

Short testimony by Jonas Aubert, part of the colloquium: „What Future for the Ecumenical Movement?“, February 2023

I want to tell you, three more or less funny experiences from my context, which show, that we as Christians are in a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* – we have a common destiny. The first one I've heard from a friend: he got a letter by a protestant church member, who declared his exit out of church because a statement of the catholic Pope. Or at the time, when I was in seminary and training for ordination as a free church pastor and invited a friend to my wedding. He was seriously asking me, “is it not the case that as a priest you are not allowed to marry?” Or at a party a person asked me, what subject do you study at university? I answered: theology. He nodded his head, but his face revealed unknowingness. I said: “do you know what it is?”. He said, “yes, yes, isn't it that you study stones?” Close enough, but theology isn't geology. This experience can be called: ecumenism *of* crisis.

On the other hand, as a free church member my whole life, my relationship with ecumenism hasn't been at ease, especially when I grew up. In the village of my home church, there was an ecumenical centre. This centre hosted a roman-catholic and a reformed sanctuary. Maybe started with good hopes, the spirit of Christ's uniting power was far away. What remained? Ugly brutalist architecture (exposed concrete) and well-paid officeholders, who refused to cooperate with all other Christian denominations. A fate that is probably repeated in many institutions. This experience can be called: ecumenism *in* crisis.

Now, how did it come about, that I nonetheless engage myself not only with people and theology from my own tradition. Honestly my reasons are extremely pre-theoretic and only in the afterward, I found out, that there are good theological reasons too.

First and foremost: I felt led and called by the holy spirit to study theology at this catholic university while I was at a free church evangelical seminary. I remember that after a conference of the Centre for Faith and Society here at Fribourg, I phoned with my dad and told him, I think I need to study there. At this conference, I had experienced a prayer-filled, Christocentric, intellectually stimulating atmosphere with distinct Christian theology, far away from dull, boring, fruitless Dialogue between functionaries who orientate themselves towards a minimum consensus of a well-organised decline. I witnessed an openness that is not to be confused with randomness. Funnily enough many of the participants were firm and convinced adherents of their own confession and tradition. But maybe that's the key to real relationship. If you don't take yourself seriously, you won't take others seriously either, and certainly no one else will take you seriously.

My second and last reason: sheer curiosity stirred by faith. Or to put it with St. Anselm: *faith that seeks understanding*. How poor is your faith and theology, if it isn't nourished by the faith and theology of the church through space and time. This includes your brother, your sister from a different kind of tradition.

Ecumenism should be, and with that I close my short testimony, not only a sharing of different genealogies, different upbringings, but oriented towards the shared 'genealogy' of Christians. John in his gospel puts it that way: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1,12-13).