual dimensions. We were pleased to welcome Kenyan theologian Professor Esther Mombo as keynote speaker on the theme "Understanding World Christianity Today - The Case Of Africa".

Esther Mombo was born into an ecumenical environment in East Africa. She has a transcontinental education and told students that African Christianity is "young and vibrant", but that it needs to listen to the women in the pews.

"It is a Christianity that has produced a theology- African Christian theology, black theology, circle theology. It is a Christianity



Photo: Peter Kenny/WCC

that is young and vibrant, most churches and church-related institutions have celebrated centenaries – one hundred years old," said Mombo. "Over the last 50 years, the church in Africa has made great strides on women's leadership, providing leaders for international organizations, but it is

still a drop in the ocean compared to the male counterparts," asserted Mombo. She said their full role is "not yet felt because the ideology of patriarchy is still at work". "To understand African Christianity, means listening to women in their work as they serve God and humanity in society".

Ecumenical Education and Formation (EEF) Commission's Third Meeting

The EEF Commission, constituted at the 10th WCC Assembly in 2013, met at Bossey Institute from 29 October to 2 November 2019 for its third and last meeting between Assemblies. The Commission reflected in formal sessions and a panel session on the importance of ecumenism in theological education in the WCC.

A panel discussion moderated by Prof. Rudolf von Sinner, (Department of theology of the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná (PUC-PR), Curitiba, Brazil), moderator of the EEF Commission was held to deepen the Commission's dialogue. Among others, the panel reflected on the ecumenical dimension of theology, and ways to apply it effectively in theological teaching and research. It also explored ways in which the WCC project on Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) and the Network of Institutions of Higher Ecumenical Theological Education (NIHETE) could contribute to fostering the teaching of ecumenism.¹ The panel



Photo: Marcelo Schneider/WCC

featured three speakers, namely, Archbishop Job of Telmessos (Getcha) (Institute of Postgraduate Studies of Orthodox Theology Chambésy, Switzerland, Prof. Christophe Chalamet, (Faculty of Theology, University of Geneva, Switzerland) and Prof. Esther Mombo (Theology department at St. Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya), EEF vice-moderator.

Another highlight was the launch of the special edition of

the Ecumenical Review under the rubric 'Pan-Africa Women of Faith and a Vision of Inclusive Global Theological Education', guest edited by Prof. Amele Adamavi-Aho Ekue, immediate past ETE Programme Executive, and Rev. Dr Angelique Walker-Smith, Coordinator of the Pan African Women's Ecumenical Empowerment Network, PAWEEN.

¹ The Network of Institutions of Higher Ecumenical Theological Education (NIHETE) is an initiative of the EEF Commission in cooperation with ETE to foster connections, collaborations, sharing and encouragement between teachers of ecumenism across the globe and a platform for interaction, presentation of the work developed in each of the institutions and sharing of materials. The network took a leading role in developing the Global Ecumenical Institute (GETI 2018) for the WCC Mission Conference in Arusha, Tanzania. NIHETE is also involved in the planning of GETI 2022 to take place at the 11th WCC Assembly.

Jürgen Moltmann Lecturing at Bossey



Photo: Peter Kenny/WCC

On 3 December 2019, 93-year old Professor Jürgen Moltmann from Germany gave a lecture on church and nationalism at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. Relating theological insights to his own life experience, Moltmann outlined his theological perspectives on the relationship between church, nation and humanity. "The church of Christ ecumenically embraces the whole inhabited earth. She is not a tribal religion, nor a

Western religion, nor a white religion, but the church of all humanity," Moltmann affirmed. He critically looked at the new wave of nationalism taking root in the contemporary world and underlined that this is a "setback for humanity," arguing that "humanity precedes nationality." His lecture at the Ecumenical Institute conveyed clearly: Theology that is inspiring and relevant has a lot to do with experience, but

goes beyond individual experience, as it finds resonance in other people and churches in the global fellowship. Moltmann's theology delineates an eco-theological horizon: "The church worships Christ as the reconciler of the cosmos and is interested not only in peace on earth but peace with the earth. The ecological peace of creation matters to her in times of climate change and the destruction of the earth."

Appreciating Benjamin Simon's Time at Bossey

Rev. Dr Benjamin Simon joined the faculty of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey as Professor for Ecumenical Missiology in 2016. He brought along a wealth of knowledge built on expertise in his areas of specialization and his intercultural experience coming from his relations with established and migrant churches. With passion, he transmitted the deeper realities and challenges of contemporary understanding of mission to the students. His achievements at Bossey include two years coordination of the Bossey Interfaith Summer course. Seconded for four years by the three mission agencies, Council for World Mission (CWM), United Evangelical Mission (UEM) and CEVAA Communauté d'Eglises

en Mission, Benjamin's contract ended in 2020. We have been in intense contact with the general secretaries of the three mission organisations that sponsor this chair. We are deeply appreciative that they decided to continue their support and partnership with the Ecumenical Institute.

One of the challenges resulting from the pandemic is that the mission agencies were unable to nominate candidates and experts in the field for consideration in time before the new academic year. Though already in a new position in the World Council of Churches as the programme executive for church relations, the Ecumenical Institute has temporarily invited Dr Simon in September 2020 to coordinate the



Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

module on ecumenical missiology in collaboration with other colleagues until a new professor will be confirmed. The Ecumenical Institute is grateful to Dr Simon for his immense contribution to the life and formation offered at Bossey and looks forward to continued collaboration in the future.

Fr Prof. Dr Lawrence Iwuamadi

Martin Robra: Ecclesiology and Ethics



Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

If I ask you what the following familiar names have ecumenically in common – Martin Robra, Margot Kässmann, Gert Rüppell, Dietrich Werner, Eva Sybille Vogel, Heinrich Schäfer – a good answer would be that they are all part of Konrad Raiser's Bochum doctoral band.

Konrad Raiser trained a generation of ecumenists, scholars, leaders, to hold together in critical tension the spirit of unity and the spirit of the time. In his 20s, Raiser had dreamed of industrial chaplaincy,

but in his 30s he found himself in the a-temporal Secretariat of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order. You cannot be exposed to such a paradox without becoming ecumenically creative.

Martin Robra has embodied and pursued in his own way, in the WCC and at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute the spirit of the Raiser ecumenical school. His doctoral thesis on ecumenical social ethics focused on the evolution of the debate on economy in the WCC up to the paradigm shift represented in his analysis by the WCC 1980s' convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. The outstanding WCC study on "Ecclesiology and Ethics" was Life and Work's Robra and Faith and Order's Tom Best working together neither in separation nor in confusion. The list is in fact very long.

I noticed for the first time Martin's proverbial solicitude and his famous zen style in an empty train Geneva-Basel-Strasbourg 20 years ago, with the late Milan Opocensky. He welcomed me very kindly and patiently to a conversation for which I was not prepared and I thought that day that I would never accuse him of developing an argument in a Cartesian way.

In his WCC farewell party, in November 2019, Martin said that deep in his heart "everything is about theology and the God of life", and that Christians and churches cannot deepen their fellowship "without common witness for justice and peace". Raiser was there. No confusion. No separation.

Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus

Bossey Remembers John Mbiti

Kenyan born Prof. John Samuel Mbiti who passed away on 6 October 2019 served as Director of Bossey Ecumenical Institute from 1974 to 1980. During his tenure, he hosted a series of intercultural conferences with a goal for African, Asian and other theologians for ecumenical encounter and dialogue. The first conference, in June 1976, focused on Asian and African contributions to current theology. It brought together more than eighty participants. The second in the series, titled, 'Confessing Christ in Different Cultures', was held at Bossey Institute, in July 1977,

and was attended by one hundred people from thirty-five countries. The third conference's theme was 'Indigenous Theology and the Universal Church'.

His body of written work is extensive and includes a translation of the Bible into his mother tongue Kikamba. At the time of his passing, he was emeritus professor of the University of Bern and retired parish minister in Bergdorf, Switzerland.

The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey celebrates the life of Mbiti and mourns the death of a renowned ecumenist and pioneer of African theology.



Photo: Naveen Qayyum/WCC

Hans-Ruedi Weber Dies at 97

During his long career, Rev. Dr Hans-Ruedi Weber, who died on 18 October 2020 at the age of 97, made the Bible come alive for thousands of people through Bible studies that he coordinated with groups from many different cultures, contexts and situations. Born on 21 March 1923, in Ruchwil, Switzerland, Weber served at the WCC as director of the department on the laity (1955-61), associate director and professor at the Ecumenical Institute Bossey (1961-71), and director of biblical studies (1971-88).

One of Weber's best known books was *On a Friday Noon: Meditations under the Cross*, which matched artworks related to the crucifixion with biblical reflections, and was translated into different languages. Another widely-circulated book, *Experiments with Bible Study*, introduced readers and church groups to ways of getting to know the scriptures through music, drama and images.

Baldwin Sjollema, first director of the WCC's Programme to Combat



Hans-Ruedi Weber, 1956. Photo: WCC archives

Racism, in trying to summarize what working with his friend and colleague Rev. Dr Hans-Ruedi Weber meant, wrote: "His strong convictions for the oikoumene were: a passion for the world, the oikoumene, which is God's first love and where God is at work through judgement and salvation. The search for a fuller obedience to the biblical faith in order to receive direction for the churches' prophetic calling to work for reconciliation, and a fostering of an 'ecumenical con-spiracy,' a common spirit and vision, fighting

against divided, self-sufficient church life and working for a more credible witness and service in the world. That task is hopefully still at the heart of the oikoumene, though today we may translate it in other words."

Among Weber's other publications are *The Book That Reads Me: A Handbook for Bible Study Enablers* (1995), *A Laboratory for Ecumenical Life: The Story of Bossey* (1996), *The Militant Ministry* (1963), and *Power: Focus for a Biblical Theology* (1989).

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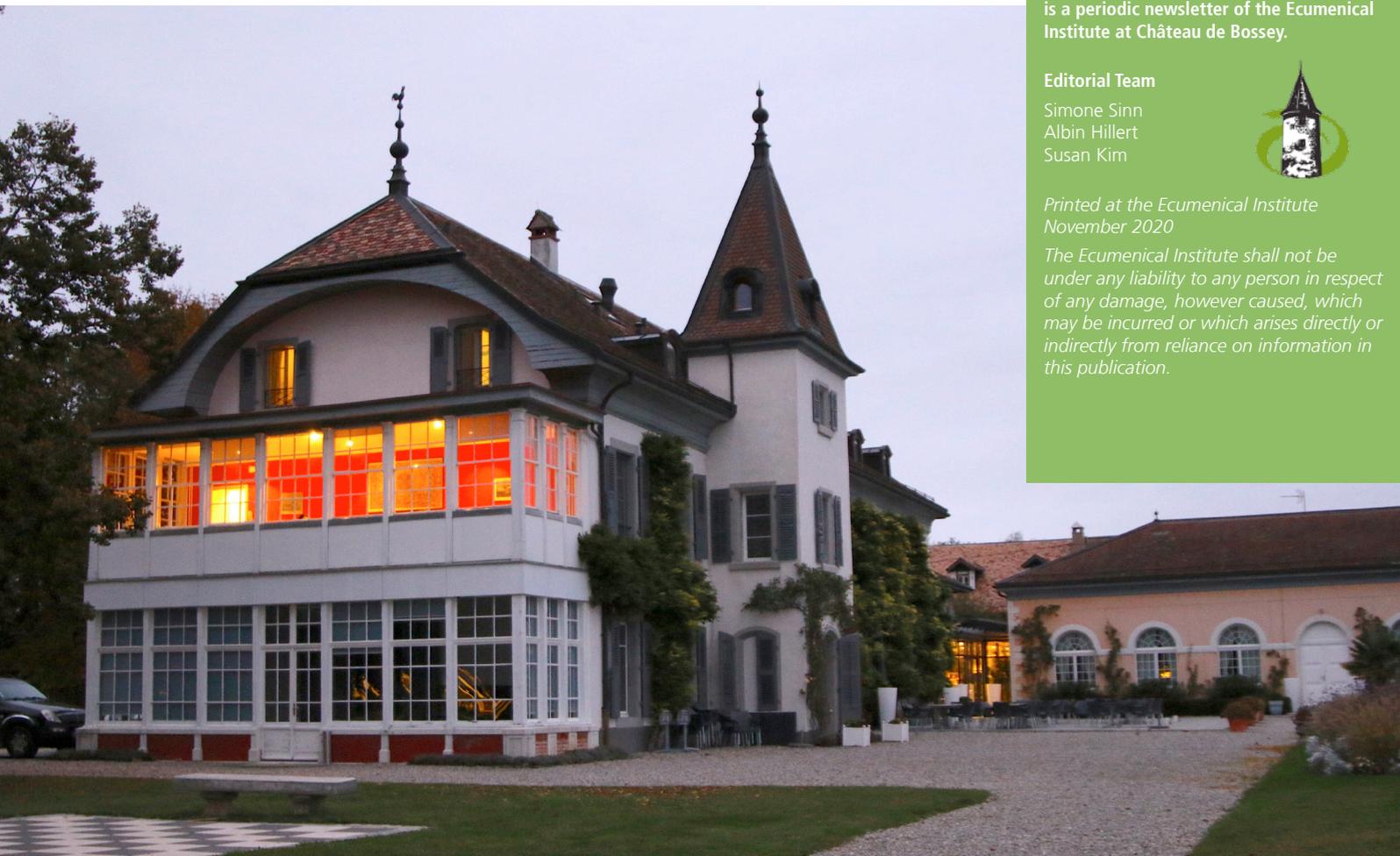
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