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The Editor
New Blackfriars

Dear Fergus,
May I take up one point raised by your excellent Comment on *Harare 1996* in the January *New Blackfriars*: the point of the advisability or otherwise of the Roman Catholic Church becoming a full member of the World Council of Churches?

The question is always raised in that way — of the R.C. *Church* becoming *a* member; but there is almost no other "Church", in the same sense that is simply a member; certainly not what you call the "Orthodox Church". I think it is true that there are several Orthodox Churches that are members, while there are also some that are not. There are, of course,also several Anglican Churches that are members in addition to the Church of England — for example "the Church of the Province of South Africa". These Churches call themselves parts, members, of "the Anglican Communion"; they include also the Episcopalian Churches of Scotland and the U.S.A, and the Church of Ireland.

The key word here is "Communion". The Catholic Church does not have to be envisaged simply as one, monolithic unitary Church; with the emphasis now being placed by ecclesiologists, including those who represent a specifically Roman theology, on the concept of Communion, the Catholic Church can very properly be regarded as a Communion of local Churches.

So it seems to me that decisions on whether or not to seek full membership of the World Council of Churches could —and should — be taken at the level of local Churches, by their Bishops' Conferences. Thus, for example (I am just guessing), the Catholic Churches in Germany, in Brazil (or CELAM, Latin America as a whole), in Zimbabwe and in South Africa, might think it worth while joining, and also some Eastern rite Catholic Church like the Maronites, while the Catholic Churches of the British Isles, Australia, Spain, Japan, say, decided otherwise. That the Holy See itself, that is to say the local Church of Rome, should continue to refrain from joining would no doubt be wise, for the reason you give, that "it might accelerate schismatic tendencies in the Catholic Church".

May I refer you to a book published last year in a series called *Ut Unum Sint, Papal Primacy and the Episcopate* by Michael J. Buckley, SJ., in particular to his fourth chapter, "Unity as Communion"?

Edmund Hill, O.P.

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