

APPENDIX I

SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

Vatican City, November 19, 1975

The Reverend Dr Philip Potter

Secretary General

World Council of Churches

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Dear Dr Potter,

The document published in Appendix 2 of the Work Book as the Fourth Report of the Joint Working Group was submitted to its parent bodies. As representative of the Catholic partner I am happy to assure you again that our reaction to the report is positive and that it has our approval.

It is a useful document which seeks to describe our mutual commitment to the ecumenical movement to give an account of the present state of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, and to point out the way ahead. Hence it reflects with a note of joy on the enormous change in ideas and attitudes that has taken place in the Roman Catholic Church and in the member churches served by the World Council of Churches. It makes an attempt to assess the significance of this change in a realistic fashion indicating both where progress has been made and can expect to be made, as well as where we are not yet able to go forward together.

We offer the comments which follow, and which apply to particular sections of the Report, as an indication of the importance which it is meant to have in the further development of the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and that large number of churches and communities which commit themselves to the ecumenical movement within the fellowship of the World Council of Churches. We believe these comments can contribute to the discussion of RC relations in the Assembly, and desire that they be published with the Fourth Report by way of an addendum or appendix, along with such comments as the Assembly may see fit to add.

1. *Unity* [see Part I, a) The existing communion; Part IV, 1) a) The unity of the Church

The ecumenical movement has become a multi-faceted movement taking within the scope of its concern almost every aspect of church life and of human endeavour thereby being enabled to make a rich contribution to Christian understanding and to the living of a Christian life in the contemporary world. Yet it loses its meaning unless it has as both its initial impulse and its ultimate goal the unity which is the gift of Christ to his faithful people. In our understanding therefore, the essential characteristic of the ecumenical movement is a longing "for the one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world so that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1).

There is a sense in which the unity of the Church is an end in itself since it is meant to be the living illustration of that mystery of unity which is the life of the Trinity (*U.R.* 2). This truth specifies both the nature and shape of the Church and its essential mission, to sum up all things in Christ. It is in this context that the Roman Catholic Church understands and affirms its service of the unity willed and given by our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is one of the important insights of the ecumenical movement that there is an already existing communion among Christians and that an urgent task for Christ's followers is the effort to give this correct and adequate expression (see *U.R.* 3). However, the scope of ecumenical endeavour has another necessary aspect. This communion is as yet incomplete. It is rendered so by important and even fundamental issues which still separate Christians. Thus ecumenism entails also the work of overcoming these separations, the sorting out of the causes of division by patient, careful effort done in full loyalty to the Gospel teaching and to right conscience, so that full and perfect communion may eventually be achieved (*U.R.* 4). We believe that the Roman Catholic understanding of ecclesial communion, presented with openness of spirit, can be a positive contribution.

We believe that in stating this clearly we are giving a realistic orientation for the common research to be fostered by the Joint Working Group. It does mean that the promising insights offered by an understanding of conciliarity as a feature of the Church and its life ought to be developed in relation to and without devaluation of the notion of organic

unity. It is in this context too that the possibilities and limits of a legitimate diversity within the life and expression of the Church may be understood.

Given such a context we can envisage the role of the Joint Working Group as one of encouragement for ecumenical efforts at the local level, stimulating awareness of the original ecumenical contribution which is to be expected from the diverse situations but always within the bonds which link the local community to the universal fellowship.

It is in this context too that we are able to welcome the idea that, with the approval and cooperation of the churches involved, there be established a forum for the exchange of information about the existing bilateral confessional dialogues, including those in which the Roman Catholic Church is engaged. This forum could also assist in the process of evaluating the emerging trends in the bilaterals and therefore be of benefit to the theological work of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and of ecumenical research generally. However, we do not see such a forum as a means of coordination of bilateral dialogues, which remain the direct responsibility of the two partners, nor, except in a very general sense, as an advisory board.

2. *Common Witness* [see Part I, Common Witness; Part IV, 1) b) Common Christian Witness]

The studies already undertaken by the Joint Working Group on this subject have been given a new actuality by the exhortation of the 1974 Synod of Bishops to "broader common witness to Christ". This common witness is central to the ecumenical task but in attempting to carry it out we touch upon crucial ecumenical problems. The promise of the ecumenical movement is that there are convergences; its problem is that the convergences have not yet reached full maturity. These convergences are taking place on the level of our understanding of the fundamental Christian faith and on the level of our understanding of the nature and demands of ecclesial communion. The oneness we already share on both these levels warrants and impels us to a certain common witness, where differences still exist on either of these levels, so that we have not yet achieved a convergence in the perfect unity of the one Church of Christ, theological and pastoral reasons will require the establishment of certain limits to the common witness we are able to give. These limits are not to be determined a priori. They will be determined in specific cases according to the concrete objectives of common witness.

In this context the Joint Working Group will make its further inquiries into the question of common witness recommended in the Report. It will direct our attention again to the issues of unity, of fellowship and of authentic doctrine, made more urgent than ever by the extent and the depth of those things we hold in common and which are drawing us closer together, as well as by the need of human beings for the faith and love of Christ.

3. *Development and Peace* [see Part IV, 1) c)]

We believe the existence and work of SODEPAX are significant in manifesting a common Christian response to an imperative which is an essential consequence of the Gospel and an effective means of enabling the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church to communicate and act together in the fields of justice and peace and to stimulate regional and local action.

Of its nature the scope of SODEPAX is limited. It cannot in any conceivable way cover the entire field of its particular subject. However, we believe its influence has been and can again be great as in its current programme it will seek to give the poor countries and poor Christian communities a voice in the search for a more just and sustainable world society.

4. *Ongoing Collaboration* [see Part IV, 3) c)]

It seems to us the contacts and collaboration already taking place between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches are greater than this section might indicate. Certainly we are convinced that the matters listed under this head are important and that persevering and patient effort needs to be given to continuing and, wherever appropriate, expanding this kind of collaboration. In most cases it will take place in a step by step process, but we are sure it is necessary to continue wholeheartedly with this solid if unspectacular part of our relationship.

5. *The Joint Working Group* [see Part III]

The importance of the Joint Working Group lies in the visibility which it gives to the RCC (WCC relationship, the manifestation it affords of the mutual ecumenical commitment, and equally in the way in which it enables this relationship to be given practical expression. The reality of the relationship and its seriousness is expressed in the

Report. Given that the Roman Catholic Church will not in the immediate future give expression to it by seeking membership in the Council, the role of the Joint Working Group becomes crucial.

We see the Joint Working Group as a point of coordination and reflection. It is to be an instrument by which the two separate bodies may coordinate both studies and activities. It is a kind of vantage point from which the ecumenical collaboration of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches and its member Churches can be surveyed, assessed and promoted. It is a highly useful means of assessing what can be done in terms of resources and in terms of our respective theological understandings.

With the proposed re-structuration of the Joint Working Group we will be rendered more flexible and more effective. We intend as far as possible to organize our participation in it so that it will encourage and serve both ecumenical efforts on the international level and those that take place regionally and locally.

We are making the above observations with a view to specifying further our understanding of the content of the Report as a result of reflection on it since it was completed. It is possible to recognize frankly the opportunities and the difficulties of our relationship since what already unites us in the faith and love of Christ is so strong that it impels us to strive courageously to overcome the things that still separate us and to manifest as fully and authentically as possible the real, if imperfect, communion that already exists.

With warm fraternal greetings, I remain,

Yours sincerely

JOHN CARDINAL WILLEBRANDS

President

APPENDIX II

RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE FIFTH WCC ASSEMBLY *Nairobi, November/December 1975*

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

I. General Considerations

Looking back at the period since Uppsala, this Fifth Assembly feels that there is much reason for gratitude to God. New perspectives of cooperation have been opened. A few may be mentioned:

a) The theological discussion has led to new and unexpected results. Subjects which could not be taken up a few years ago have now become matters of common investigation. Bi-lateral conversations between the Roman Catholic Church and various confessional traditions have led to significant convergence which, although they await the judgement of some of the churches involved, provide a basis for advance towards fuller unity.

b) Cooperation in the field of Bible translation has expanded beyond expectation. In many countries, the churches not only share the same text of translation, but cooperate in the distribution of the Bible.

c) Increasingly, the Roman Catholic Church participates as a full member in regional, national and local Councils. Recent publications of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church give significant encouragement in this direction.

At the same time, it must be recognized that in other areas the advance has become slower, even though mutual engagement has become irreversible. Nevertheless, a new situation has been created by the pace of advance in the past few years which must be viewed against the previous lack of progress seen in historical perspective. It is this accelerated pace, together with its consequent need for commitment, which presents new problems. The initial stage of encounter is over, and the churches now face the deeper problems of ecumenical fellowship.

Where are the obstacles ?

1) The principal difficulty has been to find ways to witness together as a fellowship of churches. The Roman Catholic Church is constituted as a universal community. Its belief that the one Church of Jesus Christ subsists in it does not exclude dialogue and co-operation with other churches, but the emphasis it places on its identity and proper initiative makes it difficult to act with other churches. 2) The international juridical recognition given to the Holy See makes co-operation between it and the World Council of Churches especially difficult in areas like International Affairs (especially representation at the United Nations), and in Relief and Aid, etc. 3) Similarly, the emphasis on identity of member churches of the World Council can create obstacles to further cooperation. In order to prepare the way into the future, it will be necessary to reach a deeper mutual understanding of the "unity we seek" and provide a more solid basis for the common witness which is required in today's world. The opportunities offered by the full membership of Roman Catholic theologians in the Faith and Order Commission should be even more fully utilized in the years to come. The Fourth Report of the Joint Working Group contains a statement on the Common Ground (p. 146 of Work Book-English edition) which may provide a useful starting point for further and more complete reflections. The forum suggested for the evaluation of bi-lateral conversations between the various confessional traditions could make an important contribution (page 152 of Work Book- English edition). The similarity of themes at recent important conferences of both the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church provide an encouraging sign for future development.

At the Uppsala Assembly, *the issue of Roman Catholic membership in the World Council of Churches was raised*. In the meantime, it has become clear that the Roman Catholic Church will not apply for membership in the immediate future. Nevertheless, this Assembly gladly agrees to work with the Roman Catholic Church according to the pattern which was established at the time of the Second Vatican Council and which has developed since. It remains convinced, however, that the unity of the Church can be visibly promoted through the concerted action of all Churches embodied in a structural ecumenical fellowship. The World Council of Churches is one model of such a fellowship. This Assembly therefore looks forward eagerly to the day when it will become possible for the RCC to become a member of the WCC.

Meanwhile, the significant developments which are taking place today at the regional, national and local levels need to be encouraged and intensified, so that future cooperation may build upon the experience so gained. And, finally, this Assembly expresses the hope that, responsive to the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, both the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church may dare boldly to proclaim in a more effective common witness.

II. Fourth Official Report of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches

The Assembly approves the Fourth Report. In particular, it agrees to the setting up of a new Joint Working Group and expresses its agreement with the description of its mandate. It approves the general lines of the programme as described in Part IV; and expresses the hope that:

i) The Joint Working Group will work on specific aspects of the ecumenical movement, submit them regularly to the Central Committee and through the Central Committee to the member churches;

ii) efforts be made to associate the member churches to the fullest possible extent in the work of the Joint Working Group and to build future work on the experience of dialogue, common witness and collaboration at regional, national and local levels.

iii) Particular attention will be given to the question of the role and development of ecumenical structures of collaboration at regional, national and local levels and to clarification of the relation of these structures to the concept of conciliar fellowship.

III. Sodepax (Committee on Society, Development and Peace)

The Assembly commends the activities of Sodepax and agrees that to the recommendation of the Joint Working Group as presented in its Fourth Report that Sodepax continue for a further period of three years, beginning 1 January 1976.

(The Policy Reference Committee II recommends that the comments on the Fourth Report of the Joint Working Group, submitted by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church be incorporated in the official report of this Assembly).

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