



WCC CONFERENCE ON WORLD MISSION AND EVANGELISM

COME, HOLY SPIRIT- HEAL AND RECONCILE

Called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities

Athens, Greece, 12-19 May 2005

Preparatory Paper No 3

Theme, thematic area and signposts on the journey towards the Athens Conference

The formulations used in this paper have to be understood as incentives for study, reflection and sharing, and not as adopted statements of faith. A certain amount of deliberate ambiguity is contained in the wordings. This reflects the diversity of approaches amongst members of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME Commission), responsible for the preparation of the Conference. While drawing on the work and on papers adopted by the CWME Commission or its Conference Planning Committee (CPC), this third bulletin has been prepared by staff (1).

In a time of globalization with increasing violence, fragmentation and exclusion, the mission of the church is to receive, celebrate, proclaim and work for reconciliation, healing and fullness of life in Christ.

Come, Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile

Calling on the Spirit, we confess that mission is not ours.

Mission is the mission of the triune God, the creator of heaven and earth, whose purpose is that all may have fullness of life.

In Jesus Christ, God laid the basis for real reconciliation and healing, overcoming all enmity and evil.

God the Holy Spirit is continually present and active as healer and reconciler in church and world.

So we believe that God makes it possible to:

- * Repair broken relationships between
 - God and human beings
 - People and people
 - Churches and churches
 - Nations and nations
 - Humanity and creation

- * Overcome enmity and violence

We hope to see many signs of:

Health, balance and wholeness of life:

- for individuals
- for whole communities
- for humanity
- for creation

We call on God the Spirit: heal and reconcile, empower us, so that as persons and communities, we may receive, become and share signs of forgiveness, peace, justice and unity, and renounce sin, enmity, violence, injustice and divisions.

Called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities

At this time in a globalized context, God entrusts and commissions us with a message of healing and reconciliation. The crucified and resurrected Christ invites us to participate in God's mission. It is **our mission** to form healing communities in celebration, witness, mutual love, forgiveness and respect, and to intervene in peace-building, reconciliation processes and healing of memories in society, overcoming violence wherever we can.

Our being, and our way of being together, needs to reflect our vision of reconciliation.

We are called

to create and multiply safe spaces, hospitable to those who are stigmatised, lost, searching for meaning, solidarity and community,

and to journey as and with victims of violence and sin towards reconciliation and justice.

Reconciliation and healing need to be experienced within communities (member to member), between communities where brokenness exists, and in humanity's relationship with creation.

By using the term "communities" (instead of "Community" as referring to the Church) we want to affirm the plurality and the diverse nature of the communities in which we live.

Aim and objectives of the Conference

The aim and objectives of the Conference have been adopted by the CWME Commission and received by the WCC Central Committee.

AIM

To empower participants to continue in their call to be in mission together and work towards reconciliation and healing in Christ, in God's world today.

OBJECTIVES

- To enthuse participants with new vision, energy, tools and skills to bring the holistic mission imperative alive again.
- To enable the conference to be a living community of reconciliation and healing.
- To experience healing and reconciliation that leads to the transformation of persons.
- To ensure safe/sacred spaces where reflections, theory and stories can be heard and dialogue can take place.
- To strive to be a sign of reconciliation and healing among the churches.
- To celebrate our unity in Christ and our God given diversity.
- To enable participants to commit themselves to be agents/multipliers of reconciliation and healing in their own churches, communities and contexts.

Style of the Conference

The aim and objectives make it clear that this Conference will have a **different style** to that of its predecessors (2). There will be no section work (as has been the case in almost all earlier mission conferences) and no preparation of long reports intended to be received or adopted by the Conference plenary. The main emphasis will be put on creating spaces for sharing, dialogue, debate, listening, presenting experiences and case studies or theological reflections. Participants will be free to choose to which offer of workshop, prayer and healing service, Bible study, creative encounter, they want to contribute and/or participate.

The Conference will also meet in plenary for prayer, celebration and specific inputs.

A major role will be assigned to what the CWME Commission calls the “**home groups**” consisting of approximately 10-12 persons. These will be a place for biblical meditation, silence, prayer and mutual pastoral support, based on personal sharing, story telling and reflection. These groups will meet at least once each day.

Throughout the Conference it will be important to maintain the sacredness of the spaces that are provided for sharing and dialogue. Plans include setting up a **meditation centre** where people could spend time in quiet, and a “pastoral team” of facilitators, of people with communication and counseling skills.

The Conference will have a **liturgical flow**, with elements of liturgy finding a place in the day to day activities of the meetings, as well as offering a framework to the overall flow of the conference. Such liturgical elements need not follow any rigid pattern, but could happen simultaneously in different places, and as the Spirit leads. There could be planned elements that will be for the whole Conference like celebration, confession, affirmation of faith etc, but the smaller groups too may experience the elements of such a liturgical flow as they go through the day.

Suggested liturgical elements:

Get to know each other, welcome and celebration

Repentance/ forgiveness

Glory to God

Listening to the Word of God, Bible study and reflection

Offering of our experience in healing and reconciliation

Intercessions

Moment of peace

Sending out or commissioning

Affirmation of faith

The major **outcome** of the Conference will be persons, who are transformed through their experience, energised and empowered for mission in their local churches, communities and contexts.

A short evocative **message** from the participants, which could be sent to churches and mission bodies, will share an immediate perspective from the Conference and also hold the participants themselves to accountability.

The production of a **book** or CD with texts, speeches, case-studies, prayers, stories, etc. linked to the Conference is planned to document the event. It will include materials related to the Conference and to its preparation as well as appropriate forms of missiological evaluations of the event.

Preparatory process

The preparatory processes for the Conference will draw on the reflection and experience of churches, mission bodies, networks and congregations who are already involved in and reflect on reconciliation and healing.

a) Internet.

A web page created within the WCC website is a main instrument for collecting and sharing information and documentation. Questions, stories, ideas, theories, but also poetry, worship resources, prayers, can be posted and discussion can take place. The CWME constituency are to be asked to consider a link from any websites of their own to the Conference webpage and /or the inclusion of reference to the thematic area and the Conference on their own sites.

b) Regional/national meetings.

National councils and CWME affiliated bodies (3) are invited to organise specific national or regional meetings to discuss the theme and the signposts and to share experiences and reflections. Under certain conditions, it might be recommended to use existing and already planned meetings and consultations to include contributions towards the Conference.

c) Major church events

Several important international meetings have recently undertaken work on the themes of reconciliation and healing (4). As seems appropriate, insights and challenges will be fed into the CWME preparatory process.

d) Publications

This document is part of a series of CWME 2005 Preparatory Papers, published on the Web and as hard copies. In addition, articles of more academic nature appear in the *International Review of Mission*, story, case study and experience sharing takes place also through the *Ecumenical Letter on Evangelism* and *Contact*, both available online.

Themes and Interest areas which seem key for reconciliation and healing in mission

As we have started our journey towards the 2005 world mission conference, we want to explore what reconciliation and healing mean for contemporary mission theory and practice. This will be CWME's contribution to the *Decade to Overcome Violence* (5). In the following paragraphs, we present a very brief overview of the current missiological context, followed by introductions to four "signposts", themes or interest areas which seem key for a reflection on mission as led by the Spirit. It is obvious that these signposts overlap and thus must not be treated as separate items (6).

Summary overview of current missiological context

After the cold war era, the world order has moved towards a unified market, which, accompanied by social and cultural phenomena, is usually referred to by the term globalisation. The bipolar political economic ideology has become a monopolar neo-liberal one, in which the market becomes the main reference all over the world and the measure for judging values, social achievements and even human beings and communities themselves. Partly in reaction to the risk of cultural leveling by the leading market forces and the media, new conflict areas emerged, among and within nations, often with a cultural, ethnic or religious background. These developments modify local and regional political alliances and tend to reinforce the control of the power centres of Western societies over the world.

In this context, missiology needs to focus anew intentionally on Christ's life-affirming ministry as an alternative and a means of resistance to political, economic and religious trends and forces leading to oppression, alienation and death. Witnessing to the fullness of life in Christ leads Christians and churches to consider the whole of creation as the horizon of mission. The basis and framework of Christian mission must be consistently trinitarian, based on and related to the work of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, from the beginning of creation to the end of time. There is particular urgency to better understand the role of the Spirit in church and world and to work out the consequences for mission in practice.

Reconciliation appears to be a central term, describing God's forgiveness given in Christ, the intention of God's own presence and action in the world, and the vision of the final aim of God's mission (*missio Dei*). Authentic reconciliation is costly and cannot easily be reached if separated from justice, truth about responsibilities, love for enemies and forgiveness. It has personal, community, social and ecological dimensions. It implies healing from past and present wounds, from injustices and guilt, at personal, community and social levels.

Signposts

1. Concerns of identity amidst multi-faceted and changing contexts

The way cultural and religious identities are formed and experienced change rapidly. Due to migration and the new information society, identities mix and overlap, are shaped by new content or by search for security in conservative forms. This is not a new factor, however the speed of change seems to grow dramatically, particularly in cultures influenced by secularisation and the trends towards postmodernity. Postmodernity, both a challenge and an opportunity, no longer understands culture as being a homogeneous cluster of traditions, social forms and world-views. Culture is often seen as a complex process in which human beings and communities seek to establish and maintain their identity anew, in constant relationship with other influences. Most contexts are increasingly multicultural and multireligious. Churches

in mission thus need to affirm the need for multicultural ministry and for increased cooperation with people of other faiths wherever possible. This will require a reformulation of the understanding of the role of Christianity vis-à-vis religion in general and calls for a witness which keeps a creative tension between faithfulness to Christ and openness to others and to the Spirit. Wherever identities are in violent conflict, there is a particular urgency for the ministry of reconciliation (7).

2. Healing and reconciling ministries in a violent world

There is need to focus on the multifaceted aspects of a contemporary vision of the healing and reconciling ministry.

Particular care is needed to recover the church's calling to be a **healing community** and an open and secure space for vulnerable people. This calling includes the traditional healing ministry of the church which has been carried out through two different ways

- pastoral visiting, prayer, anointing, special healing liturgies and sacraments
- through the medical profession and medical institutions.

Sometimes these seem to be in conflict.

There is a difference between cure and healing. All people including those involved in "faith healing" look for cure. But it is possible to be healed even if there is no cure. The question of the meaning of life in fullness is raised by terminal or chronic illnesses, as e.g. also by HIV/AIDS.

Can people who may not have hope for cure and are physically ill have fullness of life? Is there possibility of healing when someone is dying? How can the church be a presence for those who suffer and how does it challenge the medical profession?

At the same time, traditional churches need to receive the challenge posed by healing practices of Pentecostal and charismatic mission churches which experience charisms which were known in the earliest times of Christian mission.

Theologically speaking, we also need to dialogue on the respective understandings of the healing presence of the Spirit, on the nature of the link between healing and salvation and resume the necessary intercultural dialogue on what "health" means as well as a thorough reflection on the biblical meaning of reconciliation.

Reconciling ministry in a violent world

Particular emphasis needs to be put on the churches' role in conflict situations, addressing questions such as repentance, forgiveness, restitution, and healing of memories. A critical evaluation of the challenges put to mission by the role of Christians and churches in recent ethnic conflicts still has to be undertaken (8).

3. Seeking alternative communities in a globalized world

The struggle for alternative communities expresses the Christian hope that another world is possible. It is a movement of resistance against the commodification of all aspects of life (including the creation, culture and religion), the struggle to open up and enlarge, or keep at least, some spaces for just and sustainable human relations.

The term “alternative” is essential and refers to alternative values, relations and identities. According to the market rules it is the better, the stronger, the more imaginative, who wins. The gospel however draws its priorities from God’s grace and values those who seem to “lose”, the small, humble, excluded, poor. To speak of “alternative” means thus that there is something wrong with the world, that there is a judgement on the world. If we want to emphasise what “alternative” means, we should also speak of inclusiveness. The essence of the gospel of reconciliation is about communities that do not exclude, either for racial, economic, spiritual or other reasons.

There are several traditions which lie behind the use of the word “alternative”: it’s the Christian base communities, monastic or monastic-type communities (such as Iona e.g.), many local congregations, the Gospel and Cultures networks, Roman Catholic missionary congregations, the Urban Rural Mission networks and, among others, also the experiences of shared partnership in mission structures.

Speaking of reconciliation and healing implies to find constantly new and increased ways to be in solidarity with alternative communities, in particular those among the poor and victims of the actual economic system. This will give a testimony to our hope and vision of another world (9).

4. Being a missional and evangelising church

The message of reconciliation in Christ must also be shared widely (II Cor. 5:18-20). The CWME should be able to affirm the importance of sharing the gospel in an appropriate way with all people, in particular with those who have not yet heard it. If however the churches are not being reconciled among themselves, they fail to respond to their calling (John 17: 20-23) and their witness loses its credibility. The longing and search for unity is at the core of an ecumenical vision of mission. There is need to reinforce efforts towards common witness as first steps towards reconciliation. Trends towards confessionalisation and aggressive competition (proselytism) must be resisted and the primacy of the local church in mission recognised.

There is an urgent need to come to a clearer ecumenical stand on the place and role of evangelism within a holistic mission theology. This requests a positive appreciation of the rich diversity in theologies and practices of evangelism. Many historical churches lost the passion of sharing the gospel in a fresh way relevant and meaningful to the societies in which they serve, in particular in postmodern situations. Churches which

should have a pro-active approach have a reactive one, when they feel threatened by aggressive evangelists. Pentecostal and evangelical churches, among the most dynamic mission forces, are often perceived more as a challenge than as an opportunity for spiritual renewal. Such spiritual renewal is however essential, since people yearn for spirituality in many contexts. Perhaps a way forward is to revisit the “ecumenical strategy for congregational evangelism” proposed by Raymond Fung with its three pillars: partnership, worship and discipleship. Local Christians and church communities are called to get involved with neighbouring communities on issues of life in dignity and justice, to nurture the struggle with regular worship life and to issue personal invitations to discipleship whenever this seems appropriate. Such a strategy attempts to overcome the division between the struggle for social justice and the concern for evangelism and bases evangelistic witness upon the life and practice of a healing and reconciling community (10).

Notes

1

In this text, the term “we” participates in the mentioned ambiguity. Depending on the source on which staff depended for the formulation of the paragraphs, “we” may refer to members of the CWME Commission, or of the Conference Planning Committee. “We” can however also mean all Christians who accept these formulations, commitments and hopes. We - who prepared this text - invite you - who read it - to feel included if you so wish.

We use the terms “**mission**” and “**evangelism**” in the sense in which they have been defined in the recent study document adopted by the CWME Commission. “Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today” has been published also as CWME 2005 Conference Preparatory Paper # 1.

<“Mission” carries a holistic understanding: the proclamation and sharing of the good news of the gospel by word (*kerygma*), deed (*diakonia*), prayer and worship (*leiturgia*) and the everyday witness of the Christian life (*martyria*); teaching as building up and strengthening people in their relationship with God and each other; and healing as wholeness and reconciliation into *koinonia* — communion with God, communion with people, and communion with creation as a whole.

“Evangelism”, while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional voicing of the gospel, including the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship.>

2

A summary overview over the previous world mission conferences, first of the International Missionary Council, then of the World Council of Churches can be found on the WCC Webpage (look for the “Mission and Evangelism Programme” or the “World mission conference” pages).

3

The “CWME affiliated bodies” are mission or church councils affiliated to the CWME Conference according to its By-Laws. There are more than 50 now, in many countries and continents of the North and the South. Many of these bodies were originally member councils of the International Missionary Council until its merger with the WCC in 1961. New affiliations are regularly accepted by the CWME Commission.

4

Conference of European Churches (CEC), June 25 – July 2, 2003, Trondheim, Norway: *Jesus Christ heals and reconciles: Our witness in Europe*.

Lutheran World Federation (LWF), July 21-31, 2003, Winnipeg, Canada: *For the healing of the world*.

World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), July 30-August 14, 2004, Accra, Ghana: *That all may have life in fullness*.

5

The “Decade to Overcome Violence – churches seeking reconciliation and peace” was decided at the Harare assembly of the WCC in 1998 and officially launched in Berlin in 2001. Four main themes have been identified as major concerns: the spirit and logic of violence; the use, abuse and misuse of power; issues of justice; religious identity and plurality. Cf. the special Website: www.wcc-coe.org/dov

Suffice here to refer to the following resource materials:

* *Why Violence? Why not peace? A study guide to help individuals and groups in the churches to reflect and act in the Decade to Overcome Violence*. Geneva, WCC, 2002.

* Margot Käsmann: *Overcoming Violence. The challenge to the churches in all places*. WCC, 2000 (rev.ed.)

6

As already mentioned, this will not lead to four thematic sections at the conference itself. All “signposts” enable reflection and sharing of experiences on the theme of the conference.

7

Each paragraph will be accompanied by a short list of selected resources published by the WCC. A fuller bibliography is available on the Conference Webpage. See the WCC Website: www.wcc-coe.org)

Overall introduction: “Toward the Fullness of Life”. Special issue of the *International Review of Mission (IRM)*, October 2002. Contains papers on identity and plurality, on healing and HIV/AIDS and on intercontinental partnerships.

Gospel and Cultures:

* Christopher Duraisingh (ed.): *Called to One Hope. The Gospel in Diverse Cultures*. Geneva, WCC 1998. Contains all relevant documents from the 1996 world mission conference in Salvador de Bahía.

* Series of “Gospel and Cultures pamphlets” published before the Salvador conference.

* “Mission in secular and postmodern contexts” I and II, *IRM* January and April 2003.

Multicultural Ministry:

* Seongja Yoo- Crowe and Colville Crowe (eds.): *Reports from the First and the Second International Network Forum on Multicultural Ministry*. Sydney, Uniting Church and INFORM, 2000 and 2002.

* “Open Space: African Christian Diaspora in Europe and the Quest for Human Community” special issue of *IRM*, July 2000.

Religious plurality and interreligious relations

* *Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of other Religions*.

Taking stock of 30 years of dialogue and revisiting the 1979 Guidelines. Geneva, WCC, 2003.

8

Selected resources published by the WCC include:

Healing

* "Health, Faith and Healing". Double issue of the *International Review of Mission* (IRM), Jan. /April 2001.

* *Facing AIDS. The challenge, the churches' response*. A WCC study document. Geneva, WCC, 1997.

* Karin Granberg-Michaelson: *Healing Community*. WCC, 1991.

* *Healing and Wholeness. The churches' role in health*. Report of a study by the Christian Medical Commission. Geneva, WCC, 1990

Many other documents are available in particular on AIDS. Check the WCC Website or ask the WCC health desk as well as the coordination office of the Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in Africa.

Reconciliation

* CWME Conference Preparatory Paper No 2: worksheet on reconciliation processes.

* Geneviève Jacques: *Beyond Impunity. An Ecumenical Approach to Truth, Justice and Reconciliation*. Geneva, WCC, 2000.

* Philip Lee (ed.): *Communication & Reconciliation. Challenges facing the 21st century*. Geneva, WCC, 1991.

9

Selected resources published by the WCC include:

* *A Church of All and For All*. An interim statement prepared by the Ecumenical Disabilities' Advocates' Network (EDAN) in cooperation with Faith and Order and received by the WCC Central Committee. WCC 2003.

* Ian M. Fraser: *Many Cells, One Body. Stories from small Christian Communities*. Geneva, WCC, 2003.

* Jim Forest: *The Resurrection of the Church in Albania. Voices of Orthodox Christians*. WCC 2002.

* Lothar Bauerochse: *Learning to Live Together. Interchurch partnerships as ecumenical communities of learning*. WCC 2001

* Hugh Lewin: *A Community of Clowns. Testimonies of people in Urban Rural Mission*. WCC 1987.

10

Selected resources published by the WCC include:

* Raymond Fung: *The Isaiah Vision. An Ecumenical Strategy for Congregational Evangelism*. WCC, (1992) reprinted 2002.

* *Towards Common Witness. A call to adopt responsible relationships in mission and to renounce proselytism*. A document commended to the churches by the Central Committee of the WCC. 1997.

* Raymond Fung and Georges Lemopoulos (eds): *Not A Solitary Way. Evangelism stories from around the World*. WCC, 1992

* Raymond Fung (ed.) *Evangelistically Yours. Ecumenical Letters on Contemporary Evangelism*. WCC 1992.