

POLICY OF THE FEDERATION WITH REGARD TO ROMAN CATHOLICISM:

A. General policy and relations with Pax Romana:

The General Committee was informed that Pax Romana was most willing to continue to hold consultations with WSCF, but that it would be easier if these consultations dealt with questions of culture, modern secularism, politics, etc., rather than with doctrine. Local contacts would depend greatly upon the approval of the bishop of each diocese.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Federation should continue both to engage in such bi-lateral consultations and also to meet Pax Romana within the framework of such bodies as WUS, UNESCO, etc.
2. Whether or not the above mentioned consultation with Pax Romana is held, the Federation should certainly hold some consultation exclusively devoted to Roman Catholic questions before the next General Committee.
3. We favour the participation of Roman Catholic fraternal delegates in Federation and SCM meetings whenever possible and hope that similar invitations may be extended by Roman Catholic conferences to WSCF and SCM representatives.
4. We recognise that the ecumenical nature of the Federation compels us to seek encounter with all other Christian groups, including Roman Catholic groups. But we realise, at the same time, that there are some countries where this encounter might lead to even more division and difficulties. The Federation should, therefore suggest that national and local SCMs study the desirability of meeting Roman Catholic groups for study, discussion and prayer (especially with regard to the observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity), and act accordingly. We wish to add that true ecumenical encounter must include not only personal contacts, but also a proper appreciation of the doctrine and discipline of the churches whose members are involved.

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B. Latin America:

The Latin American delegates to the General Committee have given the following description of the situation in Latin America in relation to Roman Catholicism and the policy which Latin American SCMs seek to follow:

The nature of Roman Catholicism in Latin America and its attitude toward the non-Roman churches creates a most difficult position for the SCMs of that region as they attempt to define their wider ecumenical responsibility. An effort has been made in this regard in the three international conferences sponsored by the Federation in Latin America since 1952, especially that of Matanzas, to which reference is made in this statement.

Two factors are especially important in this situation:

1. The Roman Catholic Church in Latin America not only affirms that it is the only true Church, but also, as a result of its dominant position for three centuries,

often insists that it alone has the right to exist and propagate its faith. In certain instances, it has sought and used political power to control the work of the evangelical churches and even used violence to persecute it. "These acts have produced deep wounds in the Christian family and grave tensions, the reality of which we cannot ignore (Matanzas Conference)."



2. "Another factor in this problem is the corruption of Roman Catholic piety. The so-called veneration of the Virgin Mary has become adoration and has displaced the person of Christ in the centre of the religious life of that church. A mass of superstitions, born out of syncretism with pagan religions, tolerated and at times encouraged by the Roman Catholic Church, are indicative of popular piety." As a result, the great mass of Latin American people tends either to accept these superstitions, or to be openly irreligious and anticlerical, the latter being more common among university students in many places. In this situation the SCMs have attempted to work out their position in humility and in recognition that all our churches live under God's judgement. At the same time, they feel that their obedience to Jesus Christ in the university leads them to the following conclusions:

a. That the large percentage of students who have no clear Christian faith, be they openly atheistic or merely nominal Catholics, constitutes a mission field in which the SCM is called to evangelistic witness. It must simply be recognised that most students from this group who come to a vital Christian faith through this witness do not feel called to the fellowship of the R.C. Church and must be helped by the SCM to find a spiritual home in another church.

b. That the possibility of R.C. students becoming members of local SCMs raises serious problems that cannot easily be solved by general rules. On the one hand, the local SCM groups are open to all students who come to them. On the other hand, they are guided by the Constitution of the Federation which affirms that its purpose is to "lead students to accept the Christian faith in God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - according to the Scriptures". This is interpreted in Latin America as a Protestant statement, and, accordingly, the SCM is normally considered a Protestant movement. In some cases, as in Bolivia for example, practicing R.C.s are members of the SCM. In such a situation it is important to remember that the movement has a responsibility to all students who come to it and that such students may find themselves in a difficult situation which requires all Christian understanding and sympathy.

c. That the local SCM should take advantage of every opportunity for encounter with R.C. groups in the university for study, discussion, and prayer. Ecclesiastical restrictions from the Roman Hierarchy, and suspicions and lack of confidence on the part of many SCM members, often make this very difficult; but such meetings are now taking place in some countries and should be encouraged.

The Latin American Movements recognise that their position is a special one. "We are conscious of the danger, in this tragic situation, of forgetting the weakness and errors of our own churches and the need of daily submitting ourselves to the judgement of Christ and of asking God to renew and reform us constantly. However.... we believe that the above description of our situation is fundamentally right, and we ask that the members of the WSCF on other continents have confidence in us, just as we accept the testimony of our European brethren that their relations with the R.C. Church are different from ours."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Federation recognises that the Latin American SCMs are attempting to fulfil their ecumenical responsibilities in a difficult situation and grants the validity of the policy which they are following, and pledges the support of its study and prayer.

FRANCE. C.

The General Committee decided to receive the following statement presented by the French SCM delegation about the relationship between the French SCM and Roman Catholicism, and to commend it to the attention of Federation members.

The French SCM considers that it may be useful for the Federation to be informed about the special situation of some of its branches in the field of relations with R.Cs. The situation is not rendered unusual by the fact that groups of the French SCM meet Catholic student associations on various occasions to discuss controversial points with them and to pray together; but rather by the fact that in certain branches, half of the membership and half of the responsibility sometimes lies in the hands of R.Cs. who are fully aware of the implications of their Roman Catholic faith and are living this faith within their church. We have thus, in effect, an interconfessionalism which gives a certain direction to the whole life of the branch and which becomes evident particularly in Bible study and common worship.

Doubtless, this experiment is only possible because Roman Catholicism in France is in many respects avant garde. It is made easier by the unusual openness of certain French Catholics with regard to the question of Christian unity, following the ideas of Abbé Couturier: "unity as God wills it, when He wills it, and by the means that He will choose." The R.Cs. and Protestants who work along these lines within the French SCM are the first to realise how ambiguous and limited this ecumenical experiment is. They are aware that it is a real adventure in which the strength of God must every day be made perfect in their weakness. In this adventure they try to avoid all proselytism and often gain a clearer understanding, experience a keener sense of suffering because of their divisions, and are each strengthened in his own faith.

We do not propose that the Federation should study this particular experiment in the coming years with a view of drawing from it a general policy toward Roman Catholicism; we simply ask the Federation to help us in the study of the problems arising from that experiment, problems that will become more acute if this situation, which is at present that of a small minority, should become some day a general one. The increasing number of R.Cs. in the SCM in Schools should make us extremely watchful in this matter.

We also ask the Federation to consider favourably the hope which this experiment may contain for our relations with Roman Catholicism, a hope which God will fulfil, if it is his pleasure.

