In 1998 the World Council of Churches will celebrate a fiftieth anniversary with its VIIIth Assembly, probably at Harare, Zimbabwe. At the dawn of the third millennium, Christianity is still torn apart in various traditions, which are not in full communion with one another. Some of them live in a state of separation for more than a thousand years. Others, newly founded, do not even seek communion and prefer to remain independent from the older churches, which some of them would rather consider as having contributed to the oppression of their people, and therefore as being no longer worthy to be called Christian churches at all. Some, children of the European Enlightenment, having seen the failure of so many ‘grand stories’ of justice and liberation, would even put the ecumenical movement under that same verdict and give up the ecumenical ideal in a world full of fragmentation, pluralism, differences: why not live without unity, without any claims for binding truth at all? Still others call for the certainties of the past or claim to possess the fundamentals, which are valid for all. They seek refuge in isolation and dogmatism and plead for powerful leadership and discipline, if necessary excommunicating those who do not agree to their fundamentals of truth.

The ecumenical ship must manoeuvre between this Scylla of post-modern scepticism and the Charybdis of pre-modern fundamentalism. It must bring together the divided traditions of the former Byzantine and Latin civilisation with the independent movements from the New Worlds of Africa, the Americas and Asia. It is, moreover, seriously handicapped by the lack of collaboration and coordination between the different instruments of the ecumenical movement: the World Council of Churches, the Christian World Communions and among them, the Roman Catholic Communion of Churches especially.

In its draft policy statement Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of The World Council of Churches, the member churches of the World Council characterize themselves as ‘a people of the resurrection, proclaiming in joy and confidence, in midst of exclusion and despair, life in all its fullness’ and ‘which bid farewell to the misplaced certainty and confidence of the secular modern world’. The same policy statement speaks about

'regular working relationships' of the Roman Catholic Church with the Council, which is 'an active participant and a valued partner'. It glorifies the 'one ecumenical movement, inspired and guided by God's Spirit to move us towards making visible the unity which God has given us'. Similar phrases we may find in Pope John Paul II's encyclical Ut unum sint, published May, 1995. Many would claim that these lofty words do not reflect realistically the fact, that the fellowship of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Communion of Churches, are both impoverished by the absence of the other and that this situation substantially harms the oneness of the ecumenical movement and the credibility of Christian mission.

In this article I will first try to analyze briefly - in three theses - the actual situation of the ecumenical movement from a Roman Catholic point of view and the Roman catholic stake in it (1). Next to that I will describe three different ecclesiological perspectives, which seem to hinder closer collaboration between the WCC and the RCC (2). Finally I will submit seven proposals for further conciliar collaboration towards and beyond the year 2000 (3).

1. The ecumenical situation: three Roman Catholic points of view

1.1. Any ecumenical movement on a world level, which would not engage the Roman Catholic Communion of Churches, would only apply to the lesser half of World-Christianity. Any Roman Catholic ecumenism, that would not consider itself a part of the one ecumenical movement, would neither deserve the name of ecumenism nor of catholicism.

The one ecumenical movement towards the koinonia of all the members of the one body of Christ, engages both the older and the younger ecclesial traditions. Ecumenism did not start in the 19th or 20th century, but accompanied the Church of Christ from the very beginning. Local communities of rather diverse origin were mutually enriched and enabled in the Holy Spirit to overcome their conflicts and to become members of the same Christian family in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of God. Paul's Epistles (e.g. Gal. 3,28; 1 Cor. 12, 13; cf. Eph. 4,4-6) and the writings of the early Church Fathers reflect this unity in diversity, between Jewish and pagan christianity, between Greek, Roman, Asian, African and

2 Ibid., p. 7.
3 Ibid., p.22
6 For details about collaboration thus far I refer to a previous article on the theme of RCC-WCC relations in The Ecumenical Review 40(1988), 473-487.