

SECOND OFFICIAL REPORT OF THE  
JOINT WORKING GROUP BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE  
WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

I. GENERAL REMARKS.

1. The Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches has not yet finished its task. It was set up at the beginning of 1965 by mutual agreement between the authorities of both bodies in order "to work out the principles which should be observed in further collaboration and the methods which should be used" (Mandate of the Working Group, see *The Ecumenical Review*, 1965, No.3, pp. 171-173, and the *L'Osservatore Romano* - February 20, 1966, p. 7).

The group has studied the nature of the ecumenical movement, especially the relations between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. We give here some of its conclusions. The field is so wide that it is hardly necessary for the Joint Working Group to explain why it has not completed its task in such a short time. Experience alone will make it possible to say where the real possibilities lie, which the study has glimpsed. Moreover, the relations between Churches are in a state of rapid change. New theological problems are coming to the fore and unforeseen situations are arising.

2. The relations between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, and the problems involved can be seriously considered only if they are understood as being within the whole ecumenical movement, which is an entirely new phenomenon characteristic of our time. Although the ecumenical movement is something new, the deep realities on which it is based are very old. Christians and the Churches to which they belong are linked together through their faith in Christ, the Savior of the World, and through their desire to glorify God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They all share important elements of faith, of sacramental life and of ministry. Above all, they have a common point of reference, the Word of God, witnessed to by the Holy Scripture, which for them is not only an object of study and meditation but a norm for living.
3. Today, without ignoring or minimizing the essential differences between them, Christians are re-discovering in other Churches these values which are part of the unique Christian heritage. They are discovering that a partial communion already exists between them, and they want to extend that communion to its fulness. The whole ecumenical movement is searching for that fulness, that unity of all Christians, in order to bear testimony to Christ in the world today. It expresses itself in a whole series of initiatives in which Christians cooperate: intercession, study, collaboration, experiments in joint witness... But within this multiplicity the ecumenical movement is unique. All those Churches which are concerned to strengthen the links between Christians are participating in one single movement.
4. There is a host of those who contribute to the ecumenical movement; it is not our task to draw up a complete list of them. We wish simply to draw attention to the special function of the World Council of Churches and of the Roman Catholic Church in the service of the ecumenical movement, and to grasp as clearly as possible what the relationship between them should be.
5. The World Council of Churches is a unique instrument of the ecumenical movement. How can Churches which are still separated live and bear witness regularly together without abandoning their convictions? The World Council of Churches was formed in order to give a concrete answer to this question. It is a fellowship of over 200 Churches, for which it has increasingly become a place and a center for common witness, collaboration, mutual aid and a common search for unity. It has thus enabled its members to deepen and extend their common Christian experience.
6. The Roman Catholic Church is also making a notable contribution to the ecumenical movement, especially since

the Second Vatican Council. The labors, spread over more than thirty years, of some of the best Roman Catholic theologians prepared the way for official entry into the ecumenical movement under the pontificate of John XXIII through the creation of a special Secretariat for Christian Unity. During the Vatican Council, in its Decree on Ecumenism, the Catholic Church explained the principles which inspire its action in this field and instructed all the Bishops to promote ecumenism.

7. The World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church are being drawn closer together by their common service in promoting the one ecumenical movement. This very fact is forcing both institutions to define their mutual relationships, while taking due account of their disparity. The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of Churches, whereas the Roman Catholic Church is one Church. Joint study and the needs of the situations that arise will make it possible gradually to define the exact relation between these dissimilar entities.
8. It is important for us to clarify the criterion which fixed these relations in the past, and according to which they must become increasingly close in future. This criterion must be sought in the service of the one and only ecumenical movement. The essential question, which must constantly be asked afresh, is the following: what form should be given to the relations between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in order to witness to Christ and to serve better the unity which He desires for His Church?
9. How should one reply to this question today? Their common service - of the ecumenical movement forces both these institutions to envisage their future relations as a prolongation and an accentuation of the relations established between them during the past two years. Without entering into other considerations, the members of the Joint Working Group think that, for the moment, the common cause of Christian Unity would not be furthered if the Roman Catholic Church were to join the World Council of Churches. But this does not mean that they consider the present form of relationship as permanent. They realized the need for re-formulating in the near future the mandate of the Joint Working Group and modifying its composition. Within this modified setting they must continue and deepen their study of the bases of the ecumenical movement, its unity and its concrete achievements. This search will enable them to take another step forward.
10. The aim of the present document is to set out briefly the concrete results of the exchanges that have already taken place, and to indicate a vision of the future in which the Joint Working Group foresees the need for constantly more dynamic relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.

## II. REPORT ON WORK SO FAR ACHIEVED WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITS CONTINUATION

### 1. THE FAITH AND WORSHIP OF THE CHURCHES

#### *a) The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*

For whatever purpose Christians come together they will also meet for common prayer. Those who believe in Christ know that they depend on Him for everything. For this reason the separated Christians will only be able to advance on the way to unity if, again and again, they turn together to God through Christ in the Holy Spirit and ask for renewed clarity and freedom.

The Joint Working Group concerned itself first with the problem of "worship at ecumenical gatherings." Some guidelines were attached to the first official report. Since then it has dealt, in the first place, with the "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity." From the beginning of the ecumenical movement, this week has been the source of many new initiatives. Today it is being observed by more and more Churches. The Joint Working Group, desiring to serve the churches in this observance, made therefore arrangements for arriving at a fuller measure of agreement both on the concept of prayer for unity and on ways of preparing for the Week of Prayer. A consultation organized by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Secretariat on Faith and Order (October 16-20, 1966) came to the following conclusions:

- (i) A team shall be formed consisting of representatives of the Faith and Order Commission and of the Roman Catholic centers working in this field.
- (ii) The task of this team shall primarily consist in the annual preparation of the leaflet for the Week of Prayer at the free disposal of Churches and Council of Churches.
- (iii) The churches in the various countries shall be encouraged to adapt the text of the leaflet according to their needs. The adaptation in each country should be made, as far as possible, in ecumenical co-operation.

(iv) The week is not observed on the same date in all countries. While the majority keep the week January 18-25, some countries, for different reasons, have chosen other dates (especially the period between Ascension and Pentecost). None of these dates is to be considered as universally binding, but it is important that all churches in one country should observe the Week of Prayer on the same date. (For more details see report from the Consultation published in *One in Christ*, July 1967).

#### b) *The Date of Easter*

The efforts to reach a common date for Easter accepted by all Christians have been continued. The World Council of Churches has organized an inquiry on the subject and many of the member Churches have already sent in their replies. The question will be further examined on the basis of these replies. The Roman Catholic Church has created a commission for the study of the issue. The Joint Working Group is aware of the difficulties involved in this problem. A solution cannot be expected in the near future, since it must be based on solid agreement between all the churches.

#### c) *The Theological Commission on Catholicity and Apostolicity*

In the first official report, the joint Working Group proposed the establishment of a Joint Theological Commission of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Secretariat on Faith and Order. This commission has now been appointed and has held its first meeting (May 19-24, 1967). It is not yet ready with any results. If it is to deal in full with the subject entrusted to it, the deepest differences between the churches need to be examined and discussed. This will demand a considerable amount of time. The Commission consists of the following members:

Prof. Savvas Agourides  
Prof. Giuseppe Alberigo  
Prof. Jean Bosc  
Rev. Raymond E. Brown, s.s.  
Rév. Alexandre Ganoczy  
Rév. Père Jérôme Hamer, o.p.  
Rev. Prof. John Kelly

Rév. Dom Emmanuel Lanne, o.s.b.  
Rev. Prof. John Meyendorff  
Prof. Paul Minear  
Prof. Wolfhart Pannenberg  
Hochw. Dr. R. Schnackenburg  
Rev. Dr. Lukas Vischer  
Prof. Claude Welch  
Rev. Prof. Jan Witte, s.j.

#### d) *Authority of the Bible*

As certain exegetical and theological trends have a considerable impact on the search for the visible unity among Christians, the Joint Working Group intends to study the problem of the authority of the Bible and of its interpretation under both ecumenical and pastoral aspects.

## 2. UNITY AND MISSION

#### a) *The Common Witness of the Churches*

Division is an obstacle to the effective proclamation of the Gospel. For is the message of reconciliation not denied if Christians live side by side without themselves being reconciled to each other? All churches feel the contradiction of this situation. It is one of the reasons why they are seeking today to re-establish their communion. A common witness will proclaim the Gospel more effectively. The member Churches of the World Council of Churches express this intention by their common life and action in the Council; it has been particularly underlined by the integration of the International Missionary Council. The Roman Catholic Church has affirmed the same intention in the Decrees on Ecumenism (para. 12) and on the Missionary Activity of the Church.

Common witness presupposes ecclesial communion. Therefore it can become full reality only when the churches will have reached unity in doctrine and life sufficient to live in communion. Such communion will be the perfect form of common witness. This does not mean that the churches cannot already in many respects bear witness together to the name of Christ. A common witness raises questions with regard to the central content of the Gospel; it can happen that ecumenical activities avoid anything which goes beyond practical collaboration. This tendency must be resisted. All ecumenical work must serve the purpose of glorifying the name of Christ.

Common witness in missionary situations calls in particular for a thorough examination. For this reason the Joint Working Group is of the opinion that a special working party should as soon as possible be entrusted with the task of exploring possibilities in this field. Its members should be so chosen that both the theological and practical

aspects of the problems can be dealt with successfully.

b) *Non-Christian Religions.*

Relationships with the non-Christian religions are being discussed afresh in many churches and it is more and more apparent that the theological problems concerned with these relationships can be best discussed on an ecumenical basis. The Joint Working Group heard reports about various meetings and especially about a consultation held at Kandy, Ceylon (February 27-March 6, 1967) on the 'Dialogue with non-Christian religions'. The consultation had been organized by the World Council of Churches, but was attended also by a number of participants named by the Vatican Secretariat for non-Christian religions. The Joint Working Group feels unanimously that such contacts need to be continued and increased.

### 3. LAITY AND UNITY

a) *Conversations on the Role of the Laity*

The role of the laity in the ecumenical movement, which statements on both sides have constantly affirmed, has received high priority in the Joint Working Group's discussions from the beginning. The first informal discussion on laity questions took place at Glion, Switzerland, in January 1964, jointly sponsored by the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate of the Roman Catholic Church (COPECIAL) and the Division of Ecumenical Action of the World Council of Churches. This meeting was followed up by an Ecumenical Consultation at Gazzada, Italy, in September 1965, sponsored by COPECIAL and the Laity Department of the World Council of Churches.

There has been co-operation also in the program planning of the forthcoming Third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate (Rome, October 1967), to which the various churches, the World Council of Churches, and also the World Alliance of YMCA's and the World YWCA have been invited to send observer-consultants. These and other non-Catholic lay observer-consultants, proposed by national Catholic delegations to the Congress, will fully participate in the discussions and seminars.

The establishment of the Pontifical Council on the Laity with a permanent secretariat in Rome has opened up new possibilities. On the one hand, the type of co-operation begun with COPECIAL can continue on a more official and permanent basis, since COPECIAL'S work will be absorbed by the Consilium after the forthcoming World Congress; the Consilium, at its first meeting, favorably considered tentative plans suggested by the WCC Laity Department for a further consultation along the lines of Glion and Gazzada. On the other hand, new forms of cooperation will be able to develop as soon as the relation of the Consilium to the various Lay Catholic International Organizations is clearly structured.

b) *Women's Co-operation*

Ecumenical conversation between women at international level began at Vicarello, near Rome, in October 1965. This was a meeting of lay women, deaconesses, and religious on the changing role of women and forms of service in the Churches. It was sponsored by the Secretariat for Unity and the WCC Department on Co-operation between Men and Women in Church, Family and Society. The conversations have been continued between groups from COPECIAL and the WCC Department during preparation for the Third World Congress of the Lay Apostolate.

In June 1966, a meeting for women from various organizations on either side, was held at Crêt-Bérard, Switzerland, focusing on:

- Ecumenical education at "grass-roots" level.
- Possibility of common action through joint projects of service to humanity, etc.

This meeting was sponsored by the WCC Department on Co-operation and the Conference of Catholic International Organizations; they also sponsored, from June 19-24, 1967, a Conference at Taizé, bringing together some 100 women, most of them national executives of Church-related organizations. The theme of the Conference was "Christian Women - Co-artisans of a Changing Society."

c) *Education - General and Religious*

There are many aspects in the field of Christian education which need discussion and present opportunities of

collaboration. Roman Catholic observers have already participated in the Joint Study Commission on Education sponsored by the World Council of Churches and the World Council of Christian Education. Several significant regional developments have taken place. The Joint Working Group is agreed that closer contacts should be established, and is exploring the possibilities.

#### 4. SERVICE TO HUMANITY

##### a) *Peace and International Social Justice*

It is obvious that Christians have a responsibility to engage in the task of promoting justice and peace among peoples and nations. They proclaim the Gospel of peace: Jesus-Christ who has reconciled the world with God. This message obliges them also to act as peace-makers among men. Common action can often make these efforts more convincing and effective.

Different fields of collaboration need to be distinguished. In the first place there are long-term efforts in favor of international social justice: common study, the working out of development programs, the influencing of public opinion, education, etc. In July 1966, the World Council of Churches held its Conference on Church and Society; the problems connected with the plea for international social justice were at the center of the discussion and the participants called attention again and again to the need for close co-operation between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. On January 5, 1967, the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace was established, and when in April 1967, it met for its first session, it expressed the desire to work as closely as possible with the World Council of Churches. An exploratory ecumenical committee, consisting of representatives of the Pontifical Commission and of an ad hoc WCC committee met in June 1967 in order to examine the possibilities of collaboration existing in this field.

The Joint Working Group heard reports on these developments. It welcomes this new and promising collaboration.

##### b) *Service Activities: Emergency Relief, Development Aid and Medical Work*

The possibilities of collaboration are not limited, however, to these long-range tasks of planning and education; they exist also at the operational level: that of immediate relief in emergency situations, of development projects, service to refugees, medical work, etc. Many organizations are at work and the first conversations have shown that more can be planned and carried out together than has hitherto been done. Representatives of various Roman Catholic organizations (Caritas Internationalis, Catholic Relief Services, Misereor, Pontificia Opera Assistenza) and of the World Council of Churches (more particularly its Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service) have met twice for consultations (January 26-28, 1966, and January 21-23, 1967), and these first contacts have already led to increased collaboration. The most concrete example is common action to meet the famine in India. In February 1966 both the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church addressed an urgent appeal to the churches to make special efforts to overcome the danger threatening India. As a consequence, the churches in some countries combined forces to raise the necessary means, and an inter-church agency was formed in India for the distribution of goods (AFPRO). Other similar examples could be mentioned; the conversations helped to clarify other projects, eg, in Africa and Vietnam. The churches' relation to FAO and other organizations were also discussed.

The Joint Working Group received these reports with deep appreciation. It is of the opinion that the conversations and, more especially, the common projects should be continued. The initial conversations between the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace and the World Council of Churches do not make the efforts of this Working Party superfluous; rather they add to their importance. The Joint Working Group is particularly convinced that closer links should be established between the various church organizations which are active in medical work. The Working Party will give special attention to this field in future.

##### c) *Peace and International Affairs*

The struggle for peace and justice calls for common action of still another kind. The churches will speak where peace is in immediate danger; they will seek to make their voice heard where decisions are being taken. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches recognize the importance of this task. Through statements and other means, they seek to remind those on whom the cause of peace most depends, of their responsibility. They are both active, though in a different way, within the United Nations, etc. Collaboration in this field is still rather restricted. The task is somewhat differently conceived on the two sides, and structures need still to be found for joint or parallel action of the churches on a world level. But the task is of such importance that

common witness in this respect cannot be postponed. The Joint Working Group is of the opinion that the possibilities in this field should continue to be actively explored.

## 5. PARTICULAR PROBLEMS

### a) *The Study of Proselytism*

The Joint Working Group concerned itself in the first place with the problems of Religious Liberty. A comparison of the Vatican Council's declaration on Religious Liberty and the various statements made by the World Council of Churches led to the conclusion that, though the theological justification may still differ from one church to the other, there is basic agreement on what the principle of Religious Liberty requires in practice. The texts on both sides give a sufficient basis for mutual understanding and possible common action when practical problems arise. Therefore though the problems of Religious Liberty must continue to be discussed in ecumenical dialogue, there is good reason to hope that in the course of time, on the basis of the agreement reached, still existing tensions may be overcome.

The Joint Working Group dealt with the question of proselytism at greater length than with the problems of Religious Liberty. Although the two problems are related to one another, the difference between them must not be overlooked. While the discussion of Religious Liberty concerns the freedom of witness in state and society, the study of proselytism raises the question of the nature of Christian witness in general and the relation between separated churches in particular. How are we to understand the relation between the obligation of each church to witness to the truth and the ecumenical responsibility they bear for each other? The Joint Working Group decided that a joint study on the subject of proselytism should be undertaken.

### b) *Mixed Marriages*

The problem of mixed marriages was also examined. The World Council of Churches first called a consultation in order to analyze and survey the different positions of its member churches and to summarize the main problems in this field (June 20-24, 1966) [Published in *Study Encounter*, Vol. III, 1 (1967)].

Later, a meeting was organized by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and part of its participants met subsequently with representatives of the Secretariat on Faith and Order (March 1-4, 1967). This meeting gave the opportunity for a useful and promising exchange of views, but did not result in a joint report. If the difficulties which today still exist were to be reduced, the conversations among the churches will have to be continued on both international and national levels.

### c) *National and Local Councils*

What relationship should be established between Roman Catholic dioceses or parishes and national or local councils? This question is increasingly being asked today. In many places close contacts have already been established. In some countries the Roman Catholic authorities are represented by observers or consultants. In some places Roman Catholic dioceses or parishes have even become member of councils. The answer to the question will be influenced by many factors, and will not be the same everywhere. But as the development of Christian Councils is of the highest importance for the future of the ecumenical movement, the Joint Working Group intends to deal with the question. It has started to gather information on the situation in the various countries.

## 6. BIBLE TRANSLATION

Although the churches differ from each other in their understanding, both of the authority and the interpretation of the Bible, they all accept it as the basis of their thinking and their teaching. This common point of reference can be made manifest even more than hitherto if they begin to use the same editions of the original text and the same translations. The translation of Scriptures is therefore one of the tasks which can be undertaken and furthered together. If the Gospel is really to enter the various cultures, the Bible must be translated into still more languages, and as translations constantly need revision, existing differences can be gradually overcome by a common effort.

In these last years much has been achieved. In some countries existing translations have been made available for wider use, in other countries new translations are being undertaken. Conversations between the Roman Catholic Church and the United Bible Societies have shown that it is possible to find solutions to problems which hitherto presented difficulties (use of original text, Apocrypha, adding of notes, etc.).

In April 1966, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity was entrusted with the task of inquiring of the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conferences concerning the needs and possibilities of Bible translation and concerning possible co-operation with other Christians in this field. The replies show that the overwhelming majority of episcopal conferences is in favor of such co-operation. About one hundred projects have been decided or are currently under discussion. The principles to guide this collaboration have been clarified in discussions between the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the United Bible Societies. The United Bible Societies have already organized a meeting of African Bible Societies and representatives of some churches (Winneba, Ghana, March 1967), in order to plan policies of collaboration throughout Africa for the next six years, and similar meetings are planned for Europa, Asia and the Americas.

The Joint Working Group has no direct responsibility for this co-operation. It is of such importance for the churches, however, that it decided to refer to it in its report. The Joint Working Group wants to give its full support to this work and expresses the hope that churches and individual Christians will join in this common effort.

[*Information Service* 3 (1967) 28-33]