

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

1965

Meetings of Joint Working Group
Bossey (Geneva), May 22nd-24th,

Ariccia (Rome), Nov. 17th-20th, 1965

I. BASIC QUESTIONS

1. *The Mandate of the Joint Working Group*

After several preliminary meetings between representatives of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity and of the World Council of Churches, the mandate for the Joint Working Group was presented to and adopted by the Central Committee at its meeting in Nigeria in January 1965. It was thereafter also officially accepted by the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church.

In working out this project, the Roman Catholic side was guided by the Decree on Ecumenism promulgated at the end of the third session of the Vatican Council; while the representatives of the World Council of Churches based their approach on the main lines of several WCC documents that describe the nature and function of the World Council and on various statements made by the World Council on the contemporary ecumenical situation.

Its task, both spiritual and pastoral, is to be undertaken in a spirit of prayer, and in the conviction that God is guiding His people. The Group is not limited to settling the technical and administrative aspects of collaboration; it is called on to discern the will of God in the contemporary ecumenical situation.

2. *The Nature of Ecumenism*

The Working Group concerned itself in the first place with Ecumenism as the concept is understood by each side. It took account of the Catholic positions stated in the various documents of the Vatican Council. It also examined the various texts that express the position held by the WCC. Nor did it lose sight of the actual operation of the WCC. It is certainly difficult to draw a comparison between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC. On the one hand we have a Church, on the other a fellowship of Churches. In reality the concept of Ecumenism which is presented in the Vatican Council's Decree can be compared only with concepts to be found in similar documents emanating from other individual Churches. Nevertheless, the meeting of the RCC and the WCC has raised particular problems which require joint study. The task of Ecumenism is not regarded by the two sides in a wholly similar manner. It is therefore of importance that dialogue on this subject should be continued and deepened, so that a common understanding of it may be reached. In spite of differing views however, joint action can already be undertaken in various fields. The continued fostering and deepening of contacts can only help to clarify what still remains obscure.

Furthermore, even if there exist in the various churches different ecclesiological principles that govern ecumenical action, we are convinced that the Ecumenical Movement is one and common to all.

3. *Ecumenical Dialogue*

The Group also started a study on the nature of ecumenical dialogue. It has not yet been completed. On the request of the Joint Working Group a special sub-group prepared a document which will be discussed and approved at a later meeting. In the course of the discussions both sides stressed that ecumenical method requires that all encounters should take place on an equal footing. Attention was drawn to this essential characteristic of ecumenical dialogue both by the

WCC Executive Committee at Odessa, and by the Vatican Decree on Ecumenism ("*par cum pari*").

4. *Bilateral Conversations*

The existence of the joint Working Group does not prevent direct conversations being held between the Roman Catholic and other Churches. Questions concerning the relations of two Churches in the realm of faith and action fall within the sphere of bilateral conversations. This fact was expressly recognized when the mandate was defined. We believe, however, that multilateral and bilateral conversations are closely linked. It is for this reason that mutual exchange of information is of the very greatest importance.

5. *Observers and Consultants*

The multiplication of ecumenical contacts makes it necessary to clarify the status enjoyed by those taking part in those contacts, with a proper regard for varying situations.

a) This cannot be done without some attempt at definitions: An *Observer* attends a meeting with a view to acquiring information for himself, and to giving information to his Church. In order to underline that an Observer does not assume his function on his own initiative, but that he is appointed to be his Church, the qualification "officially appointed" may be added to his title. It will be remembered that the Vatican Council understood the expression *observer delegatus* in this sense.

A *Consultant* collaborates actively in the meetings which he attends. He may be called upon to speak, or to prepare material for study, etc.

The functions of Observer and of Consultant may be combined. In that case we propose the use of the term *Consultant-Observer*.

However, no matter how important the role of a Consultant-Observer may become, it must be borne in mind that his status (which is consultative), does not entitle him to speak or to vote.

b) In the present stage of relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, the interchange of observers and consultants appears to provide the best means of establishing and maintaining contacts.

c) If a meeting is organised by the Roman Catholic Church in conjunction with another Church or Council of Churches, all the partners involved bear equal responsibility for the meeting and for its conclusions.

d) The Joint Working Group is not called upon to concern itself directly with national and local councils. It is evident in any case that a great variety of situations exist in this field. However, the Group feels that it should prove possible in many cases to give to Roman Catholics who are asked to concern themselves with the activities of national or local Councils, the status of Observer, or even that of permanent Consultant-Observer. This does not prevent the adoption of other solutions now or further developments in future.

II. AREAS OF COLLABORATION

6. The Joint Working Group is unable, on its own, to deal with all the problems that may confront it. In order to develop relations it will require the help of specialized groups: commissions and consultations. Meetings of this kind have already taken place on certain subjects between representatives of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Other meetings are planned. In the paragraphs that follow we give a general view of areas in which collaboration either has begun or can begin.

It is important to note in this context, the difference between:

- on the one hand, the work of commissions and consultations set up directly by the Joint Working Group, and
- or the other hand, the activities of commissions and consultations set up either by various organizations of the Roman Catholic Church (for example, the Secretariat for Christian Unity), or by Catholic organizations (for example COPECIAL) in conjunction with the divisions or departments of the WCC.

In the first case, reports are sent to the Joint Working Group. In the second case, reports are submitted to the responsible bodies, while the Joint Working Group is kept informed.

7. *Faith and Order*

Although not the only sphere, the work of "Faith and Order" (which corresponds in Catholic terminology to the sphere of doctrine), offers many opportunities for consultations. Collaboration has already begun. It needs to be deepened.

We should like to put forward the following proposals:

a) The program of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC already envisages carrying out a number of studies on a world or regional scale. The Joint Working Group is glad to note that Roman Catholic theologians will take part in several of these study-commissions as consultant-observers.

b) Further possibilities for collaboration however, also exist. Parallel studies could be organised. Certain themes suggested by the Faith and Order Commission could be studied by groups of Roman Catholics, while the Secretariat for Christian Unity (or other Roman Catholic organizations), could in the same way suggest themes to be studied by groups composed exclusively of theologians invited by the World Council. The conclusions resulting from the work done would be submitted to the body which has initiated it - on occasion the World Council, on occasion the Secretariat for Unity. The Joint Working Group would be kept informed,

c) The Working Group proposes that a special theological Commission be set up jointly by the Secretariat for Unity and the Commission on Faith and Order, to study the fundamental issues that continually arise in the dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the other Churches. After detailed study of matter, the Joint Working Group suggests as a general theme "Catholicity and Apostolicity."

8. *Common Prayer at Ecumenical Gatherings*

The rapid development of the ecumenical movement obliges us to reflect together on common prayer and common liturgical action. At its first session the joint Working Group had desired a consultation on this theme. Since then, two such meetings, jointly organised, have studied the problems involved and reached certain conclusions of a provisional nature. They will be found in an appendix attached to this report. They are put forward for the attention and study of all.

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the faithful of all confessions meet together before the Lord. Further developments along these lines require common study. The Working Group expresses the wish that a further consultation be called to examine this subject.

9. *Missions*

There are possibilities of collaboration open to us in the mission field; these need to be analyzed with care. At Crêt-Bérard (near Lausanne, Switzerland) from 5th-10th April, 1965, a first consultation, jointly organised by the Division of World Mission and Evangelism and the Secretariat for Christian Unity, took place to discuss questions of missionary activity. A report was sent to the Joint Working Group. From this emerges that there are different areas open for possible collaboration in the future. Further studies will however be necessary in order to examine the ways opened up by the Council's Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, promulgated at the end of the fourth session.

This report also drew attention to the tensions that sometimes arise in missionary areas (unworthy forms of proselytism, disloyal competition, etc.). To remedy such situations the Joint Working Group is convinced that means must be sought for establishing and maintaining close contacts between the bodies concerned, and proposes that action should be taken to this end. It is desirable, for example, that someone should be appointed by the competent authorities on each side to study complaints and to initiate efforts to clarify such situations.

10. *Church and Society*

The problem of the place of the Church in society is one that faces all Christians in all Churches. Here a vast area requires study and collaboration. A consultation organized by the WCC's Department of Church and Society and the Secretariat for Christian Unity took place in Geneva from 28th-31st March, 1965. The report that was presented to us encourages us to pursue the cooperation. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World contains important elements in this respect. On its part, the World Council of Churches is preparing a World Conference on Church and Society (1966). A second consultation is already being organized.

11. *The Laity*

Problems specific to the laity in the Christian world can also profitably be studied in common. Two meetings have already taken place between the Permanent Committee for International Congresses on the Lay Apostolate (COPECIAL, a Roman Catholic organization), and the WCC's Departments on the Laity. In spite of different theological approaches, questions concerning the apostolate of the laity and their training have led to fairly broad agreement. This discussion led to the following conclusions among others: "While differences of faith must be respected, we must not do separately any aspect of laity training which we can do as well or better together" (Gazzada-Varses, Italy, September 7th-10th, 1965).

12. *Women*

A similar desire for joint action was expressed by a group of women invited by the relevant Department of the WCC (the Department on Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society) and by the Secretariat for Unity, at a meeting held at Vicarello-Bracciano from October 22nd-24th, 1965. Those taking part expressed the wish that further gatherings of this kind should be arranged. Other subjects that could be discussed include: the re-evaluation of the role of the unmarried woman, changes in the role of the family, part-time or full-time work for the married woman, possibilities of service open to women in church institutions, and possibilities of collaboration between women of different confessions in the celebration of the "Women's World Day of Prayer" and of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

13. *Social Service Activities, Emergency and Development Aid.*

Several points of contact clearly exist in the field of social service and emergency and development aid. The organizations concerned already collaborate to a large extent. The Joint Working Group notes with satisfaction the ever-increasing collaboration between the various relief organizations of the Roman Catholic Church and the Division of Interchurch Aid, Refugee and World Service of the WCC. It suggests that further possibilities of collaboration should be studied, especially with regard to emergency situations and disasters, but also with regard to long-term projects for combating hunger and poverty. The Joint Working Group recommends that consultations should be organized to study present possibilities of collaboration in the sphere of social service activities, emergency and development aid. At these meetings, not only should possibilities of immediate collaboration be studied, but attention should above all be paid to the spiritual inspiration and Christian responsibility that form the basis of all cooperation. The first meeting of this kind has already taken place from January 16th-20th, 1966 in Geneva.

14. *The International Field*

This field requires the most urgent collaboration on the part of all. It would be of the greatest value to Christians engaged in international affairs if they could reach common convictions concerning the basis for action in this whole field. Joint Working Group therefore hopes to be able to organize in the not too distant future a consultation on the Christian responsibility in international affairs. This aspect should be given priority of study.

15. *Catholic International Organizations*

The relations between Roman Catholic international organizations and the various departments of the WCC present particular problems. Which Catholic organization corresponds to which WCC department? The Joint Working Group has begun to study methods aimed at establishing contacts which will lead to fruitful cooperation.

III. PARTICULAR PROBLEMS CONCERNING VARIOUS AREAS OF COLLABORATION

16. *The Bible*

In several countries joint translations of the Bible are being undertaken. In certain cases Protestant translations have been used by the Roman Catholic Church. The Bible Societies and various churches have shown a lively interest in this joint action. The recent Vatican Council Constitution on Divine Revelation has encouraged such projects. ("Quae si, data opportunitate et annuente Ecclesiae auctoritate, conficiantur (versiones) communi etiam cum fratribus seiunctis nisu, ab omnibus christianis adhiberi poterunt": *Constitutio dogmatica De Divina Revelatione*, 18 nov. 1965, n. 22). Cf. supra pp. 9-11.

17. *Easter*

The fixing of one date on which all Christians would celebrate Easter is undoubtedly a project worthy of attention. The Group feels that detailed enquiry and study should be pursued on this point. Several churches have made their

viewpoints known (see the study undertaken by the “Universal Council for Life and Work”). The Roman Catholic Church recently stated its position on this matter in the appendix to the Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Cf. *supra* p. 16.

18. *Liturgy*

It is also desirable in the liturgical field that wherever Christians use the same prayers (biblical or other), identical texts should be available. This will greatly facilitate common prayer. We have only to think for example, of the advantages that would accrue from having the same version of the Lord’s Prayer in each language. The Group intends to encourage all that can be done along these lines.

IV. THE CONTINUATION OF OUR WORK

19. Our Joint Working Group has been in existence since the agreement reached last February. The work that has been accomplished, though quite considerable in itself, is very little in comparison with all that remains to be done. Most of the questions above are either only in process of study or else in the early stages of execution. In addition there remain a whole series of problems which we have not even touched yet. One of the main reasons for this is the need to examine together, and to take into account for our future work the documents of the Vatican Council that were not at our disposal when we held our last meeting.

We would mention here, simply as examples, some of the major issues that deserve study in the future:

- a) The training of clergy and laity with an ecumenical outlook. At the same time it might be possible to undertake a study of catechisms and other texts used in religious instruction in which other churches are not always objectively presented.
- b) The doctrine and practice of baptism.
- c) The theology of marriage; and mixed marriages between Christians.
- d) The practical consequences of religious liberty.
- e) Problems presented by proselytism.
- f) Problems of youth.

APPENDIX I

LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE JOINT WORKING GROUP

World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr. W. A. Visser't Hooft, World Council of Churches
Rev. Archpriest Vitaly Borovoy, World Council of Churches
Rev. Dr. R. H. E. Espy, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
Dr. N. A. Nissiotis, Ecumenical Institute-Bossey, Switzerland
Professor Dr. E. Schlink, Germany
The Rt. Rev. O. S. Tomkins, Bishop of Bristol, England
Father Paul Verghese, World Council of Churches
Rev. Dr. Lukas Vischer, World Council of Churches

Roman Catholic Members

The Most Rev. J. G. M. Willebrands, Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican
The Most Rev. Thomas Holland, Bishop of Salford, England
Mgr. William W. Baum, Bishops' Commission for Ecumenical Affairs, USA
Mgr. Carlo Bayer, Caritas Internationalis, Italy
Rev. Pierre Duprey, W. F., Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican
Rev. Jérôme Hamer, OP, Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican

APPENDIX II

JOINT WORSHIP AT ECUMENICAL GATHERINGS

Report of two meetings held in Rome (October-November 1965)

Two meetings were organized in Rome on October 16th and November 18th by the joint Working Group of the RCC and the WCC. The Roman Catholic representatives were: Mgrs. Joseph Baker and Henry Davis, Father Emmanuel Lanne, O. S. B., Father John Long, S. J., Father George Mejia and Father Thomas Stransky, C. S. P.

The WCC was represented by: Bishop Thomas Mar Athanasios, Canon John Findlow, Professor Nikos Nissiotis, Pastor W. Norgren, Professor Albert Outler, Professor J.K.S. Reid, Bishop Karekin Sarkissian and Pastor Lukas Vischer.

Introduction

There is an increasing number of occasions on which Christians of different communions meet together and the need is felt by many that some guidelines should be worked out as to how worship on such ecumenical occasions may be arranged. The WCC has a certain experience in this respect and has adopted some recommendations regarding these types of services. The Roman Catholic Church has enunciated some principles in the decree on ecumenism and is elaborating further directives concerning this subject which in the near future will give more guidance to the members of the Roman Catholic Church. To what degree can a consensus be found on the basis of these texts? To help in answering this question a few general remarks must be made.

1. When Christians meet together they experience a certain unity in a deep fellowship despite their separations which are still very real. The experience of this fellowship and an actual growth in it is particularly evident when they pray together and praise God, when they repent and ask for God's gift of forgiveness, when they listen to the Word of God together. What often cannot be grasped and formulated in thoughts and words proves to be a reality in the common movement to God. Therefore it is decisive for the ecumenical movement that Christians should meet for common prayer rooted in this common ground.
2. Common prayer however should not give the impression that a fellowship exists where this is not so. Nothing, therefore, should be done which is against the conviction and the discipline of a church. Any fellowship in worship which is not confirmed by fellowship in life does not further the ecumenical cause.
3. Taking into account both these aspects, one must still be aware of the fact that fellowship must be experienced if it is to grow. Therefore, rules which may be established should not be fixed in such a way that they exclude further common responsible steps in the direction of more extended fellowship.
4. The question posed by common worship can differ according as to whether two particular churches meet each other or whether the meeting is one in which several various traditions participate at the same time. The guidelines worked out within the WCC refer only to the latter type of meeting. Many member churches have established particular rules for their relations with another church. The Roman Catholic Church has done likewise, as is indicated by several documents of the Second Vatican Council and by the Directory. Gatherings of a wider character, however, pose particular problems and should receive attention as such.
5. Ecumenical gatherings differ widely in nature, and if the problem of worship does not change in principle, the practical aspects are not the same in each case. Ecumenical gatherings can be of an official and representative character; they can also be of a more informal nature. They can last for longer or shorter periods. They can be sponsored by several churches or by Christian Councils; the participants can also be the guests of a church or a church group which observes a specific form of religious life. The meetings can be arranged primarily for praying together, conversation, encounter or also for practical purposes. The whole variety of possibilities must be kept in mind and the nature of the meeting in each case will certainly influence the specific type of worship to be held in common. However, it is possible to develop some considerations which will be generally valid for all meetings.
6. Any agreement on common worship must be based on theological and ecclesiological considerations. It must be worked out in the light of the ecumenical situation as it concretely presents itself. What is possible in principle may in some places prove difficult to put into practice. Particular circumstances must be respected. Though common prayer is generally to be encouraged, pastoral considerations are necessary where local

churches are not yet prepared for ecumenical fellowship. Worship is for the glorification of God's name. Our attention cannot be directed to Him if there is no real inner freedom felt for worshiping together.

7. Agreements made between the WCC and the RCC primarily look to relations between themselves. These agreements may serve as helps and guidelines for other organizations of a more local nature. But it must be recognized that local or regional Christian Councils may have found it possible to make arrangements among themselves or with local Roman Catholic authorities which may sometimes differ from what has been achieved on a more general level.

1. If there is to be a further development of the ecumenical movement, it is essential that at ecumenical gatherings the present situation can find a realistic expression. The participants must be able to experience both the existing oneness in Christ and the difficulties still to be overcome. Solutions which hide the differences must be avoided.

As far as possible the various traditions represented at a gathering should have the opportunity to participate actively in worship, even if practical considerations seem to make it difficult.

2. There are various forms of worship which must be distinguished:

- a) Services in which representatives of several traditions participate. It is important that such services are prepared together and are carried out in a representative way. The celebration of the Eucharist is normally excluded at such occasions.

- b) Services composed in a form which can be adopted by the members of any church tradition e.g. prayers of adoration, Bible readings, prayers of intercession, etc.

- c) Services which are conducted for all those participants in the meeting by one or several members of one church according to the rules of this church. Of course, it is important that as many as possible of the traditions represented should have the opportunity of conducting such prayer. With meetings of short duration, this may prove difficult. However, if a short meeting is one of a projected series, it may be possible for each tradition represented to be responsible for the service in turn at subsequent meetings.

- d) Eucharistic services which are held by one church within the context of a meeting. It should not become the rule that the problem of the Eucharist be bypassed at ecumenical meetings and if Eucharistic services are held solutions should not be sought which make visible only one aspect of the problem. Of course, everything must be arranged so that each participant is free to follow his own conscience and the discipline of his church. The following considerations may be important: (1) The meeting itself cannot be responsible for the celebration of a Eucharistic service. Only a church can issue an invitation for such a service. It is natural that one of the churches represented at the place where the meeting is held issues the invitation. If the ecumenical problem is to become visible in all its sharpness, it must be possible to come into contact with varying traditions in the celebration of the Eucharist. While some churches can invite representatives of other churches to participate in their Eucharist, others are not able to do so; and while some are free to accept the invitation, others - for theological and disciplinary reasons - cannot take communion at the altar of another church. Therefore if the gathering lasts long enough it is advisable that there should be at least two Eucharistic services - one arranged by a church which, according to its rules may invite other Christians to communicate, the other celebrated by a church which even at ecumenical gatherings is obliged to restrict communion to its own members. If possible, all participants at the gathering should be present at all these different Eucharistic services. (2) The use of the church building for Eucharistic services at ecumenical gatherings needs careful consideration, especially in the circumstances where only one church is available. (3) A preparatory service for all participants in the gathering has proved to be a significant common act on many occasions. It can contribute to a deeper awareness of the scandal of division. If such a service is held it should be related to all Eucharistic services which may be contemplated. (4) If necessary, the participants in a gathering should have the opportunity to celebrate outside the program the Eucharist according to the tradition of their church without violating their conscience or being unfaithful to their obligations.

3. It is obvious that when there is a gathering of a certain prolonged duration, all of these forms of worship may find their proper place during the gathering. Thus those under a) may be most appropriate for the opening

and closing services of the gathering; those under b) and c) for the regular morning and evening prayer, those under d) at some time during the gathering according to the time and availability of all that is necessary. It is recognized, however, that particular emphasis on one form of worship may also be proper at prolonged gatherings, in accordance with the particular purposes for which the meetings are being held.

[*Information Service* 1 (1967) 18-24]