

COMMON WITNESS AND PROSELYTISM

(A Study Document)

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

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

The Joint Working Group, having examined it, recommends it to its parent bodies that it be offered to the Churches as a study document for their consideration. Although there may not be complete agreement on everything contained in the document it represents a wide area of consensus on common witness and proselytism.

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

INTRODUCTION

1. Unity in witness and witness in unity. This is the will of Christ for his people. The Lord has called all his disciples to be witnesses to him and his Gospel, to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1.8), and he has promised to be with them always, to the close of his age (Mt. 28.20). But for centuries, in their efforts to fulfil this mission, Christian Communion have borne the burden of divisions, even differing about the meaning of the one Gospel. They have not been a clear sign of the one and holy people, so it has been hard for the world to believe (cf. John 13.35; 17.21).

THE ECUMENICAL REVIEW

2. Today, moved by the Holy Spirit, the various Christian Communion are seeking to restore the unity they have lost, in the hope that one day, when they are fully renewed and united in faith and charity, they may be better able to glorify God by bringing home to the whole world the hope of the coming kingdom. They are striving to overcome whatever indifference,

isolation and rivalry has marked their relations to each other and thus has distorted Christian witness even to that unity with which God has already blessed them.

3. This document is an attempt to state the implications of the obligation
- to bear common Christian witness, even while the Churches are divided;
 - to avoid in their mutual relations and in their evangelising activities whatever is not in keeping with the spirit of the Gospel;
 - to provide one another, as far as possible, with mutual support for a more effective witness of the Gospel through preaching and selfless service to the neighbour.
4. This document is offered to the Churches. Its reflections and suggestions may serve as a basis of discussion among Christians in varied circumstances, in order to arrive at a line of conduct where they live and witness.

MEANING OF THE TERMS: Christian Witness, Common Witness, Religious Freedom, Proselytism.

5. 1. Christian Witness. (1) Witness is taken here to mean the continuous act by which a Christian or a Christian Community proclaims God's acts in history and seeks to reveal Christ as the true light which shines for every man. This includes the whole life: worship, responsible service, proclamation of the Good News -- all is done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order that men may be saved and be gathered into Christ's one and only Body (Col. 1. 18; Eph. 1. 22-23), and attain life everlasting -- to know the true God and Him whom he has sent, Jesus Christ (cf. John 17. 3).

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

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

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

I. COMMON WITNESS

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

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

11. Moreover, the Churches believe that they live only by the divine gifts of truth and life bestowed by Christ. Most Churches acknowledge that gifts of divine grace are a reality in other Churches which also provide access to salvation in Christ. Thus all Christian Communions, in spite of their divisions, can have a positive role to play in God's plan of salvation.

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

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

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

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

earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, etc.).

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. While it is indeed aware of its pilgrim condition, a Church can be convinced that in it subsists the one Church founded by Christ, that

also in it one can have access to all the means of salvation which the Lord offers, that its witness has always remained substantially faithful to the Gospel.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the very spirit of sectarianism which they so rightly deplore in others. Rather should they strive to hear God's call to renewal and to greater faithfulness to his message of salvation.

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

II. PROSELYTISM AND RELATIONS BETWEEN CHURCHES

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

- conformed to the spirit of the Gospel, especially by respecting the other's right to religious freedom, and
- concerned to do nothing which could compromise the progress of ecumenical dialogue and action.

26. 1. Required Qualities for Christian Witness

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

- a) The deep and true source of witness should be the commandment: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... You must love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt. 22. 37 and 39, cf. Lev. 19. 18; Deut. 6.5).
- b) Witness should be inspired by the true end of the Church; the glory of God through the salvation of men. Witness does not seek the prestige of one own's community and of those who belong to, represent or lead it.
- c) Witness should be nourished by the conviction that it is the Holy Spirit who, by his grace and light, brings about the response of faith to witness.
- d) Witness respects the free will and dignity of those to whom it is given, whether they wish to accept or to refuse the faith.
- e) Witness respects the right of every man and community to be free from any coercion which impedes them from witness to their own convictions, including religious convictions.

27. Witness should avoid behaviour such as:

- a) Every type of physical coercion, moral constraint or psychological pressure which would tend to deprive man of his personal judgement, of his freedom of choice, of full autonomy in the exercise of his responsibility. A certain abuse of mass communications can have this effect.
- b) Every open or disguised offer of temporal or material benefits in return for change in religious adherence.
- c) Every exploitation of the need or weakness or of lack of education of those to whom witness is offered, in view of inducing their adherence to a Church.
- d) Everything raising suspicion about the "good faith" of others - "bad faith" can never be presumed; it should always be proved.
- e) The use of a motive which has no relation to the faith itself but is presented as an appeal to change religious adherence: for example, the appeal to political motives to win over those who are eager to secure for themselves the protection or favours of civil authority, or those who are opposed to the established regime. Churches which form a large majority in a state should not use legal methods, social, economic or political pressure, in the attempt to prevent members of minority communities from the exercise of their right to religious freedom.
- f) Every unjust or uncharitable reference to the beliefs or practices of other religious communities in the hope of winning adherents. This includes malevolent criticism which offends the sensibilities of members of other communities. In general, one should compare the good qualities and ideals or the weaknesses and practices of one community with those of the others, not one's ideals with the other's practice.

28. 2. Christian Witness and Relations between the Churches

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

- a) In each Church one is conscious that conversion of heart and the renewal of his own community are essential contributions to the ecumenical movement.
- b) Missionary action should be carried out in an ecumenical spirit which takes into consideration the priority of the announcement of the Gospel to non-Christians. The missionary effort of one Church in an

areas or milieu where another Church is already at work depends on an honest answer to the question: what is the quality of the Christian message proclaimed by the Church already at work, and in what spirit is it being proclaimed and lived? Here frank discussion between the Churches concerned would be highly desirable, in order to have a clear understanding of each other's missionary and ecumenical convictions, and with the hope that it would help to determine the possibilities of cooperation, of common witness, of fraternal assistance, or of complete withdrawal. (5) In the same manner and spirit the relations between minority and majority Churches should be considered.

- c) Particularly all competitive spirit should be avoided by which a Christian community might seek a position of power and privilege, and concern itself less with proclaiming the Gospel to those who have not yet received it than with profiting by chances to recruit new members among the other Christian communities.
- d) To avoid causes of tension between Churches because of the free exercise of the right of every man to choose his ecclesial allegiance and, if necessary, to change it in obedience to conscience, it is vital:
 - (i) that this free choice should be exercised in full knowledge of what is involved and, if possible, after counsel with the pastors of the two Churches concerned. Particular care is necessary in the case of children and young people; in such cases, the greatest weight and respect should be given to the views and rights of the parents and tutors;
 - (ii) that the Church which admits a new member should be conscious of the ecumenical repercussions, and not draw vain glory from it;
 - (iii) that the Church which has lost a member should not become bitter or hostile, nor ostracise the person concerned; that it examines its conscience as to how it has done its duty of bringing the Gospel to that person. Has it made an effort to understand how his Christian convictions ought to affect his life, or rather was it content that he should remain a nominal and official member of that community?
 - (iv) that any change of allegiance motivated mainly by the desire to secure some material advantage should be refused.
- e) Some points of tension between the Churches are difficult to overcome because what is done by one Church in view of its theological and ecclesiological convictions, is considered by the other as implicit proselytism. In this case, it is necessary that the two sides try to

clarify what is really in question and to arrive at mutual understanding of different practices, and if possible, to agree to a common policy. This can be realized only if the carrying out of these theological and ecclesiological convictions clearly exclude every type of witness which would be tainted by proselytism, as described above. Some examples of such tensions:

- (i) The fact that a Church which reserves baptism to adults ("believer's baptism") persuades the faithful of another Church who have already been baptized as infants, to receive baptism again, is often regarded as proselytising. A discussion on the nature of baptism and its relation to faith and to the Church could lead to new attitudes.
- (ii) The discipline of certain Churches concerning the marriage of their members with Christians of other communities is often considered as proselytic. In fact, these rules depend on theological positions. Conversations on the nature of marriage and the Church membership of the family could bring about progress and resolve in a joint way the pastoral question raised by such marriages.
- (iii) The Orthodox consider that the existence of the Eastern Catholic Churches is the fruit of proselytism. Catholics level the same criticism against the way in which certain of these Churches have been reunited to the Orthodox Church. Whatever has been the past, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are determined to reject not only proselytism but also the intention even to draw the faithful of one Church to another. An example of this pledge is the common declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I, on October 28, 1967. The resolution of these questions, evidently important for the ecumenical movement, should be sought in frank discussion between the Churches concerned.

29. CONCLUSION

These reflections and suggestions on common witness and proselytism will, it is hoped, offer the Churches an opportunity of moving more quickly along the way which leads to the restoration of complete communion among them. As they travel that path to unity the Churches realize that Christian witness can never be perfect. They can never cease to strive for a deeper realization and clearer expression of the Good News of the unfathomable riches of Christ (cf. Eph. 3. 8), and for a more faithful living in accord with His one message. By fidelity to this striving the Churches will grow together in witness to Christ, "the Faithful and True Witness" (Rev. 3. 14) in expectation of that day when all things will be perfectly reestablished in him (cf. Eph. 1. 10; Col. 1. 20).

- FOOTNOTES

- (1) Modern languages use several biblically derived terms which denote particular aspects of the announcements of the Gospel in word and deed: Witness, Apostolate, Mission, Confession, Evangelism, Kerygma Message, etc. We have preferred here to adopt "Witness", because it expresses more comprehensively the realities we are treating.
- (2) Cf. Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the WCC, of the Third WCC Assembly (1961); Declaration on Religious Freedom, of the Second Vatican Council (1965); Universal Declaration on Human Rights, of the United Nations (1948), esp. N. 18.. Since the right to religious freedom operates in society, these documents also mention rules which modify the use of it.
- (3) In certain linguistic, cultural and confessional contexts, the term "proselytism", used without qualification, has acquired this pejorative sense. In those other languages and contexts in which the term still retains its more original meaning of "zeal in spreading the faith", it will be necessary always to use "proselytism in the pejorative sense" or some phrase which denotes defective attitudes and conduct.
- (4) Cf. Second Vatican Council Decree, Ad Gentes, 6 and 15; and the proposals for "Joint Action for Mission" formulated by the 1961 New Delhi Assembly of the WCC and affirmed by the Report of Section II of the 1968 Uppsala Assembly.
- (5) In speaking of Joint Action for Mission, the World Council of Churches distinguishes presently three degrees of missionary collaboration: surveying the possibilities of missionary action; joint planning; and joint action. The meaning of common witness is wider than that of joint action for mission.

The above document is available from the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

Also available at the Secretariat and at the Sedos Documentation Centre: Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National and Local Levels.

In Church Alert Nov - Dec 1977 "The Rocca di Papa Colloquium on the Social Teaching of the Churches, Part I.

TOPIC: ECUMENICISM - EAST AFRICA

ATTITUDES AND INITIATIVES TOWARDS CHRISTIAN UNITY IN EASTERN AFRICA

In October 1976, members of five different Christian denominations came together in Nairobi for shared discussion on Attitudes and Initiatives towards Christian Unity in Eastern Africa. The following resolutions adopted concerning their research project on this topic offer many useful ideas and suggestions:

TITLE OF THE PROJECT:

The project is to be known as the AACC/AMECEA Research Project on Attitudes and Initiatives Towards Christian Unity in Eastern Africa (AICU).

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT:

The planning meeting described the purpose of the research project as follows: "In order that the mission of the Church in the World may be more effective and that humanity may ultimately be reconciled in Christ, we propose to examine the Ecumenical situation in Eastern Africa, evaluating the positive achievements, identifying the negative factors and proposing further positive action. We propose to assist in the education in Ecumenism of Christians in all areas of the Churches' life and concern, and to convince the Churches of the urgent need to commit themselves to work for Christian unity".

CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT:

The character of the project is to be described as a programme of action and reflection. It is hoped, not only to provide information concerning attitudes and initiatives towards Christian unity, but also to stimulate Christians at all levels in the Churches to commit themselves to work for Christian unity.

DURATION OF THE PROJECT:

The planning meeting envisaged a three year project, commencing in January 1977 and finishing in December 1979.

AREAS OF INVESTIGATION:

The planning meeting identified seven principle areas of investigation. There were two fundamental areas: The mission of the Church to the world and the negative factors which constitute obstacles to that mission. The other five areas of investigation are essentially sub-divisions of these two fundamental areas. We give a description of each of these areas in the order determined by the meeting.

- a) **Mission of the Church to the World:** In this area the differing ecclesiologies and structures of the churches would be studied. So also would the Church's role in development and in responding to the real needs of African society today. The problem of conflicts between an African and a Christian identity should also be studied here, as well as the Church's response to other (non-Christian) faiths. Evangelisation, the influence of the churches on each other, work for development, and the response of the churches to inadequate political images of the Church would also be included in this area of investigation. The area could be described in general as the confrontation of the churches with pluralism in the modern world.
- b) **Negative Factors:** In this area both the theological and non-theological causes of division among Christians should be studied. It was noted that Christians tend to take an ambiguous attitude towards Christian unity, depending upon different contexts in which they find themselves. It was noted that even Ecumenism itself could be a stumbling block, and that some churches were vehemently opposed to working for Christian unity. There is the danger of a realignment of churches favouring or opposing Christian unity. Other factors included fear of losing one's identity, competitiveness, church centredness, and general complacency about the situation.
- c) **Spiritual Ecumenism:** In this area the actual clear-cut policies of the churches would be studied, the present situation would be assessed and the goals at which the churches are aiming would be discussed.
- d) **The Family and Ecumenism:** This area would study the positive contribution of the extended family in Africa to promoting Christian unity. Inter-church marriages would also be studied. It was noted that Ecumenism by-passes the family to a great extent. It would be necessary to discover how this situation can be remedied.
- e) **The Bible and Ecumenism:** In this area joint translations of the Bible and joint Biblical study groups would be evaluated. It will be necessary to study African attitude to the Bible and the use which is made in Africa of the Bible. The connection between literacy and Bible reading was noted. Another topic in this area concerns the relationship of attitudes to the Bible towards the African historical consciousness.
- f) **Education and Ecumenism:** It was felt that education in Ecumenism was needed at all levels in each church so as to provide information about other churches and about the movement towards Christian unity itself. An important point in this context concerns the terminology we employ when speaking about Christians of other churches. Also in this area an evaluation must be made of joint religious education syllabuses and the impact of Ecumenism in the school on the wider

community. Joint training for ministry and theological extension programmes must also be studied.

- g) **Evaluation of Ecumenical Initiatives:** In this area we would try to document and evaluate other Ecumenical initiatives such as joint pastoral care, the sharing of buildings, joint use of communications media, co-operation in the field of health, joint relief work and the working of joint and national Christian councils. The source of the initiatives must be examined as well as their motivations.

METHODS TO BE EMPLOYED:

- a) **Theological Dialogue:** Theology teachers in University Departments of Religious studies, Seminaries and Theological Colleges will be asked to contribute to a dialogue on the subject of Ecumenism. The dialogue will take place chiefly at a series of local colloquia. Theologians would also be encouraged to contribute articles to theological journals on the subject of Ecumenism. It is also proposed that theologians make contributions to religious radio programmes in each of the countries. Christian communications departments will be contacted to see if 'ecumenical' material can be supplied to broadcasters. Topics of interest to listeners would include Church-related action on development and e.g. ecumenical reactions to the recent statement by the third world theologians (at their meeting in Dar-es-Salaam).
- b) **Research Conducted by University Religious Studies Departments:** Universities Religious Studies Departments will be invited to carry out socio-religious research in a peri-urban area in order to discover and describe the religious dynamics of the area. Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation will also be contacted to see if it could participate in a similar project and/or share with us the results of previous researches of this kind.
- c) **Basic Documentation and Data Gathering:** The AMECEA Research Department was asked to prepare postal questionnaires to be sent to various levels in the churches in order to obtain basic documentation and information concerning progress towards Christian unity. Analysis of these questionnaires will also take place in the department.
- d) **Setting up "Ecumenical Laboratories" at Local level:** Controlled experimentation at local level will be conducted in favourable areas with the help of local pastors, teachers, catechists etc. and with the collaboration of theology students. It will be necessary to study areas of religious homogeneity as well as areas in which there are a number of Churches at work. Local attitudes and initiatives could be studied through personal interviews and through discussion. It was recommended that the text of Fr. Brian Hearne's paper Seeds of

Unity should be used as the basis for discussion and study groups. This booklet should be accompanied by a series of study questions proposed by an Ecumenical committee. It is important that there should be some feed-back to the AMECEA Research Department which will also provide assistance to the researchers and will co-ordinate their work. Wherever necessary, approaches will be made to Christian Councils, Episcopal Conferences and other levels of leadership in the Churches.

- e) **Evaluation of Joint Religious Education Syllabuses:** With the help of national associations of religious education teachers and inspectors, it is planned to carry out an evaluation of joint religious syllabuses at both primary and secondary level. Eventually chaplains at Universities might also be involved in this research when students who have followed the syllabuses at school begin to appear in the Universities. One or two individual experts will be approached in order to conduct an evaluation of the Makerere Diploma of Theology taken by theology students in the Seminaries and Theological Colleges of East Africa.
- f) **Approach to Churches Opposed to the Ecumenical Movement:** In the case of churches opposed to the ecumenical movement it is proposed to work through the charismatic movement and shared prayer groups in order to discover the point of view of these churches. It will be necessary to work through individual contacts and also through University chaplaincies.
- g) **Music:** Since music is of great importance in evangelisation in Eastern Africa and in influencing ideas in the area, it is proposed to stimulate musical creativity which can contribute to Christian unity. Ecumenical hymn books should be studied and, if necessary commissioned. Also the idea of an Ecumenical music festival should be studied.

Practical arrangements. A Steering Committee and a list of corresponding associates was agreed on, and a rough budget drawn up, for the stipulated three years of the research project. A press conference was held at the end of the meeting.

(From Afer Vol 19, No 3, June, 1977 pp. 185 - 190.)

MATTER ECCLESIAE CENTER. The Sisters of the Holy Cross (Notre Dame, Indiana) established this Center in 1974. Located on the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias, Israel, it is now in its fifth session, providing a program of continuing spiritual formation and enrichment for women religious, especially of Africa and Asia. Regular program for sisters of Africa and Asia begins September 29 each year and ends the first Wednesday after Easter. The third session of a mini-program of two months duration for missionary sisters begins the first week in May and ends the first week of July. For information write to P.O. Box 207, Tiberias, Israel.

TOPIC: ANGOLA

ANGOLA: THE RECONSTRUCTION FROM A LIBERATION MOVEMENT INTO A WORKERS' PARTY.

by Krien Houdijk

THE CONGRESS, AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT EVENT.

The importance of the Congress becomes apparent when one realizes that the Congress is the highest authority for the Movement and the Party, as well as for the Government. This Congress-meeting was, moreover, the first one held on native soil, and has led to the restructuring of the MPLA into the Party of the Workers', on a marxist-leninist basis. This completely new structure will make great demands on all members of the Party and will give the Movement a completely different look, as President Neto noted in the closing address.

315 delegates from all over the country participated and 150 sympathizers and guests were present including a few members of the Netherlands Angola Committee who had come to Luanda for the meeting.

President Neto opened the Congress with a long Report, which embodied the main points on which the Congress would have to pronounce. These statements have been put down in a number of short resolutions. One of the most important of these is certainly the one on the setting up of the Angola Workers' Party. Connected to this is the approval of the Statutes and of the Programme. In this Programme it is stated again very clearly that the Workers' Party will be guided by marxist-leninist principles.

In the months preceding the Congress this statement had raised many questions about the place and the function of believers in the new Angola. Regularly the question was touched upon in important speeches, and the solution proposed there boiled down to the following: the Christians could not be militant members of the Party, but they could and should co-operate in building up the country within the mass-organizations such as the Angolese Women's Movement and the Workers' Syndicate. According to the Statutes now approved, they can also become "sympathizing members" of the Party. The actual members are militants or aspirants, who have to endorse and propagate marxism-leninism in all fields. The "sympathizers" are described in the Statutes as persons who are members of one of the mass-organizations and who, moreover, accept the Programme of the Party and are prepared to carry out the tasks of the Party and to pay their financial contribution. In earlier publications it has been stated that Christians belong to this category. It seems that President Neto underlines this when he says that believers as well as atheists have to take

part together in the struggle against exploitation of one person by another.

The question of the religions within the People's Republic has been dealt with explicitly in the long Report. To me the paper seems to be somewhat ambiguous: on the one hand there are strong attacks on the Church and on Religion in general; on the other hand a confirmation that there is religious liberty, and a request for collaboration. The opening statement is quite clear. Without mincing matters, it blames religion (throughout history) for being an instrument, in the hands of the exploiters to keep the oppressed masses away from the revolutionary struggle. Religion has kept the people ignorant, and has kept them at a distance from scientific explanations of nature.

In general, and fully in line with marxism-leninism, religion was described as a warped reflection of the world around us, which is basically determined by the conditions in which the people live. Therefore, the influence of the religions can be changed only if the world of which they are a reflection is changed.

In spite of this negative view of religion, the People's Republic of Angola will not forbid religion. But one will have to be on one's guard against the danger of the Party deviating from its fundamental vision on religion. Furthermore, Party and State will have to guarantee each citizen's freedom of conscience, which means that everybody is free to profess a religion or not to do so. Moreover, each citizen will have the freedom to worship, but only within the norms laid down by the law and the norms of socialist ethics. Believers and non-believers will have equal rights and duties in the social sphere. Education will be scientific and teaching non-denominational. Finally, one will not be able to refer to religious principles in order to oppose the revolutionary process and socialism. The struggle for a free conscience and for a scientific and materialistic philosophy of life will become an integral part of the struggle for a new society, in which there will no longer be room for exploitation of one person by another.

THE BISHOPS' REPLY.

Immediately after the Congress closed, the Bishops of Angola came together in Lubango. A long Pastoral Letter was the result of their reflection on the actual situation. The document was dated December 14th, 1977, and it was read out in the churches on January 8th. It is clear that the Bishops have intensively concerned themselves with the documents of the Congress, especially with the points that touch on religion. In the introduction the bishops profess anew their solidarity with the people, in their joys and their sorrows, in their hopes and their fears. It is precisely the people who have asked the bishops

frequently for more guidelines in searching for ways and means of keeping the faith. The letter is meant to give an answer to these questions. Several points from the Pastoral Letter of November 1976 are repeated in this Letter, and further supplemented and elaborated. More than 50 footnotes have been added to the Letter; these show that the bishops have been mainly inspired by the Constitutions of the People's Republic of November 11th, 1975, and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as church documents, such as Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes, Populorum Progressio and Evangelii Nuntiandi. The Letter covers three main areas: 1) the protest; 2) collaboration and 3) being christian in the present situation in Angola.

PROTEST AGAINST VIOLATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitution has proclaimed Freedom of Religion, but in the opinion of the bishops this law of religious freedom is regularly being violated. Systematic propaganda promoting atheism goes unpunished. Discrimination of believers on the basis of their faith; profanation of religious places and objects also goes unpunished.

The bishops also think that religious freedom becomes an illusion if it is not seen as related to freedom of speech and press, and freedom to meet together. It is their opinion that freedom of speech and press has almost completely disappeared from public life. In this they refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights par. 19. In this connection they blame the Government for the fact that the Catholic Broadcasting Corporation has had to be silent for over six months.

The bishops protest also against the administration of justice as practiced in the People's Republic; arbitrary arrests, long periods in prison on the basis of unfounded insinuations and the absence of an organized court procedures allowing proper defense.

THE RIGHT OF PARENTS TO EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN

The right of parents to educate their children is a basic subject of this Pastoral Letter. Again the bishops refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (par. 26). In that light the bishops protest against the enforcement of a unified pattern of education and against government monopolizing all means of education and all centres of teaching.

The bishops express their concern about the empty way in which marxism-leninism is taught. They also protest against the transfer of children to distant countries with great danger to their faith, and the ignoring of the rights of the parents.

REJECTION OF THE MARXIST INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION

By way of a supplement to the Pastoral Letter of 1976 the bishops now go further into the interpretation of religion which the Congress adopted from marxism-leninism. They base this on the text of the opening report. They reject emphatically the caricature spread by the anti-religious propaganda, which suggests that religion is merely a deformed reflection of the outside world, or a form of social consciousness aimed at maintaining outdated situations, or a consequence of an unjustifiable obscurantism, which keeps the masses away from a scientific explanation of facts.

In a more positive way the bishops then describe religion as directed towards the total person, with a priority for spiritual values. This priority does not mean, however, that worldly values are overlooked or discarded. Never has science been rejected on the basis of religion, on the contrary, often the Church has defended and promoted science.

Particularly with reference to Angola, it is the opinion of the bishops that certain mistakes and shortcomings of the past have been generalized too easily. These mistakes and shortcomings, did exist, but also many good things have happened. They then point out that the missions have been centres of evangelization, but also of literacy and culture; centres also of education and health care, especially in the rural areas. Various missionaries have done important work for the study of indigenous languages and for ethnographic observations. They reiterate, over and over again, that the People of Angola are originally a believing people, and that the majority of the people are baptized Christians. They reject the opinion that Christianity has remained a foreign element in Angola. In their opinion it has penetrated so deeply into the African culture that destroying this element would mean mutilating the African.

CHRISTIANS IN THE PROCESS OF REBUILDING THE COUNTRY

In spite of all these points of protest and of criticism the bishops still search for points of mutual understanding and collaboration. They profess again their belief in independence. They declare again that there is no objection whatever to collaboration in building up a socialist society, but it must be on condition that the human and christian values are respected.

They condemn explicitly liberal capitalism as well as exploiting colonialism, both of which have kept the African countries in poverty and dependence for so long.

After this they address themselves to the Christians exhorting them to keep courage and not to lose hope: fear and apathy are fundamentally

wrong, because they have a crippling effect.

The bishops then warn against rash renewal towards too horizontal an africanization. In connection with this they plead for a search for the right balance between social improvement and spiritual deepening.

Just as all other citizens, the Christian has his responsibility for society, but he cannot lose his identity in the process. On the contrary, his faith will help him acquire a clearer view of the social and political structures.

It remains to be seen how the tension between the new Party and the Catholic Church will develop. Will it lead to a conflict or will they try and come to a type of round table dialogue?

(translated by Sr. Josephine Gosselink, scmm-t).

Documentation on Angola

-Deux Mois en Angola: La Rencontre d'une Eglise Vivante par
Fr. Torres Neive, cssp (Sedos Doc. No 1/7177)

-Lettre Pastorale de L'Episcopat D'Angola Lors du Cinquantenaire de
Sainte Therèse de L'Enfant Jesus Comme Patronne des Missions (Sedos
Doc. 4/2871

If there is light in the soul, There will be beauty in
the person.

If there is beauty in the person, There will be harmony
in the home, If there is harmony in the home,

There will be order in the nation

If there is order in the nation,

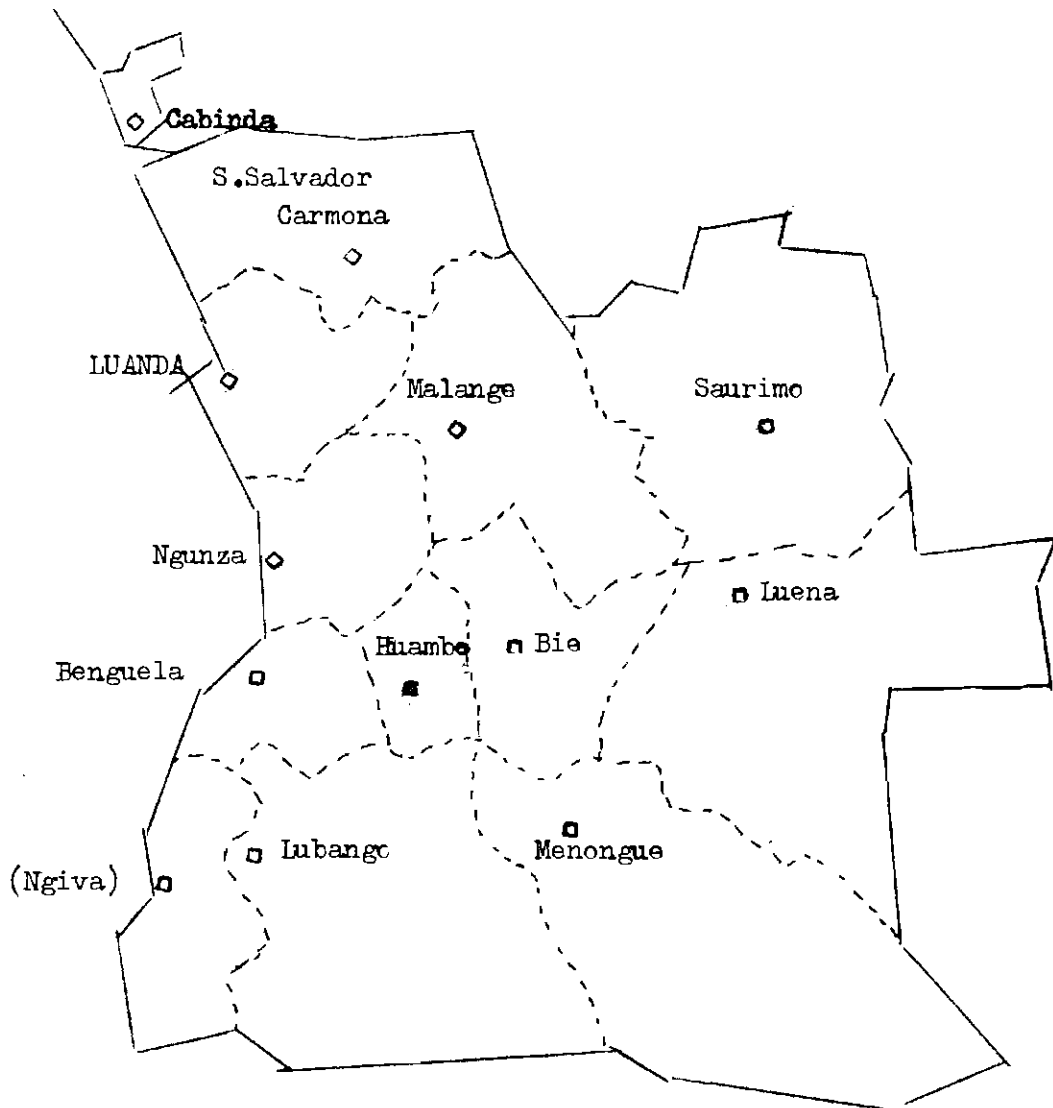
There will be PEACE in the world.

Chinese Proverb

DIOCESES D'ANGOLA

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 - LUANDA (+ Cabinda) | 7 - BIE (Silva Porto) |
| 2 - CARMONA - S. SALVADOR | 8 - LUENA (Luso) |
| 3 - MALANGE | 9 - HUAMBO (Nova Lisboa) |
| 4 - NGUNZA (Novo Redondo) | 10 - LUBANGO (Sã da Bandeira) |
| 5 - SAURIMO (Henrique de Carvalho) | 11 - NGIVA (créé et lié à LUBANGO) |
| 6 - BENGUELA | 12 - MENONGUE (Seroa Pinto) |

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A N G O L A : population (Chiffres officiels de 1970)

6.000.000 Hab.