

## **Faith and Order from Today into Tomorrow (Director's Address)**

### **I. China, Contextuality and Visible Unity**

As the WCC Commission on Faith and Order meets for the first time in mainland China, we remember with gratitude the witness of Alopen and other Assyrian Christians of the 7<sup>th</sup> century to what was then called in China the “Luminous Religion”, until Assyrian Christianity virtually disappeared under persecution centuries later; we remember the witness of Franciscan friars; the enlightened and inculturated ministry of the Jesuits; and the work of Orthodox missionaries, some of them later recognised as martyrs. We remember the witness of the first Protestant missionaries early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and their concern for the translation of Scriptures, without losing sight of the tragic connection between the Protestant presence in China, colonialism, and the tragedy of opium addiction. The secular history of Christianity in China has been a history marked by fascination for this civilisation; by attempts at Western colonisation; by the search for an autonomous Chinese Christianity; and by much suffering. It imposes respect rather than quick judgement.

Almost one hundred years ago, in May 1922, the Chinese Protestant churches held in Shanghai a National Christian Conference attended by one thousand people, half of them foreign missionaries, half of them Chinese. The theme of the conference was “The Chinese Church”. A “massive volume” published for the occasion was titled *The Christian Occupation of China*<sup>1</sup>. The Conference issued a message called “The United Church”. We Chinese Christians who represent the various leading denominations, the Conference message read, “express our regret that we are divided by the denominationalism which comes from the West”<sup>2</sup>. We are not unaware of the diverse gifts through the denominations that have been used by God for the enrichment of the Church, the message goes on to say. And it adds: “Yet we recognise fully that denominationalism is based upon differences the historical significance of which, however real and vital to the missionaries from the West, are not shared by us Chinese. Therefore, denominationalism, instead of being a source of inspiration has been and is a source of confusion, bewilderment, and inefficiency.”<sup>3</sup>

Five years later, during the First World Conference on Faith and Order, held in Lausanne, Switzerland, the poet, musician and theologian Liu Tingfang or Timothy Tingfang Lew (1891-1947) opened a public lecture on mission and unity by quoting precisely the message of the 1922 Shanghai conference. Since 1922, Liu Tingfang noted in 1927, “the necessity for Christian unity

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<sup>1</sup> K.S. Latourette, “Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement...” in R. Rouse & S. Neil (eds), *History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, London, SPCK, 1953, p. 377-387.

<sup>2</sup> T. Tingfang Lew, “The Necessity of Unity”, in H.N. Bate (ed.), *Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference – Lausanne 3-21 August 1927*, New York, George H. Doran, 1927, p. 495. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops1.066>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 496.

has become even greater than before”<sup>4</sup>. He gave three reasons for the need for Christian unity in China. The first was the magnitude of the work of evangelisation. The second was the nature of Christian work in China: It is the glory of the Christian gospel, that it has been presented to China not “as a mere system of philosophical thought or a mere set of theological doctrines or a mere system of ecclesiasticism”, he contends, but “as a life of service”<sup>5</sup>. The third was the rise of nationalism that challenged Christianity: “Christianity is being looked upon with grave suspicion at this moment in China because, while it professes to teach love and unity, it is divided against itself. (...) Only a united Church can meet such a challenge.”<sup>6</sup>

Against this background it is understandable that large sectors of Chinese Christianity have pursued since those early days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a way of being church in China which is indigenous, post-denominational, Scriptural and diaconal; a way of being church which is also self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing. Since the early 1980s, this attempt has been embodied particularly by the work of the China Christian Council, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and the Amity Foundation, the three of them pioneered after the mid-1970s by the ecumenical theologian and Anglican Bishop K. H. Ting or Ding Guangxun (1915-2012)<sup>7</sup>.

## II. Faith and Order from Today into Tomorrow

It is in this context, in which the inculturation of the gospel and the concern for Christian unity have been less a matter of theologians' controversy than an issue of survival of human beings as illustrated by the anti-colonial Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), that the WCC Commission on Faith and Order is meeting during these days, after meeting in 2017 in the context that made manifest the connection between the integrity of the faith and the resistance to racism and apartheid.

We are gathered in Nanjing in order to serve theologically the churches as they call each other – or should call each other – to visible unity in Eucharistic fellowship<sup>8</sup>; we are gathered in Nanjing in order to review the work accomplished after Pretoria and to discern in consensus the steps that the three study groups should take between now and 2021 in order to present to our churches the results of our work in ways that are owned by all of us and that may lead them to grow in their real though imperfect communion. If we take full responsibility for the work that we are doing, we will most probably recognise ourselves in its results in the near future.

### Ecclesiology

How can we continue to deepen and to share what our divided churches hold in common about the nature and mission of the One Church in history, on the one hand, while at the same time broadening this ecclesiological dialogue by taking more and more into ecumenical theological

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<sup>4</sup> Ib. p. 496.

<sup>5</sup> Ib. p. 496.

<sup>6</sup> Ib. p. 497.

<sup>7</sup> K.H. Ting, *A Chinese Contribution to Ecumenical Theology*, Geneva, WCC, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Faith and Order By-laws, §3.1.

consideration the ecclesiologies that undergird evolving ways of being church that emerged particularly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and have transformed the face of global Christianity, on the other hand?

This long question has the merit of pointing to the two ongoing projects of Study Group 2 on Ecclesiology and of underlining their interconnection. I'm referring to the work on the responses to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* and, secondly, to the work on understandings of being church that emerged especially during the last century and continue to gain momentum around the world these days. The two projects are held together by the importance of the Faith and Order focus on "ecumenical ecclesiology" for the growth in fellowship of the churches that we represent.

This long question suggests that Faith and Order should not consider that the conclusion of its work on the responses to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* marks the end of the focus on ecclesiology first proposed in 1987<sup>9</sup>, embraced by the plenary commission in 1989<sup>10</sup> and implemented in 1994<sup>11</sup>, immediately after the World Conference held in Compostela in 1993 and also under the influence of its theme and findings<sup>12</sup>.

The programmatic focus on ecclesiology should continue first and above all because if it is true that the theological and practical search for the manifestation of the One Church in history is not fully coextensive to the agenda of the ecumenical movement, it is equally true that the former lies at the heart of the latter. In other words, that the making visible of God's gift of unity to the Church lies at the heart of the search for the wholeness of the inhabited earth, the *oikoumene*, and that these two cannot be separated. Ecumenicity as we practice it in Faith and Order is essentially ecclesiological but the manifestation of the One Church and its witness in history to the ongoing recapitulation of all things in and by the head of the Body are also eschatological. They are in and for the world, "for us and for our salvation".

The programmatic focus on ecclesiology should continue, secondly, because the case for the centrality of *koinonia* in God's design for the world made manifest in Christ is one of the gifts of the ecumenical movement to a globalised Christianity sometimes too tempted by a Jesus or a Holy Spirit individualistic religion of individual prosperity that engenders market-based or utilitarian visions of the Church. Against this background, a Trinitarian-based communion ecclesiology is a contemporary correlative to the Paulin teaching that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the

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<sup>9</sup> Faith and Order, *Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Commission*, Geneva, WCC, 1987, p. 96. F&O Paper 141. F & O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition>, wccfops2.148.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Best (ed.), *Faith and Order 1985-1989: The Commission Meeting at Budapest 1989*. Geneva, WCC, 1990, p. 202-219, F&O Paper 148. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition>. wccfops2.155.

<sup>11</sup> For a chronological overview of the study on ecclesiology see my paper "The Making of an Ecumenical Text: An Introduction to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*", <https://bossey.academia.edu/OdairPedrosoMateus>.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas F. Best & G. Gassmann (eds), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, Geneva, WCC, 1994, F&O Paper 166. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition>, wccfops2.173.

more” (Rom 5: 20), which means that “salvation is not for sale; human beings are not for sale, creation is not for sale”<sup>13</sup>.

The programmatic focus on ecclesiology should continue, thirdly, because it is arguable that *TCTCV* has not exhausted the wealth of ecumenical ecclesiological insights produced by Faith and Order and by the bilateral dialogues that can be owned in common by the churches and help them grow in communion. Meeting in 1925, the Subjects Committee of the first World Conference noted that “Inasmuch as it is vain to seek for the greater unity of the Church, unless it is agreed what the Church is and ought to be, the Conference propounds for the consideration of all the Churches the following lines for advance towards agreement concerning the nature of the Church.” Lausanne 1927 dedicated one of its seven sections to “The Nature of the Church”<sup>14</sup>. In 1930, in light of the churches’ responses to the seven reports from the first world conference, the Continuation Committee decided that the theme of the 1937 World Conference would be no other than “The Church in the Purpose of God”<sup>15</sup>. Edinburgh 1937 dedicated three of its four sections to ecclesiology, addressing successively the Church of Christ and the Word of God; the Church of Christ: ministry and sacraments; and the Church’s unity in life and worship<sup>16</sup>. One of the three theological commissions that prepared the 1952 World Conference focused exclusively on “The Nature of the Church”<sup>17</sup>. Oliver Tomkins’ introduction to Faith and Order, written in preparation for the 1952 Lund World Conference, was once again entitled *The Church in the Purpose of God*<sup>18</sup>, a kind of Faith and Order *leitmotiv* that in the early 1950s was strengthened by the growing influence of the notion of history of salvation on the ecumenical thinking on mission (for instance: *missio dei* in the Willingen 1952 mission conference) and unity in those days. Lund produced a remarkable report on “Christ and His Church”<sup>19</sup>, whose development announces the Christological turn in the Faith and Order method: “From the unity of Christ we seek to understand the unity of the Church on earth, and from the unity of Christ and His Body we seek a means of realising that unity in the actual state of our divisions on earth”<sup>20</sup>. Lund envisaged the Church as called from and sent to the world. The 1963 World Conference did not miss the chance of dedicating a section to “The Church in the Purpose of God” and pursued the Lund reflection on Christ and the Church

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. the subthemes of the 2017 Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation.

<https://2017.lwfassembly.org/en/liberated-gods-grace>.

<sup>14</sup> H.N. Bate (ed.), *Op. cit.*, p. 106-159, 463-466.

<sup>15</sup> *Records of the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order – Mürren, Switzerland, August 26-29, 1930*. Boston, Secretariat, 1930. F&O Paper Series 1, n. 63. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops1.074>.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard Hodgson (ed.), *The Second World Conference on Faith and Order*, London, SCM, 1938. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops1.117>.

<sup>17</sup> R. Newton Flew (ed.), *The Nature of the Church*, London, SCM, 1952, 347 p. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops2.007>.

<sup>18</sup> Oliver S. Tomkins, *The Church in the Purpose of God*, Chatham (UK), 1950. F&O Paper Series 2, n. 3. F&O Digital

<https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops2.003>.

<sup>19</sup> *Report of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, London, John Roberts, 1952. F&O Paper, series 2 n. 15, p. 7-11. F&O Digital <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops2.017>.

<sup>20</sup> *Report of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, op. cit. p. 8.

by addressing “The Redemptive work of Christ and the Ministry of His Church”<sup>21</sup>. I stop this digression in 1963 in order to keep it short.

It is too late to regret that the writing of the three versions of the text on the Church – *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*<sup>22</sup>, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*<sup>23</sup> and *TCTCV*<sup>24</sup> – did not manage to fully build the results of past Faith and Order work on ecclesiology into its process and findings. But it is not too late to harvest the fruits of past authoritative work on ecumenical ecclesiology on behalf of the ecumenical tradition and as a service to the churches' growth in fellowship. Don't you think that these few historical references point to a wealth of ecumenical ecclesiological insights that we should prevent from falling into oblivion; a wealth of ecumenical ecclesiological insights that we should harvest and transform into a contribution to the reception of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*?

The programmatic focus on ecclesiology should continue, fourthly – and this brings us to the second part of my long question and to the work of Study Group 2, subgroup 1 -, because the post-European age of Christianity has made the search for the visible unity of the Church virtually opaque, un-understandable. The modern ecumenical movement emerged in the space delimited by the traumatic memory of the link between Christian division and the violence of religious wars in Europe and two world wars; by the Enlightenment hope that through “conference” or dialogue instead of violence, conflicting truth-claims representing confessions and denominations would be subsumed by a consensus on faith that would open the door to ecclesial communion, to the unity of all in each place and all places expressed in a global conciliar fellowship of local churches truly united. As around the middle of the last century “younger” churches in Africa and Asia emancipated themselves from formal colonial ties and persisted in the eschatological outlook inherited from the Radical Reformation once persecuted in Europe, the scandal of church division related to violence and war came progressively to be seen and experienced as a kind of innocent Christian biodiversity that makes ecumenical theological dialogue as Faith and Order embodies it virtually redundant. By establishing the Global Christian Forum, the WCC responded to this new situation by expanding the traditional ecumenical space so that those churches whose missionary eschatology prevents them from making an urgent sense of the ecumenical imperative of making visible the unity given in Christ may encounter those churches whose commitment to the manifestation of the One Church should be more enriched by the coming of God's reign to all spheres of life. How can the Commission on Faith and Order pursue its focus on ecclesiology in a globalised Christianity? Should it envisage a study on semantic equivalences between some of these more recent ecclesial narratives and the ecumenical ecclesiological narrative expressed in

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<sup>21</sup> *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order – Montreal 1963*, London, SCM, 1964. F&O Paper 42. F&O Digital:

<https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops2.046>.

<sup>22</sup> *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*, Geneva, WCC, 1998. F&O Paper 181. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops2.188>.

<sup>23</sup> *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, Geneva, WCC, 2005. F&O Paper 198. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops2.205>.

<sup>24</sup> *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Geneva, WCC, 2013. F&O Paper 214. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops2.221>.

*TCTCV* in order to unearth commonalities that the traditional methods of ecumenical dialogue have condemned to tacit non-existence?

As you will hear by report, this subgroup has undertaken a series of initiatives in order to engage a creative conversation with what *TCTCV* has called, by lack of a more accurate and careful terminology, the “emerging churches” which propose “a new way of being the Church”. The findings of the analysis of bilateral dialogues involving evangelical or Pentecostal theologians; the attempt to elaborate a typology of new ways of being church; the workshop and consultations on the nature, the mission of the Church and its ministry held in Africa, US, and Brazil need to be carefully evaluated and given a clear rationale and direction for their future, a rationale and a direction which should be at the same time consistent with the Faith and Order mandate and with the mandate of the Global Christian forum.

### **Pilgrimage and ecclesial communion**

Four years ago, the Commission on Faith and Order was invited by the WCC leadership to contribute from its specific viewpoint to the call that the 2013 WCC Assembly addressed to the churches to envisage their common life towards greater visible communion as a “pilgrimage of justice and peace”<sup>25</sup>. Placed between the past isolation of the churches and a distant future vision of churches living in a global conciliar fellowship, the ecumenical movement is in constant need of what W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft once called a theology for the in-between<sup>26</sup>. The call to a pilgrimage of justice and peace corresponds to that need and seeks to respond to it. Faith and Order established a Study Group to respond to that invitation. You may have seen the new printed version of *Come and See: A Theological Contribution to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*. You will engage tomorrow with two other texts that unfold *Come and See*: “Witness and Serve: Proclaiming the Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ in a Religiously Plural World”, and “Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and within Creation”.

Taken together, these three texts constitute a refreshing and promising experiment in Faith and Order work. The invitation to do ecumenical theology for the “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace” raised the question as to whether Faith and Order work can be more synchronised with the ecumenical needs of common witness. *Come and See* was drafted in 2015-2016, approved in 2017 and published in 2018. “Witness and Serve” and “Cultivate and Care” may be completed and published in 2020.

The invitation to do ecumenical theology for the “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace” raised also the question of the ecumenicity of a Faith and Order text whose object is not a divisive issue either inherited from the past or experienced in the present. To this question, the three texts respond by pointing not to the object of the text but to its method. They make the case for pilgrimage, for

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<sup>25</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>. See also: Susan Durber & Fernando Enns (eds), *Walking Together – Theological Reflections on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, Geneva, WCC, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft, *The Pressure of our Common Calling*, London, SCM, 1959, p. 14.

confessing Christ in pluralistic societies and for justice in and for creation by drinking from the wells of different Christian traditions.

### **Towards a better understanding of disagreement**

It was in response to issues of human sexuality “facing the WCC as a whole” that Faith and Order launched, in its 1999 Board meeting, a study on theological anthropology<sup>27</sup>, which was completed and published in 2005<sup>28</sup>. The following year, the Commission decided to “conduct a study on the ways in which the churches formulate and offer teaching and guidance with respect to moral and ethical issues – especially those that are or may become church-dividing, e.g. human sexuality” and gave its decision the title “Theological Anthropology and Moral Discernment in the Churches”<sup>29</sup>. The study text *Moral Discernment in the Churches*<sup>30</sup> was approved five years later and published in 2013 on the understanding that it was “a preliminary step in a more extensive study” and on the recommendation that Faith and Order in the future “places on its agenda further theological discussions in the field of Moral Discernment”<sup>31</sup>.

After that, Study Group 3 has dealt synchronically and diachronically with the issues of traditions, authority, moral teaching in history and the understanding of disagreement on moral teaching. A 2016 consultation reviewed the ways in which ecclesial traditions relate authority and teaching on moral issues in general. A 2018 consultation focused on the ways in which traditions relate authority to certain moral issues (such as slavery, usury, suicide, polygamy, women’s access to the altar) in different moments of their history. This work was brought to a synthesis in an extensive report on moral discernment in different traditions and in the historical experience of the churches. The report proposes a practical tool meant to help churches to understand how disagreement on moral issues emerges among them. The absence of consensus on some aspects of the report will be unpacked to you by the Co-conveners of Study Group 3 tomorrow.

As a follow-up to *Moral Discernment in the Churches*, We are seeking to reach a sound and shared understanding of differences and disagreements on matters that are at the heart of what the 2016 Orthodox Council called “the deep crisis that has arisen in the Ecumenical Movement”<sup>32</sup>. Thus it is not realistic to expect that theological work on these issues will be fast, fruitful and peaceful. *Moral Discernment in the Churches* has shown that it is not like that.

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<sup>27</sup> *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Board*, Geneva, WCC, 1999, p. 89. F&O Paper 185. F&O Digital:

<https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition>, wccfops2.192.

<sup>28</sup> *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology – A Faith and Order Study Document*, Geneva, WCC, 2005. F&O Paper 199. F&O Digital:

<https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition>, wccfops2.206.

<sup>29</sup> *Minutes of the Standing Commission on Faith and Order*, Geneva, WCC, 2006, p. 107. F&O Paper 202. F&O Digital:

<https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition>, wccfops2.209.

<sup>30</sup> *Moral Discernment in the Churches*, Geneva, WCC, 2013. F&O Paper 215. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition>, wccfops2.222.

<sup>31</sup> *Moral Discernment in the Churches*, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World”, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/rest-of-christian-world>, paragraph 7.

But it is ecumenically irresponsible to imagine that given the obstacles we should give up this enterprise. We represent churches that, through membership in the WCC, have recognised that “the membership of the Church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body”<sup>33</sup>; that have recognized in each other *vestigia ecclesiae*, elements of the true Church<sup>34</sup>; that have recognized that despite ecclesial division, they are “in a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church”<sup>35</sup>. Thus we owe each other mutual accountability and mutual admonition as we share in mutual vulnerability and seek to grow in fellowship.

To my knowledge, no other ecumenical multilateral forum is doing what we are doing in Study Group 3. This Study Group is probably the one that is requiring more patience, imagination and commitment from its members and from the Commission. Let us be thankful for what has been accomplished (sometimes through tears!) and constructive in relation to our way forward together.

### III. #Nicea2025 – Towards a World Conference?

What is a world conference on Faith and Order? Before the establishment of the WCC in 1948, world conferences were the main instrument to advance the work of the Movement on Faith and Order. In more recent years they were organised in response to important ecumenical developments. Until Montreal 1963, they were organised approximately every 10 years (1927, 1937, 1952, 1963), but the fifth World Conference was not held until 1993. Almost twenty-six years have passed since the last world conference was held in Compostela, Spain. Isn't it high-time to call a new world conference?

The commemoration in 2025 of the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first ecumenical council is approaching. That anniversary is related to Faith and Order in at least three ways: 1. The past work on the confession of the apostolic faith today as a constitutive element of the search for visible unity; 2. The work on conciliarity, preceding and in line with the vision of the One Church as “conciliar fellowship”; 3. The search for a common date for Easter given that the WCC and Faith and Order have contributed to that search and that in 2025 Eastern and Western churches will celebrate Easter on the same day. I would like to submit to you the proposal for a #Nicea2025 world conference on the transmission of the apostolic faith in tomorrow's world.

#Nicea2025 may provide the opportunity for harvesting the fruits of ecumenical dialogues on issues related to faith. During the 1980s F&O did a study on confessing the apostolic faith today which resulted in the publication of a contemporary commentary of the Creed focusing on the

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<sup>33</sup> “The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches – The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches”, IV.3,

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/1950/toronto-statement>.

<sup>34</sup> “The Church, the Churches...” *op. cit.*, IV.5.

<sup>35</sup> “Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*”, I.3, in W. M. Abbott, S.J. (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*, New York, Guild Press, 1966.

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html).

text itself, its biblical roots and its contemporary meaning<sup>36</sup>. How could this work be continued in the coming years?

#Nicea2025 may provide the opportunity for an ecumenical conversation on the confession of the apostolic faith today with the “new ways of being church” which the Global Christian Forum is bringing to the ecumenical table. The world conference may also provide the opportunity for an ecumenical conversation on the proclamation and transmission of the apostolic faith in contexts of growing de-christianisation in which Christian faith may tend to be reduced to civil religion.

### Conclusion

Since the last Commission meeting, I have had the privilege of attending at least eight meetings of the three study groups and one of the Leadership. I wish to take this opportunity to recognise and celebrate the contribution of women to the ongoing Faith and Order work in its leadership; in the leadership of the study groups; in the production of theological content; in reporting, drafting and editorial work; in the work of the Secretariat, and in the preparation of this meeting. This brings me back to the beginning of this paper, to Liu Tingfang's lecture during the 1927 Faith and Order world conference. In the development of the Chinese [Protestant] Church, he wrote, “we find that women have played an important part. To an increasing number of Chinese of this generation there is a definite hope that in the completely united Church of God there should be nothing that can be interpreted as ‘prejudice against women’”<sup>37</sup>. Thank you.

Odair Pedroso Mateus

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<sup>36</sup> *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, Geneva, WCC, 1991. F&O Paper 153. F&O Digital: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition/wccfops2.160>.

<sup>37</sup> T. Tingfang Lew, “The Necessity of Unity”, *op. cit.*, p. 498.