

REPORT ON ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH COLLABORATION

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One of the important aspects of the RCC/WCC relationship is the effort that it makes to relate to the important events of each other's life and to benefit from each other's work. This can be the occasion of mutual theological exchange, of enrichment and deepening of fraternal contact. Several such events are immediately before us and the collaboration over the past year has included preparation for them.

a) The Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches

- (i) The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity has sent copies of the material for the Assembly preparatory booklet to the ecumenical commissions of all episcopal conferences for appropriate use by local Roman Catholic and ecumenical groups.
- (ii) The Secretary of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Mgr Charles Moeller, is a member of the Assembly Preparatory Committee.
- (iii) The Secretariat has been in contact with the local Indonesian Roman Catholic Church authorities to provide the necessary information and to encourage and support the efforts of collaboration in both the preparation and celebration of the Assembly which are under consideration by the Indonesian Episcopal Conference and the Indonesian Council of Churches.¹
- (iv) The Secretariat has received and is acting on the World Council of Churches invitation to send observers to the Assembly. It is understood that while the categories which are obligatory on member churches sending delegates do not apply strictly in the case of observers, nevertheless they will be taken into account when making the selection.
- (v) It is further envisaged that a Fourth Official Report of the Joint Working Group will be presented at the Assembly, and a Roman Catholic will be invited to comment upon it.

The Joint Working Group welcomes this evidence of a larger participation by the Roman Catholics in the preparation and celebration of the Assembly.

b) The Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church (September-October 1974)

The Synod, on the theme "The Evangelization of the Contemporary World", has deep implications for the whole life within the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, it was significant that in September 1973, the World Council of Churches was asked to react to the first draft of the Synod working document at the time it was sent to all episcopal conferences. This World Council of Churches' reaction was then submitted along with the replies from the episcopal

conferences to the Secretariat of the Synod which is responsible for the final version of the document that will be used in the Synod sessions.

An invitation has been sent to the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches to come to Rome on the occasion of the Synod in order to address its members at a special gathering with a view to communicating and sharing the insights of the World Council of Churches and its member churches on aspects of world mission and evangelism.

c) Holy Year 1975

Following a custom which originated in the 13th century, the Roman Catholic Church will celebrate the year as a Holy Year. When announcing the event the Pope expressed the wish that this year be a period of renewal and reconciliation. For the Roman Catholic Church the Holy Year is also an occasion when the faithful make pilgrimages to Rome and special indulgences are granted. This aspect of the Holy Year presents difficulties to other Churches; other Christians do not have the emphasis on Rome nor the teaching on indulgences. These issues need to be faced in open discussion.

There is no doubt, however, that the forthcoming Holy Year will place more emphasis than earlier years on the reconciliation among Christians of all traditions. Stimulated by the discussion in the Joint Working Group in 1973 the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity has been able to help notably in developing the ecumenical aspects of the Holy Year preparations. The Roman Catholic Committee in charge of the preparations for the Holy Year has now an ecumenical sub-committee chaired by Mgr Charles Moeller.

The Joint Working Group is encouraged by the considerable efforts being made by the commission responsible for the ecumenical aspects of the Holy Year to develop its ecumenical dimension. They indicate a promising beginning of a convergence of views for the future. Where the themes of reconciliation and renewal are being emphasized in the celebration of the Holy Year, ecumenical collaboration may already take place. This is all the more significant in the year when the member churches of the World Council of Churches are concerning themselves with the theme of the Fifth Assembly, "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites".

d) The Survey and Analysis

In order to carry out a process of re-appraisal of the WCC/RCC relationship and of its role, the JWG in 1973 asked for a survey and analysis of the problems facing the churches as they carry out their mission and the consequences of these problems for the ecumenical situation. The study was also to include an analysis of the various types of ecumenical cooperation which have come into being in the course of recent years.

The first step was a questionnaire sent by the World Council to councils of churches in approximately twenty countries and the Secretariat to ecumenical commissions in the same countries. The results were then used in order to prepare two reports, one on each side. This was done with a certain amount of coordination both in the local situations and especially between the authors of the reports, Fr Jean de la Croix Bonadio and Reverend Ivan Gould.

These reports were discussed at a small joint consultation held in Geneva, February, 1974. They were then, together with the recommendations formulated by this consultation, submitted to the Joint Working Group as basic material for its consideration for future relationships and programs.

In order to make known fairly widely the results of the joint survey, the JWG requested that

- (a) analysis of the survey and discussion on it be published in an appropriate form, and
- (b) six of its members be asked to give reactions to this joint analysis in the form of brief essays.

e) SODEPAX

Sodepax has continued to function as a joint liaison service between the RCC and the WCC, acting as a catalytic agent for Christian cooperation for justice, development and peace.

Sodepax is involved, together with the Pontifical Commission justice and Peace and the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development, in promoting thinking about development as the midpoint of the Second Development Decade approaches. The publication of Church Alert as an information service for the churches and groups forms part of this effort as does the recent survey of ecumenical agencies on the national and regional levels and of their activities. joint staff discussions between the two commissions are planned and a series of regional consultations.

The Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD) is an interreligious attempt at researching and studying situations in Asia from the viewpoint of development and economic justice. It has sought to identify problems, to define national priorities and decide strategies and planning for regional and interregional cooperation. In accordance with the original plan, the project was initiated by Sodepax and is progressively being handed over to the control of local groups.

Northern Ireland. Here Sodepax has tried over the past three years to act as a catalytic agent. At Pentecost in 1973 there was the world-wide Ecumenical Initiative of Understanding and Prayer for Northern Ireland jointly promoted by the SPCU, the Pontifical Commission justice and Peace, and the World Council of Churches and involving churches throughout the world. In November 1973, there was a small informal meeting in France which gathered 24 Catholics and Protestants from Ireland and the Continent for information, joint reflection on the role of Christians in conflict situations, and mutual encounter in an ecumenical atmosphere. In a period of growing tension and confrontation

between the two communities, plans are -being discussed with the Irish churches for a follow-up program in Ireland.

f) Other Collaboration

1. Faith and Order

(i) Since 1968, Roman Catholic theologians have been members of the Faith and Order Commission. Their membership represents approximately 10% of the Commission and they are involved in all Faith and Order studies. At present, the three major studies are:

a) "Giving Account of the Hope that is Within Us", an attempt to articulate the Christian hope in contemporary terms. The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity has transmitted an invitation to the ecumenical commissions of the episcopal conferences to join in this study process. Roman Catholics are also involved in several local groups.

b) "Concepts of Unity and Models of Union" a study that focuses on the nature of the unity we seek. This study was the theme of a conference held in Salamanca in September 1973, and several Roman Catholics were present. One of the major papers at the conference was given by a Roman Catholic theologian.

c) "The Ministry", a study on the ordained ministry in ecumenical perspective. The Faith and Order Secretariat has convened several consultations to foster common understanding in this field. Participation of Roman Catholic theologians has been welcomed in these consultations.

(ii) Week of Prayer. For several years, a joint WCC/RCC group has been responsible for preparing the material to be used as a help in this annual observance. Since 1972, a particular local committee has prepared the initial material and a small consultation of WCC/RCC has edited the material for international use. A group in Melbourne, Australia prepared the initial material for the Week of Prayer 1975, and the Caribbean Conference of Churches is preparing it for 1976.

(iii) Triennial of the Faith and Order Commission, July-August, 1974, at Accra, Ghana. Two major themes were dealt with: "Giving Account of the Hope that is Within Us" and "The Unity of the Church". Two presentations were given by Roman Catholics.

2. The Conference and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism

(i) The new constitution of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism offers the possibility of a consultative or affiliative relation of various groups to the Conference. It was framed with a view to including also the possible cooperation of Roman Catholic participation of religious orders active in mission. This was taken up on the Roman Catholic side and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in consultation with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, acting through its advisory group of major superiors of religious orders, Consilium 18, appointed four congregations, two of men and two of women to have a consultative relationship with the Conference. This is an immediate step which it is hoped will permit better communication and exchange of information and assist any future collaboration that may be considered appropriate. Further, by the same process three persons have been appointed as observer consultants for a three year period to the regular meetings of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. In addition, the SPCU and SEDOS also continue to be represented by one observer consultant.

(ii) A seminar was held in Rome in March 1974 which gathered a number of Roman Catholic theologians and missiologists; in order to respond to selected themes from the "Salvation Today" study and the Bangkok Conference. Two CWME staff members also took part. Summaries of the group discussion have been sent to CWME as a response and contribution to the "Salvation Today" study.

3. Christian Medical Commission

(i) Two small meetings have been held at the request of the Christian Medical Commission to reflect on the nature of the Christian ministry of healing and the role of the Church in health and medical work. A Roman Catholic observer has taken part in both. Because of the amount of collaboration in national medical secretariats and in health programs in a number of places, it is important that there be convergence in understanding of the Christian responsibility in these fields.

(ii) Since Sister Gilmory Simmons has come to the end of her second term as a staff consultant with the Christian Medical Commission, and is due to return to work with her religious congregation, an effort is being made to find another Roman Catholic sister who is also a doctor of medicine and who could be recommended to the authorities for appointment as a consultant for a term of eighteen months.

4. Dialogue with other Faiths and Ideologies

Roman Catholic scholars have participated regularly in the WCC program on Dialogue with People of Living Faith and Ideologies. Further important contacts have been made this year through the visit of Cardinal Pignedoli and staff members of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions to Geneva, as well as through the visit of Cardinal Koenig and staff members of the Secretariat for Non-Believers. These were followed by a visit to Rome by World Council staff. Staff consultations of this kind may be expected to continue.

There is already an important mutual exchange of information and a certain coordination of some programs. The Joint Working Group encourages the continuance and, as appropriate, the development of the contacts and coordination and recommends investigation of some possible joint programs in the field of dialogue.

5. Church and Society

The study on "The Future of Man and Society in a World of Science-Based Technology" which has been going since 1970 concluded this year with a conference in Bucharest, June-July, 1974. In view of its importance, several Roman Catholic observer consultants were present and one of the major presentations was made by a Roman Catholic.

6. Laity Concerns

Informal staff consultations between the Laity Council of the Roman Catholic Church and the Program Unit III on Education and Renewal of the World Council of Churches continue to be held on an average of twice a year.

(i) In June 1974, in Berlin, the WCC Program Unit III organized a conference on the theme of "Sexism in the 1970s: Discrimination Against Women", in which several Roman Catholics participated. The report of this conference along with results from the Pontifical Roman Catholic Study Commission on Women in Society and the Church, when they are available, will be considered in the context of one of the staff consultations between the Laity Council and Unit III to see what collaboration is feasible in this area, particularly with a view to the observance of 1975 as the "International Year of Women".

(ii) Arrangements are in hand for the Unit III Laity Council consultation on new trends in laity formation to be held in Assisi in September 1974. As well as providing for sharing experiences and critical evaluation of approaches over recent years, it is hoped that the consultation will contribute to ecumenical thinking and further exchange and help to establish a network of contact and collaboration. It would also contribute towards the Fifth Assembly and meetings of the Laity Council organized in Rome as part of the program of the Holy Year 1975.

(iii) A staff consultation, to be held at the end of 1974, will explore the implications of the survey and analysis prepared for the 1974 Joint Working Group meeting to discover what they mean for ongoing collaboration between the WCC Program Unit on Education and Renewal and the RC Laity Council,

7. Education

The contact between the WCC Unit on Education and Renewal and the various departments of the Roman Curia concerned with education continues. At the third consultation of this kind, which was held in June 1974, representatives from the Unit III and from the Theological Education Fund met with representatives from the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the Congregation for the Clergy, the Laity Council, the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. Among the topics discussed were the concerns for education which will be treated at the Fifth Assembly of the WCC. It was recommended that, at the next staff consultation to be held in the Spring of 1975, this topic be the principal subject of discussion.

At the next plenary meeting in February 1975, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity will take up the first draft of a document on ecumenism in preaching and catechetics. The JWG recommends that the WCC be invited to make a contribution towards the preparation of this document.

The Joint Working Group notes the considerable amount of Roman Catholic participation in the Ecumenical Institute of the WCC through the form of guest lecturers, seminar group leaders and students.

8. Service and Relief

Staff contacts between the Pontifical Council Cor Unum and CICARWS, together with an exchange of information and the coordination of some aspects of programs, have continued. The JWG wishes to encourage the intensification of these contacts with a view to more effective coordination.

9. Human Rights

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights in December 1973, the President of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace and the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches published a declaration. The Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace is now preparing a document on human rights and the Commission of Churches on International Affairs of the WCC has been giving major emphasis to this subject through a series of regional consultations and a world consultation, to be held in October 1974, which is hoped to give further impulses to re-thinking the issues involved in human rights. The JWG welcomes the efforts of the staffs of both commissions in promoting discussion and collaboration in this field.

10. Councils of Churches

On the Roman Catholic side, the SPCU has a document on local ecumenism in preparation. It aims at giving orientations for Roman Catholic relations to regional, national and local councils of churches as well as other forms of ecumenical collaboration. It will be made available in the near future.

In 1971 the joint Working Group initiated a survey on Roman Catholic participation in national and local councils. Since that time further developments have taken place. Therefore, the Joint Working Group suggests that another survey be made to review and assess these developments.

[*Information Service* 24 (1974/II) 1-5]

ENDNOTES

1. This was before the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches meeting in Berlin in August 1974, which, due to various circumstances, had to change both the place and the date of the Fifth Assembly. It is now to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, Nov. 23-Dec. 10, 1975.