



THE JOINT WORKING GROUP BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES: 40th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

November 17-19, 2005

The Joint Working Group between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (JWG) came into existence while the Second Vatican Council was still in session. Its first meeting was held in May, 1965. On the occasion of the JWG's 40th Anniversary a prayerful celebration, followed by a consultation to discuss its work, took place November 17-19, 2005 in Geneva.

There was, first, a public program on November 17th, at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, where the World Council of Churches is located. The WCC General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia welcomed some 200 participants. Archbishop Mario Conti, Archbishop of Glasgow, Scotland, Catholic Co-Moderator of the JWG, then introduced the event. His Holiness, Aram I, Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church (House of Cilicia), Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, and Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, both gave addresses, looking at the role of the JWG in reference to the future of ecumenism.

This public event came to a close with an evening prayer led by Bishop Jonas Jonson, Bishop of Strängnäs, Lutheran Church of Sweden, WCC Co-Moderator of the JWG, in the Chapel of the WCC. A reception followed.

After this a smaller group consisting of JWG members and some former members and consultants went to the WCC Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, outside of Geneva, for a two day consultation, November 18th and 19th. Its purpose was to evaluate the work of the JWG during these forty years and to begin to reflect on ways in which the JWG could continue to strengthen the relationship between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church in the years ahead. The work of the consultation was facilitated by a "proposed Working Document" distributed beforehand to the participants, and by brief interventions of four participants to stimulate discussion WCC participants Rev. Dr. Diane Kessler, and Dr. Lukas Vischer, and Catholic participants Sister Joan Delaney, MM, and Dr. Teresa Francesca Rossi.

Below we print the papers given by Cardinal Kasper and Catholicos Aram I, the "Proposed Working Document" used by the participants in the consultation, and the "Reflections" at the end which summarize some of the main issues discussed during the two days. The list of participants is included as well.

THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY A CONTRIBUTION FROM THE PCPCU

Cardinal Walter Kasper

We celebrate in these days the 40th anniversary of the Joint Working Group (JWG). With gratitude we look back over four decades of a sometimes difficult, but nevertheless fruitful co-operation between the WCC and the Catholic Church. We thank all those who have been our companions and friends along the way. The purpose of our consultation, however, is not only to look back but primarily to look forward and to reflect on the future role and mandate of the JWG, and to find ways in which the JWG can contribute to the renewal of the ecumenical movement in the 21th century.

I. THE ECUMENICAL COMMITMENT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The ecumenical developments of the 20th century were valued in the Catholic Church long before the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) officially took part in the movement. Already in the first half of the century theologians such as Paul Couturier, Yves Congar, Jan Willebrands, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Adam and many others, following in the footsteps of Johann Adam Möhler and John Henry Newman, prepared the way for the Council's Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, in which the Council affirms that the restoration of the unity among all Christians is one of its principal concerns.¹ This decision is founded in the mandate our Lord himself entrusted to his Church in his prayer on the eve of

¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1.

his death, "That all may be one" (*Jn 17:21*).

Pope John Paul II on several occasions called this decision irrevocable and irreversible;² indeed, the ecumenical task was one of his pastoral priorities.³ Pope Benedict XVI immediately after his election reaffirmed the same commitment in the following words: "Following in the footsteps of my predecessors, in particular Paul VI and John Paul II I feel intensely the need to affirm again the irreversible commitment, assumed by the Second Vatican Council and continued over the last years, thanks also to the action of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity".⁴

II. A BRIEF LOOK BACK

In order to understand our ecumenical relations we need to place them into a brief historical perspective. Only when we see clearly where we have come from can we know where we are going in the new century.

It is nearly one hundred years since the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, traditionally dated from the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. At the time, there was perhaps a prophetic sign of the Catholic Church's entry into the ecumenical movement through Bishop Geremia Bonomelli from Cremona (1831-1914),⁵ who sent a personal message to the conference.⁶ This is probably one of the first unofficial contacts between the Catholic Church and the early beginnings of the ecumenical movement. Soon after, on 2 November 1914, Robert Gardner, Secretary of the Commission of the Episcopal Church USA, wrote to the Secretary of State Cardinal Gaspari asking for an audience with the Pope for the purpose of discussing the proposed Conference of all Christian Communions to discuss "Faith and Order" questions. This audience was granted and in May 1919; a delegation of five Episcopalians visited Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922).

These examples show that there were ecumenical contacts with the Catholic Church from the beginning of the ecumenical movement. But there were many obstacles to overcome. When the first "Faith and Order" Conference took place in Lausanne Switzerland, in 1927, the Catholic Church was not ready to send any official delegates. Only an instruction of the Holy Office issued on 20 December 1949 helped to create a more positive attitude towards the participation of Catholics in ecumenical gatherings.⁷ Thus, four Catholic observers were able to participate in the WCC Assembly of New Delhi in 1961, something we take for granted today.

The Second Vatican Council created an atmosphere leading the Catholic Church to enter into the mainstream of modern ecumenism. In 1960, Pope John XXIII established the "Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity as one of the preparatory commissions for the Council. One of the first tasks of the Secretariat was to advise the Pope on how to proceed in inviting observers from other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, as well as representatives of ecumenical bodies. In 1962, the Secretariat was placed on the same level as other conciliar commissions, and thus it was responsible for preparing and presenting to the Council the documents on ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), on non-Christian religions (*Nostra Aetate*), on religious liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*) and together with the doctrinal commission, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*).

One of the tasks of the Secretariat during the Council was to facilitate the participation of over 100 ecumenical observers, among them two observers of the WCC who through the Secretariat had a remarkable influence on the Council. Their presence created a trustful atmosphere, which led to various ecumenical dialogues and structured relations with the WCC. The idea of a JWG was born in meetings between the first General Secretary of the WCC, Dr Visser't Hooft, and the first President of the Secretariat, Cardinal Augustin Bea, both ground-breaking and outstanding promoters of the ecumenical movement. They envisaged the JWG as a consultative forum and an instrument of flexible co-operation. Its first meeting was able to take place at Bossey in May 1965, that is, even before the conclusion of the Council. This was an important milestone that we rightly commemorate in these days.

The Catholic Church and the WCC are two quite different entities, the one a worldwide Church with a universal mission and structure of teaching and governance; the other a council of churches, which understands itself as a fellowship

² For example, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴ *L'Osservatore Romano (English edition)*, n.18, 4 May 2005, p. 3.

⁵ Cf. J. DELANEY, *From Cremona to Edinburgh: Bishop Bonomelli and the World Missionary Council of 1910*; West Haven, Connecticut, 1999.

⁶ That message was published in *World Missionary Conference 1910 Report of Commission VIII on Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity*.

⁷ Cf. AAS 2, 195, 12-17.

of churches.⁸ However, when one reads again the numerous statements and eight reports of the JWG one immediately becomes aware of the engagement with which it has carried out its ecumenical vocation and has sought to bring together the theological, social and pastoral dimensions of ecumenism. One is also led to reflect on the rich common experience it has offered its members and the progress towards full visible communion which with God's help, was made possible in this period.

The interest Pope John Paul II showed on different occasions in the work of the JWG was re-affirmed by Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion of the visit to Rome by Dr Samuel Kobia, General Secretary of the WCC, in June this year. So we can look forward to the new tasks and challenges which stand before us in the new century.

III. CURRENT SITUATION IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

After forty years of an intense ecumenical experience, we can look back with gratitude for the progress made in the journey towards full visible unity. But we need also to look critically at the present situation of the ecumenical movement. There have been highlights and at the same time difficulties, misunderstandings and delusions. We cannot in this context go into detail on these aspects, although an overall evaluation will be undertaken during this consultation.

On a more general level, we can say that the ecumenical movement is today clearly in a transitional period. On the one hand, we gratefully acknowledge the good fruits of the ecumenical dialogue, particularly the rediscovery of Christian brotherhood among the members of the different Christian communities, which no longer consider each other as enemies or competitors but as brothers and sisters in Christ on the common pilgrimage towards full communion.⁹ On the other hand, we cannot overlook the theological, political and institutional critique of the ecumenical movement, which comes not only from so-called fundamentalist groups but from some venerable old churches and serious theologians as well. For some of them ecumenism has become a negative term, equivalent to syncretism, doctrinal relativism and indifferentism.¹⁰

Furthermore, we should bear in mind the changing ecumenical scene at the beginning of the 21st century. At the global level, we observe on the one side unions and alliances, a huge number of bilateral and multilateral ecumenical consensus or convergence documents; on the other side, tensions and even new divisions, often due to ethical questions. We also observe the emergence of sometimes enormously growing new communities of an Evangelical and Pentecostal character, often only barely or not at all joining the ecumenical movement, if not openly hostile to it.¹¹ There is also the relatively recent phenomenon of new ecumenical configurations consisting of various ecumenical coalitions: the WCC, Christian World Communions, regional ecumenical organizations and ecumenical non-governmental organizations. At the national and local levels we have witnessed the growth of councils of churches and similar bodies.¹² The proposed discussion on "Ecumenism in the 21st Century" or the re-configuration of the ecumenical movement is to be seen in this context.

Our response to this situation cannot be only and primarily an institutional and organizational one. This transitional period must have its own 'ethos' involving a willingness to approach partners and to extend the hand of reconciliation, in order to heal the wounds left by history (purification of memories). Without danger of betraying our faith or our conscience we could already today do much more together than we actually do: common Bible study, exchange of spiritual experiences, gathering of liturgical texts, joint worship in services of the Word, better understanding of our common tradition as well as our existing differences, co-operation in theology, in mission, in cultural and social witness, co-operation in the area of development and environmental conservation, in the mass media, etc. Spiritual ecumenism and ecumenical formation are, as we will see later on, particularly important for this transitional period.

It is with such a renewed spirit that the partners in the ecumenical movement must find institutional forms and structures for the present transitional period. This can be undertaken in particular through councils of churches at the regional and national level. They do not constitute a super-church, and they require none of the churches to abandon their

⁸ Cf. WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Directory 2005*, Constitution, I Basis; WCC Geneva 2005, 65. The ecclesial status of the WCC was clarified by the Toronto Statement *The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches. The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches* (1950).

⁹ *Ut Unum Sint*, 42.

¹⁰ Cf. TOM STRANSKY, "Criticism of the Ecumenical Movement and of the WCC", in: *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Geneva 2002, 278-284.

¹¹ Cf. PHILIP JENKINS, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002.

¹² Out of a total of 120 councils of churches around the world, the Catholic Church is a member of 70 of these bodies.

own self-understanding. While the responsibility for the ecumenical journey ultimately remains with the churches themselves, councils of churches are important instruments for the promotion of unity, and valuable forums for the exchange of mutual information, communication and co-operation between the churches.¹³

IV. ECUMENISM IN THE 21st CENTURY

At the beginning of the 21st century, the ecumenical movement needs a revitalised ecumenical vision, a renewed spirit and a new commitment by all partners. This does not mean devising unrealistic utopias of the future. Instead of staring at the impossible, and chafing against it, we need to live the already given *communio*, and do what is possible today. This is more than we actually normally do. By advancing in this realistic way, step by step, we may hope that, with the help of God's Spirit who is always ready with surprises, we will find the way towards a common future.

So what is our, or what is my Catholic vision of the ecumenical movement in the 21st century? In what follows, I want to summarize my view in five points:

1. First of all, the ecumenical movement in the 21st century needs clarity, sometimes new clarity on its theological foundations. Otherwise it will be like a house built on sand, which falls down when the storm comes (cf *Mt* 7:26 f). This is not a question of a mere emotional family feeling or a vague humanitarianism. The corner stone is Jesus Christ (cf. *Mt* 21:42 *et al.*). This understanding forms the constitutional basis of the WCC, and underlies the Second Vatican Council.¹⁴ According to our understanding, this foundation is laid in the Holy Scriptures themselves and in their interpretation by the Creed and the first mutually acknowledged ecumenical councils; through the one Baptism in the name of the Triune God we are inserted in the one Body of Christ (cf. *Gal* 3:28; *I Cor* 12:13). Through our common faith in the one God, the one Lord, the one Spirit and the one Baptism we are one Body in Christ (cf. *Eph* 4:4 f). We are in an already existing, but not yet full communion, which makes it possible for us to give each other the honorary name of Christian.

The continuation of the dialogue on baptism and the mutual recognition of baptism, successfully initiated in 1982 with the Lima documents on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, is therefore fundamental for our future ecumenical relations. We welcome the affirmation of the Third International Consultation on Councils of Churches in Hong Kong in 1993 that baptism is a common binding element, which compels Christians to respond towards the unity of the body of Christ.

We are also grateful for the "Faith and Order" document *Confessing One Faith. An Explication of the Apostolic Faith* published in 1999, and we regret that this important document did not find the echo and reception it deserved. Without continuation and deepening of this project ecumenism will become vague and ambiguous. It will be cut from its roots, will fade away and finally die or be ideologically manipulated for other purposes, which cannot be ours. We ask therefore the WCC to give back to "Faith and Order" the momentum it originally had both in the ecumenical movement and in the programme of the WCC. The JWG cannot be a supplementary motor for what "Faith and Order" should do.

2. The second point is a shared vision and goal. What do we understand by "visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the word", as the Constitution of the WCC states?¹⁵ Do the partners in the ecumenical movement have a shared understanding of ecumenism and its main goal? Without an answer to the question of where we are going, we will get nowhere. The saying, "without a vision people perish" is true for us too. The Harare Assembly of the WCC in 1998 gave a profoundly moving testimony on "Our Ecumenical Vision".¹⁶ Nevertheless, it was realistic enough to confess that up to now we do not share a fully common vision.¹⁷ This is not the least reason for the ecumenical crisis.

The Catholic understanding of unity, understood as full communion in faith, sacraments and Church ministry,¹⁸ corresponds in principle with the understanding of our Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox sister churches, but unfortunately differs from the most usual interpretation of the mainline Protestant position and its famous "*satis est*

¹³ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, Vatican City 1993, 166-171.

¹⁴ Cf. WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Directory 2005*, Constitution, I Basis, WCC Geneva 2005, 65; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1.

¹⁵ WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Directory 2005*, III. Purpose and Functions, WCC Geneva, 2005, 65.

¹⁶ WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Together on the Way. Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva 1999, 113-116.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103-105.

¹⁸ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.

consentire de doctrina evangelii et de administratione sacramentorum".¹⁹ With some Lutheran theologians Catholics would say: "Satis est non satis est".

However, the Catholic understanding of unity is not to be confounded with uniformity. The principle of the Apostles' Council is valid also for us, i.e., that no burdens should be imposed beyond what is indispensable (*Acts 15:28*).²⁰ Unity understood as communion implies unity in diversity and diversity in unity. But in the same way as unity should not be confounded with uniformity, so plurality should not be identified with contradictory doctrinal pluralism or indifferentism about our respective confessional positions. Indifferentism can never be a solid basis to build upon.

Dialogue presupposes partners who have their own clear identity; only then can they appreciate another and different identity and enter into a meaningful and fruitful dialogue. Thus, the Toronto Statement of 1950 declared that different ecclesiologies do not prevent the ecumenical dialogue; on the contrary, they are a challenge and a call for dialogue. This is valid also for the disputed Declaration *Dominus Jesus* (2000) of the Holy See's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which in substance did not say more than what every well-informed person already knows, i.e. that Catholics and Protestants hold a different ecclesiology, and that this divergence therefore should form the object of future serious dialogue.

Such dialogue is much more than simply an exchange of ideas; in some ways it is an exchange of gifts that each of the respective churches receive.²¹ In dialogue we can learn from each other. The result will not be a united new super-church. In the same measure that we grow and mature by dialogue to the fullness of Jesus Christ (cf. *Eph 4:13*), the Church also realizes more concretely what she is, what she has always been and ever shall be; she achieves a fuller concrete realisation of her catholicity. This is not a so-called ecumenism of return, not a way back, but the Christ and future-oriented guidance of the Holy Spirit into all truth (*Jn 16:13*).

So ecumenism in the 21st century must be coherent and honest in its purpose, goal and orientation. However, partners cannot have a shared vision of the goal without common theological ground on the meaning of the Church and her unity. Therefore, the project of "Faith an Order" on the Nature and Purpose of the Church has for us a high priority for the ecumenical debate in the 21st century.

3. When the foundation and the goal are clear, then – and this is the third point – the way to go becomes sure. This way is nothing extraordinary but identical to the path of Christian life. There is no ecumenism without conversion,²² and there is no future at all without conversion. The best reflection know on this issue can be found in the document of the Group of Dombes *For the Conversion of the Churches* (1991).²³ The document points out that confessional identity and ecumenical conversion are not mutually exclusive but complementary.

Renewal and conversion of heart includes both personal and institutional aspects. Personal conversion and renewal entail a change of attitude towards each other, leading to the purification of memories from bitter experiences of the past and to the avoidance of unfair polemical statements, thus preparing the way for reconciliation. Personal conversion and sanctification imply a spirituality of *communio*, which means to make room for the other and to withstand the egoistic temptations of competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.²⁴

At the same time institutional reform – the Council speaks even of "continual reformation" (*perennis reformatio*) – is an essential presupposition and condition for ecumenical progress.²⁵ Pope John Paul II did not hesitate to speak of the structures of sin.²⁶ The Church is "at once holy and always in need of purification"; she "follows constantly the path of penance and renewal".²⁷ There is no doubt that the Catholic Church in the 20th century after the Council has taken many steps in terms of reform which no other Church has carried out. It is understandable that after such a period of reform, time is now needed to stabilize the inner life of the Church and to gather new spiritual forces for a new reach out to the future. But there is also no doubt, as our ecumenical partners and many of our own faithful remind us, that we are not

¹⁹ *Confessio Augustana*, Art. 7 (BSELK 61).

²⁰ Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 18.

²¹ *Ut Unum Sint*, 28.

²² *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 7; *Ut Unum Sint*, 15 f; 33-35; 82-84.

²³ GROUPE DES DOMBES, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, WCC Geneva, 1993.

²⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001), 43.

²⁵ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6.

²⁶ *Ut Unum Sint*, 34.

²⁷ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

yet at the end of the road.

Similarly, the ecumenical movement too needs the same reform and the same renewal that is required of all partners, if it is to make a difference in the new century.

4. This leads me to a fourth point, the soul and the heart of the ecumenical movement, spiritual ecumenism.²⁸ When we speak of spiritual ecumenism, we do not use this concept – which is unfortunately overused – to mean a spirituality that is vague, weak, merely sentimental, irrational and subjective, that does not take into account the objective Church tradition, or even ignores it. It does not mean any spirit but the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who confesses “Jesus is the Lord” (1 Cor 12:3). Spiritual ecumenism means therefore the teaching of Scripture, of the living tradition of the Church, and of the outcomes of ecumenical dialogues that have been personally and totally assimilated, filled with life, and becoming light and strength in our everyday life.

Mere ecumenical activism becomes a soulless bureaucracy and is destined to exhaust itself; mere academic debate among experts, no matter how important it may be, escapes the ‘normal’ faithful and touches only the margin of their hearts and lives. We can only expand the ecumenical movement by deepening it.

The first place in spiritual ecumenism belongs to prayer,²⁹ which joins Jesus’ own prayer on the eve of his death “that all may be one” (Jn 17:21). Such prayer culminates in the “Week of Prayer for Unity”. Christian unity cannot only be the fruit of human effort; we cannot as human beings ‘make’ or organize it. We can only receive it as a gift of the Spirit. I would further mention the shared reading and meditation of Sacred Scripture, exchanges between monasteries, communities and spirituality movements, visits to pilgrim sites and centers of spirituality. One of the most encouraging signs are the recently spreading spiritual ecumenical networks between spiritual movements, monasteries, fraternities and religious congregations.

Pope John Paul II reminded us of another important form of spiritual ecumenism, which can give new vigor to our ecumenical commitment: the ecumenism of the “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1), especially of those who gave their life for Christ, the numerous martyrs in many of our churches, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant, in the 20th century.³⁰ If there is truth in the words of Tertullian already in the early third century, that the blood of martyrs is the seed for new Christians,³¹ then we can apply this famous phrase also to the ecumenical movement and state: The blood of so many martyrs of so many churches in the 20th century is the seed for unity of the churches in the 21th century.

5. The fifth and last point is practical ecumenism. The unity of the Church is not a goal in itself. The unity of the Church is instrument, sign, anticipation of the unity of all humankind. This affirmation is fundamental in the documents of the Second Vatican Council,³² and is developed very often by the WCC.³³

Indeed, the ecumenical movement has been since its very beginnings in Edinburgh intimately linked with the missionary movement and with the “Mission and Evangelization” Commission. The Church is missionary by its very nature,³⁴ whereas our divisions damage “the most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature”.³⁵ Today the missionary task entrusted to the Church is all but accomplished; as we enter the beginning of the 21th century, it stands at a new beginning.³⁶

The “Mission and Evangelization” conference held in Bangkok in 1973 was aware of the new missionary situation in our post-colonial world, but its proposal of a moratorium and its contextual understanding of mission gave rise to critical questions from the evangelical side. The conference held in Athens some months ago was a new beginning, though common answers are still lacking. This has consequences for the ecumenical movement in the 21th century. There will not

²⁸ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 8; *Ut Unum Sint*, 21.

²⁹ *Ut Unum Sint*, 21-27.

³⁰ *Ut Unum Sint*, 1; 48; 83 f.

³¹ TERTULLIAN, *Apologeticum*, 50, 14.

³² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen Gentium*, 1; 9; *Gaudium et Spes*, 42, and others.

³³ Especially the Uppsala Assembly of the WCC in 1968 with the theme “Behold, I make all things new”, which marked the start of a not unproblematic more secular anthropological and social ethical orientation of the WCC.

³⁴ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Ad Gentes*, 2.

³⁵ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1.

³⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), 1.

be a new ecumenical enthusiasm without a renewed missionary spirit and theology for the new missionary situation in all five continents.

The universal context of the commitment for the unity of the Church has further implications for social and political *diakonia*, practical witness, and for the dignity of the human person and for human rights, for the sanctity of life, family values, education, justice and peace, health care, the preservation of creation and last but not least interreligious dialogue.

In all these fields we can work together, and such co-operation can bring us closer together. But, as experience shows, these practical problems can have, and indeed unfortunately often have had, also a divisive consequence. The ecumenical slogan: 'doctrine divides, practice unites' is therefore all but self-evident. Already in the past, political implications were often responsible when theological conflicts ended with divisions within the Church; today secular political options have often a similar effect.

Theology can degenerate into a nationalist, rightist, leftist ideology or to a secular utopia. Examples of all these dangers are easy to be found; neither any Church nor the WCC is immune to such tendencies or to the loss of the theological foundation and goal of ecumenism. Sober self-critical theological reflection and discernment of the Spirit will be needed for a healthy development of the ecumenical movement in the 21st century.

Over the years, the issues raised in the ecumenical debate have shifted from political ethics to individual ethics, especially in relation to sexual behavior. In the past there was a large consensus in these questions; now, previously unknown new differences have arisen. One may say, that these questions are not the most important ones in the hierarchy of truths. That's true. Nevertheless they have an enormous emotional and therefore, as recent examples show, also an enormous divisive power. They are no *adiaphora*. Behind the concrete problems deeper different anthropological views and problems of Bible hermeneutics can easily be identified. Therefore, it is a pity that the JWG's project on anthropology could not be brought to an end during the last period; there is still a large field for "Faith and Order" too. At stake is no less than the ecumenical contribution to a new humanism in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

The Catholic Church sees and rejoices in the progress made in the ecumenical pilgrimage in the last century. But much more than what has already been accomplished remains to be done. We are only at the beginning of a new beginning. In order to start with renewed enthusiasm and energy in the new century we have to clarify the foundations, the vision, the ways and the practice of the ecumenical movement; above all, there is a need for spiritual ecumenism.

The ecumenical movement from its very beginnings has been and will continue to be an impulse and a gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ Ecumenical activities not grounded in spiritual ecumenism will very soon become a soulless routine, whereas spiritual ecumenism will lead us to the conviction that who has initiated the whole ecumenical movement, is faithful and will bring it to its fulfilment. With this hope we can start with courage and with confidence in the 21st century. We hope, with God's help, it will be an ecumenical century

³⁷ Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1; 4.

FROM REFLECTION TO RECEPTION
CHALLENGES FACING THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
CHURCH -WCC COLLABORATION

Aram I
Catholicos of Cilicia
Moderator of the Central Committee
World Council of Churches

As we, representatives of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Roman Catholic Church, embark on a process of reflecting together on the future of ecumenism, I believe that the Joint Working Group (JWG), which is currently celebrating its 40th Anniversary, has a vital role to play in exploring and shaping the emerging ecumenical perspectives and priorities. The aim of my speech is twofold: first, to make a critical assessment of the relations and collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC, particularly within the framework of the JWG; and, second, to identify with a realistic and forward-looking approach those specific areas where deeper collaboration is possible and necessary.

1. A JOURNEY OF CONFIDENCE-BUILDING

The relations and collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and WCC after Vatican II can be rightly described as a journey of confidence building. After a long period of tension and estrangement, the JWG generated a spirit of *rapprochement* and mutual understanding with the Orthodox and Protestant churches. Vatican II opened a new page in the history of the ecumenical movement. That spirit found expression through common declarations, bilateral dialogues, agreed statements, and mutual visitations. The creation of the JWG was a concrete manifestation of the *aggiornamento* and the ecumenical openness of Vatican II. However, the ecumenical journey that was opened by Vatican II was not an easy one. After so many years of doctrinal controversies, attitudes were not easily transformed. Yet, in spite of the many difficulties and challenges on global, regional and local levels, the JWG continued its journey, although with slow pace, and remained faithful to its mandate.

As a member of the Central Committee, and since 1991 as Moderator, I have followed this journey closely. I have made many suggestions, shared critical remarks and voiced my expectations from this important structure of ecumenical collaboration. I consider the Roman Catholic Church-WCC relations and collaboration a special area of vital concern. We still have a long way to go together. We have before us many critical questions and pertinent issues of common concern that require serious scrutiny. We are called to broaden our mutual understanding, deepen the spirit of fellowship and strengthen our commitment to work together. We are called, therefore, to enhance, with renewed engagement, our common journey of confidence-building.

2. JWG: A FRAMEWORK OF DIALOGUE

One of the most significant contributions that the JWG made to the ecumenical movement was to create the opportunity for the major traditions of Christianity to engage in multilateral dialogue. Although the multiplication of bilateral dialogues has weakened the churches' commitment to multilateral dialogue, the JWG continues, though in a limited scope, to provide a challenging ecumenical forum to address common issues, share our experiences, exchange views and clarify prevailing misunderstandings. In fact, listening to each other carefully has made us to realize that,

a) Although the ecumenical movement is one, we have different understandings of ecumenism. We in the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church have repeatedly emphasized the "oneness" of the ecumenical movement and strived to promote one ecumenical cause. Yet, we have different ways of doing ecumenism. We have different ecumenical priorities. We have different expectations from the ecumenical movement. But we are partners and have a firm engagement in ecumenism. We are called to strengthen and articulate the "oneness" of the ecumenical movement. But how are we to do this? To what extent are the differences legitimate or divisive? Is it possible to develop a shared vision of ecumenism where the diversities interact creatively and coherently?

b) We have carried on our ecumenical witness on the basis of different ecclesiological assumptions. Vatican II was a turning point in the ecclesiological attitude of the Roman Catholic Church vis-a-vis the other churches. However, in my view the Roman Catholic Church did not completely drop the concept of "return" to the "fullness" of truth and unity that subsists in the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church continues to remind us about the "incomplete" communion existing with other churches. More significantly yet, the Roman Catholic Church considers other churches as "churches and ecclesial communities". The ecumenical implications of this new approach are clearly seen in the studies undertaken by the JWG. The question is: after so many years of dialoguing and reflecting together, can we develop a common ecclesiological basis that may provide a proper framework or entry point to tackle controversial matters such as mutual recognition of baptism, ministry and eucharist, the primacy and authority, in the church, etc?

c) Because our vision of unity is based on our ecclesiological self-understanding, we have a different

understanding of visible unity. In this context, it is important to remind ourselves that, first, even within the WCC churches differ considerably in their perceptions of unity; second, through the continuous efforts of Faith and Order, the churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, have reached a common agreement concerning the basic requirements and assumptions necessary to manifest the full and visible unity of the church. Although we may maintain different approaches to unity, our commitment to it is firm, because we believe that visible unity constitutes the *raison d'être* of the ecumenical movement. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church's growing participation in councils of churches and the Vatican's publication of a new Ecumenical Directory are tangible signs of the Roman Catholic Church's "irreversible and irrevocable commitment" to the ecumenical movement. The question is: can different models of unity developed over the years by Faith and Order help us to reach a consensus model? Can the concept of "conciliar fellowship", encompassing different concepts of unity, become a mutually accepted model?

3. A COLLABORATION OF UPS AND DOWNS AS WELL AS INCOMPATIBILITIES

a) Our relationship and collaborations have not been always smooth. They sometimes underwent moments of serious difficulties; they faced crises of various nature and scope. We experienced moments of hope and moments of frustration as well. I would like to mention some of the difficult situations related to the last fifteen years: the strong reaction of the Roman Catholic Church to the consultation on Uniatism (1991) organized by WCC upon the request of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the critical attitude of the WCC towards the Declaration "*Dominus Jesus*" by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (2000) and the Encyclical letter by Pope John Paul II "*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*" (2003). For the Roman Catholic Church the increasing participation of ecumenical partners in the WCC has remained a source of concern in spite of the Council's assurance that they are not ecclesial bodies and may not change the major goals of the Council.

b) The fact that one of the partners of the JWG is a church and the other is a fellowship of churches often creates problems and inconsistencies. This incompatibility is seen clearly in the decision-making and implementation process. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, decisions are forwarded to local churches for implementation. Since the WCC has no authority over its member churches, the decisions are conveyed simply as recommendations.

c) The question of reciprocity has often generated sensitivities. For example, reciprocity on the part of the Roman Catholic Church has not been on the level expected by the WCC. As a church, the Roman Catholic Church probably looks at this matter from a different angle. All these mean that too much expectation from Roman Catholic-WCC collaboration may create unnecessary disappointment. We must accept the limits and limitations imposed by different ecclesiologies, institutional requirements and styles. But, at the same time, our common and firm engagement in the ecumenical cause challenges us to explore the proper means and ways to enlarge the scope and increase the level of reciprocity, on the one hand, and to transform our reactionary attitudes to frank discussion, on the other hand.

4. FROM REFLECTION TO RECEPTION, FROM DIVERGENCE TO CONVERGENCE

a) These concerns and challenges must lead us to move slowly and carefully from reflection to reception, from divergence to convergence. The JWG has initiated more than ten studies dealing with controversial matters and timely issues pertaining mainly to Christology, Pneumatology, ecclesiology and ethical and pastoral areas. These rather comprehensive and solid studies, prepared with ecumenical spirit, retain their theological validity and ecumenical relevance. However, the problem is that they still remain on the shelves of the WCC and PCPCU. How many churches, clergy or theologians are aware of the work of the JWG? Its work is confined to a limited circle of ecumenists. To address this situation, the work of the JWG must be related to the life of the church on the local level, and must be appropriated by the churches through a process of ecumenical education. Reaching the local churches: I consider this a major task before the ecumenical movement for the years to come.

b) The work of the JWG has also not reached the Council's of Churches. To what extent have the studies of the JWG impacted the thinking and programmatic life of the WCC? The interest of the governing bodies of the WCC and those of regional, national councils, as well as ecumenical organizations in the JWG has been very low. The integration of the work of the JWG, and collaboration with the Roman Catholic Church in ecumenical life and witness should become an urgent priority.

c) The existing divergences must be eventually directed towards convergence. Differences are integral to our ecumenical life; they are the projection of the diverse historical developments that the churches have undergone, diverse environments that they live in, and diverse doctrinal attitudes and theological teachings that they hold. However, these divergences must not generate tensions and polarizations. They must not lead to estrangement and self-isolation. Our divergences must complement and enrich each other through mutual challenge and creative interaction. They must be considered as integral to the one whole. We must give clear articulation to this conviction and commitment. How can we transform divergences into a process of convergence? Here lies one of the major tasks of JWG.

5. THE JWG MUST REMAIN A PROPER FRAMEWORK OF COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

a) The JWG has become mainly a joint study group. Without undermining the vital importance of study, I believe that the study of major theological, doctrinal and ecumenical issues must be reserved to Faith and Order. Taking into consideration the composition and experience of this body, I believe that it may play a pivotal role in initiating major studies and ensuring broader diversity and participation. The JWG's role may be one of reminder, facilitator and challenger:

b) The JWG may, in its turn, address those issues and concerns that are timely and immediately relevant to the life and witness of the churches. In this context, an attempt to bring together, within a coherent whole and in a form of consensus, the findings and recommendations of bilateral theological dialogues could be of special significance. Furthermore, participation in the week of prayer for Christian unity, more Catholic input in different programs of the WCC, preparation of major ecumenical conferences, bilateral visits and invitation to each other's main events would definitely enhance and deepen the collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC.

c) In a world of uncertainties and tensions, people are increasingly expecting the churches' united voice. The JWG can provide the global framework in which the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church can address issues of common concern together. And occasions and concerns are so many! Such a joint action would make a difference in many respects: it would further the quest for visible unity; it would strengthen the ecumenical fellowship on national, regional and global levels; it would serve as the point of reference for the local churches; it would give spiritual strength to those churches living in a minority situation.

d) And, finally, the JWG must act as a framework for communication and information sharing. Such a role is crucially important in an age where information and communication play a major part in shaping relationships, deepening collaboration, building communities, preventing crises and orienting societies. Therefore, I suggest that in the coming period, the JWG give priority to information sharing rather than to study. Partial information and biased communication may lead us to wrong conclusions. Listening to one another and direct communication must acquire a focal attention.

6. CHALLENGES FACING THE JWG

As the ecumenical movement enters a new period, a period full of new risks and hopes, uncertainties and prospects, I believe that the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church must be ready to face the following challenges:

a) The membership of the Roman Catholic Church in regional and national councils of churches is a significant step forward. And let us bear in mind that Roman Catholic-Orthodox and Protestant collaboration in national and regional councils is far beyond that in the JWG or even in the WCC. This reality needs to be seriously discussed and its implications clearly spelled out. The JWG must remain a consultative body, not an "operative agency"; yet, a more organized and efficient collaboration needs to be established with regional and national councils. The JWG is responsible for overseeing and fostering relationships and collaboration between Roman Catholic Church and WCC. I wonder whether this collaboration should be confined to the "headquarters" alone. In my view, the mandate given to the JWG implies a broader context and a larger scope.

b) The agenda of our ecumenical collaboration needs revision. The major doctrinal and ecclesiological issues have already been treated both by the JWG, Faith and Order and bilateral theological dialogues. Furthermore, our churches today are more divided in respect to moral, ethical and pastoral issues than doctrinal ones. They need guidance and help to heal the intra-church and inter-church divisions on these questions. Hence, it is high time that we focus our attention on areas and concerns that touch the daily life of churches and Christians.

c) As we celebrate our achievements and assess our relations and collaboration in the last 40 years, we must also seek new ways of working together. Reviewing the mandate of the JWG, which was originally set in 1966 and modified in 1975, is a must in a world that is in radical change. Such an engagement requires that structure, style and agenda be revised. We must aim at new patterns of relationship and a new quality of collaboration.

d) On several occasions the Roman Catholic Church has made it clear that "the time is not yet ripe" to join the WCC. It looks as though the Roman Catholic Church retains that position. Therefore, we, in the WCC, must not have high expectations. We must be realistic and patient. "Inspired by the same vision" (CUV, 4:1 and title of a JWG study), we must reaffirm our common commitment to bear united witness to Christ's Gospel and its call to visible unity, remembering that a WCC with the full participation of the Roman Catholic Church will become more complete, global and efficient on the way to visible unity.

e) By initiating the reconfiguration process, the WCC made it clear that this is not a Council-related concern but a pan-ecumenical concern and process. Therefore, it is my hope that the Roman Catholic Church will take the reconfiguration seriously. The ecumenical predicament and its imperatives were different 40 years ago. Today we face a new ecumenical landscape. In fact, changing faces and centers of Christianity and emerging new ecumenical realities and challenges have strong implications for Roman Catholic-WCC relations and collaboration. They must not be neglected by the JWG as it embarks on a new period of its history.

f) Ecclesiology will clearly dominate the ecumenical agenda in the years ahead. Hence, the concept of "communio", which I developed in my report to the Central Committee in 1999 and H.E. Cardinal Kasper addressed at the plenary of PCPCU in 2001, needs to be revisited by the JWG. "Communio" ecclesiology, which was at the heart of the early church, displays challenging perspectives that merit deeper investigation. In this context, particular attention should

be given to conciliarity, primacy and authority. Some of the earlier studies and statements of Faith and Order and the JWG could be of immense help in this respect.

g) According to the mandate of the JWG, it must deal with issues and areas that “foster or hinder WCC-RCC relations”. Thus far we have mainly emphasized matters that may “foster” collaboration, and have avoided touching issues or areas of an explosive or divisive nature. I believe that 40 years of collaboration must have given us the experience, courage and hope to deepen and enlarge our common ground, to give clear articulation to our shared ecumenical vision and wrestle pro-actively with controversial issues, considering them as challenges. This requires not only a change of agenda priorities, but also a change of approach and methodology.

h) A few years ago, when the idea of a Global Christian Forum was introduced, I had some doubts and reservations about it. In view of the growing pace of charismatic, pentecostal and evangelical forms of Christianity, I wonder whether the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church, which have played an important role in giving shape to the idea of forum, should not assume the particular responsibility of bringing the various expressions of Christianity together within the framework of a global forum? Furthermore, in view of the widening gap between the churches and institutional ecumenism, again, I wonder whether the Global Christian Forum could strengthen the ecumenical spirit among those churches that are out of the scope of ecumenical life and, further, promote the ecumenical values and goals?

I) Reflection and action, relationship and collaboration without a solid spirituality will lose much of their relevance and credibility. Ecumenism in all its forms and expressions must be underpinned by the kind of spirituality that will take it to the roots of Christian faith. I welcome the Roman Catholic Church’s strong emphasis on spiritual ecumenism. Strengthening spiritual ecumenism is a major priority for all of us and we must take it most seriously.

j) The question of local and global has been a major concern from the very inception of the modern ecumenical movement. Globalization and growing inter-religious dialogue and contacts have sharpened the relevance of this issue in its diverse dimensions and manifestations. A greater interaction between the local and global is imperative. Hence, this ecumenical issue, with its new challenges and implications for the ecclesiological and missiological self-understanding of the church, must be revisited in the 21st century.

* * *

We are moving to a new period in our ecumenical history. Some depict the present juncture of ecumenism as ambiguous, stagnant and uncertain. Others believe that the ecumenical movement is acquiring new forms and is calling for a new style and agenda. I myself opt for the second.

We may have a different grasp of and respond differently to the changing ecumenical panorama. We may even have different priorities. But our common calling impels us to continue, with renewed impetus and ever-growing engagement, our ecumenical collaboration for the visible unity of the church.

ARAM I
Catholicos of Cilicia

16 November 2005 Antelias

TOWARDS THE RENEWAL OF ECUMENISM
IN THE 21st CENTURY:
THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE
JOINT WORKING GROUP

Proposed Working Document

I. WHY THE CONSULTATION?

1. *Brief historical background*

The historical background to development of the relations between the WCC and the RCC needs to be placed within the context of the Second Vatican Council, in which two representatives of the WCC, Dr Lukas Vischer and Dr Nikos Nissiotis, participated as observers in all four sessions.

Shortly before the Council, the RCC had sent four observers to the WCC Assembly in New Delhi in 1961. This gesture signaled the beginning of RCC representation at major WCC events, such as the RCC observer delegation to the WCC Conference of World Mission and Evangelism held in Mexico City in 1963.

In 1961, a meeting took place in Milan between Cardinal Bea and Dr. Visser 't Hooft to discuss the nature of future relations. That meeting focused on possible common ground on ecumenism and Christian unity; and on the each other's concerns and mutual misconceptions. One outcome of the meeting was the proposal to establish a 'Joint Working Group' between the two partners.

In January 1965, Dr. Visser 't Hooft traveled to Rome for further discussion with Cardinal Bea on the proposed Joint Working Group (JWG) between the WCC and the RCC. The WCC Central Committee meeting in Enugu, Nigeria (January 12-21 1965), discussed and subsequently accepted the proposal. In February 1965, Cardinal Bea traveled personally to Geneva to convey the positive response of the Holy See. The first meeting of the JWG took place in May 1965 at Bossey, co-chaired by Bishop Willebrands and Dr. Visser 't Hooft.

2. *Major Highlights*

The JWG marks its 40th Anniversary in 2005. What are the main moments to call to mind when looking back over the last forty years? What are the main achievements that should be celebrated?

The very agreement to set up the JWG in 1965 was an important milestone, and we commemorate with joy the first meeting in May 1965. Without entering into detailed history of the relations between the two partners, the following outline of some main highlights offer a general overview:

- Participation of RCC observer delegations in major WCC events commencing with New Delhi 1961;
- The agreement to start joint preparation of texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian unity in 1966;
- The appointment of 12 Catholic theologians as full members of the Faith and Order Commission (1968);
- The establishment of a joint office on 'Society, Development and Peace' (SODEPAX) in 1968;
- The historic visit of Pope Paul VI to the WCC in June 1969;
- The address by Dr Philip Potter, General Secretary of the WCC, to the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1974;
- The secondment of a Catholic professor to the Bossey Ecumenical Institute (1978);
- The first joint consultation on 'The Significance and Contribution of Councils of Churches to the Ecumenical Movement in 1982;
- The visit to the WCC by Pope John Paul II in June 1984;
- The appointment of a Catholic as consultant staff person to the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in 1985;
- Collaboration in the preparatory process leading to the Convocation on 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation' (JPIC) from 1986-1990;
- The second joint consultation on Councils of Churches in Geneva in 1986;
- The third joint consultation on Councils of Churches in Hong Kong in 1993.

The JWG continues to work effectively, enabling the WCC and the RCC to listen to one another, to listen together to the demands of the ecumenical movement, and embodying the commitment of the parent bodies to visible unity. Three examples are worth highlighting. Firstly, the study on a common date for Easter on the global level and the willingness of local churches to celebrate Easter on the same day, especially in the Middle East; secondly, the expansion of the celebration of prayer for Christian unity, and the decision in 2005 to publish the common text together; thirdly, the JWG study on 'The Ecumenical Dialogue on Moral Issues' (1998), which served as a model for the WCC process on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches. Given the value of the vast experience of the past 40 years, it is important to see this anniversary not only in terms of recognizing past achievements, but also in terms of identifying new common

ground in order to overcome different perceptions and expectations, and of working towards more fruitful future collaboration.

3. *Dealing with Difficulties*

The past forty years have been a journey of hope and growth in understanding between the two partners, but also a journey at times hampered by difficulties. These obstacles have been in part due to different perceptions of the ecumenical movement and its goals as well as different ways of understanding issues such as authority in the Church. Misunderstandings also come from the asymmetry of structures and methods.

During its first three years (1965-1968), the JWG embarked upon clarifying different perceptions by studying together the nature of ecumenism and dialogue. It was necessary to establish a common understanding of the principles and methods of ecumenism and dialogue.¹ Given the importance of this theme and later developments in bilateral dialogues since 1967, the JWG undertook a second study on the same theme published in 2005 as part of the Eighth Report.²

The question of RCC membership in the WCC has been a matter of debate from the beginning, and at times a source of misunderstanding. As soon as the JWG was set up, concern was expressed within the WCC about possible RCC membership and any ensuing reaction of the WCC, given the fear of its member churches regarding the issue of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. The RCC on the other hand was concerned about the apparent tendency of the WCC towards becoming a 'super-church'. The issue of membership led to a serious study by the JWG undertaken by a commission that eventually produced the document 'Patterns of Relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches'.³ The joint preface of the study concluded: "It is not realistic at the present to try to get a date by which one must arrive at an answer to the question of whether the RCC should apply for membership. It is not expected that such an application will be made in the near future".⁴

Another area in which there have been difficulties is that of collaboration in the social field. Formal cooperation started in 1968 with the establishment of SODEPAX and continued until its mandate was terminated by mutual agreement in 1980. While the experience of SODEPAX was positive in many respects, it also revealed differences in expectations as well as in issues deriving from the diversity of structures, the exercise of authority and ways of communicating the analysis of social issues and implementation of decisions. After the termination of the SODEPAX project, collaboration in the social field has remained on the level of bilateral visits, exchange of information and invitation to each other's main events. The JWG continued reflections on social questions as part of its ongoing agenda as well as through bilateral contacts. Since the launch of the Decade to Overcome Violence [DOV - 2001-2010] by the WCC, the JWG has closely followed its work through a collaborative effort with a staff member of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace on the DOV working group. Against this background, the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace paid a visit to the WCC for the purpose of exchanging information and discovering other ways of collaboration. How can the JWG facilitate such collaboration in the future? And can the JWG find time to reflect on new creative ways of collaboration?

During the current mandate, "the WCC members of the JWG held discussions with the Roman Catholic partners on two documents, namely the instruction *Dominus Jesus* (published in 2000) and the 2003 encyclical on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. Both documents have important ecumenical implications and therefore needed to be discussed. For that reason, following their publication, the JWG played a valuable role as a forum where a frank discussion of the documents could take place. This process of dialogue was useful for clarifying some of the misunderstandings about the purpose of issuing such documents on the part of the RCC. The fact that the RCC is open to listen to reactions of the WCC representatives is in itself an important sign of its commitment to ecumenical dialogue".⁵

II. MANDATE OF THE JWG

¹ Cf. "On the Ecumenical Dialogue: A Working Paper Prepared by the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches", in *Information Service*, 1967, pp. 33-36, and in *Ecumenical Review*, XIX, 1967, pp. 469-473.

² Cf. "The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue: A JWG Study", in *Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches*, Eighth Report, Geneva-Rome, 2005, Appendix D, pp. 73-89.

³ Cf. *The Ecumenical Review*, 24, 3, July 1972, pp. 247-288.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁵ *Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches*, Eighth Report, Geneva-Rome, 2005 *op. cit.*, p. 26.

I. Introduction

The purpose of the JWG was described in 1966 in terms of exploring possibilities of dialogue and collaboration, studying problems jointly, and reporting to the competent authorities of both sides. In the Seventh Report, the JWG was described as a consultative forum that “has no authority in itself but reports to its parent bodies – the WCC assembly and the central committee, and the PCPCU”. Thus the JWG has an advisory function and serves as an instrument for promoting cooperation between the RCC and the WCC. The JWG receives its mandate every seven years from its parent bodies, at the end of which it submits a detailed report of its activities. This report is examined by the parent bodies who offer their observations and approval and give further guidelines for the next mandate.

Since 1975, the mandates given by the parent bodies have mainly been a broad framework for the agenda of the JWG (cf. Appendix A of the JWG Eighth Report). The last plenary of the JWG, held in Crete in May 2004, requested a consultation on the future direction of the JWG, with a view to developing a new mandate, which after 40 years from the first should reflect the current changed situation as well as the partnership that has deepened between the two bodies.

2. Evaluation of the JWG

At the conclusion of each mandate, the JWG has always undertaken an evaluation of its work. Both the WCC Central Committee and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) have consistently evaluated the work of the JWG in positive terms. In their exchange of letters at the end of each mandate, the President of the PCPCU and the General Secretary of the WCC have affirmed this positive assessment. This correspondence has also served as a means of suggesting ways in which cooperation between the two partners could be enhanced in the future. Such an exchange accompanied the publication of Seventh Report of the JWG in 1998. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Decree on Ecumenism in November 2004, one of the main presentations from the PCPCU focused on the work of the JWG. A DVD documentary assessing the past 40 years since the publication of the Decree on Ecumenism featured two visits to the WCC made respectively by Pope Paul VI in 1969 and by Pope John Paul II in 1984. In their assessment of the present mandate, members of the JWG see many positive aspects of the work of the JWG group. The Eighth Report indicates as one positive example the participation of many Catholic members in various Councils of Churches.

The current consultation takes place in the context of the 40th anniversary of the JWG (1965-2005). We naturally rejoice in the achievements of the JWG over the past 40 years, but at the same time we must also consider objectively how well it has fulfilled its mandate. The Eighth Report states that “the JWG, as a consultative forum, is truly capable of inspiring, directing and sustaining dialogue between the RCC and the WCC regarding issues of concern to the ecumenical movement, and facilitating collaboration between the various organs and programmes of the WCC and the RCC” (Eighth Report, p.17). This positive evaluation is encouraging as we seek ideas for the best way forward in terms of a new direction and of new forms of collaboration.

3. The importance of the JWG

The members of the JWG are convinced that there continues to be a need for a forum enabling the RCC and the WCC to evaluate together developments in the ecumenical movement. Over the last 40 years, the JWG has proved that it is a necessary and vital instrument for the growth of ecumenical relations and for the facilitation of a joint Christian response to the needs of the 21st Century. The JWG is a precious instrument and should be kept.

Over the last 40 years, the JWG has played an important role of not only assessing the situation of the ecumenical movement, but also of discovering new ways of developing ecumenical relations. In its style of work, the plenary of the JWG has always started with a sharing of information drawn from the recent experience of participants from different parts of the world. In this rich exchange, the JWG has been kept updated on a wide range of ecumenical activities throughout the world, on the issues being raised, and on the climate of the ecumenical movement. There is no question that the JWG has made a substantial contribution to the ecumenical movement. Moreover, the JWG has been a sign of great hope every time it has met in different places, as it has been seen as an important example of common witness and hope for the future of the ecumenical movement.

The role of the JWG is consultative, acting as a kind of a think-tank that helps its partners to brain-storm or generate ideas on topics of mutual interest. Its role is to evaluate the ecumenical situation today, and to identify ways of helping the RCC and the WCC to move forward in the journey toward the unity of Christians and of responding to issues emerging in our world today. It has also been suggested that its agenda should include deeper reflection on relations between the parent bodies, in particular their differences in terms of their respective natures and structures.

III. PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

1. *Proposed New Direction*

The JWG is the fruit of the commitment of the parent bodies to seek Christian unity between the RCC and the member churches of the WCC. It was conceived as an effective instrument aimed at fulfilling the Gospel imperative “that they may be one”. This command of Jesus is the primary task of all churches and Christians. The question at hand, therefore, is how does the JWG respond to this command?

The world is changing very rapidly, whether through its technological advancements or its human problems of violence, poverty, conflicts and most seriously through the HIV/ AIDS pandemic. How can the agenda of the JWG hold these together and find ways of responding to such concerns?

The ecumenical horizon is changing. The historical churches are growing in Africa and Asia but diminishing elsewhere, and Charismatic and Pentecostal churches are growing on all continents. Population movements are changing the cultural and linguistic aspects of Christianity in all countries. These changes affect the parent bodies and will therefore have an impact on the future direction of the JWG.

Spirituality and ecumenical formation are at the heart of the ecumenical movement. People are seeking spirituality either through the traditional prayers and liturgical lives of their churches, through lay renewal movements in the churches, or through other meditative and ritual forms. Sometimes they live all these aspects together as an expression of their spiritual life.

How can the JWG respond to these contemporary realities and concerns through its reflections and studies, and through the involvement of its members and its presence in the places where it meets?

During this mandate there has been a growing awareness that the impact of its documents has not been as fruitful as envisaged, perhaps in part due to its dense publication format and unsatisfactory channels of distribution. However, it seems necessary to question whether or not the publication of documents should be the main task of the JWG, or whether it should be a forum for the exchange of information, communication and coordination. Documents of the JWG do not have the authority of bilateral documents between Churches although they have a special status. Discussion of the implications of this could take place in the Consultation, Therefore, we need to ask whether JWG documents should be limited to issues of general interest to the ecumenical movement and to specific issues of concern to both partners. There is need for serious reflection on the priorities of the JWG, both as regards methodology and content.

2. *New Forms of Working Together*

Some of the shortcomings of the JWG relate in varying ways to its overall organization, its methodology, and its work approach and procedures. The JWG has functioned in the same way since its foundation in 1965 while the context in which it functions has changed. In the last forty years the JWG has undoubtedly done its best to fulfill its mandate. In changing circumstances, however, it should focus on enhancing its role as a forum for information and consultation and proposal on issues relevant to the present world.

The style of the JWG should be kept flexible and adaptable to a range of changing needs. The JWG needs to be kept small enough to achieve the aims of its mandate with the lightest structure possible. The issue of the present number of JWG plenary members being significantly reduced should be discussed, For example, a distinction could be made between members of the JWG and experts or consultants who are invited for particular questions. This would allow more flexibility and fresh input.

The JWG has also observed that while engaging in study topics is important, the results of those studies should reach the grassroots level. The JWG should therefore look at preparing study guides that help to maximize the impact of its studies. In order to function better, the JWG needs to plan clearly its objectives and achievable goals. The idea of undertaking parallel studies between the JWG and Faith and Order needs to be clarified. One example of this sort of joint effort was the study on Theological Anthropology.

The last two mandates spoke of the consultative and advisory function of the JWG. As the two partners look into the future, it would be important to evaluate exactly how this function could be developed in terms of formulating a vision for the ecumenical movement in the 21st century. The JWG has an important contribution to make in the renewal of ecumenism. Its role could especially serve in identifying further common ground between the two partners and offering this vision to the ongoing debate as it enters into the new century.

REFLECTIONS ON THE JOINT WORKING GROUP
BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
(1965-2005)

Report of the Consultation

On 17-19 November 2005, 28 participants, invited by the World Council of Churches and by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, gathered at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland, the site of the first Joint Working Group meeting in 1965. The purpose of the meeting was to mark the 40th anniversary of the Joint Working Group at a transitional moment in the ecumenical movement. The consultation reflected on the role and mandate of the Joint Working Group and the ways in which the Group could continue to strengthen the relationship between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church.

The meeting was preceded by an open dialogue on spirituality and a public celebration of the 40th anniversary at the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. Presentations on the future of ecumenism were given by His Holiness Aram I and His Eminence Cardinal Walter Kasper, followed by an ecumenical evening prayer.

The purpose of the Joint Working Group is to enhance the relationships between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The goals of the consultation were as follows: to assess the achievements of the Joint Working Group and its impact on relations between the parent bodies, to explore the role and contribution of the Working Group to the renewal of ecumenism in the 21st century, to help the parent bodies express their common commitment to the one ecumenical involvement, to reevaluate the methodology of its work as a group, to identify ways in which the experience and findings of the Joint Working Group could better reach the local churches, and to suggest new forms of working together.

Through intense dialogue, the consultation addressed many aspects of the Joint Working Group experience, seeking to offer to the next Joint Working Group reflections that might help to improve its working method and effectiveness. The consultation affirmed the *Eighth Report of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches* and its recommendations. A more detailed account of the proceedings of the consultation will be found in the Minutes.

The very fact of the establishment and continued co-operation between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches for 40 years must be considered one of the significant achievements of the modern ecumenical movement. The slow but persevering establishment of a relationship in which the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church have found in one another a trusted partner has been perhaps the most enduring achievement of the past four decades. Some examples of concrete co-operation include joint responsibility for preparing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, full membership in the commissions on Faith and Order, Mission and Evangelism, co-operation with other World Council of Churches entities, provision for staff in areas of mission and at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, joint study projects on topics such as baptism and theological anthropology, and providing oversight and review of institutional links between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church.

The decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* of the Second Vatican Council noted that the call to full visible Christian unity can be fulfilled only by the joint efforts of churches working together. The Joint Working Group has sought to play this role over the years, as well as that of calling the churches to recover and reaffirm the original vision and goal of the ecumenical movement. In this context, examination of the relationship between bilateral and multilateral expressions of the ecumenical movement needs to be undertaken, in order to affirm the legitimacy of both types of relations and to clarify that multilateral dialogue provides the framework within which bilateral relations grow.

The task of the Joint Working Group has been one of providing a common witness to the enduring commitment of the two parent bodies to cooperate in pursuing a common ecumenical vision. The Working Group, which was originally intended to be provisional, may not be the only possible alternative to membership of the Roman Catholic Church in the World Council of Churches, but in the historical reality since the Second Vatican Council, it has proved to be an effective expression of the desire of both parties for an ongoing collaboration and partnership.

The forthcoming Joint Working Group must study the possibilities of new forms of working together to assess and respond to the continually evolving global and ecclesial context. The Joint Working Group will need to pay close attention to actual developments in the ecumenical movement, e.g., the Global Christian Forum as it evolves and takes shape, the Conference of the Secretaries of Christian World Communions as it seeks to redefine its role, and the emerging process of reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement as it attempts to articulate a common vision and to review existing structures. Stocktaking of the state of ecumenical relations, identifying strengths and weaknesses in actual ecumenical relations, setting priorities with measurable goals, and monitoring progress to determine whether goals have been seriously and consistently pursued should all become part of the expected activity of the Joint Working Group.

In an evaluation of the methodology of the Joint Working Group, the exchange of information, the identification of initiatives and encouragement of the parent bodies were seen as central to the task of the Joint Working Group. It was felt that the Joint Working Group should not duplicate the work of the Faith and Order Commission in producing studies on doctrinal questions. On the other hand, the Joint Working Group has a role to play in providing reflection on the pastoral

dimension, and must decide whether it can make a particular contribution in a given area (cf. *Eighth Report*, p. 29) either by asking a specialized body to undertake a study or by itself organizing a study on its own. This method may continue to be fruitful, because the Joint Working Group has an enabling function for the parent bodies.

Areas of concern for the Joint Working Group have been the communication of the results of its studies, deliberations, and declarations to the parent bodies, the reception of its reports, and the implementation of its recommendations. This consultation recognizes the need for improvement in two-way communication between the Joint Working Group and its parent bodies in order to ensure that its mandate is effectively fulfilled. More attention must be given to exploring effective ways of fostering reception of ecumenical agreements within the Roman Catholic Church and among the member churches of the World Council of Churches. As for implementation, the style of communication should be that of advocacy aimed at enabling the churches to receive, apprehend and affirm the material communicated. A change of name for the Group may be considered as a means of expressing the significance of this partnership.

Experience from past years indicates that any future Joint Working Group should spend some time, particularly at the beginning of its mandate, in familiarizing itself with the structures of the parent bodies and building a sense of teamwork and of shared spiritual commitment. Time spent on setting priorities for its work together would help the Joint Working Group focus on its ecumenical mission. In this way, the working group will be better prepared to incarnate ecumenism in its meetings and provide a common witness to a single ecumenical vision.

Rome/Geneva, 21 November 2005

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

His Eminence WALTER Cardinal KASPER

President, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Most Reverend MARIO CONTI

(JWG Co-Moderator), Archbishop of Glasgow

Most Reverend BRIAN FARRELL

Secretary, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Ms MARJA ARANZAZU AGUADO ARRESE

Roman Catholic Consultant, World Council of Churches

FR GOSBERT BYAMUNGU

Professor, Ecumenical Institute Bossey

Sister JOAN DELANEY, M.M.

Former Roman Catholic Consultant, World Council of Churches

Mgr FRANK DEWANE

Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace

Rev. FATHER THOMAS MICHEL, SJ

Secretary for Interreligious Dialogue, Jesuit Curia

Sister ELIZABETH MORAN

Former Roman Catholic Consultant, World Council of Churches

Mgr JOHN MUTISO-MBINDA

JWG Co-Secretary, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Mgr JOHN RADANO

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Dr. TERESA FRANCESCA ROSSI

Centro Pro Unione

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
HIS HOLINESS ARAM I
Catholicos of Cilicia, Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia

Rev. Dr. SAMUEL KOBIA
General Secretary, World Council of Churches

Rt. Rev. Bishop DR. JONAS JONSON
(JWG Co-Moderator), Church of Sweden

Rev. Dr. DIANE C. KESSLER
Executive Director, Massachusetts Council of Churches

Metropolitan PROF. DR. GENNADIOS OF SASSIMA
Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople

Dr. MERCY AMBA ODUYOYE
Trinity Theological Seminary, Institute of Women in Religion & Culture

Ms KATHERINE PASTUKHOVA
Belorussian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, Project Assistant, Faith and Order

Rev. Dr. LUKAS VISCHER
Prof Emeritus of Ecumenical Theology, University of Bern, Former Director of Faith & Order

Mr. YORGO LEMOPOULOS
Deputy General Secretary, WCC

Rev. Dr. TOM BEST
Director, Faith and Order

Rev. THEODORE GILL
Senior Editor, Publications & Research

Rev. JACQUES MATTHEY
Programme Executive for Mission studies, IRM

Ms TENY PIRRI-SIMONIAN
Co-Secretary of JWG & Programme Secretary, Church & Ecumenical Relations (CER)

Rev. Dr. MARTIN ROBRA
Programme Executive for Ethics and Ecology

Ms LUZIA WEHRLE
Administrative Assistant (CER)

Mr ALEXANDER BELOPOPSKY
Team coordinator

Mr JUAN MICHEL
Media relations officer

Rev. OLIVER SCHOPPER
Executive web editor

Mr PETER WILLIAMS
Visual arts/photographer

[Information Service 120 (2005/IV) 165-179]