

# KATHOLIKENTAG, STUTTGART 2022

Reverend Dr Andrzej Choromański  
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

*The love of Christ moves, reconciles and unites the world. Towards the 2022 Assembly of the World Council of Churches.*

## Ecumenical Panel

Friday, 27 May 2022, 11.00 am – 12.30 pm

---

### **WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH – GROWING IN MUTUAL TRUST, STRENGTHENING COOPERATION**

Dear Participants of this 102 Katholikentag, held in this beautiful city of Stuttgart, on the theme of “sharing life”. Let me first thank the organisers for inviting me to this ecumenical panel which is an important step on the way towards the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC). I am also pleased to extend greetings from Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), which I represent in this meeting.

In my presentation I will focus on the relationship between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church. First contacts go back to the time of the Second Vatican Council. Between 1962 and 1965 two official observers from the WCC, invited by Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI, attended all four of the Council’s sessions. Since then a multiform collaboration has developed between the two entities despite the fact that the Catholic Church is not formally a member of the WCC. Catholics officially appointed by the Holy See are members of its various commissions and teams, and different dicasteries of the Roman Curia collaborate with their corresponding programmatic areas. There is joint preparation of the texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, an active presence of Catholic members in the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, fruitful collaboration with the Office for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, as well as on joint projects promoting justice and peace, concern for migrants and refugees, and the care of creation.

From the perspective of the pursuit of the goal of full visible unity, the most important is the collaboration between the WCC and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, which takes several tangible forms. One of them is the Joint Working Group (JWG) which since 1965 has been a catalyst of fruitful cooperation in the fields of ecumenical formation, mission and evangelism, youth, justice and peace, and emerging questions related to contemporary society. Arriving at the end of its tenth mandate, the JWG produced recently two important studies with recommendations to churches, first on peacebuilding in situations of conflict, and second on migrants and refugees. The two texts provide valuable pastoral guidelines on how churches can strengthen their ecumenical cooperation in these two pressing issues. There also exists a fruitful cooperation in the area of ecumenical education and formation. The PCPCU has for many years appointed and sponsored a full-time Catholic professor on the staff of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, near Geneva. Every year in January the students and staff of the Institute come to Rome for a one week study visit which culminates in the participation of the group in the ecumenical vespers presided by the Holy Father on the closing day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

As the resolution of doctrinal divergences is indispensable for recovering full visible unity, the Catholic Church acknowledges the special importance of the work carried out by the Faith and

Order Commission. It is the most widely representative theological Commission in the world, comprising Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and, since 1968, Catholic theologians who constitute ten percent of the membership. The Commission has published an impressive number of studies on topics including Holy Scripture and Tradition, Apostolic faith, anthropology, hermeneutics, reconciliation, peace, preservation of creation, and visible unity. All these documents were the results of intense theological work and were prepared with a substantial input from Catholic scholars.

Special moments in the history of the relations between the Catholic Church and the WCC were three papal visits to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. To open the road was Pope Paul VI in 1969. This was a gesture of high symbolic significance at a time when the relationship between the Catholic Church and the WCC was still at its beginnings. Fifteen years later John Paul II visited the WCC in 1984. In his speech during an ecumenical worship service he insisted that the involvement of the Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement was irreversible. On 21 June 2018, Pope Francis visited the WCC to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation. This “ecumenical pilgrimage”, as it was called, was placed under the motto of “Walking, Praying, Working Together” which reflected well the kind of relationship that the Catholic Church has been developing with the World Council of Churches for over half a century. In his reflections the Holy Father encouraged all Christians to “pray, evangelize and serve together” and underlined that in the face of social disparities, ecumenism today must include the collaboration of churches for those who are in need, migrants and refugees and for the many victims of wars, injustice, and natural disasters. He particularly stressed the need to intensify common efforts for mission and evangelism. Pope Francis was also the first pope to visit the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, meeting with the Faculty, students and staff. Reverend Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, then WCC Secretary General, described the visit of Pope Francis as “a historical milestone in the search for Christian unity and for the cooperation among the churches for a world with peace and justice.”

Privileged moments in the life of the ecumenical movement are the WCC Assemblies which gather together not only representatives of the member churches but also many other Christians from around the world. The Holy See has sent delegated observers since the Third Assembly in New Delhi in 1961 without interruption. Responding to the invitation from the Secretary General, a large Catholic delegation of about 20 persons from all parts of the world, led by Cardinal Koch, President of the PCPCU, will attend the upcoming Assembly. As members of a unique Body of Christ still wounded by scandalous divisions among our churches, we will meet in Karlsruhe to be moved by the love of Christ towards reconciliation and unity.

Despite a shared commitment to common witness within the one ecumenical movement, the Catholic Church is still not a member of the WCC. This issue was discussed in depth by the two partners around the time of the Second Vatican Council. A report of the JWG published in 1972 came to the conclusion that there were no fundamental obstacles preventing possible membership. There was no doubt that the Catholic Church could accept the doctrinal basis of the WCC rooted in the Trinitarian faith. However, after a sound study, the Holy See decided not to seek WCC membership in part because of the disparities between the structure and size of the Catholic Church and in part because of its theological self-understanding as universal fellowship with a universal mission and structure. From this perspective the Bishop of Rome cannot be considered as one among many heads of churches, but as the point of reference of the unity of all the baptized. The question of Catholic membership remains open but is not considered a priority at the present time either by the Catholic Church or by the WCC.

The various aspects of ‘walking together’ pointed out in this short presentation are concrete achievements in the sound and time-tested relationship between the Catholic Church and the WCC.