

# *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* Faith and Order and the Renewal of the Churches

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## **Introduction: Renewal**

Renewal has long been on the agenda of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The 1968 Uppsala Assembly – with its theme “Behold, I make all things new” – stated “The Church is faced by the twin demands of continuity in the one Holy Spirit and of renewal in response to the call of the Spirit amid the changes in human history.”

What is renewal? What are the signs of renewal? What are the signs of *needing* to be renewed? How is renewal related to tradition? In which ways is renewal related to ‘reform’, ‘change’ and ‘transformation’? Such questions are critical for churches around the world in relation to dramatic shifts in society, yet different experiences and expressions of renewal can also be church dividing. Thus, theological reflection on renewal invites the churches to seek a common understanding of renewal and a common recognition of its many forms.

## **Ecumenical movement as renewal**

Ecumenism is a movement of renewal. Yet because it has been so successful, and takes place so slowly, it is easily taken for granted. Indeed, it has been so successful that most of us cannot remember a time when we were *not* ecumenical. We can be forgiven for not seeing how profoundly ecumenism has renewed the churches.

The sense of ecumenism as a movement of renewal goes back to its earliest days. The 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference had as one of its goals increased cooperation amongst the Western missionary societies. What happened was a vision of so much more, a vision of a united Church. It was a moment of conversion for the delegates. As one of the delegates, Anglican missionary-bishop Charles Brent said at the end of the conference:

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