'The Ecumenical Movement can be viewed as a success.' Evaluate this view with reference to Christianity

The World Council of Churches was formed in 1948. It arose from three earlier movements that originated out of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. These movements were "Faith and Order", "Life and work", and "the International Missionary Council". In order to decide whether the Movement has been a success, it is necessary to measure it against its objectives. Amongst its objectives is the visible unity of Christianity as one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, and to express that faith and fellowship through worship, witness and service in order that the world may believe. However, it is questionable whether unity has been achieved. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church remains outside the World Council of churches. Given the Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination, its absence as a member suggests a serious lack of unity amongst Christians. The Roman Catholic Church is also not the only denomination to be non-members. There are also a number of evangelical churches that remain outside the World Council of Churches.

Actually there is evidence to argue that there is growing diversity rather than unity among Christians. The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity estimates that the number of Christian denominations during the last 100 years has grown from 1 600 to 43 000. However it could be argued that these figures are slightly misleading as they reflect different organisations rather than different beliefs. Also, although the Roman Catholic Church is not a full member it does have participating observers and joins in certain events. It does seem that some progress on Christian unity has been achieved even though there remains much to do.

Doctrine has, not surprisingly, been an area where unity has been difficult. The World Council of Churches has failed to develop a common ecumenical theology and ecclesiology. It has been more successful in presenting a coherent Christian message on global issues such as poverty and fair trade. The number of Christians is increasing worldwide, even though it is declining in the Western countries. It could be argued that mission and witness has shown some success but how far that is down to the World Council of Churches is difficult to say. Overall, the picture is mixed regards success or failure. It depends which objective one is considering.

'The World Council of Churches can never achieve its aims until the Roman Catholic Church becomes a member.' Evaluate this view.

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination. However, it is not a member of the World Council of Churches. If the aim of the World Council of Churches is to achieve Christian unity, then it is difficult to see how it can do so. How can Christian unity be achieved when the largest denomination is not involved? It could be argued that a majority of denominations are part of the World Council of Churches so a large measure of unity is possible to achieve. Indeed, many Christian denominations share views on major doctrines and the Council has successfully initiated conversations between a wide range of Christian denominations. However, other evidence suggests that the diversity has widened. It

seems that even those present members of the World Council of Churches can't even achieve unity. The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity estimates that Christian denominations have increased in the last 100 years from 1600 to 43000. Even those who are members do not exhibit Christian unity. The World Council of Churches has failed to develop a common ecumenical theology and ecclesiology. Real unitive progress is impossible unless these issues can be resolved. In many ways the Christian Church seems often marginalised in society.

Mission has also been an area of disunity, with the emphasis moving between the horizontal (reconciliation between humanity) and the vertical (reconciliation with God). The evangelicals particularly arguing that the vertical was being ignored in statements about mission. However, there has been some success in striking a balance between preaching the Gospel and social responsibility.

The Roman Catholic Church is not the only non-member denomination. There are a number of evangelical churches who remain outside of the world Council of Churches. But the Council has achieved success in presenting a coherent Christian message on global issues such as poverty and free trade.