

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Statement adopted by the Central Committee at Enugu

1. At its meeting in Rochester in 1963 the Central Committee of the WCC adopted a statement on relations with the Roman Catholic Church which spoke of the beginning of a genuinely ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholic and other churches, resting upon the one foundation of God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ, aiming at deeper understanding, mutual enrichment and the renewal of the life of the churches in which the profound dogmatic differences can be faced in a spirit of love and humility. It was urged that every opportunity be seized for the development of this dialogue at every level of the life of the churches. A number of specific issues were mentioned which must be faced if true dialogue is to be possible.
2. The World Council itself is preparing for this dialogue in several ways through the sending of observers to the sessions of the second Vatican Council; through a number of consultations on specific topics such as the work among the laity, missionary problems, or social questions, and more generally through the contacts which have been established with the Secretariat for the Promotion of Unity in Rome.
3. The adoption and promulgation of the Decree *de oecumenismo* by the Roman Catholic Church has created a new situation. The fact that the Roman Catholic Church expresses so definitely its desire to enter into conversation with the other churches and expresses its convictions on the subject is an important new fact in the development of the ecumenical movement. For the Roman Catholic Church thus adopts a number of principles and policies which have guided the churches in the ecumenical movement in the past decades. There are points in which the conception of ecumenical relations is the same as that developed in the World Council of Churches and in its member churches. There are other points in which there are considerable differences. The World Council of Churches which has always sought "to draw Churches out of isolation into conference" must surely use this opportunity to do whatever it can do, in the light of its mandate, to encourage these new contacts and should itself enter into a conversation with the Roman Catholic Church about common concerns and unsolved problems of relationships.

The very fact that there are differences in our conceptions of ecumenical relations obliges us for the sake of a healthy development of the ecumenical movement to do our utmost to clarify our positions and, if possible, to arrive at mutual understanding.

4. Preliminary conversations have taken place between representatives of the WCC and of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Unity. The WCC's Executive Committee has given serious consideration to the matter and a number of church leaders have been consulted.

These discussions have led to the conclusion that the time has come to elaborate a common understanding between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church concerning the principles on which the relationships should be based and the manner in which they should be developed.

5. The World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church are not comparable entities. The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of many churches with different confessional background. The Roman Catholic Church is a single church. Their cooperation creates therefore special problems. These problems can however best be solved by frank discussion.
6. It is very important to note that the competence of the WCC in this field has its strict limitations. It cannot act for the member churches, unless it is specifically authorized to do so. The principle laid down in the Toronto Declaration must be faithfully observed:

“The purpose of the World Council of Churches is not to negotiate unions between churches, which can only be done by the churches themselves acting on their own initiative, but to bring the churches into living contact with each other and to promote the study and discussion of the issues of church unity.”

This means that the WCC does not interfere in discussions which its member churches may have with the Roman Catholic Church. The World Council does however desire to be informed about such discussions and stands ready to give any assistance that it may be asked to give.

7. A clear distinction must also be made between the subjects which can properly be discussed between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church and those which can and must be discussed in bilateral conversations between the individual member churches (or confessional bodies) and the Roman Catholic Church.

Among these subjects which belong to the first category we would mention especially: *a)* practical collaboration in the fields of philanthropy, social and international affairs; *b)* theological study programs which have a specific bearing on ecumenical relations (Faith and Order); *c)* problems which cause tension between the churches (e.g. mixed marriages, religious liberty, proselytism); *d)* common concerns with regard to the life and mission of the Church (laity, missions, etc.).

It is recognized that these subjects have certain aspects which can best be discussed at the international level, and other aspects which can best be discussed at the national level.

8. In the light of the above considerations it is proposed that a working group be established composed of 8 representatives of the WCC and of 6 representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. The task of this group would be to work out the principles which should be observed in further collaboration and the methods which should be used. When discussing specific fields of work the group could invite persons specially concerned with these fields to sit with them as consultants. The working group would not be able to take any decisions, but elaborate proposals which would be submitted to the bodies they represent, and communicated to the member churches.
9. The relationships between the WCC staff and the Secretariat for the Promotion of Unity can best be maintained by the regular exchange of visits.
10. It will be important for the WCC to keep in these matters in close touch with the families of churches and confessional bodies, several of which will develop their own contacts with the Roman Catholic Church. This can be done by developing as much consultation and mutual representation as proves to be possible.

It may also be that some national councils of churches may desire the help of the WCC in their conversations with the Roman Catholic Church at the national level.

11. It should be underlined that the WCC desires to develop its relationships with all churches which are not members of the WCC but which would maintain contacts with it.

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