**Book Presentation: "A History of the Desire for Christian Unity: Vol 1: Dawn of Ecumenism"**

**19 January 2022**

**Greetings from the acting general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca**

Let me begin by saying how much I appreciate and welcome the publication of the first volume of this new history of ecumenism, or as the title of the project puts it, the “history of the desire for Christian unity.” I particularly wish to thank Professor Alberto Melloni, the director of the project, and Dr Luca Ferracci, the editor of the history, from the Foundation for Religious Studies (FSCIRE) in Bologna, for the proposal that it should be launched during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in conjunction with the World Council of Churches. I was able to get acquainted with this project when I was in Bologna last year for the G20 Interfaith Forum that was hosted in this city, and I am grateful for this webinar which will allow this publication to reach a much wider audience.

It is sometimes said that “a generation which ignores history has no past and no future,” and in some ways the same might be said of the ecumenical movement. We need to understand and be acquainted with our past to look forward to our future, and this volume will help us do that. At a time when wider society often seems to be focussed on what is immediate, what is in the here and how, taking stock of our history can help us to understand better not just where we have come from but our tasks for today and tomorrow.

In his introduction to the volume, Professor Melloni underlines that this history should not be understood as an institutional history - neither as a history of an institution, nor a history produced by an institution.

Instead, Professor Melloni speaks of the history of the “desire for unity” - “the Christian desire for the unity of the churches, the history of the churches’ desire for the unity of Christians, [and] the history of the desire for the unity of Christians … It is the history,” writes Professor Melloni, “not of concepts or models, but that of men and women” (p11-12).

A glimpse at the table of contents of this first volume shows the many ways from the 19th to the mid-20th centuries in which women and men manifested this desire for unity in their lives and witness. I am particularly happy that volume is being presented at the beginning of 2022, the year in which the World Council of Churches will hold its 11th Assembly. It reminds of all those who have preceded us, and of the history on which our present and future is built. The message of our last assembly in 2013 in Busan declared: “We intend to move together!” Looking at the journey of the churches and the ecumenical movement from our founding assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 to Busan, the delegates in Busan wanted to emphasize that ecumenism, the desire for unity, is about moving together step by step, growing every day in mutual accountability, building trust in each other, deepening relationships on the common journey, and finding creative responses to challenges old and new for the benefit of all. When we gather in Karlsruhe, we will do so under the theme “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.” The theme is a reminder that our desire for unity does not come from our own resources, nor is it self-regarding or self-absorbed. Rather our horizon is the world that demands reconciliation and unity, and our desire for unity is nurtured by the love of the triune God manifested in Christ.

As an Orthodox theologian, I am particularly grateful that the first chapter of the book is by John Zizioulas, metropolitan of Pergamon, who many years ago also served in the WCC’s secretariat for Faith and Order.

Let me conclude by thanking once again Professor Melloni and Dr Ferracci for this welcome initiative, and the panellists who will contribute their own perspectives on this history: Professor Dr Michael Quisinsky, Professor Elisabeth Parmentier, and Archbishop Job of Telmessos.