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CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY AND THE SALVATION ARMY

Summary and Recommendation

In May 2012 delegates representing the Catholic Church and The Salvation Army met at Sunbury Court, Sunbury-on-Thames, near London, for the last of a series of five meetings of informal conversations. The first meeting was held in December 2007 – also at Sunbury Court. The decision to embark on these conversations was a natural consequence of the friendly, and more frequent, contacts between the Holy See and The Salvation Army in Italy over recent years, and the visits of international Salvation Army leaders to Rome and the Holy See.

The fruits of these contacts include the presence of General John Larsson and Commissioner Preda Larsson at the funeral of Pope John Paul II and the visit of Bishop Brian Farrell to the 2004 Salvation Army Europe Zonal Conference, where he addressed Salvation Army leaders representing 28 European countries, and a meeting between General Shaw Clifton and Cardinal Walter Kasper.

Background

The reasons for embarking on these conversations include the following:

1. *Mutual history*

William Booth had cordial relationships with a number of Catholic leaders and on the whole, contacts between the Catholic Church and The Salvation Army have always been friendly, although in some countries misunderstandings and tensions have arisen. The area of closest affinity and occasional cooperation has been in ministry to the poor, the suffering and the marginalised. As early as 1889, when The Salvation Army was in its infancy, Cardinal Manning marched with a Salvation Army band in support of hungry London dockworkers in the East End of London. This is just one of many examples of The Salvation Army and the Catholic Church joining forces in serving humanity. Furthermore the Catholic Church and The Salvation Army have both been positively engaged in the ecumenical movement.

2. *Recent developments*

As mentioned above, friendly contacts between the Holy See and Salvation Army leaders in Italy have developed over recent years. Local and national Salvation Army leaders have been invited to a number of the Holy See's celebrations – both as guests and as participants. Succeeding world leaders of The Salvation Army – General John Larsson and Commissioner Freda Larsson, and General Shaw Clifton – have been guests of the Vatican. A new milestone was reached in 2007 when Bishop Brian Farrell addressed The Salvation Army's Europe Zonal Conference in Rome, and General Shaw Clifton met Cardinal Kasper for a wide-ranging conversation on issues of mutual interest and concern. Out of the warmth and sincerity of these meetings arose the conviction that the Holy Spirit was guiding us together along a path where, in sincere Christian fellowship, we could share in frank, informal conversations and exchange of views, leading to deeper mutual understanding and appreciation of each others' beliefs, practices and traditions.

3. *Serving communities*

In many parts of the world The Salvation Army and the Catholic Church minister to the same communities – both spiritually and practically – and a clearer understanding and appreciation of the faith, values and principles upon which our varying ministries are built will offset the danger of mistrust and exclusivity. We can also learn from each other and improve the effectiveness of our ministries.

4. *Common pastoral grounds*

In many workplaces Catholics and Salvationists work side by side. It has also become more common for Catholics to be employed by The Salvation Army in administrative and executive positions, as well as in institutions

such as hospitals, clinics, hostels, schools and homes for the elderly. Similarly, it has become more common for Salvationists to be employed by Catholic institutions and agencies.

Marriages between Salvationists and Catholics already take place and are likely to become even more common. Mutual understanding of each other's spiritual background and loyalty to one's church tradition are not only desirable, they can become sources of spiritual enrichment.

5. *Church unity*

The Catholic Church and The Salvation Army have been active participants in ecumenical fellowships and events for many years and both have the desire to live and serve in harmony with the prayer of Jesus for the unity of all believers (see John 17).

Reflections, Recommendations and Conclusion

Firstly we thank God for:

- The providential series of events and circumstances that brought the Catholic Church and The Salvation Army closer together in Christian fellowship and service, and created the desire for greater mutual understanding.
- The willingness of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and The Salvation Army international Headquarters to explore the viability and potential value of arranging a series of informal conversations.
- The atmosphere of sincere, mutual acceptance in Christ that has pervaded every meeting.
- The seriousness with which the chosen topics have been discussed, and the honest, uninhibited exchange of views which they have stimulated.
- The genuine desire to understand each other's points of view and interpretations of fundamental beliefs – even where these differ – and the helpful and challenging insights that we have received.
- The commitment and prayerful engagement of all the delegates.

Reflections

- Through these conversations we have learned much about each other's history, worship, structures and traditions. In comparing our theologies of church, divine revelation, holiness and mission we have discovered common ground, and strengthened our mutual commitment to social justice and service to suffering humanity.
- We have come a long way in terms of mutual understanding of, and respect for, our distinctive identities, traditions and vocations within the purpose of God.
- We have recognised that in addition to revealing areas of consensus, the most carefully researched studies and sincere discussions can lead to varying conclusions, depending on our particular histories and our understanding and interpretation of foundational sources such as Scripture, church history and tradition.
- The exchange of views on doctrines has revealed encouraging degrees of consensus. However, it has also confirmed areas of sincerely held difference. In either case it has been acknowledged that both The Salvation Army and the Catholic Church desire to share the gospel of Christ with the world and to witness and serve the Lord faithfully.
- While recognising that the prayer of Jesus in John 17 calls us to commit ourselves to unity, we do not believe that genuine unity implies uniformity or excludes legitimate diversity. There are, understandably, a number of issues on which the Catholic Church and The Salvation Army have different views and interpretations, such as the role of the sacraments in Christian life. However, these differences have not prevented us from finding a path of encouraging and helpful dialogue. Each set of conversations has started with the recognition of the degree of agreement already present, and from there we have gone on to discuss specific areas of disagreement. When foundational issues have been discussed there has been no attempt from either side to push for change of beliefs in a bid to attain consensus. Rather, there has been a search for a wholeness of the truth that is represented and expressed by complementary and differing understandings.
- We have confirmed areas of consensus that are strong enough to sustain continuing fellowship, dialogue and cooperation.

Recommendations

- We recommend that a report of these conversations be presented to the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and to the General of the Salvation Army.
- We recommend that deliberate steps be taken by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and The Salvation Army's International Headquarters to ensure that the positive momentum generated by these conversations be maintained.
- To this end, we suggest that another series of conversations be scheduled where, in addition to sharing in fellowship, testimony and prayer, attention be given to specific areas of Mutual interest and concern.

Conclusion

We believe that this series of conversations provides a solid foundation upon which to build an ongoing relationship which can be of Mutual benefit to The Salvation Army and the Catholic Church.

*Colonel Michael Marvell
Sunbury Court, 26 May 2012*

[<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/salvation-army/2007-2012-information-conversations/2007-2012-information-conversations/summary-and-recommendations.html>]

and

[*Conversations. A record of the papers presented and recommendations made during the informal conversations between The Catholic Church and The Salvation Army 2007-2012* (London: Salvation Books, 2014) 271-276]