

ON THE EMERGENCE OF AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN MISSION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECUMENICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONDUCT RELATING TO CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN A MULTIRELIGIOUS WORLD

In a process lasting five years a working group comprising representatives of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) elaborated the draft of a joint code of ethics for Christian commitment to mission, which was ultimately published in 2011 in Geneva under the heading 'Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct'.

This document can be seen as an 'internal Christian code of ethics for mission'.¹ It comprises a set of recommendations on the nature of missionary work in which there is a special focus on the relationship with other religions. The code of ethics, which was signed by Jean-Louis Pierre Tauran (President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue), Geoff Tunnicliffe (World Evangelical Alliance) and Olav Fykse Tveit (General Secretary of the World Council of Churches), incorporates twelve principles which emphasise the missionary task of the Christian churches whilst simultaneously appealing for respect for the beliefs of non-Christians.²

In its Principles the oecumenical document speaks about:

- Acting in God's Love
- Following in the Footsteps of Jesus Christ
- Christian Values
- Acts of Service and Justice
- Responsible Approach within the healing Services
- Refusal of Violence
- Religious and Spiritual Freedom
- Mutual Respect and Solidarity
- Respect for all Human Beings
- Not to give false Witness
- Ensuring personal Commitment and
- Abuilding inter-religious Relations

On the development of the ecumenical recommendations for conduct

Preliminary work on the drafting of the document began in 2006, when 27 representatives of various religions met in **Lariano, Italy**, for the international conference 'Conversion: Assessing the Reality', organised on the initiative of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and

¹ Cf. Troll, Christian/Schirmmacher, Thomas, Der innerchristliche Ethikkodex für Mission: Eine Einführung, in: 'Materialdienst' journal of the EKD Institute for Research on Religious and Ideological Issues (EZW), Berlin, 74 (2011), no. 8, pp. 293-295

² The representatives of the Catholic Church, the World Evangelical Alliance and the World Council of Churches were thus acting on behalf of the churches to which approximately 90 per cent of Christians worldwide belong.

the Office for Interreligious Relations and Dialogue of the World Council of Churches. This focussed specifically on questions of religious freedom considered from the perspectives of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and the Yoruba religion. The conference concluded by formulating a joint commitment to religious freedom. The representatives of the Christian churches agreed to pursue an ecumenical dialogue on questions related to mission in order to continue this process of consultation. A working group comprising representatives of the Holy See, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance was set up. In the following years it met several times in Geneva (Bossey) and Rome to draft a code of ethics for Christian mission.³

As part of this dialogue process, representatives of the various Christian churches met the following year, 2007, at the Institute for Religious Studies and the Theology of the Religions (ISTR) in **Toulouse, France**. Attending an international theological conference entitled 'Towards an Ethical Approach to Conversion – Christian Witness in a Multireligious World', they discussed questions of mission in the context of families, schools, education, legislation, business, politics and violence and compiled a catalogue of questions and problems. The point of departure for both theological reflection and thoughts on principles of Christian witness was provided by pastoral and missionary issues relating to these subject areas. All the participants agreed that the freedom (of choice) of the dialogue partners should invariably be respected in the process of Christian mission and, in particular, that any form of violence, intimidation or threat (including the use of drugs and brainwashing) should, therefore, be inadmissible.

Four years later, in 2011, representatives of the various churches met in **Bangkok, Thailand**, to conclude work on a draft joint code of ethics, which by this time was well advanced. The meeting in Bangkok made it clear once again that all Christian denominations have a vested interest in 'generating joint internal Christian dialogue on the limits of religious freedom and on unethical methods of mission. The participants in the Bangkok consultations succeeded in drawing up a draft code of ethics, which is largely identical with the document signed six months later in Geneva in June 2011 by senior representatives of the Catholic Church, the World Evangelical Alliance and the World Council of Churches.

The group of ecumenical signatories, in particular, must be seen as one of the outstanding features of the document 'Christian Witness in a Multireligious World: Recommendations for Conduct', which deems that the church is missionary by its very nature⁴ and states unequivocally that mission should invariably be guided by charity, compassion, humility and integrity.⁵ The code of conduct is the first ever document on missionary work to be signed jointly by the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance. For that reason alone it represents an ecumenical milestone in the history of mission.

³ The dialogue process was steered by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the Office for Interreligious Relations and Dialogue of the World Council of Churches (IRRD), and the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) and Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance.

⁴ Cf. *Ad Gentes* 2

⁵ The presence of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) among the signatories was especially noteworthy. The preparation of ecumenical studies on issues such as interreligious or inter-faith marriages (1994-1997), inter-faith or interreligious prayer (1997-1998) and African religiosity (since 2000) had previously been limited to collaboration between the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).