

COMMUNIQUE OF THE *BILATERAL CONVERSATIONS* BETWEEN THE DELEGATIONS
OF THE HOLY SEE AND THE PATRIARCHATE OF MOSCOW

Cassano delle Murge (Bari), May 7-8, 1997

On the 7-8 of May 1997 in Bari, Italy, the place where the holy relics of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia are kept, and in the framework of earlier agreements, a regular Bilateral Meeting was held between the delegations of the Holy See and the Patriarchate of Moscow, headed respectively by Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and His Eminence Kirill, Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, Chairman of the Department for external Church relations of the Moscow Patriarchate. Representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Greek-Catholic Church in Western Ukraine and Transcarpathia were invited to take part in the conversations.

The meeting took place at the time when the translation of the holy and healing relics of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker from Myra in Lycia to Bari is celebrated. Both delegations participated in the festivities dedicated to this memorable event.

During the meeting a wide range of problems were considered, connected with the relations between the Greek-Catholics and the Orthodox in Ukraine.

1. Both parties stated the need to activate efforts of reconciliation and to eradicate every form of violence, whether it be physical, verbal or moral. "The first step to take is to put an end to everything that can foment division, contempt and hatred between the Churches" (*Uniatism, Method of Union of the past, and the present search for full communion*, Document of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, Balamand, 1993, n. 21).

2. In connection with many questions which arise among believers of both churches, as to the significance and meaning of the Balamand Statement, both parties pointed out that it would be opportune to carry out a detailed theological analysis of the basic ecclesiological and pastoral aspects of the document. The Balamand Statement should not become a factor of new divisions between the faithful of our Churches.

3. Both parties stressed that it is inadmissible that expressions in the spirit of nationalism and con-

fessional intolerance should appear in the mass media and especially in the ecclesiastical press, and they call upon the faithful of both Churches to abstain from sharp and insulting statements. "Still more, the evangelical ethos requires that statements or manifestations which are likely to perpetuate a state of conflict and hinder the dialogue be avoided" (*ibid*, n. 28).

4. It was agreed to seek the solution of problems according to church norms and in a Christian manner, avoiding the intervention of outside parties, which often ignore principles of religious freedom and rights and could have their own material or political interests. In fact, Saint Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians invites his fellow Christians to try to solve their problems among themselves in the spirit of Christian brotherhood (*1 Cor* 6,1-10).

5. Both parties examined some worrying situations, particularly in Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv, and expressed their intention to seek a solution to them urgently.

6. In difficult situations, which are connected with the division of ecclesiastical buildings and church properties, in particular when in one place there is only one church and two communities of different number, one Orthodox and one Greek-Catholic, both parties recommend that the principle of majority be applied, as was agreed by the Delegations of the Holy See and Moscow Patriarchate in 1990.

7. Both parties recommend that in order to overcome obstacles to peaceful coexistence and provide, where possible, mutually agreeable solutions, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Greek-Catholic Church in Ukraine establish a joint working group, headed by two bishops, one from each Church.

The earliest possible relieving of tensions in Ukraine has special significance for the normalisation of relations between Orthodox and Catholics at a time when they are preparing for the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Coming of Christ the Saviour into the world. May the Lord Himself help us in this through the prayers of His Most Pure Mother and of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker.

Information Service 95 (1997) 108