

# Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue

The involvement of lay associations in the field of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue was the theme of an important seminar, held in our offices on 22-23 June 2001, and organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity in collaboration with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. Apart from the offices of the Roman Curia concerned, the meeting was attended by representatives of the Conference of Catholic International Organizations, some CIOs, and various ecclesial movements and new communities.

Discussion focused on the problems arising from the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue initiated by many international lay associations. Their missionary impetus has led to the birth of new forms of dialogue and cooperation of Catholics with their Christian brothers of other Churches and communities and with the believers of other religions. This encounter between different religious experiences has given rise to new and sometimes complex situations that require careful discernment and appropriate guidance.

Introduced by Cardinal James Francis Stafford, the scope and aims of the seminar were set by Msgr. Rino Fisichella, auxiliary bishop of Rome, with a report on: "Questions, needs and challenges of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the light of the mission of the Church in the global and multicultural society".

The first day was dedicated to ecumenical dialogue. The speakers were Cardinal Walter

Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, who spoke of the "Contribution of the lay faithful and associations of faithful to the promotion of Christian unity, in the light of the Magisterium and in the current situation of the ecumenical movement". His report was followed by a round table on the experiences of the ecumenical involvement of the lay associations; the discussion was enlivened by contributions from exponents of Communion and Liberation, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the Focolare Movement and the *Communauté Chemin Neuf*.

The second day was dedicated to interreligious dialogue. It was opened by a report by Msgr. Michael Fitzgerald, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, on the "Contribution of the lay faithful and the associations of faithful to interreligious dialogue, in the light of the Magisterium and in the current historical and cultural phase". The experiences of interreligious dialogue of the lay associations were discussed at the round table that followed, at which exponents of the International Catholic Conference of Scouting, the St. Egidio Community and the *Communauté de l'Arche* intervened. In the afternoon, Prof. Giorgio Feliciani and Father Gianfranco Ghirlanda, SJ, examined the question of the "Participation of Christians of other Churches and communities and of believers of other religions in the life of the lay associations, both Catholic and interconfessional, in the light of canon law".

The proceedings of the seminar will be published in the series of studies *Laity Today*.