

RELATIONS WITH THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES

Conversations between representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church

Joint Communiqué

From December 6th to 10th, 1970, at Bari in Italy there took place a series of conversations between representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. The theme of the discussions was: "The role of the Christian in the developing society". The conversations were a continuation of those held in Leningrad in December 1967 on the general theme of the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

Taking part in the conversations from the side of the Russian Orthodox Church were: His Eminence Mons. Nikodim, Metropolitan of Leningrad and Novgorod, President of the Office for External Ecclesiastical Affairs of the Patriarchate of Moscow (Chairman of the Orthodox delegation); Very Rev. Archpriest Liverii Voronov, professor of dogmatic theology at the Leningrad Theological Academy; Revd. Fr. Kyrill Gundiaev, instructor of dogmatic theology at the same Academy; Mr. Alexei S. Bouievsky, secretary of the Office for External Affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate; Mr. Vladimir Kotelkin, official of the same Office. Roman Catholic participants were: Very Revd. Jérôme Hamer, O.P., Secretary of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (Chairman of the Catholic delegation); Monsignor Charles Moeller, Under-Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; Mons. Joseph Gremillion, Secretary of the Pontifical Commission "Justice and Peace"; Mons. Pietro Pavan, Rector of the Pontifical Lateran University (Rome); Revd. Prof. Louis Bouyer, former professor at the Institute Catholique of Paris and visiting professor at Brown University (U.S.A.); Revd. Fr. John Long, S.J., head of the department for the Oriental Churches of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity; Rev. André Joos, official of the same Secretariat; Revd. Michael Arranz, S.J., professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute (Rome). His Eminence, John Cardinal Willebrands, President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, assisted at the concluding session of the conversations.

The conversations opened on the evening of December 6th with an address of welcome by His

Excellency, Mons. Enrico Nicodemo, Archbishop of Bari and member of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. After recalling that Bari has a long history of being a centre for meetings between Christians of the East and the West, Archbishop Nicodemo stressed the importance of the theme chosen. Questions of peace, social justice and development are the preoccupations of all the Christian Churches. Christians must search out the ways to assure that an integrated development of the spirit accompanies the material and technical development which is taking place throughout the world. Father Jérôme Hamer opened the conversations from the Roman Catholic side. He explained that the theme was proposed in order that, in the new situation in which society finds itself as described in the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, a study might be made of the specific role of the Christian, based on Christ, on revelation and on tradition of the Church. This role is different from a merely humanistic one. The Church strives to give the Christian a formation which makes it possible for him to assume his personal responsibilities in the world. In his opening address, His Eminence Metropolitan Nikodim summed up the work of the previous meetings. He noted the development of both Catholic teaching on social questions and also of the method of expressing this teaching. Differences concerning both the meaning and application of certain concepts of social questions still exist. However there is an increased tendency to engage the world in a dialogue which is open to contributions from Christians as well as from those who have other differing convictions. It is in this context that we must consider how the Christian develops his own spiritual life and struggles against all evil in private and social life. In concrete situations he must not only struggle against evil but must make a positive contribution to the good. Thus, in the society which is developing today, a Christian along with evangelization has the task of contributing to reconciliation among men and to achieving peace and social justice in the world as an aid to this process of development.

The main part of the conversations revolved around three topics, each presented by a Catholic and an Orthodox participant. Fr. Louis Bouyer and Father Kyrill presented studies on: "Personal formation and the contribution to the building up of

human society ". They considered various aspects of the relationships between contemplation and action, between doctrine and practice, between retirement from the world and presence in it. In assuming his responsibilities in social life, the Christian must see to it that his actions remain in conformity with the Christian teaching he professes.

Father Liverii Voronov and Mons. Charles Møller considered a series of questions related to the Christian understanding of development as well as the service and involvement of Christians as members of the " city of God " in the life and activity of the " earthly city ", i.e. in the developing world of today. There was extended discussion of the concept: the " heavenly city " and the " earthly city ", and the profound relationship existing between them. A better understanding of this relationship should help the Christian in the concrete situations of his service to the world which is undergoing many changes today.

Mons. Pietro Pavan and Mr. Alexei Bouievsky presented studies on: " The eternity of God's Word and the relativity of his incarnation in the successive civilisations ". God's Word is eternal but it is always new and always actual. The Christian should respond to God's action in him according to the concrete situations of his life. This calls for a better understanding of how to give Christian witness in today's world as well as for a searching out of concrete ways to serve the common good of society in cooperation among Christians themselves and also with those who profess other religions or who are non-believers.

The discussion following the presentation of these three basic topics revealed the many aspects of the fundamental question which still needs further study. Among the concepts touched upon during the conversations were two points: 1) Christian ascetism and service to mankind with special reference to the role of the monastic life in the modern world; 2) man's active cooperation in God's creative work; 3) the relationship between the community of the Church and the wider human family; 4) how Christians working together can help make the world more human; 5) how to be an authentic Christian totally faithful to his own principles and at the same time be a loyal cooperator with those who are also working for a better development of society but who do not have a Christian vision of the world.

At the end of the conversations, it was decided that further study on the themes mentioned above would be made by both sides. This will be the subject of conversations to be held in the future.

The conversations took place in an open and cordial atmosphere. Though the reports presented by the Roman Catholics and the Russian Orthodox participants had been prepared independently, the

many common ideas which came out of them show how close both Churches are in their understanding of the fundamental Christian teaching concerning the relationship of God to the world and the role the Christian must play in the world under frequently changing circumstances.

The conversations were not merely an exchange of scholarly ideas. They were marked by a spirit of common prayer. Thus on Sunday, December 6th, feast day of St. Nicholas, His Eminence Metropolitan Nikodim celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the tomb of St. Nicholas in the presence of the Roman Catholic delegation. Immediately afterwards the delegation of the Patriarchate of Moscow assisted in places of honour, at the solemn Mass celebrated by His Excellency, Archbishop Enrico Nicodemo, at the end of which the Catholic and Orthodox prelates exchanged a kiss of peace at the tomb of the Saint who belongs to both traditions and is widely venerated in the East and in the West.

During the stay in Bari, the members of the two delegations were guests of the Archbishop of Bari at the Casa del Clero. They visited a number of places of religious and historical interest in the region including the cathedral of Bitonto and Trani, the monastery of Our Lady " della Scala " at Noci and the Institute for Ecumenical Theology in Bari.

Before and after the conversation at Bari, the delegation of the Patriarchate of Moscow visited various places of historical and, particularly, of religious interest in Italy. In many basilicas and churches of Rome they prayed at the shrines of saints which are venerated by both Churches. They were able to become acquainted with some of the Roman Catholic educational institutions in Rome. On December 11th and 12th they travelled to Ravenna and Florence, where they were guests of His Excellency Archbishop Salvatore Baldassarri and His Eminence Ermenegildo Cardinal Florit. On Sunday, December 13th they celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the Catacombs of Domitilla, after which they were the guests of the abbot and the monks of Subiaco. On December 14th they were received in audience by His Holiness Pope Paul VI. The delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church will leave for Moscow on December 16th.

NIKODIM

Metropolitan of Leningrad and Novgorod
President of the Office for External Church
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fr. JÉRÔME HAMER, o.p.
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