Pontifical Council for Social Communications

Criteria for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Cooperation in Communications
(October 4, 1989)

Introduction

1. The witness of faith which should be given in the public forum of the media makes it necessary for Christians to work together more effectively in their communications efforts and to act in more direct cooperation with other religions to ensure a united religious presence in the very heart of mass communications. The guidelines gathered in this document have been drawn up in order to promote greater cooperation among Christians and with the representatives of other religions engaged in the field of communications. They aim to permit Catholics engaged in mass communications to carry out better their primary task of announcing and witnessing to their own faith, while at the same time favoring a better mutual understanding, both among Christians and with believers of other religions.

2. Cooperation among Christian communicators and with members of other religions working in the field of communications takes on a central importance in the relationship with public authorities and with communications officials for the preservation, promotion and coordination of the expression of a religious viewpoint in the media. For the most part, access to the mass communications media is permitted only in the context of an understanding among the different religious bodies who wish to take part in the public dialogue.

3. This document is concerned with concrete cooperation and does not deal directly with questions about doctrinal dialogue in communications programs or productions. It can be said, on the other hand, that the Catholic doctrinal and moral teaching is an irreplaceable reference point for Catholic communicators. It is the responsibility of the competent ecclesiastical authorities - on the different levels: local, national, continental and world - to safeguard the doctrinal and moral aspect of every communications activity. The responsible pastoral officials have the right and the duty to give their judgment and their specific directions in this regard. They will evaluate in each case the risks and the opportuneness of common initiatives, keeping in mind the necessity to safeguard the specific identity of Catholic initiatives.

4. Manipulation or base proselytism, at times practiced in the media, is incompatible with the ecumenical task and with the spirit of inter-religious cooperation, as the Word of God indicates and as the decisions of ecclesiastical authorities affirm.1 The growth today of new religious movements, often called "sects", which claim to be a form of evangelism, but which are at least partially inspired by non-Christian ideologies, is sometimes accompanied by proselytism fraught with serious consequences, accentuated by widespread diffusion through the communications media.

5. All cooperation will take into account the pastoral situation in each particular place. The communicators charged with ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation will have to be carefully prepared, prudent and keenly aware of their responsibilities.

Criteria for Ecumenical Cooperation in the Media

6. The era of communication and information that is taking shape today is contributing to the fashioning of a new sort of relationship between persons and communities. It requires an increasingly deeper unity on the part of Christians through the exercise of close cooperation.

The impulse towards ecumenical action and initiative comes from the message and the decisions of Vatican Council II,2 as well as from later Church documents indicating how these are to be applied and interpreted.3 They illustrate the unity which already exists among the Churches and Christian communities. Such an attitude can only make more credible the work and methods of evangelization in the service of the Kingdom

of God.

7. Ecumenical cooperation can be realized in every aspect of social communication. It is in itself a witness offered to the world. Because the mass media reach beyond the normal limits of space and time, this cooperation will be at one and the same time local, regional and international. At times, it will require the reciprocal participation of Catholic communicators in the communications initiatives of other Churches and Christian communities, and of other Christians in Catholic projects, as well as the formation of Christian working groups within secular communications organizations.

8. The manner of cooperation in social communications matters will depend to a large extent on the way in which communications actually work. The international Catholic communications organizations have for their task to make known these methods and to initiate pastors and the faithful to an effective presence in the communications aspect of contemporary society. Thus, ecumenical cooperation will require exchanges between the Catholic Church's international communications organizations and the corresponding organizations of the other Christian bodies. This cooperation will evidently also extend to the regional and local levels, according to the circumstances of each communications initiative.

9. Joint projects, undertaken when this seems opportune, have as their aim to allow Christians to give a common witness to Christ. It is not their purpose to weaken the authenticity of the Christian and ecclesial message, or to limit any specifically Catholic initiative.4

10. The application in practice of these general criteria demands that Catholics working in the media shall have a deep knowledge and a faithful practice of their faith. It requires reciprocal trust and understanding among Christians, based on mutual respect, and with a view to doing things together in communications. This implies that Catholic communications services and Catholics engaged in communications will provide fair and objective information on the ecumenical movement and on the other Christian Churches and communities. Such an obligation will never prevent the faithful presentation of the specifically Catholic message in all its fullness. Reciprocity often stumbles on practical questions such as differences in the organization of the social communications apostolate, or different approaches to the financing of it. It is indispensable that pastoral authorities take these practical problems into consideration and allow a fair sharing of financial resources and a harmonization of working practices.

11. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications encourages present and future efforts at ecumenical cooperation in the field of social communications.

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications is itself involved in seeking further forms of ecumenical cooperation, as discoveries in the media field open up new possibilities, with a view to avoiding fragmentation of effort where organization and planning are essential.

Priorities need to be defined by common accord regarding the specific areas in which ecumenical cooperation can best be exercised.5

12. The dynamism of Catholic organizations and Church institutions in the social communications apostolate is a fundamental condition for constructive ecumenical cooperation, as well as a guarantee that the Catholic message in its entirety will be safeguarded. In this connection, it is essential to develop on all levels of the Catholic social communications apostolate a team of Church personnel who are professionally competent, technically sophisticated and theologically well-grounded.

A more energetic cooperation in the apostolate among the international Catholic organizations for social communications (OCIC, UCIP and UNDA) 6 will be a help towards a better ecumenical collaboration.

13. The training of Catholic communicators must include serious ecumenical preparation, conducted in accordance with the directives of the Holy See 7 and of local and regional pastoral authorities.

14. It would be very useful if Christians would extend their cooperation to take in also the more recently developed media, especially in regard to the common use of satellites, data banks, and cable networks and in informatics generally, beginning with system-compatibility.

Criteria for Inter-Religious Cooperation in Communications

15. The era of communication and information taking shape today demands equally of all who live a religious faith and who are engaged in the service of public dialogue a mutual commitment for the good of humanity.

These guidelines for a joint response by Christians and members of other religions to the opportunities which arise in modern communications exchange reflect the spirit of the relevant decrees of Vatican Council II.8 Inter-religious understanding is based on the common quest by the world's great religions to make a fitting reply to the main questions regarding human destiny. A serious and continuing joining of efforts will help to overcome any tendency within the general public to have a superficial, superstitious, or magical understanding of religion.

16. Cooperation among the different religions can be realized in every aspect of social communication. This is already in itself a way of witnessing before the world. Because the media reach beyond the limits of space and time, this inter-religious cooperation will be at one and the same time local, regional and international.

Reciprocal agreements will sometimes be advisable between Catholic (and other Christian) communicators and the communications workers of other religions, as will be the formation of inter-religious working groups within secular communications organizations.

17. The manner of cooperation in social communications will depend to a large extent on the methods proper to the media. Interreligious cooperation will take into account the specific contexts of production and planning on the local, regional, national or international level.

18. Joint projects, undertaken when this seems opportune, have as their aim to allow Christians and members of other religions to give a common witness to God. It is not their purpose to weaken the Christian and ecclesial message or to limit any specifically Catholic initiative.

19. The application in practice of these general criteria demands that Catholics working in the media shall have a deep knowledge and a faithful practice of their faith. It requires reciprocal trust and understanding among Catholics, other Christians, and members of other religions, based on mutual respect, and with a view to doing things together in communications. This implies that Catholic communications services and Catholics engaged in communications will provide fair and objective information on other religions of humanity. Such an obligation will never prevent the faithful presentation of the specifically Catholic message in all its fullness.

Reciprocity often stumbles on practical questions such as differences in the organization of the social communications apostolate, or different approaches to the financing of it. It is indispensable that pastoral authorities take these practical problems into consideration and allow a fair sharing of financial resources and a harmonization of working practices.

20. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications encourages further efforts at cooperation with the members of other religions to promote religious and moral values in the field of social communications. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications is itself involved in seeking further forms of inter-religious cooperation, as discoveries in the media field open up new possibilities, with a view to avoiding fragmentation of effort where organization and planning are essential.

21. The dynamism of Catholic organizations and Church institutions in the social communications apostolate is a fundamental condition for constructive and effective inter-religious cooperation, as well as a guarantee that the Catholic message in its entirety will be safeguarded. In this connection, it is essential to develop on all levels of the Catholic social communications apostolate a team of Church personnel who are professionally competent, technically sophisticated and theologically well-grounded.

A more energetic cooperation in the apostolate among the international Catholic organizations for social communications (OCIC, UCIP and UNDA) (see note no.6) will be a help towards better cooperation with other religions.

22. A specific formation, in accord with the directives of the Holy See, is necessary to prepare Catholic

communicators better for cooperation with the members of other great religions in the work of communications .

23. An inter-religious understanding between Catholics and the members of other religions would be equally useful in regard to the more recently developed media, especially the common use of satellites, data banks, and cable networks and in informatics generally, beginning with system-compatibility.

Vatican City, October 4, 1989, Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi.

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Notes

(1) SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY - WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, Common Witness and Proselytism, "Information Service" 14 (1971), pp. 18-23; about the interpretation of the Scripture and the will of the ecclesial authorities on the unity of witness, see also: WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES / ROMAN CATHOLIC JOINT WORKING GROUP, Common Witness,"Information Service" 44 (1980), pp. 142-162.

(2) VATICAN COUNCIL II, Conciliar decree Unitatis redintegratio, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 1965, esp. pp. 99-100 n. 12.

(3) PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, Pastoral Instruction Communio et progressio, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 1971, pp. 628-630, n. 96-100; SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, Directorium ad ea quae a Concilio Vaticano II de re oecumenica promulgata sunt exsequenda, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 1967, pp. 574-592 (an updated edition is scheduled for publication in 1989); PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, Critères généraux pour la collaboration æcuménique dans les communications sociales, "Bulletin d'information" 80 (1971), pp. 65-66 (updated by this present document). See also: SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue, "Information Service" 12 (1970), pp. 5-11; Common Witness and Proselytism, "Information Service" 14 (1971), pp. 18-23; Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National and Local Levels, "Information Service"26(1975),pp.8-31; Sects or New Religious Movements: Pastoral Challenge,"lnformation Service" 61 (1986), pp. 144-154.

(4) There already exist the formulas of the ecumenical jury (e.g., those of Cannes, Locarno, Montreal, Berlin...), of the ecumenical television week (sponsored by UNDA, the international Catholic organization for radio and television, and WACC, the World Association of Christian Communicators), of ecumenical publications on communications (Comunicación), of joint meetings (Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada-Associated Church Press, USA), of ecumenical foundations (Interfaith Media Foundation), of reciprocal consultations, of mutual financial aid, of common promotion and consultation with secular networks. It is important to discern the value of such initiatives and to see what further forms of common ecumenical projects there can be. Those common ecumenical projects which have precise and concrete themes will be all the more useful.

(5) For example: whether or not to sponsor a joint celebration of World Communications Day, taking advantage of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for joint initiatives in the communications media, the expression of commonly shared opinions on doctrinal and ethical questions, the establishment of an ecumenical recognition for meritorious service in the field of social communications, the preparation of joint catalogs...

(6) OCIC: International Catholic Organization for Cinema and Audiovisuals (General secretariat, B-1040 Brussels, 8 rue de l'Orme); UCIP:International Catholic Union of the Press (General secretariat, CH-1211 Geneva 20 CIC, 37 39 rue de Vermont); UNDA: International Catholic organization for radio and television (General secretariat, B-1040 Brussels, 12 rue de l'Orme).

(7) Cf. SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, Directorium ad ea quae a Concilio Vaticano Secundo de re oecumenica promulgata sunt exsequenda. Pars altera: De re oecumenica in institutione superiore, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 1970, pp. 705-724; CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, Ordinationes ad constitutionem apostolicam "Sapientia Christiana" rite exsequendam, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 1979, pp. 500-521 (p. 513, art. 51, Indications on the Teaching of Ecumenism among Theological Matters).

(8) VATICAN COUNCIL II, Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 1966, pp. 740-744; SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS, Towards the Meeting of Religions, Suggestions for Dialogue, "Bulletin" (supplement n. 3) 1967, pp. 1-51; IDEM, The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions, Bulletin 1984, pp. 126-141; COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH JUDAISM, Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration "Nostra Aetate" (n. 4), "Information Service" 26 (1975), pp. 1-7.