

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

SIXTH REPORT

With Two Study Documents  
Commissioned and Received by  
the Joint Group:

The Church: Local and Universal

The Notion of "Hierarchy of Truths": an  
Ecumenical Interpretation

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# Foreword

The Joint Working Group for relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches has just become twenty-five years old - an opportunity for it to take stock of what it has achieved.

The Joint Working Group came into existence immediately after Vatican II and the opportunity the latter opened up and endorsed for the Roman Catholic Church. The Group was entrusted with studying the conditions for cooperation between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church and even - in the first few years - with considering the possibility of the latter's becoming a member of the WCC. When that prospect proved premature, the JWG turned its attention to furthering relations and practical cooperation between the two partners as far as possible.

In submitting the sixth report of JWG, we wish first of all to say how grateful we have been for the experience we have had since it was given its present membership, following the 1983 assembly of the World Council of Churches at Vancouver.

Fraternal cooperation among its members has indeed been gradually consolidated till it has become a real fellowship characterized by mutual trust and respect. We have learned to talk to each other and listen to each other with real openness. And our awareness of the common mission of our churches in the world has deepened to the point where that mission is seen as the urgent priority.

Reading this sixth report will in itself show the extent to which the productive relations between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church have multiplied and developed. Setting aside the places in which they have found institutional expression, especially in the Commission on Faith and Order, most of the sub-units of the WCC and their Roman Catholic partners have worked out a process of mutual consultation and sometimes common action which must be taken fully into account. The JWG has constantly applied itself to following this process through and expanding it. It has nevertheless not confined itself to this but has also sought to contribute its own bricks to the common structure. The JWG decided to publish as an appendix to this report two documents - on "The Church: Local and Universal" and on the "Hierarchy of Truths" - which it had ordered and officially received and which demonstrate this. We hope they will make a useful contribution

to opening up new stages of fruitful reflection on the journey towards Christian unity.

It is true that we have also had to face certain difficulties - especially, as the report shows, in the field of social thinking and action. And in the last few years Roman Catholic participation in the world convocation on "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" was subject to a variety of ups and downs which need not be discussed in detail here. We would mention only that this enabled us to realize that, as Cardinal Willebrands put it, "the difference in nature between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church" represents a continuing obstacle to the full development of their relations. This obstacle must be analyzed more thoroughly. That must be one of the priority tasks of the next JWG.

Above all, however, we wish in submitting this report to state jointly our firm conviction that whatever may be the hazards of the day-to-day history of ecumenism, the search for unity must never cease. We have to be completely and constantly obedient to our Lord's command: "that they may all be one". We cannot play fast and loose with that prayer and take up our stance in some *status quo*. On the contrary we must gratefully appraise the whole way along which the Lord has already brought us over the last fifty years and go forward yet more boldly and hopefully on the path he himself has opened up and in which he constantly walks ahead of us and awaits us!

Mgr Alan Clark

Pastor Jacques Maury

Joint Presidents of the Joint Working Group  
20 June 1990

# The Sixth Report of the Joint Working Group

## INTRODUCTION

The Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) joyfully celebrates its twenty-five years of ecumenical endeavour. Its mandate to serve the RCC/WCC relationships was given by the Central Committee of the WCC at Enugu, Nigeria, in 1965 and by the authorities of the RCC in the same year.

Since then the Group has made five reports. They reflect the steady growth and maturing in the relations between the RCC and the WCC. The Sixth Report is prepared in a spirit of gratitude for these fruitful years. **It** gives an account of the activities of the Group since the last assembly of the WCC at Vancouver in 1983. It also looks to the future with hope as the relationships continue and develop.

## I. THE ECUMENICAL SITUATION

### 1. Current development

The life of the churches and the thrust of the ecumenical movement are affected by the situation of our world. Today there are many signs of hope for the human family, not least in places where spiritual forces have helped to break down the forces of tyranny. But we also face many grave problems which threaten the well-being of humanity and call for the concern and solidarity of all people of good will. The followers of Jesus Christ have a special duty to be fully present in the world in this time of promise and difficulty. **It** is a time when the ecumenical movement is more than ever necessary if the churches and Christian communities are to be a sign and seed of the unity, peace and hope which the human family needs.

There is much room for encouragement. An increasing number of Christian communities and ecumenical organizations are active in working for unity among Christians. A number of the essential issues dividing Christians have still to be resolved, but suspicion and hostility have in large part given way to good will and

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mutual respect. Churches and Christians of different confessions often engage in common witness and in projects of interchurch aid which respond to urgent human need. In a world so often marked by despair the ecumenical movement itself, as an historic effort to achieve full reconciliation among Christians, is a source of hope. The movement reaches back to the deepest spiritual roots that all Christians share and can be an answer to the spirit of secularism which marks our modern world.

The WCC and the RCC have played an important part in the ecumenical process, not least through their Joint Working Group (JWG). The official visit of Pope John Paul II in 1984 to the WCC, as well as the visit of Dr Emilio Castro, General Secretary of the WCC, to the Holy See in 1986, have helped consolidate the relationships and the cooperation. In its letter to the Extraordinary Synod in 1985, the Central Committee of the WCC could speak of the bonds of "fraternal solidarity" that exist between the two partners. On important ecumenical occasions each has shared in the initiatives and events of the other. The Assisi Day of Prayer for Peace, called by Pope John Paul II in 1986, was supported by the presence of a high level delegation from the WCC. There has been notable Roman Catholic (RC) presence in the WCC assemblies and conferences.

So the ecumenical task has continued well. However, it has yet to reach its goal of full visible unity. The JWG still has substantial work to do. It is more than ever called to help the RCC and the WCC to strive for the unity of Christians and for the unity and solidarity of all human beings.

### **2. Patterns of relationships between the WCC and the RCC**

Twelve RC theologians are full members of the Faith and Order Commission. Seven others participate as consultants in the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). An RC representative is on the Bossey board. For a number of years now, three Roman Catholics have worked on the WCC programme staff: in CWME, Bossey and JPIC. Various forms of contact and working relationships have developed also between other WCC sub-units and Vatican offices, and missionary societies. There has been useful and continual mutual exchange of information, of newly-published documents and of staff visits.

Catholic consultants and observers have participated in a series of WCC conferences, meetings, consultations and seminars.

Many member churches of the WCC and the RCC have close relationships on regional and national levels in taking part in and contributing to ecumenical organizations.

### **3. Factors that influence the relationships**

The above-mentioned patterns are positive factors which promote ecumenical collaboration and strengthen relations not only between WCC sub-units and Vatican departments but also between WCC member churches and the RCC throughout the world. Encouraging statements about the results of this collaboration and achievement of the JWG have been made by Pope John Paul II, representatives of the WCC and leaders of local churches.

Through the agenda of the JWG and other ecumenical endeavours, the RCC and the churches in the WCC fellowship have faced the challenges of division. They have shared in some basic theological reflections on visible unity and contributed to

the process of reconciliation, renewal and growing communion. The WCC and the RCC have increased awareness of the need for mission and dialogue, for promoting the values of the gospel in secularized societies, for Christian stewardship of creation, for furthering justice and peace, for the protection of human rights and dignity.

The WCC member churches belong to almost all Christian traditions. They bring a variety of theological streams into the WCC, which has implications for ecumenical dialogue and collaboration.

The diverse understanding of the ecumenical goal and of the means of achieving visible unity may affect ecumenical progress. Acts of proselytism, excessive concern for "confessional identity", lack of awareness about common problems and ecumenical tasks also affect dialogue and rapprochement. Divergencies on basic doctrinal questions, ethical, social and political issues further limit the process of advancing towards full communion and effective common action.

The WCC and the RCC differ in their nature, their structure, their style of operation, their exercise of authority. Sometimes these differences are a hindrance to cooperation. The RCC is a universal church with a strong hierarchical structure fostering unity in diversity. The WCC is a fellowship of autonomous churches bound together in the search for visible unity and common witness. They are not held together by canonical/structural form, but see themselves as belonging to an ecumenical fellowship which enables them to grow together.

The ecumenical partners need to be sufficiently attentive to the use of their own press and other media in portraying the image of the "other". Likewise, more care needs to be taken in the ways the partners speak of some events in the life of the churches and their ecumenical significance.

## II. FUNCTIONS AND OPERATIONS OF THE JWG

In its First Official Report, the JWG stated that "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 ... called on to discern the will of God in the contemporary ecumenical situation" (First Report, 1). This has been a guiding principle for the members of the Group.

The JWG is a consultative body. It explores new forms of cooperation between the WCC and the RCC, and prepares projects but does not make or monitor policy.

At present the JWG consists of 12 members from each side, some of whom are involved in pastoral work in different parts of the world, others are from departments of the Roman Curia and units of the WCC. Consultants are coopted for particular tasks. The JWG normally meets once a year.

A small executive is responsible for the ongoing work between annual meetings and prepares the agenda and material for the plenary meetings. At the end of its normally seven-year mandate, the JWG presents an official report to the parent bodies.

Members may also discuss questions and ideas arising from JWG work with their own churches so as to foster dialogue and ecumenical relations.

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The JWG is called to help in assessing the ecumenical situation and stimulating the search for visible unity and common witness. It should select those ecumenical issues which require particular care, and promote development of relationships between the WCC and the RCC. This means giving attention, support and encouragement to whatever contributes to wider ecumenical progress, and discerning differences which hinder WCC/RCC relations. By keeping itself informed and stimulating the spread and exchange of information, and sponsoring particular studies, the JWG serves as an instrument of cooperation between the WCC and the RCC. When its findings commend themselves to the parent bodies, the JWG offers its services in helping to present ideas and proposals to the appropriate departments on either side, and to such concerned bodies as theological faculties and ecumenical institutes.

### III. ACTIVITIES OF THE JWG DURING THE PERIOD 1983-90

#### **A. Priorities of this period**

Since the sixth assembly of the WCC (1983) the JWG has concentrated on four areas: "unity of the church - the goal and the way", "ecumenical formation", "common witness" and "social thought and action". Some of these themes, of course, overlap.

##### 1. UNITY OF THE CHURCH - THE GOAL AND THE WAY

The JWG has kept high on its agenda the goal of visible unity of Christians and has regularly undertaken studies of specific importance for this task. A significant role in this work has been carried out by the Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU). The JWG hopes that by such studies it can be of service in complementing and supporting the ongoing work of bilateral and multilateral dialogues.

In the period 1983-90 five areas of studies relating to unity have been undertaken by the JWG. Two are primarily theological: "The Church: Local and Universal" and "The Hierarchy of Truths". The impetus for work on these two themes came during the visit of Pope John Paul II to the WCC (1984). A third area of study concerns new potential sources of division, especially ethical issues. A fourth relates to the impact of councils of churches on the ecumenical movement. A fifth is concerned with a particular pastoral issue: Christian mixed marriages.

##### *a) The local and universal church*

This study document deals with fundamental aspects of the mystery of the church: its local and universal expressions. There is first of all a discussion of the ecclesiology of communion. It is presented as a framework within which the study of the church local and universal takes place. It emphasizes that these two dimensions of the church are not two alternative aspects of the church from which to choose, but must be understood in relationship, and seen simultaneously. A second part looks at the church local and universal in ecumenical perspective, presenting the view of Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant positions on this theme. A third section indicates ecclesial elements required for full communion

with a visibly united church, which is the goal of the ecumenical movement. This discussion includes a presentation of the way the notion of ecclesial communion has been interpreted by the RCC in the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and by the New Delhi (1961) and Nairobi (1975) assemblies of the WCe. A fourth section describes the ways in which the different Christian World Communions understand and use canonical structures to express and safeguard communion within their churches.

The JWG commissioned and received this study document and presents it with the hope of stimulating further ecumenical reflection on this theme. It is added to the Sixth Report as *Appendix A*.

*b) Hierarchy of truths*

The purpose of this study was "an ecumenical attempt to understand and interpret the intention of the Second Vatican Council in speaking of a "hierarchy of truths", and to examine some implications for ecumenical dialogue and common Christian witness" (para. 3). The result of this work is a study document which is appended to the Sixth Report. It analyzes the conciliar statement, indicates examples of a "hierarchy of truths" in Christian history and in different Christian traditions (even though the expression is not used there) and draws out implications for ecumenical dialogue and for the goal of full communion as well as for mission, common witness and theological method. It is noteworthy that this study document is the first ecumenical text on this subject.

The JWG commissioned and received this study document and hopes that it will render a service to the wider ecumenical discussion. It is added to the present report as *Appendix B*.

*c) Ethical issues as new sources of potential divisions*

The past twenty-five years have seen more and better multilateral and bilateral dialogues on those *doctrinal* differences which helped to cause and perpetuate divisions among the churches. In many of these dialogues the RCC has been an active partner with member churches of the WCC. Convergence and common affirmations are beginning to form on such classical divisive doctrinal issues as scripture and Tradition, baptism, eucharist and ministry.

But during the same period, personal and social *ethical* questions have appeared, causing disputes and even threatening new divisions within and between churches. All Christian traditions recognize that ethics cannot be separated from revealed doctrine: faith does have ethical consequences. Yet the JWG notes that in fact there is not enough serious, mature and sustained ecumenical discussion on many of these ethical issues and positions, personal and social; for example, nuclear armaments and deterrence, abortion and euthanasia, permanent married love and procreation, genetic engineering and artificial insemination.

The JWG has taken the first steps in exploring the new sources of potential ecumenical divisions. It first asked a few interchurch groups to investigate and illustrate this development in local contexts, and then it convened a small group of specialists to review these studies. The JWG proposes that the subject be a priority for the post-Canberra period. The JWG's intention is not to examine the substance of each of the potentially or actually divisive issues, but to see how they may best

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be approached in dialogue. Such issues can offer new opportunities for the increase of mutual understanding and respect and, we may hope, for common witness without compromise of a church's convictions or of Christian conscience. The JWG emphasizes the following questions:

1. Why are some ethical issues so emotionally and intellectually divisive that often mature dialogue about them is inhibited, even avoided?
2. **In** what ways do churches formulate ethical principles and decide on specific issues? 3. Do churches help their members to enlighten and form consciences? 4. **In** what ways do the churches understand and use their authority to decide on specific issues for all their members?
5. What are the ways in which the churches should humbly enter into public debate, where peoples of other world faiths or of secular persuasions also desire to live together peacefully and justly; how should Christian convictions be presented as a contribution to the common good?
6. When does an ethical issue on which Christians disagree become an obstacle to full ecclesial communion?

**In** discussing these questions, Christians can rediscover the resources which our church traditions provide for ethical analysis and decision-making. We can better learn to respect the convictions of others who are rooted in their traditions and commitments, and to continue dialogue even in disagreement without demanding that anyone should compromise convictions "for the sake of unity".

### *d) Councils of churches*

On several occasions the JWG has discussed what councils of churches can do to foster unity and to follow up its own work. A very important contribution during the period under review was the second world consultation for national councils of churches (NCCs), held in Geneva in 1986. This meeting brought together 120 leaders from some 70 NCCs and regional ecumenical bodies: (a) to share their experience and expertise, (b) to encourage the "reception" of recent developments, such as the increased participation of the RCC in NCCs (35 NCCs and 3 regional councils of churches with RC membership), and (c) to continue reflecting on their ecumenical role and ecclesiological significance.

There were major papers on councils as instruments of unity and in relation to justice, peace and service. One workshop explored specific ecclesiological issues, following on from the theological consultation on "The Significance and Contribution of Councils of Churches in the Ecumenical Movement" which was held in Venice in 1982. Other workshops dealt with the role of NCCs in ecumenism, aspects of mission and dialogue, issues of finance and resource sharing, and councils in their social and political context.

The papers, responses and workshop reports have been published by the WCC in *Instruments of Unity: National Councils of Churches Within the One Ecumenical Movement* (ed. Thomas F. Best, Geneva, WCC, 1988).

The vitality and development of NCCs affect the ecumenical movement as a whole. Of particular interest to the JWG are the cases where the RCC is moving to

official membership; this at times promotes reflection on crucial ecclesiological and practical issues.

The Geneva consultation touched upon a number of important matters of common concern in the community of national councils. Examples include: (1) the emergence of *koinonia* as an expression of self-understanding of the councils, affirming unity, diversity, and creative interaction, (2) shared life and commitment prompt shared reflection on the nature of the church, (3) people learn more about ecumenism as they take part in the work of NCCs, (4) churches in a council learn together what it means to be "the church in that place", (5) they begin to understand "the instrumental" character of it but also to appreciate that they have a germinal unity, a certain "ecclesial density" (*Instruments*, pp.42-3), (6) churches in a council will be brought up against the problem of the local and the universal and the relation between authority and autonomy.

e) *Christian mixed marriages\**

In the course of the first years of its existence the JWG on many occasions considered the pastoral challenges which mixed marriages pose. Its work certainly contributed to the progress represented by Pope Paul VI's *Matrimonia Mixta* (1970), which has been developed in the new Code of Canon Law (1983). Churches normally encourage marriages between persons of the same communion. However, churches and society no longer view mixed marriages as the object of reproach, but now consider them with greater appreciation and understanding. The churches still seek more effective pastoral means to assist couples and their children in such marriages - both in preparation for marriage and continuing Christian counselling during the marriage itself.

Those couples who take seriously their vocation in marriage as a union in Christ, have found it to be an enriching ecumenical experience. Nevertheless, because of the divisions in Christianity, they and their children reflect the sufferings of Christ; with hope and prayer they travel together the road of conversion towards the goal of unity.

Conscious of the increase in mixed marriages and their significance for the ecumenical movement, the JWG held a consultation on this question in 1989. Its report pointed to the rich experience offered by mixed marriages but also to persisting problems such as: (1) the mutual recognition by churches of such marriages, (2) differing baptismal practice, (3) the education of children, (4) intercommunion.

The consultation stressed the need for common pastoral care before and during marriage, especially during the early years. It recommended more study of the ecclesiological implications of mixed marriages. Finally, it asked that the next JWG should study the report.

## 2. ECUMENICAL FORMATION

The Fifth Report of the JWG emphasized the urgency of the task of ecumenical formation. It stressed that the ecumenical dimension must be an indispensable part

. "Mixed marriages" is used simply to describe the union of spouses of different Christian churches or communions. In more recent times the term "interchurch marriages" is used in some areas to indicate that both parties are clearly committed to their respective churches.

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of all processes of Christian formation, whether of laity, of youth, in catechesis, in religious education, in theological training.

The subject has been a priority in the subsequent sessions of the JWG. Following discussion and reflection at the Riano meeting (Rome), 1985, a first draft of a possible study document on the subject was prepared. This went through a series of revisions, with texts being prepared for discussion in Bossey, 1987, Venice, 1988, and StPrix (Paris), 1989. But a primary task remains: to adapt the content, length and style of the draft document to the audience it addresses. After a small consultation in 1990, the executive of the JWG will hand over the unfinished task to the next JWG, in the hope that the new Group will give the topic priority on its agenda.

### 3. COMMON WITNESS

Collaboration between Christians in the search for new ways of rendering common witness has been consistently encouraged by the RCC and the WCC. Pope John Paul II has emphasized that common witness among Christians is a stimulus to the search for full unity. In the joint statement issued by the then General Secretary Dr Philip Potter and by Cardinal Willebrands on the occasion of the visit of Pope John Paul II to the WCC (1984), mutual commitment to collaboration in the social field and the need to strengthen cooperation in several other areas were stressed. Pope John Paul II has expressed his conviction that "common witness among Christians is possible in various fields. It is founded on the common faith which exists among them and which the comparison in the dialogue in progress has shown in a new light... The common witness which can be given today is a stimulus for the search for full unity" (general audience address by John Paul II, 23 January 1986).

The JWG is pleased to note that in many countries important work of common Bible studies, use of the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, joint Bible translations, publication and distribution is carried out. Very important is also the collaboration between churches in the area of press, radio, television and other means of communication, as well as the training of personnel in specific fields. In some places, the celebration of local, national, regional and international events, the common struggle for human rights, justice and peace (e.g. Basel assembly on "Peace with Justice", 1989), and the sharing of resources, have also contributed to unity, renewal and common Christian witness.

#### *a) Common witness, mission and unity*

Following the publication of the *Common Witness* document by the JWG in 1982, steps were taken to distribute it widely and to emphasize its importance both to the visitors to the WCC and to RC groups. The presence of RC consultants in the commission of CWME and their participation in the WCC mission conference in Melbourne 1980 led to the appointment of an RC consultant to the staff of CWME in 1984.

During the period under review, there has been a renewal of CWME staff visits to Rome as well as a visit of Catholics from Rome to Geneva. Members of the staff participated in three Roman Catholic mission seminars. An invitation to the missiological congress at the Urbaniana University (Rome) was also extended to CWME.

A series of visits was made by the RC consultant to both Roman Catholic and Protestant missionary organizations in order to discuss common witness as practised at both national and local level. An important part of the consultant's work during recent years has involved promoting and organizing RC involvement in work arising from the WCC mission conference in San Antonio, Texas (22 May to 1 June 1989). This included a seminar on the conference theme held in Rome with representatives of the WCC, some departments of the Roman Curia and RC missionary organizations. A Vatican delegation of twenty observers was present at the conference itself. The local committee for the conference was chaired by the ecumenical officer of the RC diocese of San Antonio.

RC representatives contributed to the discussion on the mission/unity issue both at Faith and Order and CWME meetings.

The question of *proselytism* has been raised at various meetings and has made the need to promote common witness more urgent. It will be for the next JWG to suggest ways in which common witness, mission and unity can be further promoted. It is important to involve those organizations and groups who share the concern for a common witness to Jesus as Lord and Saviour in today's world. There is also need to continue ecumenical reflection on the challenge of new religious movements.

*b) The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*

The Week of Prayer is one of the oldest ways of expressing and celebrating the spiritual communion that binds the churches together in listening to the word of God, in praise and intercession. The 80th anniversary of the Week of Prayer, 1987-88, was marked by gratitude for this form of ecumenical fellowship and "spiritual ecumenism", which is generally regarded as an indispensable basis for all other ecumenical endeavours.

Christians are convinced that their efforts to overcome their divisions can only be fruitful through the Lord's blessing. Therefore, prayer should be at the very centre of the ecumenical movement. The various other ecumenical activities that may be occasioned by the Week of Prayer are important, but they should not "obscure" the significance of praying together for unity. In thousands of places all over the world Christians gather together to pray for Christian unity and the needs of all people. In many places and circumstances this Week remains, for various reasons, the main expression of local ecumenism. The material for the Week of Prayer is prepared each year through joint consultations of the PCPCU and the Faith and Order Secretariat (WCC). Local churches of different traditions prepare draft texts for these consultations.

At all its meetings the JWG has heard reports about the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It has noted that in several countries observance of the Week is expanding, while there is a certain stagnation in others. An enquiry undertaken by the PCPCU in 1984 regarding the Week of Prayer showed how vital is the practice of ecumenical prayer for education and renewal, unity and common witness. The considerations and suggestions of the JWG point in the same direction. Churches must be reminded that the Week is not just a prayer for unity once a year, but is an integral part of continuous ecumenical formation and collaboration; that material and proposal for the Week should reflect a wider range of context and oppor

tunities; that more preparation/adaptation should be done at the local level; and that more thought should be given to the relationship between prayer, ecumenical formation and shared activities.

The JWG is convinced that the Week of Prayer can provide one of the most fundamental ecumenical experiences and inspirations and that therefore it deserves the active participation and commitment of all the churches.

*c) Collaboration in justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC)*

The initiative for the JPIC programme and convocation came from the sixth assembly at Vancouver (1983). At the 1985 JWG meeting, the PCPCU was asked to investigate the possibility of RC participation in JPIC. In January 1987 the WCC Central Committee officially invited the RCC to be a "co-inviter" with the member churches of the WCC, non-member churches, and CWCs for the world convocation on JPIC (Seoul, 1990). In December 1987, Cardinal Willebrands informed Emilio Castro that although the RCC would not be a "co-inviter" because of some unresolved difficulties (for example, "the different nature of the two bodies"), it would collaborate in the project because of the common Christian concerns for justice, peace and integrity of creation. The RCC sent participants to the preliminary consultations (Geneva, 1986; Glion, 1986; Granvollen, 1988), appointed a staff person to work full-time in Geneva with the JPIC desk, and designated five official representatives on the 30-member preparatory group.

In September 1988, the WCC General Secretary invited Cardinal Willebrands to arrange for the RCC to appoint fifty participants to the Seoul convocation. Cardinal Willebrands and Cardinal Etchegaray (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace) responded to Dr Castro in November 1989: the RCC would appoint twenty experts to Seoul in the capacity of advisers - the type of participation now customary in WCC assemblies and other major meetings. Meanwhile, the RC staff assigned to JPIC remained; Roman Catholics continued to serve on the local planning committee in Seoul; and the RCC assured financial support for the convocation. Furthermore, local RC churches have fully participated, together with other Christians, in the development of national or regional JPIC programmes, and their representatives attended the convocation in Seoul as members of delegations either of NCCs or of regional ecumenical bodies of which the RCC is a member.

At its January 1990 meeting, the JWG discussed the process that led to the official RC decision. The common preparatory group work and the presence of RC official advisers and others at Seoul, as well as the urgency of common Christian witness in confronting the world's survival issues, will lead the JWG to follow attentively this post-Seoul process, and to be alert to the ways of possible cooperation in the period which leads to the Canberra assembly and thereafter.

#### 4. SOCIAL THOUGHT AND ACTION

At its meetings in Le Louverain (1979) and Marseille (1980), the JWG accepted a proposal to form a Joint Consultative Group on Social Thought and Action (JCG) that would undertake a study on collaboration in the field of social thought and action. When the mandate of SODEPAX came to an end in 1981, the JCG continued work in this field, focusing first on development, peace and human rights. Later, attention was specifically given to the issues of racism and apartheid (1985-87). At

its meeting in Venice (1988), the JWG, with the agreement of the parent bodies, decided not to renew the mandate of the JCG, which ended the same year. The work formerly done by this Group is now to be carried out by the JWG itself, with the help of small ad hoc study groups, on basic issues such as development and debt crisis, racism and apartheid, armaments and arms transfers, human rights and religious liberty. At its 1989 meeting, the JWG strongly recommended that it was now time to explore the possibilities of common witness against racism. The Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace (PCJP) and the WCC Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) are working together on a common reflection on the issues of racism and apartheid.

## B. Ecumenical collaboration in other areas between wee and Ree partners

### 1. MAJOR STUDIES AND OTHER ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF FAITH AND ORDER

Since 1968, the RCC has been officially represented in the Commission on Faith and Order; so have several other non-member churches of the WCC. This is the basis for continuing and extensive cooperation, which has enabled Faith and Order to include in its work RC theological perspectives and contributions. Thus, the wider dimensions of current ecumenical endeavours have always been present in this work. In recent years this cooperation and the consequent wider outlook has deepened and led to remarkable results.

The 1982 Lima document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) was a major result of this cooperation. The document was elaborated with the help of RC theologians and led to convergences on issues that had long been divisive. In the broad discussion process on BEM from 1982 to 1990 the RCC was actively involved at international, national and local levels. Roman Catholics have discussed BEM in ecumenical groups, seminars, commissions, seminaries, theological faculties, publications, etc.

Most importantly, the RCC accepted the invitation of Faith and Order to send a response to BEM at the highest appropriate level. This involved several steps. First, the document was sent to RC Bishops' Conferences, theological faculties and others asking them to study it and send their reports to the PCPCU. These reports were analyzed and taken into account by the PCPCU, which then, with the help of a team of theological consultants, prepared a draft response to BEM. The response was brought to its final form as a result of collaboration between the PCPCU and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In August 1987, it was sent by the PCPCU to the Faith and Order Secretariat in Geneva.

The RCC has thus for the first time given an official response to an ecumenical document. The response affirms the ecumenical achievement represented by BEM. It contains a positive evaluation of large sections of BEM, points to areas that from a RC point of view need further study and raises ecclesiological questions which, according to the RCC, need to be faced if ecumenical progress is to be made. It reaffirms the commitment of the RCC to continuing multilateral dialogue.

Pope John Paul II and other RC leaders have repeatedly underlined the importance of BEM in the movement towards visible unity. The BEM process is probably the most significant instance for many years of ecumenical rapprochement between Roman Catholics and Christians of other traditions.

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RC theologians have participated in all meetings, consultations and drafting groups of Faith and Order in recent years. They have thus made theological contribution to the major study programmes on *Towards the Common Expression of Apostolic Faith Today* and *The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community*.

The meeting of the Faith and Order Commission in Budapest in August 1989 received the results of these studies, which will determine the future direction of the work of Faith and Order. This will include more comprehensive work on ecclesiology, especially a reconsideration of the "unity we seek", for which RC contributions and cooperation are of crucial importance. The same applies to the plan to hold the fifth world conference on Faith and Order in 1993.

### 2. BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL DIALOGUES

While the WCC and the RCC cooperate directly through multilateral dialogue in Faith and Order, many member churches of the WCC have been engaged for a long time in bilateral dialogue with the RCC, either through their respective CWCs at the world level, or directly at the national level. During the last eight years, both the number and range of bilateral dialogues have increased. They represent an important element of the present ecumenical movement and have led to significant results.

There is common agreement that multilateral and bilateral dialogues have complementary purposes and possibilities. Ways have been developed to further their complementary character and to help to give them common purpose. Thus, the work of Faith and Order has profited from the insights and results of bilateral dialogues and these in turn have focused attention on the developments and achievements in multilateral dialogues. For example, several bilateral dialogues and many responses of the churches to BEM have seen the BEM document as providing a wider framework within which dialogues can find common aims. The *Fourth Forum on Bilateral Conversations*, sponsored in 1985 by the CWCs and organized by Faith and Order, has confirmed the complementary character of multilateral and bilateral dialogues by evaluating and comparing main elements of multilateral convergence on BEM and the results of bilateral dialogues on the same issues (*Report of the Fourth Forum on Bilateral Conversations*, Faith and Order Paper No. 125, Geneva, 1985). The *Fifth Forum* was held in 1990 and focused on the question of consistent ecclesiology in bilateral and multilateral dialogues.

It will also be a task of the next JWG to follow developments in bilateral and multilateral dialogues and help to ensure that they together serve the one ecumenical movement. This corresponds to a request by the WCC Central Committee in 1988 which was addressed to the JWG and Faith and Order.

### 3. DIALOGUE AND WITNESS

Cooperation between the WCC Dialogue Sub-unit and the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue (PCID) has continued regularly. There have been yearly joint staff meetings held alternately in Rome and Geneva. Conversations during the past three years have been concerned with (1) the role of dialogue in relation to religious fundamentalism, (2) dialogue and mission, and (3) the place of dialogue

in a religiously plural society. In 1988 a joint meeting was held to discuss the possibilities and problems of tripartite dialogue: Christians, Jews and Muslims. The WCC and its RC partners have also been jointly in contact with Islamic and other organizations.

RC groups have participated in the study of the Dialogue Sub-unit on "My Neighbour's Faith and Mine" which makes Christians more aware and informed about religious pluralism. Inter-religious dialogue is growing in importance; WCC and RCC partners should discuss the questions it raises and share information, studies and publications.

#### 4. FAITH, SCIENCE AND ETHICS

There are moves towards collaboration on these topics: (1) faith and science, (2) technology and environment, and (3) the theology of creation. For example, Cardinal Sin addressed a Church and Society meeting on technology and its effects on the poor, held in Manila. RC observers attended the working committee meeting of the Sub-unit on Church and Society in 1988 and 1989. Further, RC theologians attended consultations on "A Theology of Nature and Theocentric Ethics" (Annecy, September 1988) and on "God, People and Nature - One Community" (Sao Paulo, June-July 1988). Valuable RC contributions on these themes were made.

#### 5. HEALTH CARE, HEALING AND MEDICINE

Since 1982 collaboration in this field has found expression in the presence of RC observers/consultants at the WCC Christian Medical Commission (CMC) meetings. They are appointed jointly by the PCPCU and the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers. The partners have undertaken joint activities in the field of health care, healing and medicine. For some years there have been mutual invitations to meetings. The exchange of visits between CMC and the Vatican staff has helped further collaboration. One proposal that would augment this cooperation in the future is the appointment of RC consultants to work with CMC Commission.

#### 6. DIACONAL SERVICE..., PEACE...

The WCC/CICARWS Emergencies Desk maintains good relations with Caritas Internationalis on disasters, and often works closely with national organizations related to Caritas Internationalis such as Caritas Germany, Caritas Switzerland, Catholic Relief Service and Secours catholique in France. Effective joint relief work has been done in Ethiopia and there are plans to support actively long term reconstruction by the Armenian Apostolic Church. A protocol has been signed by the Armenian Soviet Republic, by WCC/Caritas Internationalis and by the Armenian Apostolic Church.

In the wider context of coordinating agency responses to disaster, CICARWS and Caritas Internationalis are members of the LICROSS- Volags steering committee in which six members are engaged, the others being the League of the Red Cross Societies, Oxfam, Catholic Relief Service and the Lutheran World Federation. It, too, should be noted that there was important coordination through the CCDA in 1983-86.

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In June 1989 CICARWS visited Rome and met Bishop Alois Wagner, the Vice President of Cor Unum. A number of areas of mutual interest were identified and an agreement to encourage dialogue on world developments, refugee service and relief operation was warmly welcomed. Sharing information on the position of the two organizations, in the Vatican and the WCC, will help the two bodies in meeting the challenge ahead.

In many parts of the world (Africa, Latin America, Europe) CICARWS partners and networks collaborate with RC colleagues. In Africa there are many NCCs in which Catholics are full members, e.g. Sudan, Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland, Lesotho and Liberia. In these countries there are ongoing refugee programmes in which CICARWS and the RCC participate fully in leadership and funding.

The RCC and the WCC member churches together address issues relating to peace, e.g. in Sudan and make joint statements. In 1988 a visit to Europe by Sudan church leaders was organized, in which Roman Catholics participated. In 1989 a journey was made to North America, to explain to churches and human rights movements the difficult situation in Sudan and its people's deep need for peace. The Namibia repatriation programme, handled by CICARWS, received funds from RC funding agencies. These brief examples - refugee aid, joint projects, peace action, repatriation programmes - indicate that some African Christian councils are active in coordinating essential programmes and need direct funding to be able to offer to their societies leadership and resources. An equitable way must be found by all partners to support ecumenical enterprises.

#### ... AND REFUGEE WORK

In 1984 CICARWS/Refugee Service held a consultation of church-related partners in Western countries which had significant RCC participation, to examine the situation of asylum and refugee protection.

In 1986 a global Consultation on Protection and Asylum in Zurich was jointly organized by CICARWS, Swiss Inter-Church Aid (HEKS) and Caritas Switzerland. The consultation brought together representatives of the various Catholic and WCC-related networks. It called for greater collaboration between RC and WCC-related groups serving refugees. An International Ecumenical Committee on Refugee Protection was established, to be convened alternately by the WCC and Caritas Internationalis with the participation of other global bodies, such as the LWF, International Catholic Migration Commission, etc.

After this initiative on the international level, efforts have been made to foster collaboration between WCC and RC agencies at the regional levels. The Zurich consultation called for the establishment of joint committees or working groups in each of the regions.

The North American Continuing Committee for Refugee Protection is composed of both RC and WCC-related bodies (Canadian Bishops' Conference, Canadian Council of Churches, NCCC-USA, US Catholic Conference) and meets regularly. In Europe, a joint CEC-CICARWS European Churches' Working Group on Asylum and Refugees was set up and has met every two years since 1988. Catholic participation has been continuous, represented by an observer from the Council of European Bishops' Conferences.

#### 7. INTERNATIONAL ISSUES AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Member churches of the WCC in Latin America and the Caribbean have taken wide-ranging initiatives on human rights, with RC participation at local level. These are seen as ministries of assistance to victims of human rights violations, as well as pastoral help. Human Rights Resources on Latin America (HRROLA) has spread ecumenical groups which have RC leadership. It has sought funds from churches and agencies related to CICARWS/WCC for work in which most, if not all, membership in a given ecumenical committee belongs to the RCC.

Examples of cooperation dot the landscape of Latin and Central America. Representatives from *El Salvador* have, with the help of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, appeared before the UN Human Rights Commission. *Chilean experience* includes the work of the Committee of Cooperation for Peace in Chile. This committee, made up of Lutherans, Methodists, Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and evangelicals, has carried out ministries with political prisoners, exiles and families of those who have disappeared.

In *Brazil*, the NCC constituted by the RCC and Protestant churches has closely followed the situation on human rights, especially in relation to land rights involving several indigenous nations. The Ludigenist Missionary Council is developing sections and programmes in this connection which are appreciated by the different ethnic groups. The participation of leaders of some Protestant churches in the Pastoral Commission on Land has opened up this section of the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil to ecumenical dialogue and greater commitment. This progress was confirmed at the 7th Inter-ecclesial Meeting of Basic Ecclesial Communities in July 1989, where RC, Orthodox and Methodist bishops were present.

WCC and RC-related organizations jointly sponsored a meeting in Brussels, 16-20 May 1988, on the European Community and the debt crisis of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

Representatives of the Vatican PCJP have attended the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development (CCPD) Advisory Group and Economic Advisory Group meetings. CCPD is a member of the advisory board of the Swiss RC/Protestant initiative regarding the international debt crisis.

#### 8. EDUCATION (GENERAL EDUCATION, THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION, FAMILY EDUCATION)

Collaboration in these areas during most of the period under review was limited to those situations in which the WCC and RC partners in education participated in jointly planned activities with NCCs and regional ecumenical bodies to which local RCCs belong. Examples of this were a workshop held in the Pacific on ecumenical learning for JPIC, in September 1988, and the consultation on the church and persons with disabilities held in Bangkok in March 1989.

Another area of indirect collaboration is in relation to "street children". Following the International Year of the Child (1979) a three-year Inter-NGO Programme on Street Children and Street Youth was started on the initiative of the International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB) in 1982. The WCC and ICCB among others founded a new organization in 1986, called CHILDHOPPE, in order to continue the work. The headquarters are in Rio de Janeiro.

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Since the beginning of 1988 the scope for joint collaboration, particularly in the field of adult education, increased significantly when a RC priest from Mauritius joined the WCC staff. Because of his previous involvement in ecumenical adult education work in Asia and the Pacific he has brought the WCC into contact with a new network of RC or RC-related organizations that are open to ecumenical collaboration on justice, peace and development education.

In East and Southern Africa, training for transformation programmes, which were originally started by the RCC, are now being planned ecumenically by NCCs (e.g. Zambia, Zimbabwe) and the All Africa Conference of Churches, with significant RC involvement. The WCC adult education programme is actively participating in this development.

Catholic educators are involved in the work of the Programme on Theological Education (PTE) through the Association of Theological Institutions. RC representatives have attended some consultations sponsored by PTE and other ecumenical partners.

### 9. RENEWAL AND SPIRITUALITY

Since 1983, "spirituality" has figured largely in the life and the programmes of the WCC and in cooperation between the WCC and the RCC.

A first step towards "A Spirituality for Our Times" was a consultation held in Annecy (France), in December 1984, in which the RC contribution was substantial. Because of need for further study and reflection on some aspects of spirituality, the Sub-unit on Renewal and Congregational Life (RCL), as well as other sub-units of the WCC, have organized a series of seminars and consultations. In all of these the RC participants shared their specific experiences and understanding making possible creative dialogues between various traditions and cultures of the ecumenical community.

In the period 1985-88, a series of workshops have been held for renewal of worship in Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, Caribbean, North America and Australia. Roman Catholics participated in these meetings and, in some cases, shared in the leadership.

### 10. THE ROLE OF THE LAITY IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

A good deal of common work in this field has been done on the one hand by the RCL and other sub-units in Programme Unit III "Education and Renewal" and, on the other, by the Pontifical Council for the Laity (PCL).

The Sub-unit on RCL has a desk for lay centres. In Asia, Africa, North America, Caribbean and Europe, networks of ecumenical centres and lay academies include RC centres and staff.

RCL and other sub-units in Education and Renewal sent their comments on the Lineamenta-document prior to the Synod of Bishops in October 1987 to the Synod Secretariat in the Vatican. Moreover, WCC Unit III engaged in a meeting in Geneva on 26-27 February 1987 with representatives of the PCL on the questions raised by the subject of the Synod of Bishops, in 1987.

In November 1988, WCC staff visited the PCL in Rome and discussed the present dialogue and the promotion of this topic. In February 1990, this discussion

was carried further in the seminar on "Merging Ecumenical Trends regarding Laity" organized by Unit III with RC participation.

As part of future cooperation between the WCC and the PCL, the RCL has proposed to continue this ecumenical reflection on "The Role of the Laity in Church and Society".

#### 11. ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE AT BOSSEY

During recent years, the dynamic WCC/RCC collaboration at Bossey has continued. It has been strengthened by the appointment this time for three years of a RC professor to the annual Graduate School. The participation of a RC observer on the Bossey board, the continued interest of the PCPCU in the Graduate School, and the invitation to Bossey staff and students to visit annually various departments of the Roman Curia, the Unions of Superiors General, the missiology department of the Gregorian University, the Dominican House of Studies, the Focolare movement and the St Egidio parish community, have made a positive impact on WCC/RCC relationships and on youth commitment to the ecumenical movement.

#### 12. PREPARATION FOR THE SEVENTH ASSEMBLY OF THE WCC

RC theologians and others have been involved in the preparations for the Canberra assembly through consultations on the theme and sub-themes, several regional meetings, visitors programmes, and ecumenical team visits. Twenty RC observers will attend the assembly and contribute to its deliberations. Others are serving on the local committees and many RC parishes throughout Australia are participating in the preparatory process of study and prayer.

### IV. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE (1991-98)

#### 1. TOWARDS A MORE EFFECTIVE ROLE FOR THE JWG

The JWG is dedicated to its mandate. In a happy atmosphere it has fulfilled difficult tasks and tried to meet vital priorities. But its status, its heavy agenda, the sensitive nature of the issues it deals with, short annual meetings and limited financial resources do not allow it to cover the whole pattern of relationships between the RCC and the WCC.

Further work is needed to strengthen its role. This could be done. Composition, working methods, financial resources and staffing could be improved. Possibilities should be explored of holding some meetings in different countries. This could stimulate local contacts and make the JWG more effective.

Better communications, through publications, special visits and meetings could help the work of the JWG to be better known within its constituencies.

Given the limited time and resources available to the JWG, its agenda should be more limited in scope and better use could be made of the time spent together. While continuing to devote part of its agenda to reviewing cooperation between various programmes of the WCC and the departments of the RCC, the JWG should in future give greater attention to assessing both the ecumenical situation and important developments in various regions of the world, particularly at local level. In some cases these reviews could be done through written reports. The JWG

should concentrate on developing topics of crucial importance for church unity and common Christian witness.

The signs of the times continue to be a challenge to all churches and a call to renewal and unity. The demands of WCC/RCC relationships call for renewed joint efforts to achieve the goal of visible unity of the church and the renewal of human community. Credible Christian witness, mutual respect and growth in truth and love must be sustained and further developed.

## 2. PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE WORK

After assessing its activities over the past seven years as well as the development in the ecumenical situation, the JWG proposes the following priorities for the next period:

- A) Ecclesiological dimensions of ecumenical work
- B) Ecumenical education and formation
- C) Common witness and mission

The first area provides continuity on the central and ongoing concern for *the unity of the church - the goal and the way*, and places emphasis on ecclesiological issues, such as: the ecclesiology of communion and the unity we seek.

The second and the third areas also focus on major ecumenical fields, where joint effort is urgently needed.

A. There are many indications that both in bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues the understanding of the nature and mission of the church is becoming a central topic. This is so because ecumenical conversations so far have led to the recognition that many of the remaining difficulties in the theological dialogue have their roots in different ecclesiologies, especially in different concepts of the place and mission of the church in God's saving and transforming action. Closely connected with this are: (1) the question of authority in the church, (2) the relations between church and humanity, (3) the ecclesiological basis of a common Christian witness and service in a broken world crying out for reconciliation and renewal. *The ecclesiology of communion* integrates a number of basic ecclesiological concerns within a coherent vision.

Through its work on "The Church - Local and Universal" and other topics the JWG has already been involved in the new ecclesiological debate. This debate will continue and the JWG should be an active partner in it. The Group may again choose a specific aspect of ecclesiology for its own contribution.

The question of *the unity we seek* remains important on the ecumenical agenda. There has been an emerging ecumenical consensus on the conditions and expression of the goal of visible unity, as witness the statements of the WCC assemblies from New Delhi (1961) up to Nairobi (1975). However, since 1975 developments in bilateral dialogues and Faith and Order studies, new relationships between the RCC and other churches, experiences in church union negotiations, changes in ecumenical perspectives have all made necessary a restatement of "the unity we seek" which should build on the New Delhi and Nairobi statements.

The 1991 Canberra assembly is expected to take up this task. It will be a major responsibility of the JWG to evaluate such a restatement, to assist in its interpretation and application and to monitor and support further steps towards this goal.

Among matters needing specific attention are:

the continuing impact and implications of the BEM process;  
the continuing development of the Faith and Order studies on "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today" and "The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community";  
the ecumenical significance and contribution of councils of churches (cf. chapter III, A.1.d., p.6 above);  
the possibility of a more comprehensive ecumenical movement and its structures (especially with regard to evangelical and charismatic/pentecostal movements);  
developments within bilateral dialogues; continual efforts to see how the bilateral and multilateral developments relate to one another.

During the next period the JWG should further deepen the study of *New Sources of Division: Ethical Issues* (cf. III.A.1.c., p.5).

The report and the recommendations of the consultation (1989) on *Mixed Marriages* (cf. III.A.1.e., p.7) should be studied particularly for its ecumenical and ecclesiological implications.

Major demographic changes, refugees and migrant workers make more urgent problems of *inter-religious marriages*. A new study on this question should be undertaken in cooperation with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the WCC Sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths.

B. Further study on *ecumenical formation* (see III.A.2., p.7) should embrace the wide field of *ecumenical education*. Promoting work for unity, transforming the life of Christians so as to bring about deeper conversion of heart and renewal of the church, should extend to the education of priests, pastors, theologians and laity.

C. During the 1990s the call for common *Christian witness* in missionary endeavours "so that the world may believe" (cf. John 17:21) should continue to be a major task for the JWG (cf. above III.A.3. and 3.a., pp.8-9).

The JWG should further explore ecumenical approaches to *dialogue and proclamation of the gospel*. This could be done in collaboration between the WCC sub-units (CWME, Dialogue) and RC partners.

The JWG should also go on moving *towards common perspectives on social thought and action*. During the past period there have been difficulties in tackling some social issues, such as apartheid, JPIC, and with some of the instruments used, e.g. SODEPAX and the JCG. The JWG has called a special meeting to examine these problems, to discern successes and failures and to make recommendations for the future. Its report will be given to the Executive Committee of the JWG for consideration in the next steps of collaboration.

The JWG recognized that throughout the world, *ecumenical cooperation at local, national and regional levels* between WCC member churches and the RCC often flourishes, with fruitful results in common witness and mission. The JWG recommends that in the future more account be taken of such ecumenical collaboration and its significance evaluated.

D. Further, the JWG recognized that *new issues are arising in the world which may call for ecumenical collaboration*. These include the considerable spiritual and ideological challenges for the whole world coming from the events in Central and Eastern Europe and in other regions. The response of churches to these theological, economic, political and social issues could be strengthened through ecumenical cooperation. The role of the churches and their life together in such changing societies, and the kinds of solidarity and fellowship they may need from churches elsewhere, could be part of the JWG's future concern. Likewise, the global ecological crisis, newly recognized as an urgent matter of survival, may well call for joint responses.

Future decisions about official WCC/RCC cooperation in any of these areas should be carefully considered in the light of the recommendations to come from the meetings on these subjects.

E. Besides these aims, the JWG could continue to monitor *collaboration on matters which may arise from major ecumenical events*. The need to give attention to the results of the JPIC world convocation has already been mentioned. The seventh assembly of the WCC at Canberra in February 1991 will certainly provide new ecumenical impetus. The theme of the assembly "Come, Holy Spirit - Renew the Whole Creation", can open up fresh dimensions in theological exploration, spiritual understanding, and hope for God's presence and action in the world.

Likewise, Roman Catholic events, such as the General Synod of Bishops in 1990, and the Special Synod of African Bishops, the centenary of the first social Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, 1991, can open new paths to explore in this relationship. The JWG encourages openness to the Spirit as we consider the ecumenical implications of these events. They could provide room for increased collaboration between the WCC and RCC.

F. *Churches and Christians towards the year 2000*. As we approach the end of a millennium, the attention of churches and peoples throughout the world will be focused upon *hope for the future*. This historical turning point will provide a natural occasion for all Christians to reflect on the state of their ecumenical relationships, recommit themselves to unity, and strengthen their common witness for the sake of the world's salvation. The next JWG to serve after the Canberra assembly could take the responsibility of coordinating the responses to the assembly made by the WCC member churches, the RCC and, if possible, other non-member churches. It may be hoped that the churches might offer together to the world a Christian vision of unity and renewal, of social, economic, and spiritual life which can contribute to the work for a stable and just world as we enter a new millennium. This goal might be considered by the newly established JWG.

The JWG renews its hope that it will continue to serve as an instrument of unity and ecumenical collaboration between the two partners. It will try to open hearts and minds to the gifts of the Holy Spirit who leads all Christians to unity (cf. Gal. 5:22-23).

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# The Church: Local and Universal

A Study Document Commissioned and Received  
by the Joint Working Group

## PREFACE

One of the ways in which the Joint Working Group (JWG) of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches has attempted over the years to fulfill its purpose of fostering closer relations between the two, has been to sponsor the joint study of issues that are of great significance in the quest for Christian unity. The theme of "The Church: Local and Universal" is one of these challenging issues.

The JWG has given attention to this theme in the period since the sixth assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, 1983. The Central Committee of the WCC asked in 1984 that this theme be studied. The JWG meeting at Riano (Rome), September-October 1985, made plans for "The Church: Local and Universal" to be an important topic for the subsequent meeting in 1987. It asked for three papers to introduce the theme with Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox perspectives, and suggested that these include some consideration of an ecclesiology of communion and also the organization of this communion at the local and universal levels, taking account of diversity within the unity of the church and of cultures. At Bossey, April-May 1987, the JWG heard and discussed these papers which were prepared by Pierre Duprey, Gunther Gassmann and Ion Bria. As the process continued, the perspectives of other scholars were solicited for continued discussion of the theme at the 1988 meeting. Contributions came from Emmanuel Lanne, OSB, Jean Tillard, OP, Margaret O'Gara, and Patrick Granfield, OSB, who had in hand, as they wrote, the three papers mentioned above, as well as the list of questions raised at the discussion at Bossey. These contributions were discussed by the JWG in Venice, April-May 1988, which decided that a consultation on the theme should be held later in 1988. Since all of the contributions for 1988 were from Catholic sources, it asked that theologians belonging to the Orthodox and the Protestant traditions be part of this consultation.

The consultation was convened in Rome, during December 1986, by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now the Pontifical Council for Promot

ing Christian Unity] and the Commission on Faith and Order. Members included Nicholas Lossky, Geoffrey Wainwright, Günther Gassmann, Emmanuel Lanne, OSB, Patrick Granfield, OSB, and John A. Radano. The work of the group was facilitated by a draft text prepared beforehand by Patrick Granfield who made use of the papers previously prepared for the JWG meetings of 1987 and 1988. His text was the basis for discussion. The draft resulting was discussed by the JWG in St Prieux (Paris) in February 1989. It was further revised by a small committee in September 1989, reviewed by the JWG at its meeting in Rome, January-February 1990, and received there in its present form as a study document.

The Joint Working Group does not intend this study to be an exhaustive presentation on this theme. Rather it is intended to point to some factors which may help to give support and direction to the continuing ecumenical exploration of this theme. It highlights for example the necessity of both the local and the universal expressions of the church, their interdependence, the healthy tension that exists

between them, and some aspects of the ecumenical convergence seen today on these notions of the church. It also explores the ecclesiology of communion and its usefulness as a framework for discussing the relationship between the local and universal church, not only within each Christian communion, but also in terms of the ecumenical relationship between divided Christian communions. It points to different expressions of ecclesial communion and helps us to see aspects of ecumenical convergence here as well.

This study document was prepared with the conviction that the ecclesiology of communion can be a way of expressing and especially of building on the real although imperfect communion already existing between churches despite their continuing divisions.

### **Introduction: the church as local and universal communion**

1. The church is the icon of the Trinity, and the Trinity is the interior principle of ecclesial communion. From the resurrection to the *parousia*, communion is willed by the Father, realized in the Son, and caused by the Spirit in and through a community. Every authentic Christian community shares in this communion and is part of the mystery of God unfolded in Christ and the Spirit. Thus, the eschatological reality is already present, and ecclesial communion expresses the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit". At the same time the church has an inner dynamism towards that unity that rests in the Holy Spirit. In the words of Cyprian, "the church is a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit".<sup>1</sup>

2. Different views of the church as local and universal are found among the various Christian communions (cf. below paras 12-24). Common perspectives on the theological understanding of the local and universal church are therefore critically important for the restoration of Christian unity and have been frequently considered in ecumenical documents.<sup>2</sup> There is only one church in God's plan of salvation. This one church is present and manifested in the local churches throughout the world. It is the same unique church of Jesus Christ, his body, which is, thus, present in every local church. It is also the same Spirit who, from the day of Pentecost, gathers together the faithful in the one church and in the individual local churches.

3. Any ecclesiological investigation of the local and universal church must recognize both its Christological and pneumatological dimensions which are

reflected in the holy scriptures and the early creeds. The Christological dimensions of the church are realized in and through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Thus Ignatius of Antioch could affirm that "where Jesus Christ is, there is the Church Catholic"(To the *Smyrnaens*, viii.2) and Irenaeus that "where the Church is, there is the Spirit, and where the Spirit is, there is the Church" (*Adversus Haereses* 111.24.1). The church is the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

4. This paper will explore in four sections the local and universal aspects of the one church. First, the concept of the ecclesiology of communion as a theological basis and framework for the unity of the church as universal and local; second, the local and universal communion in ecumenical perspective; third, the ecclesial elements of communion; and, fourth, the structuring of communion.

### **I. The ecclesiology of communion**

5. More and more the concept of *koinonia* <sup>3</sup> or communion is seen as having great value for understanding the multiplicity of local churches in the unity of the one church. *Koinonia* refers to the source and nature of the life of the church as body of Christ, people of God, and temple of the Holy Spirit. In particular, this concept

allows us to hold two dimensions of the church - its locality and universality not as separate entities but as two integrated dimensions of one reality.

6. The theological meaning of *koinonia* is rich. Used nineteen times in the New Testament, the term *koinonia* in its primary sense means participation in the life of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. *Koinonia* is the gift of the Holy Spirit: we share in the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. 13:14). *Koinonia* refers to a profound, personal relationship between God and humanity (Acts 2:42 and John 1:3). The Old Testament themes of inheritance and covenant convey similar ideas.<sup>4</sup> Israel is the inheritance of the Lord (Ex. 34:9) and a covenant exists between God and his people (Jer. 24:7). *Koinonia* rests on God's free choice to communicate himself to us: "We are called into the communion of his (God's) Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1 :9). Through baptism believers are called into the fellowship of the Spirit. As a result we share in the passion and consolation of Christ (2 Cor. 1 :7; Phil. 3: 10), and we participate in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). For St Paul the sharing of possessions and the financial help for needy churches (*koinonia* in Rom. 15:26 and 2 Cor. 9: 13) are signs of our communion in the life of God.

7. Because it is the result of our union (*koinonia*) with God, the Christian community can also be called *koinonia*. The *koinonia* or bond of union between believers and God establishes a new relationship among believers themselves. It is realized by participating in the life of the Triune God through word and sacrament. The church is *koinonia* precisely because of the fellowship that its members have in the life of the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> Our vertical relationship with God makes possible our horizontal unity with our fellow believers. <sup>6</sup> *Koinonia* is a dynamic reality that binds us together within the one body of Christ. Our communion with the Triune God and with one another develops throughout history and will never be completely realized until we are ultimately united with God in glory. According to Irenaeus, the history of salvation is a progressive introduction of humanity into communion with God (*Adversus Haereses* IV.14.2).

8. Does communion relate only to the church? Can it also extend to the world and operate in society? Communion refers primarily to the church, since communion is based on participation in the life of the Trinity. The absence of communion among churches affects the world and society, because it is a negative sign of the gospel message of unity. But growing communion among the churches presents even now a positive sign of Christian unity and an effective way to encourage common Christian witness. Division among Christians is a scandal, but the church's mission to announce the gospel to the world is strengthened as communion grows.

9. In a broader sense a notion of communion can also be related to the whole of humanity. All human beings are created in the image of God and are thus called into communion with God. Because it is God's plan of salvation to reconcile broken humanity and to bring it to fulfilment in the kingdom of God, there is a dynamic in history towards solidarity and constructive interdependence. The church is called by God to serve this movement of reconciliation and to help break down barriers which prevent that renewed community among human beings willed by God. "By her relationship with Christ, the church is a kind of sacrament or sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). "The church is bold in speaking of itself as the sign of the coming unity of mankind" (*Uppsala assembly* of the WCC, sect. 1).

10. The notion of the ecclesiology of communion has been found helpful in various bilateral conversations. The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) noted that *koinonia* is the term "that most aptly expresses the mystery underlying the various New Testament images of the church".<sup>7</sup> The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission described the church as "a communion subsisting in a network of local churches".<sup>8</sup> According to the Nairobi report of the Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *koinonia* "includes participation in God through Christ in the Spirit by which believers become adopted children of the same Father and members of the one body of Christ sharing in the same Spirit. And it includes deep fellowship among participants, a fellowship which is both visible and invisible, finding expression in faith and order, in prayer and sacrament, in mission and service" (para 23).<sup>9</sup> The first report of the Catholic-Orthodox Joint Commission, issued at Munich in 1982 and entitled: "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity", spoke of the way in which "the unfolding of the eucharistic celebration of the local church shows how the *koinonia* takes shape in the church celebrating the eucharist". It went on to describe aspects of that *koinonia*, including that "the *koinonia* is eschatological... kerygmatic... (and) at once ministerial and pneumatological".<sup>10</sup> The Reformed-Catholic dialogue spoke of the church indicating that "... it comes together for the purpose of adoration and prayer, to receive ever new instruction and consolation and to celebrate the presence of Christ in the sacrament; around this centre, and with the multiplicity of gifts granted by the Spirit...it lives as a *koinonia* of those who need and help each other" (*The Presence of Christ in Church and World*,

1977).<sup>11</sup>

11. Various Christian World Communions have also recognized the importance of the ecclesiology of communion. Within the Roman Catholic Church, for

example, Cardinal Willebrands said that "the deepening... of an ecclesiology of communion is. .. perhaps the greatest possibility for tomorrow's ecumenism" ,<sup>12</sup> and the 1985 Synod of Bishops called by the Pope on the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council recalled that "the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents".<sup>13</sup> In its "Statement on the Self-Understanding and Task of the Lutheran World Federation", the seventh assembly of the LWF (1984) stated that: "We give witness and affirm the communion in which the Lutheran churches of the whole world are bound together."<sup>14</sup> The ecclesiology of communion was also a major consideration of the Anglican communion within the Lambeth conference in 1988.

## II. Local and universal communion in ecumenical perspective

12. Any discussion of the *koinonia* in the local and universal church must be first placed in the broader context of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, the *Una Sancta* of the early Christian creeds.<sup>15</sup> The *Una Sancta* in the plan of God is God's creation - an eschatological reality existing throughout history from the earliest days (*ecclesia ab Abel*) to the return of Christ in glory. The local and universal church are historical manifestations of the *Una Sancta*, even though they should not be purely and simply identified with it. They have their unity in the *Una Sancta*. There is only one church of God, whether it is expressed locally or universally.

### 1. The local church

13. The local church is truly church. It has everything it needs to be church in its own situation: it confesses the apostolic faith (with special reference to belief in the Trinity and the Lordship of Jesus); it proclaims the word of God in scripture, baptizes its members, celebrates the eucharist and other sacraments; it affirms and responds to the presence of the Holy Spirit and his gifts, announces and looks forward to the kingdom, and recognizes the ministry of authority within the community. All these various features must exist together in order for there to be a local church within the communion of the church of God. The local church is not a free-standing, self-sufficient reality. As part of a network of communion, the local church maintains its reality as church by relating to other local churches. In the words of Vatican II, "The Church of Christ is truly present (*vere adest*) in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament" (*Lumen Gentium*, 26).<sup>16</sup>

14. The local church is not an administrative or juridical sub-section or part of the universal church. In the local church the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church is truly present and active (*Christus Dominus*, 22). The local church is the place where the church of God becomes concretely realized. It is a gathering of believers that is seized by the Spirit of the risen Christ and becomes *koinonia* by participating in the life of God.

15. All Christian World Communions can, in general, agree with the definition of the local church as a community of baptized believers in which the word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, the redemptive work of Christ for the world is witnessed to, and a ministry of *episcopus*

exercised by bishops or other ministers is serving the community. Differences between World Communions are connected with the role and place of the bishop in relation to the local church.

16. For churches of the "Catholic" tradition the bishop is essential for the understanding and structure of a local church. Bishops, as successors of the apostles, are "the visible principle and foundation of unity in their own particular churches" (*Lumen Gentium*, 23). According to the first report of the Catholic-Orthodox Joint Commission (Munich 1982, cf. note 10), "the bishop stands at the heart of the local church as minister of the Spirit to discern the charisms, and take care that they are exercised in harmony, for the good of all, in faithfulness to the apostolic tradition". The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission defined the local church as "the unity of local communities under one bishop" (ARCIC-I, *The Final Report*, *op. cit.*, p.92). Accordingly, the church is most fully revealed/realized when God's people are united at the eucharistic assembly with the bishop. Consequently, the local church in these traditions is primarily the diocese, but it may also refer to several dioceses.

17. For churches of the Reformation and Free church traditions, which have developed a great variety of institutional structures and forms of self-understanding, the term "local church" is not so common and therefore also not defined by referring to the office of the bishop. For these churches it is the local Christian community (parish, congregation) for which the above definition would apply and which could, therefore, be called a local church.

18. Yet in addition to the common elements mentioned above in paragraph 15, there are also certain convergences concerning the differences just mentioned. Within churches characterized by an "episcopal" concept of the local church, the local congregation or parish is recognized as the local expression of the diocese and the entire church (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 42). Such communities must, however, be related to the local church, i.e., diocese, and be in communion with it.<sup>17</sup> Reformation and Free churches, on the other hand, which put special emphasis on the local congregation, have developed structures which serve a larger community of congregations (e.g. districts, dioceses, circuits) and have developed ministries (e.g. bishops, superintendents, regional pastors) which carry special responsibilities (together with presbyteral-synodical organs) for such larger units. **In** the past such larger geographical structures were seen mainly under practical aspects. **In** the present, however, such wider expressions of a local church are seen in a number of churches also in pastoral and ecclesiological terms: as communions of communities.

## 2. *The universal church*

19. The universal church is the communion of all the local churches united in faith and worship around the world. However, the universal church is not the sum, federation or juxtaposition of the local churches, but all together are the same church of God present and acting in this world. The issue here is fundamentally ecclesiological and not organizational.<sup>18</sup> The communion of local churches gathered by and around the celebration of word and sacrament manifests the church of God. The concept of the universal church recognizes the diversity of cultural and social conditions. "While preserving unity in essentials", Christians have "a proper

freedom on the various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in the variety of liturgical rites, and even in the theological elaborations of revealed truth" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4). Catholicity enters into the very concept of church and refers not simply to geographic extension but also to the manifold variety of local churches and their participation in the one *koinonia*. Each local church contributes its unique gifts for the good of the whole church.

20. The Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church understand themselves as representing the church universal. Reformation and Free churches, because they had to organize themselves on the national level, often had difficulties in grasping and experiencing the universal dimension of the church. However, through their involvement in the ecumenical movement and their experience within the Christian World Communions and the fellowship of the World Council of Churches, they have developed a stronger sense of the universal character of Christ's church which transcends their own reality as churches organized on a national or regional level. This experience and insight finds expression also in the development of Christian World Communions which, according to the WCC assembly at Uppsala (1968), provide "some real experience of universality".<sup>19</sup> It is the task of the ecumenical movement to lead the churches to that unity which enables them to confess and express together the universal communion of the church of Jesus Christ.

### *3. The question of priority*

21. **In** the past, biblical scholars held that the term *ekklesia* was first used to designate the local church of a city or region and only later the universal church. Contemporary biblical study, however, raises questions about the earlier view of priority. **It** presents evidence that suggests a more complex picture of the early Christian community than that indicated by the axiom "first particular, then universal".<sup>20</sup>

22. One way of looking at the question of priority is by using an eschatological and pneumatological ecclesiology. This approach does not assign a priority exclusively to either the local or the universal church, but suggests a simultaneity of both. Both are essential. Thus it must be said, on the one hand, that in God's general plan of salvation the universal has an absolute priority over the local. For Christ came to gather together the dispersed children of God; at Pentecost the Spirit of God was poured out upon all flesh (cf. Acts 2:17). God created the church in the framework of universal reconciliation and unity. The Pentecostal experience and the word and grace of Christ have continual and universal relevance. The gospel of salvation is addressed to humankind as a whole without exception. **In** this sense the universal has priority and will keep it forever.

23. At the same time the church began and came into existence at a determined place. "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2: 1). From this place the apostles began to preach the gospel to all the nations (cf. Matt. 28:19). **In** the concrete historical situation of the foundation of the church, the local had priority and will keep it until the second coming of Christ, because the gospel is preached each time in a determined place; the faithful receive baptism and celebrate eucharist in this determined place, even though it is always and necessarily in communion with all the other local churches in the world. There

is no local church that is not centred on the gospel and not in communion with all other churches. 21

24. Since Pentecost the church celebrates the eucharist as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The eucharist celebration, therefore, embraces the church both in its local and universal dimension. It thus affirms a mutual presence of all the churches in Christ and in the Spirit<sup>22</sup> for the salvation of the world.

### III. The ecclesial elements of communion

25. The ecclesial elements required for full communion within a visibly united church - the goal of the ecumenical movement - are: communion in the fullness of the apostolic faith, in sacramental life, in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry, in structures of conciliar relations and decision-making, and in common witness and service in the world. This goal is still to be achieved, and on the way to this goal it is important to note how the notion of ecclesial communion has been interpreted by the Roman Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council, and the way in which it has been interpreted within the World Council of Churches.

#### 1. Interpretations of ecclesial communion

26. The Second Vatican Council described two types of ecclesial communion. The *first* is full and complete ecclesial communion in which the ecclesial elements of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church are integrally present. Accordingly, the Council taught that the unique church of Christ "subsists" in the Catholic church, "... although many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside her visible structure" (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). This leads to the *second* type which is partial and incomplete, but nonetheless real ecclesial communion. The essential elements are present in some way in other Christian churches: the written word of God; faith in Christ and in the Trinity; baptism; the sacraments; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity; the interior gifts of the Holy Spirit; and prayer and other spiritual benefits (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3, 20-23, and *Lumen Gentium*, 15). By their nature these elements tend towards full realization of catholic unity (*Lumen Gentium*, 8, 15). Although a non-Catholic community may not have the "institutional" fullness of the ecclesial elements, this does not mean that it does not have an authentic "pneumatic" response to the presence and grace, and form a vital communion of faith, hope and charity. 23 The ecclesiology of communion offers a promising way to explain and express the incomplete but real communion that already exists between the Catholic church and the other churches. It allows us to speak of a growing communion.

27. Vatican II, in its teaching on "subsists" and the presence of ecclesial elements outside its visible boundaries, provided sound theological basis for genuine ecumenical commitment. Although it did not resolve the problems, it nevertheless with courage and consistency laid the foundation for further progress. The ecumenical bilateral and multilateral conversations since the Council have continued to examine in detail the thorny questions connected with a common profession of faith, the sacramental life, and the role of authority.

28. Elements of communion among the churches have been discussed and clarified in the World Council of Churches in the perspective of "the unity we

seek". The results of these reflections are formulated in statements of the 1961 New Delhi and 1975 Nairobi assemblies of the WCC.

29. The New Delhi statement said: "We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to the church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people."<sup>24</sup>

30. Taking up the report of a Faith and Order consultation in Salamanca, the Nairobi assembly stated its vision of unity in the following way: "The one church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united. In this conciliar fellowship, each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith, and therefore recognizes the others as belonging to the same church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit. As the New Delhi assembly pointed out, they are bound together because they have received the same baptism and share in the same eucharist; they recognize each other's members and ministries. They are in their common commitment to confess the gospel of Christ by proclamation and service to the world. To this end, each church aims at maintaining sustained and sustaining relationships with her sister churches, expressed in conciliar gatherings, whenever required for the fulfilment of their common calling."<sup>25</sup>

31. The two statements from New Delhi and Nairobi refer to ecclesial elements that are generally recognized as being indispensable for any realization of visible church unity both on the local and universal level. These include: the common confession of the apostolic faith, mutual recognition of the apostolicity and catholicity of the other churches and of each other's members, sacraments and ministries; fellowship in the eucharist, in spiritual life and in mission and service in the world; and the achievement of mutual fellowship, also in conciliar meetings and decisions. Both statements emphasize local unity but this is inter-related, especially in the Nairobi statement, with the universal dimension of unity in the form of a conciliar fellowship (or, as a Faith and Order consultation in November 1988 stated: "conciliar communion of common faith and life in the service of God's world"). The descriptions of New Delhi and Nairobi are not limited solely to the goal of visible unity. They express at the same time basic elements of the faith and life of the church, both in its local and universal dimensions.

32. It is obvious that the essential elements of communion or unity stated in these two texts of the WCC correspond to the elements mentioned earlier in this paper. The different Christian traditions believe that these elements, in different forms, are present within their traditions and that, accordingly, full ecclesial communion exists within them. Also between member churches of the WCC different degrees of communion have developed, including, for many, eucharistic hospitality, interim eucharistic sharing, altar and pulpit fellowship understood as full communion. The question then arises as to how the communion can be described between churches which are not yet able to enter into forms of eucharistic fellowship.

33. All churches which participate actively in the ecumenical movement agree that even where eucharistic fellowship and full communion are not yet achieved between churches, nevertheless forms of communion do exist. The churches are no longer living in isolation from each other. They have developed mutual understanding and respect. They pray together and share in each other's spiritual experience and theological insights. They collaborate in addressing the needs of humanity. Through bilateral and multilateral dialogues they have achieved remarkable convergences with regard to previously divisive issues of doctrine and church order. They share, in different degrees, in the basic elements of communion. It is, therefore, possible to speak of an existing real though imperfect communion among the churches - with the understanding that the degrees of expressions of such communion may vary according to the relationships between individual churches.

34. This recognition of an already existing though imperfect communion is a significant result of ecumenical efforts and a radically new element in twentieth century church history. It provides a basis for renewal, common witness and service of the churches for the sake of God's saving and reconciling activity for all humanity. And it provides a basis and encouragement for further efforts to overcome those barriers which still prevent the recognition and implementation of full communion between the churches.

## *2. The interdependence of local and universal in the communion of churches*

35. Elements of communion at the local level correspond to and interact with their expression at the universal level, because the Holy Spirit is the same source at both levels. Different churches, however, may have different ways of manifesting the same ecclesial elements. Ecclesial communion is lived and experienced in eucharistic communion. The eucharistic synaxis celebrates both the communion with the eternal life of the Triune God and the link with all worshipping communities, as members of the one body of Christ (cf. I Cor. 10:17).

36. "The local church is wholly church, but it is not the whole church."<sup>26</sup> This applies already in the case of existing World Communions, even though they may understand "local church" differently. It will continue to apply when full unity among Christians has been realized. The local church should never be seen in isolation but always in a dynamic relationship with other local churches. It has to express its faith in relation to other churches, and in so doing it manifests communion. The catholicity of the church implies an inter-relatedness and interdependence among local churches. Once a local church turns in on itself and seeks to function completely independently from other local churches, it distorts a primary aspect of its ecclesial character. The local church is not a free-standing, self-sufficient reality. As part of a network of communion, the local church maintains its reality as church by relating to other local churches.<sup>27</sup>

37. Mutual solicitude, support, recognition, and communication are essential qualities among local churches. Even from earliest times, the local churches felt themselves linked to one another. This *koinonia* was expressed in a variety of ways: exchange of confessions of faith; letters of communion as a kind of "ecclesiastical passport"; hospitality; reciprocal visits; mutual material help; councils; and synods.

38. Inter-relatedness is now more evident among local churches of the same World Communion. The unity we seek prompts us all to find ways of restoring such *koinonia* at the local and universal levels with Christian communities, from whom we are at present divided. Ecumenism, in its local and universal expression, with its emphasis on dialogue and mutual concern, has already opened up many avenues of collaboration, spiritual and theological exchange and convergence on essential issues of faith and order.

39. At the same time, however, the growth in the *koinonia* is especially tested when, locally or universally, the churches are called upon to act together on pressing social issues. Ethical issues can become factors of division as witnessed in the ongoing discussion on abortion, birth control, divorce, and homosexuality. The old slogan that "doctrine divides, service unites" is no longer axiomatic. The impact of socio-cultural challenges and the need for common responses to them is of immense importance for the future of ecumenism.

40. Each Christian World Communion has to face specific challenges regarding universality and particularity. The Protestant churches have stressed the importance of the local church, but they face the problem of concretely manifesting universality among their own churches. Participation in the World Council of Churches has heightened the experience of universality among the member churches. In the Roman Catholic Church today dialectical tension between local authority and central authority remains a critical issue.<sup>29</sup>

#### **IV. The structuring of communion**

41. The very nature of the church of God, the elements of ecclesial community already discussed, and the lived experience of individual Christian communities, all form the basis on which the canonical expression of communion has to be developed. Here are meant questions of polity, order, law, authority, and constitution which all refer to the structure of the church and of communion. What has been said above about the nature of communion and its many qualities is presupposed here. The canonical dimension of communion applies to the local and universal framework of one particular tradition as well as to the already partially existing communion among different churches.

##### *1. Canonical structures*

42. Communion, as we have seen, refers to a dynamic, spiritual, objective reality which is embodied in ecclesial structures. The gift of communion from God is not an amorphous reality but an organic unity that requires a canonical form of expression. The purpose of such canonical structuring is to ensure that the local churches (and their members), in their communion with each other, can live in harmony and fidelity to "the faith which has been once and for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

43. In the Roman Catholic Church communion with the Bishop of Rome is necessary. Vatican II referred on several occasions to "hierarchical communion".<sup>30</sup> It taught that one becomes a member of the college of bishops through sacramental ordination and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college. At his ordination a bishop receives the office (*munus*) of sanctifying, teaching, and governing. But these tasks can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with

the head and members of the college of bishops. Furthermore, although bishops possess the threefold *munera* through their ordination, they cannot exercise them in a particular place without a specific determination, a "canonical mission" by the Pope. The college of bishops cannot act independently of the Pope, since the collegial character of the body would be inoperative without its head.

44. Despite certain differences in the life and the practice of Orthodox churches, they believe on the basis of a common canonical tradition that episcopal ordination confers the functions of sanctifying, teaching and ruling. They have comparable practices dealing with the designation and assignment of bishops. Moreover they agree that the bishops must be in hierarchical communion with the head of the synod. **In** this context, canon 34 of the "apostolic canons" is an appropriate expression of the Orthodox understanding of communion. <sup>31</sup>

45. The Reformation and Free churches have developed their canonical structures of expressing and safeguarding communion within their churches. According to their particular heritage they employ presbyterial and synodical structures for this purpose and, in many cases integrate into them episcopal ministries under different titles, including the office of bishop. **In** their respective Christian World Communions these churches have also developed canonical structures which enable consultation, cooperation, and common witness, but which do not allow for decisions which are binding for the individual member churches of that communion. However, there is a general tendency to strengthen ways in which these communions can express their common faith, life and service on a universal level.

46. The ministry of the Bishop of Rome as the minister of universal unity is essential to Roman Catholicism. According to Catholic faith Peter and his successors, the Bishops of Rome, have been entrusted by God to confirm the brethren in the faith "which has been once and for all entrusted to the saints" and in the unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 25, CD2). The Bishop of Rome is seen as the sign and guarantee of the communion of local churches with each other and with the church of Peter and Paul. His ministry is multiple: to protect both unity and legitimate diversity; to offer support and solicitude; to facilitate communication between churches; and to arbitrate differences.

47. The office of the papacy remains a controversial issue in ecumenism, but there are signs of better mutual understanding.<sup>32</sup> On the Orthodox side the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios **I**, following a deliberation and resolution of his synod, and convinced that it expressed the mind of the early church, stated that the Bishop of Rome is marked out as the one who has the presidency of charity and is the first bishop in rank and honour in the whole body of the Lord. <sup>33</sup> The Pope can be called *primus inter pares* (first among equals), because this apostolic see has exercised a primacy of love from earliest times. <sup>34</sup> **In** bilateral dialogues, Lutherans speak of the value of the "Petrine functions"<sup>35</sup> and Anglicans have agreed that "a universal primacy will be needed in a reunited church and should appropriately be the primacy of the Bishop of Rome". <sup>36</sup> The Joint Roman Catholic-World Methodist Council Commission noted: "Discernment of the various factors in scripture and history might contribute to an agreed perception of what functions the See of Rome might properly exercise in a ministry of universal unity, by what authority, and on what conditions" (para. 40).<sup>37</sup> Despite these positive statements, the problems of

*ius divinum* (divine right), primacy of jurisdiction, infallibility and the papal teaching authority remain subjects of intense ecumenical dialogue.

## 2. *The shape of future unity*

48. If all local churches are to be united to form one *communio ecclesiarum* (communion of churches), there must be an acceptance of the basic ecclesial elements of communion: common profession of the same apostolic faith; proclamation of the word of God; mutual recognition of the sacraments, especially baptism and eucharist; and agreement on the nature and exercise of pastoral leadership. Such agreements and recognitions are necessary for the achievement of visible unity in legitimate diversity.

49. Several models of structured Christian communion have been proposed and critically analyzed within the ecumenical movement. Some of the models of comprehensive union that have been suggested include the following: organic union; corporate union; church fellowship through agreement (concord); conciliar fellowship; communion of communions; and unity in reconciled diversity.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the precise shape the united church of the future should take and the forms of diversity it could embrace is an important but still unresolved question for all Christian communities.

50. Furthermore, the different understandings of the Christian World Communions concerning the relationship between the church local and universal clearly affects our approach towards future unity. Questions are raised if ecumenical relations develop rapidly on the local level between traditions which have not achieved full communion on the universal level. For example, what degree of communion can local churches of different traditions achieve in these cases, without breaking communion with churches of their own tradition?

51. In conclusion, it can be said that although canonical communion does not yet exist among local churches of different traditions, the churches are in communion in a profoundly spiritual way. Our churches share the common gospel in the Christian heritage. Because ecclesial communion is a fellowship inspired by the indwelling Spirit, we can say that the barriers of our divisions do not reach to heaven. Christian unity is both a gift and a task. Christians of all communities pray for the unity of all in each place and look forward to that "one visible church of God, truly universal and sent forth to the whole world so that the world may be converted to the gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, I).

## NOTE S

<sup>1</sup> Cyprian, *De Orat. Dom.* 23, *PL* 4:553 and cited in *Lumen Gentium*, 4.

<sup>2</sup> For examples see Faith and Order Paper No. 59, report of Joint Working Group on "Catholicity and Apostolicity", 133-58 and 216-17; the individual papers of the Group can be found in *One in Christ* 6 (1970), 242-483, note especially paper by E. Lanne, "The Local Church: Its Catholicity and Apostolicity", 288-313; Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity], "Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National, and Local Levels", *SPCU Information Service* 26 (1975), 8-31, esp. Part 2; Paul VI, Address during the 1973 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, *SPCU Information Service* 21 (1973), 3-4; WCC, *In Each Place: Towards a Fellowship of Local Churches Truly United* (Geneva, WCC, 1977); and Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission, *Facing Unity* (Lutheran World Federation, 1985).

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3 *Koinonia* comes from *koinos*; common, the opposite of *idios*: proper, particular, private. *Koinoo* means to put together or to pool. *Koinonia*, then, refers to the action of having something in common, sharing in, participating in. It is often rendered in Latin by *communio* or *communicatio*.

For studies on *koinonia* consult P.C. Bori, *Koinonia* (Brescia, Paideia, 1972); J.M. McDermott, "The Biblical Doctrine of *Koinonia*", *Biblische Zeitschrift* 19 (1975), 64-77 and 219-33; H.J. Sieben, "Koinonia, communaute-communion", *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite* (Paris, 1975), col. 1743-45; S. Brown, "Koinonia as the Basis of New Testament Ecclesiology?" *One in Christ* 12 (1976), 157-67; and J.M.R. Tillard, *Eglise d'Eglises. L'ecclésiologie de communion* (Paris, Cerf, 1987).

4 See "Heritage et alliance", in *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* (Paris, 1970).

5 The *communio sanctorum* in the Creed may refer both to the "communion of the saints or holy people" and to "communion in holy things" – sharing the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. See S.

Benko, *The Meaning of Sanctorum Communio: Studies in Historical Theology* (London, SCM, 1964) 3.

6 John Paul II has used the terms "vertical" and "horizontal". He noted that the vertical dimension of *communio* with God is primary. If it is not deeply experienced, it can weaken the possibility of the horizontal dimension reaching its full potential. Address at the meeting of the US bishops in Los Angeles, 16 September 1987. *Origins*, 1 October 1987, Vol. 17, No. 16,257.

7 *The Final Report*, in Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer eds, *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (New York, Paulist Press, and Geneva, WCC, 1984), 65.

8 *Facing Unity*, 9.

9 *Towards a Statement on the Church: Report of the Joint Commission Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council*, 1982-1986. Fourth Series. *SPCU Information Service* 62 (1986), 209.

10 *SPCU Information Service* 49 (1982), 109.

II *Growth in Agreement*, 447.

12 "The Future of Ecumenism", *One in Christ* II (1975), 323.

13 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, 1985, *A Message to the People of God* and *The Final Report* (Washington, NCCB, 1986).

14 Eugene L. Brand, *Toward a Lutheran Communion: Pulpit and Altar Fellowship*, LWF Report, 26 (Geneva) Lutheran World Federation, 1988).9. This report shows that the ecclesiology of communion has long been a subject of discussion within the Lutheran World Federation.

15 See Ion Bria ed., *Jesus Christ - The Life of the World. An Orthodox Contribution to the Vancouver Theme* (Geneva, WCC, 1982), 12-13.

16 For a discussion of the theology of the local church in Vatican II see the following: P. Granfield, "The Local Church as a Center of Communication and Control", *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 35 (1980), 256-63; H. Legrand, "La réalisation de l'Eglise en un lieu", in *Initiation ilia pratique de la théologie*, B. Lauret and F. Refoule eds, Tome III, *Dogmatique 2* (Paris, Cerf, 1983), 143-345; and J.A. Komonchak, "The Local Realization of the Church", in *The Reception of Vatican II*, G. Alberigo et al., eds. (Washington, Catholic University of America, 1987), 77-90.

17 A problem in some parts of the Catholic world is the decrease in the number of ordained ministers. As a consequence there are many parishes where the liturgy of the word is becoming more common than the eucharistic liturgy. When a priest is not available, appointed lay members and religious lead the congregation in prayers and readings and distribute the eucharist. There is great concern that the practice of infrequent eucharistic liturgies could adversely affect the doctrine that the eucharist is central to the Catholic concept of the church.

18 In the words of J.D. Zizioulas: "There is one church, as there is one God. But the expression of this one church is the communion of the many local churches". See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 134-35.

19 *The Uppsala Report* 1968, ed. Norman Goodall (Geneva, WCC, 1968), 17.

20 For further discussion on this point see R.E. Brown, "The New Testament Background for the Concept of the Local Church", *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 36 (1981), 1-14, here 4.

21 For the New Testament communities of St Paul, the church of the saints of Jerusalem was a reference for communion (cf. 2 Cor. 8-9). This local church was also the test for apostolic faith (cf. Gal. 2: 1ff.).

22 Cf. J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 132-33. 23 It should be noted that the expressions "full and complete communion" and "partial and incomplete

communion" are not found as such in Vatican II. They are intended to correspond to "*plena*

- communio*" (UR, 3) and "*quaedam communio, etsi non perfecta*" (UR, 3). Some authors prefer to speak of "full and perfect communion", an expression used by Paul VI. This expression assumes the possibility of "incomplete and imperfect communion". Obviously, the use of "perfect" and "imperfect" relates to wholeness or completeness and not to the moral qualities of holiness or goodness.
- 24 Lukas Vischer ed., *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1963* (St Louis, Bethany Press, 1963), 144-45.
- 25 David M. Paton ed., *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi, 1975. The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Nairobi, 23 November-10 December 1975 (London, SPCK, and Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 60.
- 26 J.J. von Allmen, "L'Eglise locale parmi les autres Eglises locales", *Irenikon* 43 (1970), 512. 27 See J. Ratzinger, "The Pastoral Implications of Episcopal Collegiality", *Concilium* (American ed.), Vol. 1,45.
- 28 See L. Herding, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity* (Chicago, Loyola University, 1972) and B.P. Prusak, "Hospitality Extended or Denied: *Koinonia* from Jesus to Augustine", *The Jurist* 36 (1976), 89-126.
- 29 On this issue see P. Granfield, *The Limits of the Papacy: Authority and Autonomy in the Church* (New York, Crossroad, 1987). 30 *Lumen Gentium* 21 and 22; *Nota praevia*, 2 and 4; and *Christus Dominus*, 5.
- 31 Canon 34: "The bishops of every region ought to know who is the first one (*protos*) among them, and to esteem him as their head, and not to do any great thing without his consent; but every one ought to manage only the affairs that belong to his own diocese and the territory subject to it. But let him (i.e., the first one) not do anything without the consent of all the other (bishops); for it is by this means that there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through Christ in the Holy Spirit". Text in F.X. Funk, *Didascalia et constitutiones apostolorum*, 1905,572-74.
- 32 See V. von Aristi, et al., *Das Papstamt: Dienst oder Hindernis für die Oekumene?* (Regensburg, F. Pustet, 1985).
- 33 Letter of Dimitrios I to Pope Paul VI on the tenth anniversary of the lifting of the anathemas, 14 December 1975, in E.J. Stormon SJ ed., *Towards the Healing of Schism, The Sees of Rome and Constantinople. Public Statements and Correspondence between the Holy See and the Ecumenical Patriarchate 1958-1984* (New York/Mahwah, the Paulist Press, 1987), par. 331, 279-81.
- 34 Ignatius to the Romans I. Also see J. Meyendorff, et al., *The Primacy of Peter in the Orthodox Church* (Leighton Buzzard, Faith Press, 1963). Also P. Duprey, "Brief Reflections on the Title 'Primus inter Pares'", *One in Christ* 10 (1974),7-12.
- 35 P.C. Empie and T.A. Murphy eds, *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V* (Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1974).
- 36 ARCIC, *The Final Report*, in *Growth in Agreement*, 108.
- 37 *Towards a Statement on the Church*, SPCU Information Service 62 (1986), 211.
- 38 Briefly summarized in *Facing Unity*, 8-20, with appropriate bibliographical references.

# The Notion of "Hierarchy of Truths": An Ecumenical Interpretation

A Study Document Commissioned and Received  
by the Joint Working Group

## Introduction

1. During Pope John Paul II's visit to the World Council of Churches offices in Geneva (12 June 1984), Dr Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, former WCC General Secretary, suggested a study on the "hierarchy of truths". The expression is in the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism (1964). The concept has aroused ecumenical hopes, but the expression still needs clarification of its use in the Decree and of its implications for the ecumenical dialogue. The Pope immediately favoured the suggestion.

2. The Joint Working Group (JWG) between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches commissioned two consultations on "the hierarchy of truths". The first took place at Bossey, Switzerland, September 1985. After the JWG had commented on the initial report (October 1985), the second consultation met in Rome, March 1987. The draft returned to the JWG meeting in May 1987. A small editorial group incorporated the comments from the JWG and from other consultants. The JWG again reviewed the text in April-May 1988 and in February 1989, and received this present version in January 1990 as a study document to help further reflection on the theme.

3. This study document is an ecumenical attempt to understand and interpret the intention of the Second Vatican Council in speaking of a "hierarchy of truths", and to offer some implications for ecumenical dialogue and common Christian witness. The document also relates "hierarchy of truths" to other Christian traditions, although it can do so only in an approximate way. These traditions do not normally use the expression although they appreciate the insights it contains or they may express them in different terms.

## Chapter One: The conciliar statement and its contents

4. "In ecumenical dialogue, when Catholic theologians join with separated brethren in common study of the divine mysteries, they should, while standing fast by the teaching of the church, pursue the work with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility. *When comparing doctrines, they should remember that there*

*exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths in Catholic doctrine, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith. Thus the way will be open whereby this kind of 'fraternal emulation' will incite all to a deeper awareness and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ (cf. Eph. 3:8)" (Decree on Ecumenism, no. 11).*

5. The paragraph is in the Decree's second chapter, which deals with the practice of ecumenism in the Roman Catholic Church (nos 5-12). This practice includes the continual examination of our "own faithfulness to Christ's will for the church", and our efforts "to undertake with vigour, wherever necessary, the task of renewal and reform" (no. 4). Essential in such ecumenical practice is doctrinal dialogue which is carried out "with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility" (no. 11). Therefore, the concept of "the hierarchy of truths" relates directly to the task of ecumenical dialogue.

6. The Decree emphasizes the necessity for a clear, full and understandable explanation of Catholic doctrine (no. 11) as a presupposition to "dialogue with our brethren". Then in conversation Christian communions explain their doctrine more profoundly and express it more clearly, in order to achieve a more adequate understanding and accurate judgment about each other's teaching and life (cf. no. 9). Then in the same number **11**, the Decree broadens this understanding of dialogue: it is a search together into the divine mysteries to incite "a deeper realization and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ". One thus has to understand the statement on a "hierarchy of truths" within this broader, never-ceasing investigatory concept of dialogue.

7. Two immediate sources for the teaching about the "hierarchy of truths" indicate its meaning. Archbishop Andrea Pangrazio (Italy) first presented the idea to the Council (November 1963). He noted that "to arrive at a fair estimate of both the unity which now exists among Christians and the divergences which still remain, it seems very important to pay close attention to the hierarchical order of revealed truths which express the mystery of Christ and those elements which make up the church". Later (October 1964), in a written modus or proposed amendment to the Decree, Cardinal Franz König (Vienna) proposed the exact phrase, "hierarchy of truths". He emphasized that the truths of faith do not add up in a quantitative way, but that there is a qualitative order among them according to their respective relation to the centre or foundation of the Christian faith (Modus 49).

8. The Decree is silent about the meaning of "the foundation of Christian faith". According to the official reason (ratio) in Modus 49 for the introduction of the phrase, the importance and the "weight" of truths differ because of their specific links with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation.

9. Thus by using the words "order" or "hierarchy" the Council intended to affirm the organic nature of faith. Truths are articulated around a centre or foundation; they are not placed side by side.

## **Chapter Two: "Hierarchy of truths" in Christian history**

10. "Hierarchy of truths" was a new concept at the Second Vatican Council. But the phrase expresses an insight into a reality which has had different forms in the history of the church. The following serve as examples.

11. Even though the *scriptures* are divinely inspired as a whole and in all its parts, many have seen an order or "hierarchy" in so far as some biblical sections or passages bear witness more directly to the fulfilment of God's promise and revelation in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit in the church.

12. One sees several kinds of "hierarchies" in relation to the authority of the church *councils* and to their contents. Most Christian traditions give special priority to the seven ecumenical councils of the early church. Some see also a "hierarchy" among these seven councils, inasmuch as those which have formulated the doctrine of the mystery of Christ and of the Spirit within the communion of the Holy Trinity should as such hold a pre-eminent position in comparison with the other councils.

13. The *sacraments* could provide another example of a "hierarchy" within the same order which directly concerns the faith. Baptism (which for some includes chrismation) as incorporation into the church, and the eucharist as the centre of the life of the church, are regarded as primary, while all other sacramental acts are related to these major sacraments.

14. The mystery of Jesus Christ, particularly seen in his death and resurrection, is at the centre of the *liturgical year*. All the celebrations during the year, such as Christmas and Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost, and feasts of the saints, highlight a different aspect of the one mystery which is always fully present. Thus the various festivals of the liturgical year with their particular emphases are related in different ways (*diversus nexus*) to the centre or foundation - the mystery of Jesus Christ.

15. The churches of the Reformation observe also a kind of "hierarchy" in dealing with the truths of the Christian faith. These churches hold that the gospel of God's saving action in Jesus Christ, witnessed to normatively by holy scripture, is the supreme authority to which all Christian truths should refer. It is in relation to the gospel as the centre of the faith that these churches have summarized the truths of the faith in catechisms meant for the edification of the people of God in their faith, in new liturgical formularies and books, and in confessions of faith which are to guide the pastors in their preaching and the synods in their decisions. All this implies a "hierarchy of truths".

16. The Orthodox tradition refers to the fullness of truth, the totality of the revelation of God. The revealed divine truths constitute an indivisible unity, the coherent apostolic tradition. This holy tradition, on which the church bases its unity, represents the entire content of the divinely revealed faith. There is no distinction between principal and secondary truths, between essential and nonessential doctrines. This position does not mean that within Orthodox theological reflection and formulations, there is no room for differentiation or distinctions. Orthodox theologians suggest that the concept of "hierarchy of truths" could help to distinguish permanent and common teachings of faith, such as the declared symbols (creeds) of the seven ecumenical councils and other credal statements, from those teachings which have not been formulated and sanctioned with the authority of those councils. Here may be room for differentiation. This raises, on the other hand, the problem of the nature of the teaching authority in the church. Ecumenical discussions on "hierarchy of truths" are thus inseparable from the ways in which the church formulates authoritatively the truths and insights of its faith.

### Chapter Three: Interpretation

#### A. Hierarchy

17. The Decree on Ecumenism uses "hierarchy of truths" as a metaphor (and places "hierarchy" between quotation marks). This indicates an order of importance (a) which implies a graded structure (b) in which the different degrees serve different functions. The Decree applies this to Christian doctrine in two ways. First, there is an order between propositional truths of doctrine and the realities which are known by means of the propositions. Propositional truths of doctrine which articulate the faith, such as the Marian dogmas, refer ultimately to the divine mystery and guide the life of the people of God. Secondly, "neither in the life nor the teaching of the whole church is everything presented on the same level. Certainly all revealed truths demand the same acceptance of faith, but according to the greater or lesser proximity that they have to the basis of the revealed mystery, they are variously placed with regard to one another and have varying connections among themselves" (Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, "Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue [1970]" IV, no. 8). Some truths lean on more principal truths and are illumined by them (cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory* [11 April 1971], No. 43; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Mysterium Ecclesiae* [24 June 1973], no. 4).

18. Some Christian traditions, upon reflection, perceive two dimensions of a "hierarchy of truths". On the one hand, God's revelation itself exhibits an order, such as the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. On the other hand, in the continuing response of faith to revelation by God's pilgrim people, one sees an ordering of truth which has been influenced by the historical and cultural contexts of time and place. These varied responses in faith to revelation have resulted in different orderings and emphases in the doctrinal expressions of various churches in their various historical periods, and of groups and even of individuals within churches. The Second Vatican Council recognizes that in the investigation of revealed truth, East and West have used different methods and approaches in understanding and proclaiming divine things and that sometimes one tradition has come nearer than the other to an appropriate appreciation of certain aspects of a revealed mystery, or has expressed them in a clearer manner (Decree on Ecumenism, 17).

19. In the ecumenical dialogue churches may become more aware of existing hierarchies or orderings of truths in their tradition and life. Through dialogue changes can result also in the ordering of a church's own teaching, and this can facilitate *rapprochement*. The Reformation churches, for example, increasingly acknowledge the significance of the episcopal ministry in their order of truths; and the Roman Catholic Church is finding a new appreciation of the doctrine of justification by faith. These are signs of convergence.

#### B. Foundation

20. The Decree on Ecumenism states that "the foundation of Christian faith" determines the different ordering of doctrinal truths (no. 11). What does this term "foundation" mean? The Council's deliberations hint at the meaning by reference to the "mystery of Christ" (Pangrazio) and to the "mystery of Christ and the history of

salvation" (Modus 49). This context clearly indicates that the "foundation" refers primarily to the living and life-giving centre or foundation of the Christian faith itself, and not to any of the formulations which express it. Although many different formulas have witnessed to this centre or foundation, e.g., the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Apostles' Creed, no one formula can fully grasp or express its reality.

21. This foundation is primarily that reality on which the entire Christian faith and life rests, and by which the community of Christ's disciples is constituted as his body. It establishes the true nature of the church and sustains it on its pilgrim way. The central place where this foundation is proclaimed, confessed and celebrated is the worship of the church.

22. Any attempt to describe this foundation on a conceptual level should refer to the person and mystery of Jesus Christ, true God and true human being. He is the one who said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). In the life, death and resurrection of the Son of the Father, God has come into our midst for our salvation, and the Holy Spirit has been poured out into our hearts. In the Spirit's power God has established his one church, enables its members to experience Christ in faith and to be witnesses to him, and empowers the church to reach out to all humankind until all have been gathered up in God's kingdom.

23. This foundation is normatively witnessed to by the prophets, apostles and the apostolic communities in the Old and New Testaments. In faithfulness to the original apostolic witness, it is confessed in the ecumenical creeds and handed on by the church through the ages.

c. *Nexus*

24. The Decree bases its affirmation of a "hierarchy of truths" on the fact that these truths have different links (*diversus nexus*) with the foundation of the Christian faith. What is "different"? How do different affirmations of truth relate in different ways to the same foundation?

25. First of all, the Council's sentence does not mean that there is only a more or less incidental relationship between these truths and the foundation, so that a merely relative character stamps them, and one can consider them optional in the life of faith. Still less does the Decree's sentence consider truths of faith as more or less necessary for salvation, or suggest degrees in our obligation to believe in all that God has revealed. When one fully responds to God's self-revelation in faith, one accepts that revelation as a whole. There is no picking and choosing of what God has revealed, because there is no picking or choosing of what revelation is our salvation. Hence, there are no degrees in the obligation to believe all that God has revealed.

26. The difference of the link of each truth is in its wider or closer proximity to the foundation of faith. This proximity does not ask us to fit each one of these truths into a static system of ordered concepts. Rather, we are to perceive the dynamic relationship which a given truth entertains with the foundation in the communal and personal faith as it is lived by each member of the body of Christ. We are to see the importance or the proximity or the "weight" which each truth has with the foundation of faith in the existential relationship of Christians and their communities.

27. This presupposes that those truths which serve to explain and protect other more fundamental truths have only an indirect link with the foundation of faith, or at least a link which is less direct than that of other truths. This is important in the search for unity among churches, because each Christian communion establishes a more or less immediate link between this or that truth and the foundation.

#### **Chapter Four: Ecumenical and theological implications**

28. The concept of "hierarchy of truths" has implications for the relations between churches as they seek full communion with one another through such means as the ecumenical dialogue. It can help to improve mutual understanding and to provide a criterion which would help to distinguish those differences in the understanding of the truths of faith which are areas of conflict from other differences which need not be.

##### *A. Implications for the search for full communion*

29. The notion of "hierarchy of truths" acknowledges that all revealed truths are related to, and can be articulated around the "foundation" - the "mystery of Christ" through which the love of God is manifested in the Holy Spirit. All those who accept and confess this mystery and are baptized are brought into union with Christ, with each other, and with the church of every time and place. This fellowship is based upon the communion of the Holy Spirit, who distributes various kinds of spiritual gifts and ministries and binds the members together in one body which is the church. Thus the "mystery of Christ", "the centre", "the foundation", is not only that which Christians believe but also a life which they share and experience.

30. Those who accept and confess the mystery of Christ and the Holy Trinity and are baptized and thereby share in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, are challenged to manifest that fellowship in shared life, in common witness, in common confession of faith and service to humanity, in shared worship, in joint pastoral care, and in commitment to ecumenical dialogue. Such living-out the degree of communion that already exists excites desire for greater communion.

31. While the common "foundation" and baptism unite Christians with one another in the communion of the Holy Spirit, they have not yet been able in a perfect way to make this communion fully visible. This is due to human weakness and sin, to theological and doctrinal disagreements, to historical factors, and in part also to differences about the ordering of truths around the central mystery.

32. **In** their common acknowledgment of the "foundation", divided Christians are led to view their differences of ordering the truths around this foundation in a more positive and constructive way; for example, the place in different churches of the doctrine of justification in relation to the "foundation". They understand some differences to be instances of that legitimate diversity of expression of common truth which may always characterize the communion of the church; for example, those differences in theological reflection and devotional practice which may have arisen on account of historical and cultural factors, are not necessarily differences with regard to the foundation of the faith. The communion of a visibly united church will certainly include a diversity which is a proper expression of its catholic, apostolic faith.

33. However there are doctrinal differences which are still decisive obstacles that Christians have to overcome before they can manifest full communion in a shared sacramental and ordered life. These differences vary in importance according to their relation to the central mystery of Christ. Ecumenical dialogue is one of the principal means by which Christians can better understand the weight and importance of these differences and their relation to the "foundation" of our common faith. In such dialogue Christians can gain new perspectives on their common task to reorder priorities in faith and practice and to take appropriate steps on the way to fuller communion.

34. An appreciation of "hierarchy of truths" could mean that the ecumenical agenda will be based upon a communion in the "foundation" that already exists and will point the way to that ordering of priorities which makes possible a gradual growth into full communion.

*B. Implications for ecumenical dialogue*

35. If rightly used, the concept of "hierarchy of truths" can help those Roman Catholics who are responsible for teaching the faith eagerly to become more open to fuller communion in the faith of Christ, when they are "comparing doctrines" (Decree, no. 11) in ecumenical dialogue. Those of other Christian confessions also make use of such an ordering of truths, and emphasize this method especially in their ecumenical initiatives. For Protestants, the gospel has a more immediate link with the foundation than does the ministry which serves the gospel. This different link also brings about differences in what we have in common. That there is only partial communion among churches is due not only to their disagreement about certain doctrines, but also to the different links they establish between the truths and the foundation of faith. The progress made in ecumenical dialogue leads to convergences which tend to attenuate the differences which the Christian Communion have established between the links of certain truths with the foundation of faith. Several churches, by recognizing this in their involvement in bilateral and multilateral dialogues, are experiencing the beginnings of such convergences.

36. By better understanding the ways in which other Christians hold, express and live the faith, each confessional tradition is often led to a better understanding also of itself, and can begin to see its own formulations of doctrine in a broader perspective. This experience and discernment of each other is mutually enriching. The process respectfully approaches the mystery of salvation and its various formulations, with no intent to "reduce" the mystery by any or all formulations. The process is a means of more adequately assessing expressions of the truth of revelation, their interrelation, their necessity and the possible diversity of formulations. Refocusing on the "foundation", a "hierarchy of truths" may therefore be an instrument of that theological and spiritual renewal which the ecumenical movement requires.

37. The notion of "hierarchy of truths" could be helpful in the area of *mission and common witness*. Especially in secularized and highly complex societies, it is important to proclaim in word and life those foundational truths of the gospel in a way that speaks to the needs of the human spirit. The common discernment of these needs is imperative and the common use of a "hierarchy of truths" may facilitate an

ecumenical discernment of the "foundation" and thus lead to convergence in theological understanding which may clarify the content of a common witness.

38. The contemporary understanding of the missionary task has to respect and take into account the richness, complexity and diversity of cultures. The process by which the Christian faith is interpreted and welcomed in various cultures requires sensitivity to this diversity. A "hierarchy of truths" may also be a means of ensuring that the necessary expressions of the faith in various cultures do not result in any loss of its content or in a separation of Christian truths from the foundation. Both in relating content of faith and culture and in making a distinction between them, the notion of "hierarchy of truths" may play an important part.

39. The notion of "hierarchy of truths" could also be a useful principle in *theological methodology and hermeneutics*. It could provide a way for ordering theological work by acknowledging both the organic wholeness and coherence of the truths of the faith and their different places in relation to the "foundation". It is *dialogical* in spirit inasmuch as it envisages "comparing doctrines" within the specific traditions and within a broader ecumenical context. In directing primary attention to the person and mystery of Jesus Christ, "the one who is, who was and who is to come" (Rev. 1 :8), the concept may help theology to respect the *historical dimension* of our search for, and witness to, the truth.

40. By focusing on the "foundation" - the mystery of Christ, the notion of "hierarchy of truths" contains an orientation towards the full realization of the kingdom of God and thereby already now evokes a sense of urgency and responsibility. This can highlight the dynamic character of the Christian faith, its relevance for every time and age, and therefore serve the pilgrim churches in their task of "discerning the signs of the times" and of giving an account of their faith and hope in their concrete situations. In responding to the challenges of the present with an awareness of a "hierarchy of truths", Christians are encouraged both to draw gratefully on the wisdom of their traditions and to be creative by seeking fresh responses in the light of God's coming kingdom.

## **Appendix**

The work on the study document *The Notion of "Hierarchy of Truths"* was organized by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Secretariat of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches.

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