

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

THIRD OFFICIAL REPORT

For the past five years there has been a development in relations between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The Joint Working Group, since its inception in 1965, has attempted to encourage this development and to search out and recommend to the responsible authorities on both sides areas and forms of co-operation. In two previous reports presented in February, 1966, and August, 1967, it reviewed the many fields of common study and action. The impressive range of common concern is clear evidence of the communion already existing among the Churches. Since the publication of the Second Report, there has been a marked increase in common programmes for study and action. An account of these will be found in the attached survey of joint activity currently in progress (Appendix I).

The Joint Working Group is convinced that the work of the past five years has been worthwhile. At the same time a great many things remain to be done. The Lord's demand is clear: "that they may be one in order that the world may believe" (*John* 17, 21). As we face this demand we are keenly aware of how much we still fall short of giving to the world the sign of communion which should arouse its faith in the love of the Father who sends his Son to save us.

A recognition of the contemporary situation calls for reflection on the foundations for future co-operation among Christians, and specifically between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. If on the one hand the scandal of disunity is sharper and the task of overcoming our confessional differences becomes more imperative, on the other hand it becomes clearer that we are faced with the question of how to interpret the Gospel today so that we may respond more faithfully to God's call to give witness to him in a way which can be effectively heard by the world.

As one response to this double aspect of the ecumenical problem the Joint Working Group offers to its parent bodies two studies conducted under its initiative. The first is an effort to describe more completely the conditions under which common witness may be given as fully as possible in the concrete situation in which the Churches still find themselves divided (cf. Appendix II, *Common Witness and Proselytism*). Because there are certain fundamental elements which limit this common witness through lack of full agreement as to its content, a second study is presented which seeks

to open paths for a deeper consideration of the confessional differences which still divide us (cf. Appendix III, *Joint Study on Catholicity and Apostolicity*).¹ The concepts of catholicity and apostolicity constitute a sensitive point in the ecumenical dialogue. The work done by the joint theological commission has made it possible to discover new areas of agreement which are much larger than had been imagined at the beginning of the work.

These two studies are interrelated. It is hoped that they can offer fresh impetus for study and action at various levels so that Christians may respond more fully to the ecumenical task in today's world.

As Christians strive for the coming of that unity which Christ wills for them, they seek to create in a certain way, while they are still divided, a community which will make it possible to begin to bear the common witness demanded of them. This desire led to the formation of the World Council of Churches and has animated its activity since its foundations. The increasing co-operation which has taken place in the past five years between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches has underlined the increased importance of this search. As a result the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala (1968) and Pope Paul VI during his visit to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva (1969) expressed the desire that a study be made of the advantages and disadvantages of various possible forms of collaboration or closer and more permanent association of the Roman Catholic Church with the World Council of Churches. The Joint Working Group is sponsoring a study of this question which it hopes to conclude within the next few months.

In reflecting upon the first five years of its mandate, the Joint Working Group recognises that whatever may be the results obtained up to now, they are still quite small in relation to the urgent task which faces us today. Further progress calls for a more complete engagement of the Churches at all levels. What takes place in concrete situations can be of vital importance for a more universal response to the demand of the Lord, for unity among those who bear his name, to the call to bear a more perfect witness in common to the world and to serve mankind better as we listen attentively to what the Spirit is asking today of the Churches.

¹ Fox text, see *One in Christ*, 1970, N. 3.

APPENDIX I: REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

In recent years there has been a rapid growth in cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. Joint studies and projects were initially still regarded as the exception and only proposed rather tentatively but joint planning has increasingly become the rule. A marked extension of cooperation to many new areas of activity followed the adoption of the first official report in 1966. This cooperation is now so varied and extensive that it would be difficult to give a complete survey.

The cooperation stimulated by the Joint Working Group forms only a limited section of the total field of ecumenical collaboration, and one which cannot be isolated from the work of the ecumenical movement as a whole. The present report, however, is restricted to the specific responsibilities of the Joint Working Group and deals with what has been achieved since the second official report, published in 1967.

I. The Faith and Worship of the Churches

a) *The Commission on Faith and Order*

Roman Catholic theologians have increasingly participated as observer-consultants in the studies undertaken by the Commission both at a regional level and at a world level. A notable step forward was registered following the second official report in 1967. With the agreement of the Roman Catholic Church, the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches invited nine Roman Catholic theologians to become members of the Commission on Faith and Order. Among current studies in the general framework of Faith and Order the following examples may be cited:

1. *Studies on the Authority of the Bible*

The 1967 report had stressed the importance of this theme. A document prepared by the Faith and Order Commission is now being studied by a number of regional groups, most of which have Roman Catholic members. Roman Catholic faculties and other similar centres have displayed special interest in the subject. At least three of the groups at work are predominantly Roman Catholic in membership (in Spain, France and Germany).

2. *Worship Studies*

The World Council of Churches was invited to send observers to the meetings of the council set up to implement the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Official links between this council and the Faith and Order Commission were established in the spring of 1968. It became clear in the discussions that even in this field joint study of many questions is possible.

In the course of the sixth and seventh meetings of the Joint Working Group, in December 1967 and May 1968, much time was devoted to the problem

of intercommunion. The Joint Working Group looked at the theological and liturgical aspects of intercommunion. In December 1968 it decided to suspend its work in this field although keeping the subject on its agenda, since the Faith and Order Commission (now enlarged to include the participation of Roman Catholic theologians) was initiating a study of intercommunion. (A provisional study paper has since been published with the title "Beyond Intercommunion: On the Way to Communion in the Eucharist", in *Study Encounter*, Vol. V, No. 3, 1969, pp. 94 ff.).

b) *Joint Theological Commission on Catholicity and Apostolicity*

The second official report described the membership and first meeting of this Joint Theological Commission, which has pursued its work in two further meetings. The results of its discussions so far have been summarized in a report already published in French and English. This document seeks to define the two terms "catholicity" and "apostolicity" with a view to establishing the areas of agreement which could provide a starting point for future ecclesiological studies within the ecumenical movement. It also tries to determine which theological problems are in most urgent need of attention in view of the rapid development of both the ecumenical movement and theology, and the consequences of this development in the life of the churches.

With only fourteen members, the Commission could hardly claim to represent the whole spectrum of confessional traditions and theological trends. A much wider circle of theologians was therefore consulted before the document was given in its final form.

At its meeting in May 1970, the Joint Working Group agreed to adopt the report and recommended its publication.² It was hoped that this would ensure that the document was circulated in colleges, ecumenical groups and institutions, the Faith and Order Commission, National Christian Councils, ecumenical and theological commissions of Episcopal Conferences and other similar bodies.

In August 1970 a consultation was held to draft a list of questions raised in the discussions to which the Faith and Order Commission should give priority in its future work. This 1970 consultation also prepared recommendations for presentation to the meeting of the Faith and Order Commission at Louvain in August 1971.

c) *The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*

The team of representatives of the Faith and Order Commission and of the Roman Catholic centres working in this field was set up in accordance

² See Appendix III. The text has been published in *Ir-enikon*, 1970, pp. 163 to 200 and in *One in Christ*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1970, pp. 452, 482.

with the recommendations made by the joint consultation held in October 1966, referred to in the second official report of the Joint Working Group. This team has met regularly since. As a result it has been possible to plan the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity jointly. The consequence has been a far greater measure of cooperation and common prayer in the actual celebration of the Week than ever before.

d) *The Date of Easter*

The Joint Working Group recognized in its second official report that there was no easy or speedy way to solid agreement between all the churches on the date of Easter.

To bring this agreement nearer, a consultation was organized by the Faith and Order Commission at the Orthodox Centre at Chambesy, Geneva, from March 16-20, 1970. Three Roman Catholic observer-consultants participated in the consultation, representing the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

The consultation felt that there were two possibilities:

1) *Either* to fix Easter on the Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox (employing the Gregorian calendar, which takes March 21 as the spring equinox and adopts scientific astronomical methods to determine full moon). This solution would respect the ancient rule as adopted by the Council of Nicea.

2) *Or* to choose a fixed Sunday in April. This solution, too, respects the wishes of the Council of Nicea in the sense that the main concern of the Council was to arrive at an agreed date, although, of course, it does not follow the strict letter of the decision usually attributed to the Council.

The consultation expressed its preference for the second alternative and suggested the Sunday following the second Saturday in April, though it had no objection to another Sunday being chosen if this would make the adoption of a common date for Easter possible for all Christians and in particular for all the Orthodox Churches.³

II. Mission and Unity

a) *Common Problems*

Along the lines of the recommendations made in the second official report, an exchange of views took place between representatives of the World Council of Churches, the Secretariat for Christian Unity, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and other missionary bodies, in April 1963.

This was followed up in 1969 when six representatives of the World Council of Churches visited a number of the Vatican offices in Rome, particularly those concerned with missions.

Three Roman Catholics from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the Secretariat for Christian Unity, and SEDOS (a working party of

various missionary orders) were appointed as consultants to the WCC's Division of World Mission and Evangelism. Roman Catholics have also participated in the work of the Department on Studies in Mission and Evangelism.

In its second official report, the Joint Working Group announced its decision to undertake "a joint study on the subject of proselytism", a question which it had been concerned with for some time. A document was sent to specialists by the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Christian Unity with a request for their comments. In May 1968, Roman Catholic experts considered the question from the standpoint of their Church. Next, a joint consultation was held at Arnoldshain, where the document was revised. The work of revision continued during 1969 until the September of that year when a consultation took place at Zagorsk. The document was then modified in the light of comments made at the consultation.

In the course of this work the form in which the question was posed was changed. At first the emphasis had been on distorted forms of evangelism as contrasted with genuine Christian witness. The more the study proceeded the clearer it became that our real task was not simply to eliminate wrong methods of evangelism but rather to reach a position in which it would be possible to bear joint witness, within the limits imposed by our condition as still divided churches.

The final form of the document was submitted to the Joint Working Group at its meeting in May 1970. It was adopted not as a joint declaration but as a study paper for consideration by the churches in their respective local situations. The Joint Working Group recommended its publication as such.⁴

b) *Dialogue with Men of Other Faiths and with Non-Believers*

Contacts with the Secretariat for Non-Believers, mainly in the form of the exchange of observers, became more frequent and regular from 1967 onwards.

For its part, the World Council of Churches organized a consultation at Ajaltoun in the Lebanon in March 1970 which brought together scholars and others experienced in dialogue from the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim faiths. Of the twenty-eight Christian participants, six were Roman Catholic. Three Roman Catholics also participated in the consultation in Zurich arranged by the World Council of Churches in May 1970 to study the theological implications of the dialogue between men of living faiths.

c) *Christian Medical Commission*

The second official report of the Joint Working Group in 1967 expressed the desire for the establishment of closer relationships between the various church

³ The full text of this report will be found in the *Ecumenical Review*, January 1971.

⁴ « Common Witness and Proselytism ». See Appendix II. The text will be published in the *Ecumenical Review*, January 1971.

bodies engaged in medical work. In fact the cooperation already existing in this area in many countries makes organized coordination at the world level a matter of some urgency.

From its inception the Christian Medical Commission has worked closely with a number of Catholic hospitals, medical bodies and religious orders.

Three Roman Catholic observers attended the first annual meeting of the Christian Medical Commission in 1968. In June 1969, on the invitation of the Commission, the Secretariat for Christian Unity appointed seven Roman Catholic representatives who were coopted by the Commission as consultants *ad personam*. These seven representatives were coopted not in virtue of their membership of a particular organization but because of their qualifications. They were present at the Commission's second annual meeting. One of the decisions taken at this meeting was to call for the establishment of a joint committee to study possible future forms of Roman Catholic participation in the Christian Medical Commission. This resolution was conveyed to the Division of World Service, the bodies responsible for the Christian Medical Commission on the World Council side. It was also conveyed to the Secretariat for Christian Unity. The resolution was accepted and a joint committee duly set up, which met in Rome on March 23, 1970, in Geneva on June 9, and again in Rome of July 31, 1970. It considered a number of possible forms for cooperation between the Commission and the Roman, Catholic Church. It has submitted a report to the respective authorities and this is now under consideration.

d) *World Christian Handbook*

The call to cooperation between the churches would be greatly helped by the existence of a joint statistical work of reference. Such a reference book is in fact now being compiled and it is hoped that a World Christian Handbook will be published jointly in 1972, giving details of all the churches throughout the world. Conservative evangelicals are cooperating in this project.

III. The Laity

Since the second official report of the Joint Working Group was published, the Third World Congress of the Laity was held in Rome in 1967. Its preparation occasioned several joint consultations and cooperation with a view to giving the Congress an ecumenical character as possible. The churches and Christian confessions, as well as the World Council of Churches, were invited to send consultants. These were in sufficient numbers to have some influence on the discussions of the Congress. The World Council of Churches was consulted in the planning of the programme. One of the closing addresses was entrusted to a consultant and it has already been suggested that in future the Congress might be made into a joint enterprise.

a) *Relations between the Division of Ecumenical Action and the Laity Council*

When the Laity Council was constituted in Rome in 1967, the Joint Working Group suggested that its partner in the World Council of Churches should be the Division of Ecumenical Action. This proposed collaboration was approved by the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala and by the Laity Council at its first meeting. Several joint consultations followed and the Laity Council sent representatives to meetings of the Committee of the Division of Ecumenical Action.

It is mainly in the field of studies that this collaboration has been developed. The Laity Council was associated with the study "Towards A New Style of Living", drafted in preparation for the Uppsala Assembly, and has also collaborated in the present programme of the Division of Ecumenical Action on "Participation in Change", which is a follow-up to the Uppsala Section VI report "Towards New Styles of Living". The Division of Ecumenical Action will likewise be participating in the symposium which the Laity Council is planning on "Dialogue within the Church". Other fields of joint study have still to be explored.

At its meeting in May 1970, the Joint Working Group invited the Division of Ecumenical Action and the Laity Council to look together at the possible areas of ecumenical collaboration between lay people and also at the problems and concerns of young people. The information obtained in this way will be valuable for current studies on possible forms of cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.

The Division of Ecumenical Action sent observer-consultants to the preparatory meetings planning the Pan-African-Madagascan Laity Congress which is to be held in Yaounde in August 1971.

b) *Women's Ecumenical Work*

The establishment of the Laity Council made it possible to put ecumenical cooperation between women on a more permanent basis. In 1968 the small, and more or less unofficial, group formed to continue the work of the 1967 Taizé Conference was replaced by the Women's Ecumenical Liaison Group. This group has a provisional mandate to operate experimentally until 1972. So far it has met three times. One of its decisions has been to undertake a study on "The Image of Woman in the Mass Media".

IV. Social Service and Service to Humanity

a) *SODEPAX*

Collaboration between the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace developed rapidly, as the second report of the Joint Working Group had hoped it would. The decision was taken to organize a conference on the problem of development. It was held in Beirut from April 21-27, 1968. The aim of the conference

was to formulate common convictions and intentions based on as comprehensive and objective an analysis of the problems as possible. It was also intended to emphasize with some conviction the responsibility for human, social and economic development which accrues primarily to Christians but also to all men. Theologians and church leaders from developed and developing countries, representatives of international organizations and a number of leading experts in the development field took part in these discussions. The conference report was widely circulated and became a major factor in helping to establish cooperation both at the level of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches and in the individual countries.

Since a joint structure was needed to organize a conference of such magnitude, a joint secretariat had been set up in Geneva and Father George Dunne, S.J. appointed secretary with responsibility for organizing the programme. At the end of the conference it became clear that the programme would become even more extensive and that the secretariat should therefore not merely continue but even expand. A more permanent structure was called for and agreed to by both parties on condition that its flexibility and task-centred existence should not be lost sight of. In the first instance joint work was to be planned for a period of only three years, i.e. up to the end of 1971. This would preserve its experimental character and it would still be possible, at the end of this period, to guide cooperation into a different direction or give it a different structural form. But even for this limited period an effective organization was essential. A meeting of the exploratory committee in May 1968 drafted suggestions for a Committee on Society, Development and Peace (SODEPAX). The competent Roman Catholic authorities and the World Council of Churches' Uppsala Assembly approved these proposals in principle. The details were worked out in the following months.

The Rev. Dr. Roy Neehall of Trinidad was appointed associate secretary and in addition three other staff members were appointed with more specialized qualifications. The secretariat is responsible to the two co-presidents and to the SODEPAX Committee, which consists of sixty experts and church representatives. This Committee also has a delegated authority in relation to the two bodies sponsoring SODEPAX. It meets annually, current matters being dealt with by a smaller steering committee which meets more frequently.

Major international consultations have been held: at Cartigny in Switzerland in November 1969 on the theology of development; at Driebergen in Holland in March 1970 on communications media in the service of development and peace; and at Baden in Austria in April 1970 on peace and the international community. A dozen smaller seminars have also been held, notably those in connection with the second development decade and with education for civic action.

In addition to international consultations to cla-

rify the churches' motives for social action, a noteworthy aspect of the work of SODEPAX has been its local and regional activity. For example in several African and Asian countries SODEPAX groups have been formed. This advance was stimulated by the ecumenical conference on the churches' role in the development of Asia, held in Tokyo in July 1970. This was jointly organized by SODEPAX and the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC). Within this joint programme, aimed at gathering and making available information about justice, development and peace, and at awakening Christians to a sense of their responsibility in this area, SODEPAX gives special attention to the whole range of questions in the field of education in the widest sense, to the mass media, and to cooperation with people of non-Christian religions and ideologies, as well as with secular institutions.

The question of the continuation of the SODEPAX experiment has, of course, been raised. It was considered at the meeting of the Joint Working Group in May 1970 and at the SODEPAX assembly held at Nemi in Italy in June 1970. There it was suggested that at this present stage SODEPAX had achieved its objectives and that its experimental thrust, its flexibility, and its educational scope might now be continued as part of some wider structure. This question was given added urgency by the World Council of Churches' decision to create a Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development (CCPD). However, after a very full discussion of the matter, it was recommended during the Nemi meeting that SODEPAX should continue its activities for a further period of three years. This recommendation is subject to the approval of the bodies which sponsor SODEPAX. Obviously it is still a matter of urgency that the efforts of both parties in the field of development should be concerted.

b) *Church and Society*

While the joint studies and consultations on social issues between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches are for the most part conducted through SODEPAX, a close collaboration has developed on other problems between the Department on Church and Society, on the one hand, and the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace on the other. Four Roman Catholic observers attend meetings of the working committee of Church and Society, which has a total membership of twenty-five. These Roman Catholic observers are chosen by the Secretariat for Christian Unity in consultation with the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace.

Out of this has come substantial Roman Catholic participation in the World Council of Churches' new study on "Technology and the Future of Man and Society". Eighteen Roman Catholics took part in an exploratory conference on this theme in 1970 at which there were one hundred and three participants altogether. Four of the Roman Catholic participants were present as observer-consultants, the other fourteen as guest specialists. Collaboration in this study

is expected to grow as the study progresses.

Certain public reactions, especially on the part of business people, to the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* and to the 1966 Church and Society Conference, led to collaboration in another field. A consultation was held in Rotterdam in June 1968 to discuss these Christian statements. It was attended by sixty business people. The consultation was jointly arranged by the Department on Church and Society and the International Christian Union of Business Executives (UNIAPAC), a Roman Catholic body having close but unofficial relationships with Vatican agencies, especially the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace.

A second conference was held at Vevey in November 1969 and a third is planned for May 1971 in London.

c) *Service and Aid*

Since 1967, Caritas Internationalis and the WCC Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service have held a third joint consultation. This took place from April 28-30, 1968. This consultation stressed, as the first joint consultation had done, the great variety of ways in which the relief organisations of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches can be of mutual assistance in this field. Above all it emphasized the need for mutual exchange of information, for reciprocal consultation, and for the joint planning and coordination of church appeals.

Clearly the policy of holding such study conferences should continue to be encouraged. Contacts between the various sectors of the WCC Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service and Caritas Internationalis are now normal practice but everywhere the situation needs to be frequently reexamined. The inclusion of specialists in this field

at such study conferences will be the best way of ensuring effective planning of direct cooperation.

In order to ensure wider and more effective cooperation, the Joint Working Group at its meeting in May 1970 "warmly welcomed the proposal of the Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service and Caritas Internationalis to hold a joint conference of representatives of the staff of the various bodies belonging to the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches which are concerned with relief, aid and development, for the purpose of establishing and extending ways and means of planning joint programmes",

V. National and Local Councils of Churches

Speaking at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva on June 10, 1969, Pope Paul VI mentioned the importance of ecumenical activity at the local level. Since the Roman Catholic Church decided to participate actively in the ecumenical movement, many national and local Christian Councils have invited the Roman Catholic Church to send observers or consultants to their meetings. In some places, the Roman Catholic Church is now a member of the National Christian Council. In a far larger number of cases, the Roman Catholic Church participates in Christian Councils at more than one level, parish, diocesan and provincial. Some of the questions which this development raises concern the Joint Working Group.

In view of the importance of this current development, the Joint Working Group at its meeting in May 1970 asked for a detailed report on the various National Christian Councils and Roman Catholic participation in or collaboration with these Councils to be presented to its next meeting.

APPENDIX II: COMMON WITNESS AND PROSELYTISM

(A Study Document)

The following document, prepared by a Joint Theological Commission, was received by the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches at its meeting in May, 1970, which recommended it for publication.

The document was elaborated by the commission on the initiative of the Joint Working Group. The commission held two full meetings (in Arnoldshain, Germany, in 1968, and in Zagork, USSR, in 1969). Various subsequent drafts were submitted to a wide group of consultants. The text being presented now has been formulated in the light of comments received.

The Joint Working Group, having examined it, recommends to its parent bodies that it be offered to the Churches as a study document for their consideration. Although there may not be complete

agreement on everything contained in the document, it represents a wide area of consensus on the subject of common witness and proselytism which may guide the Churches in their mutual relations.

It is, therefore, suggested that the Churches in the same area study it together. The further examination of the theme of common witness will inevitably demand a fuller development of, and agreement on, the content of the witness Christians are bound to give to Christ and his Gospel.

Introduction

1. Unity in witness and witness in unity. This is the will of Christ for his people. The Lord has called all his disciples to be witnesses to him and his Gospel, to the ends of the earth (cf. *Acts* 1: 8),

and he has promised to be with them always, to the close of his age (Mt. 28: 20). But for centuries, in their efforts to fulfil this mission, Christian Communion have borne the burden of divisions, even differing about the meaning of the one Gospel. They have not been a clear sign of the one and holy people, so it has been hard for the world to believe (cf. *Jo.* 13:35; 17:21).

2. Today, moved by the Holy Spirit, the various Christian Communion are seeking to restore the unity they have lost, in the hope that one day, when they are fully renewed and united in faith and charity, they may be better able to glorify God by bringing home to the whole world the hope of the coming kingdom. They are striving to overcome whatever indifference, isolation and rivalry has marked their relations to each other and thus has distorted Christian witness even to that unity with which God has already blessed them.

3. This document is an attempt to state the implications of the obligation:

— to bear common Christian witness, even while the Churches are divided;

— to avoid in their mutual relations and in their evangelising activities whatever is not in keeping with the spirit of the Gospel;

— to provide one another, as far as possible, with mutual support for a more effective witness of the Gospel through preaching and selfless service to the neighbour.

4. This document is offered to the Churches. Its reflections and suggestions may serve as a basis of discussion among Christians in varied circumstances, in order to arrive at a line of conduct where they live and witness.

MEANING OF THE TERMS:
CHRISTIAN WITNESS, COMMON WITNESS
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, PROSELYTISM

5. 1. *Christian Witness*.¹ Witness is taken here to mean the continuous act by which a Christian or a Christian Community proclaims God's acts in history and seeks to reveal Christ as the true light which shines for every man. This includes the whole life: worship, responsible service, proclamation of the Good News—all is done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order that men may be saved and be gathered into Christ's one and only Body (*Col.* 1: 8; *Eph.* 1: 22-23), and attain life everlasting—to know the true God and Him whom he has sent, Jesus Christ (cf. *Jo.* 17: 3).

6. 2. *Common Witness*. Here is meant the witness the Churches, even while separated, bear together, especially by joint efforts, by manifesting before men whatever divine gifts of truth and life they already share in common.

¹ Modern languages use several biblically derived terms which denote particular aspects of the announcements of the Gospel in word and deed: Witness, Apostolate, Mission, Confession, Evangelism, Kerygma, Message, etc. We have preferred here to adopt "Witness", because it expresses more comprehensively the realities we are treating.

7. 3. *Religious Freedom*. Religious freedom is not used here in the wider biblical sense (e.g. *Rom.* 8: 21). It is pointing to the right of the person and of communities to social and civil freedom in religious matters. Each person or community has the right to be free from any coercion on the side of individuals, social groups, or human power of any kind; so that no individual or community may be forced to act against conscience or be prevented from expressing belief in teaching, worship or social action.²

8. 4. *Proselytism*. Here is meant improper attitudes and behaviour in the practice of Christian witness. Proselytism embraces whatever violates the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be free from external coercion in religious matters, or whatever, in the proclamation of the Gospel, does not conform to the ways God draws free men to himself in response to his calls to serve in spirit and in truth.³

I. Common Witness

9. There is a growing recognition among the Churches that they must overcome their isolation from each other and seek ways to cooperate in witness to the world.⁴ In face, however, of difficulties and obstacles, a clear basis and source of power and hope is needed if the Churches are to embark on this common witness.

10. This basis and source is given in Christ. He is sent into the world by the Father for the salvation of mankind. There is no other Name in which men may find salvation and life (*Acts* 4: 12). Christian Churches confess Christ as God and only Saviour according to the Scriptures, and most adhere to the ancient Creeds which testify to this central truth of faith.

11. Moreover, the Churches believe that they live only by the divine gifts of truth and life bestowed by Christ. Most Churches acknowledge that gifts of divine grace are a reality in other Churches which also provide access to salvation in Christ. Thus all

² Cf. *Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious liberty in the Setting of the WCC*, of the Third WCC Assembly (1961); *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, of the Second Vatican Council (1965); *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, of the United Nations (1948), esp. N. 18. Since the right to religious freedom operates in society, these documents also mention rules which modify the use of it.

³ In certain linguistic, cultural and confessional contexts, the term "proselytism", used without qualification, has acquired this pejorative sense. In those other languages and contexts in which the term still retains its more original meaning of «zeal in spreading the faith», it will be necessary always to use "proselytism in the pejorative sense" or some phrase which denotes defective attitudes and conduct.

⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Council Decree, *Ad Gentes*, 6 and 15; and the proposals for "Joint Action for Mission" formulated by the 1961 New Delhi Assembly of the WCC and affirmed by the Report of Section II of the 1968 Uppsala Assembly.

Christian communions, in spite of their divisions, can have a positive role to play in God's plan of salvation.

12. The Churches have the privilege and the obligation of giving witness to the truth and new life which is theirs in Christ. Indeed both privilege and obligation are entrusted to the whole community of Christians to whom God gives a vital role in his plan for the salvation of the world.

13. Therefore Christians cannot remain divided in their witness. Any situations where contact and cooperation between Churches are refused must be regarded as abnormal.

14. The gifts which the Churches have received and share in Christ have demanded and made urgent a common witness to the world. The needs of men and the challenges of a broken and unbelieving world have also compelled the Churches to cooperate with God in deploying his gifts for the reconciliation of all men and all things in Christ. This common witness takes place in many areas of social concern, such as

- the development of the whole man and of all men;
- the defence of human rights and the promotion of religious freedom;
- the struggle for the eradication of economic, social and racial injustice;
- the promotion of international understanding, the limitation of armaments and the restoration and maintenance of peace;
- the campaign against illiteracy, hunger, alcoholism, prostitution, the traffic in drugs;
- medical and health and other social services;
- relief and aid to victims of natural disasters (volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, etc.).

15. Cooperation has also extended to include the production, publication and distribution of joint translations of the Scriptures. Moreover, an exploration is being made of the possibility of common texts to be used for an initial catechesis on the central message of the Christian faith. In this connection, cooperation in the field of education and in the use of communications media is already going on in some places.

16. The cooperation of the Churches in these varied fields is increasingly being accompanied by common acts of worship for each other and for the world. Of particular significance is the "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" which is now celebrated in many places around the world. This practice of common prayer and of acts of worship has greatly helped to create and develop a climate of mutual knowledge, understanding, respect and trust. The World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church have contributed to this improved climate by their studies and guides to common prayer. This fellowship in prayer, nevertheless, sharpens the pain

of the Churches' division at the point of Eucharistic fellowship which should be the most manifest witness to the one sacrifice of Christ for the whole world.

17. The central task of the Churches is simply to proclaim the saving deeds of God. This then should be the burden of their common witness; and what unites them is enough to enable them in large measure to speak as one. Indeed all forms of common witness are signs of the Churches' commitment to proclaim the Gospel to all men; they all find in the one Gospel their motivation, their purpose and their content.

18. Whether in witness or service, the Churches are together confronted by the fundamental issues of the nature and destinies of men and nations; and while they face these questions they encounter men of other religions, or men who are indifferent or unbelievers who hold to a variety of ideologies.

19. But at this vital point of mutual engagement, the Churches become aware not only of their shared understanding of the Gospel but also of their differences. They all believe that Jesus Christ has founded one Church, and one alone; to this Church the Gospel has been given; to this Church every man has been called to belong. Yet today many Christian Communion present themselves to men as the true heritage of Jesus Christ, and this division among the Churches greatly reduces the possibilities of common witness.

20. In the context of religious freedom and the ecumenical dialogue, respect is due to the right of Churches to act according to convictions, which they believe should be held in fidelity to Jesus Christ:

1. While it is indeed aware of its pilgrim condition, a Church can be convinced that in it subsists the one Church founded by Christ, that also in it one can have access to all the means of salvation which the Lord offers, that its witness has always remained substantially faithful to the Gospel.

2. A Church can regard itself as bound in conscience to proclaim its witness to its own belief, which is distinct from that of the other Churches.

3. While the major affirmations of faith, such as those which are formulated in Scripture and professed in the ancient Creeds, are common to almost all the Christian confessions, different interpretations can sometimes call for reservations on this common character.

4. The teaching of certain Churches can place limits on cooperation in social concerns, for example, different positions on family ethics (divorce, abortion, responsible parenthood).

Nevertheless, it is not enough to know the limits which the division of Christians places on common witness. The more the need of common witness is grasped, the more apparent does it become that there is a need to find complete agreement on faith—one of the essential purposes of the ecumenical movement.

21. Differences about the content of witness, because of varied ecclesiologies, are by no means the only obstacle to cooperation between the Churches. The rivalries and enmities of the past, the continued resentments due to the memory of ancient or recent wrongs, the conflicts generated by political, cultural and other factors, all these have prevented the Churches from seeking to bear a common witness to the world. Only the willingness to extend mutual forgiveness of past offences and wrongs and to receive correction from each other will enable the Churches to fulfil their obligation to show forth a common witness to each other and to the world.

22. There is, however, an understandable hesitation of a Church to cooperate in witness where this may trouble and confuse its members. Among other reasons, it may be due also to lack of contact and mutual understanding between the clergy and the laity of Churches. In all such cases, a patient and determined effort should be made to create conditions which favour cooperation.

23. A further obstacle to joint action in witness derives from receiving and interpreting the Gospel in forms so exclusive as to lead to a refusal of all discussion and an unwillingness to recognise that the Spirit can operate in groups other than one's own. This attitude is generally labelled "sectarianism" and such exclusive and excluding groups are often called "sects". When faced with this situation, Churches should first of all recognise the challenge which these groups present to them and examine themselves as to their inadequacy in meeting the profound spiritual needs of their members and of those around them. They must also guard against the very spirit of sectarianism which they so rightly deplore in others. Rather should they strive to hear God's call to renewal and to greater faithfulness to his message of salvation.

24. Moreover, the Churches should pay particular attention to groups which seem open to receive those aspects of the Christian message which those communities have hitherto neglected. The Churches must thus always stand ready for dialogue and to seize every opportunity to extend a fraternal hand and to grasp the hand held out to them.

II. Proselytism and Relations between Churches

25. Christian witness, to those who have not yet received or responded to the announcement of the Gospel or to those who are already Christians, should have certain qualities, in order to avoid being corrupted in its exercise and thus becoming proselytising. Furthermore, the ecumenical movement itself had made Christians more sensitive to the conditions proper to witness borne among themselves. This means that witness should be completely

— conformed to the spirit of the Gospel, espe-

cially by respecting the other's right to religious freedom, and

— concerned to do nothing which could compromise the progress of ecumenical dialogue and action.

1. REQUIRED QUALITIES FOR CHRISTIAN WITNESS

A

26. In order that witness be conformed to the spirit of the Gospel:

a) The deep and true source of witness should be the commandment: "you must love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your mind ... You must love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt. 22: 37 and 39, cf. Lev. 19: 18; Deut. 6: 5).

b) Witness should be inspired by the true end of the Church: the glory of God through the salvation of men. Witness does not seek the prestige of one own's community and of those who belong to, represent or lead it.

c) Witness should be nourished by the conviction that it is the Holy Spirit who, by his grace and light, brings about the response of faith to witness.

d) Witness respects the free will and dignity of those to whom it is given, whether they wish to accept or to refuse the faith.

e) Witness respects the right of every man and community to be free from any coercion which impedes them from witness to their own convictions, including religious convictions.

B

27. Witness should avoid behaviour such as:

a) Every type of physical coercion, moral constraint or psychological pressure which would tend to deprive man of his personal judgement, of his freedom of choice, of full autonomy in the exercise of his responsibility. A certain abuse of mass communications can have this effect.

b) Every open or disguised offer of temporal or material benefits in return for change in religious adherence.

c) Every exploitation of the need or weakness or of lack of education of those to whom witness is offered, in view of inducing their adherence to a Church.

d) Everything raising suspicion about the "good faith" of others — "bad faith" can never be presumed; it should always be proved.

e) The use of a motive which has no relation to the faith itself but is presented as an appeal to change religious adherence: for example, the appeal to political motives to win over those who are eager to secure for themselves the protection or favours of civil authority, or those who are opposed to the established regime. Churches which form a large majority in a state should not use legal methods, social, economic or political pressure, in the attempt to prevent members of minority communities from the exercise of their right to religious freedom.

f) Every unjust or uncharitable reference to the beliefs or practices of other religious communities in the hope of winning adherents. This includes malevolent criticism which offends the sensibilities of members of other communities. In general, one should compare the good qualities and ideals or the weaknesses and practices of one community with those of the others, not one's ideals with the other's practice.

2. CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CHURCHES

28. The Lord has willed that his disciples be one in order that the world believe. Thus it is not enough for Christians to conform to the above. They should also be concerned in fostering whatever can restore or strengthen between them the bonds of true brotherhood. Proposed suggestions:

a) In each Church one is conscious that conversion of heart and the renewal of his own community are essential contributions to the ecumenical movement.

b) Missionary action should be carried out in an ecumenical spirit which takes into consideration the priority of the announcement of the Gospel to non-Christians. The missionary effort of one Church in an area or milieu where another Church is already at work depends on an honest answer to the question: what is the quality of the Christian message proclaimed by the Church already at work, and in what spirit is it being proclaimed and lived? Here frank discussion between the Churches concerned would be highly desirable, in order to have a clear understanding of each other's missionary and ecumenical convictions, and with the hope that it would help to determine the possibilities of cooperation, of common witness, of fraternal assistance, or of complete withdrawal.⁵ In the same manner and spirit the relations between minority and majority Churches should be considered.

c) Particularly all competitive spirit should be avoided by which a Christian community might seek a position of power and privilege, and concern itself less with proclaiming the Gospel to those who have not yet received it, than with profiting by chances to recruit new members among the other Christian communities.

d) To avoid causes of tension between Churches because of the free exercise of the right of every man to choose his ecclesial allegiance and, if necessary, to change it in obedience to conscience, it is vital:

— that this free choice should be exercised in

full knowledge of what is involved and, if possible, after counsel with the pastors of the two Churches concerned. Particular care is necessary in the case of children and young people; in such cases, the greatest weight and respect should be given to the views and rights of the parents and tutors;

— that the Church which admits a new member should be conscious of the ecumenical repercussions, and not draw vain glory from it;

— that the Church which has lost a member should not become bitter, or hostile, nor ostracise the person concerned; that it examine its conscience as to how it has done its duty of bringing the Gospel to that person. Has it made an effort to understand how his Christian convictions ought to affect his life, or rather was it content that he should remain a nominal and official member of that community?

— that any change of allegiance motivated mainly by the desire to secure some material advantage should be refused.

e) Some points of tension between the Churches are difficult to overcome because what is done by one Church in view of its theological and ecclesiological convictions is considered by the other as implicit proselytism. In this case, it is necessary that the two sides try to clarify what is really in question and to arrive at mutual understanding of different practices, and if possible, to agree to a common policy. This can be realised only if the carrying out of these theological and ecclesiological convictions clearly excludes every type of witness which would be tainted by proselytism, as described above. Some examples of such tensions:

— The fact that a Church which reserves baptism to adults ("believer's baptism") persuades the faithful of another Church, who have already been baptised as infants, to receive baptism again is often regarded as proselytising. A discussion on the nature of baptism and its relation to faith and to the Church could lead to new attitudes.

— The discipline of certain Churches concerning the marriage of their members with Christians of other communities is often considered as proselytic. In fact, these rules depend on theological positions. Conversations on the nature of marriage and the family could bring about progress and resolve in a joint way the pastoral question raised by such marriages.

— The Orthodox consider that the existence of the Eastern Catholic Churches is the fruit of proselytism. Catholics level the same criticism against the way in which certain of these Churches have been reunited to the Orthodox Church. Whatever has been the past, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are determined to reject not only proselytism but also the intention even to draw the faithful of one Church to another. An example of this pledge is the common declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I, on October 28, 1967. The resolution of these questions, evidently important for the ecumenical movement, should be sought in frank discussion, between the Churches concerned.

⁵ In speaking of Joint Action for Mission, the World Council of Churches distinguishes presently three degrees of missionary collaboration: surveying the possibilities of missionary action, joint planning; and joint action. The meaning of common witness is wider than that of joint action for mission.

Conclusion

29. These reflections and suggestions on common witness and proselytism will, it is hoped, offer the Churches an opportunity of moving more quickly along the way which leads to the restoration of complete communion among them. As they travel that path to unity the Churches realise that Christian witness can never be perfect. They can never cease

to strive for a deeper realization and clearer expression of the Good News of the unfathomable riches of Christ (cf. *Eph.* 3: 8), and for a more faithful living in accord with His one message. By fidelity to this striving the Churches will grow together in witness to Christ, " the Faithful and True Witness " (*Rev.* 3: 14) in expectation of that day when all things will be perfectly reestablished in him (cf. *Eph.* 1: 10; *Col.* 1: 20).