

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX ROMAN CATHOLIC
CONVERSATIONS AT ODESSA
March 1980

Joint communique

At the theological seminary of Odessa in the Soviet Union from March 13-17 there was held the fifth series of theological conversations between representatives of the Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. Preceding conversations took place at Leningrad (USSR) in 1967, Bari (Italy) in 1970, Zagorsk (USSR) in 1973, and finally in Trent (Italy) in 1975.

Those who took part in the Odessa conversations were:

For the Catholic Church:

— Cardinal Jan Willebrands, Archbishop of Utrecht, president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity;

— Archbishop Antoine Hacault of St. Boniface, president of the ecumenical commission of the Canadian bishops' conference and member of the Secretariat for Christian Unity;

— Archbishop Lucas Moreira Neves, secretary of the Congregation for Bishops;

— Canon Jacques Desseaux, secretary of the ecumenical commission of the French bishops' conference and consultor of the Secretariat for Christian Unity;

— Father Pierre Duprey, undersecretary of the Secretariat for Christian Unity;

— Father Emmanuel Lanne, OSB, of the Benedictine monastery of Chevetogne (Belgium), consultor of the Secretariat for Christian Unity;

— Father Stjepan Schmidt, SJ, official of the Secretariat for Christian Unity;

— Father John Long, SJ, official of the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

For the Russian Orthodox Church:

— Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev and Halych, patriarchal exarch of the Ukraine;

— Archbishop Vladimir Dmitrov, rector of the theological academy and the seminary of Moscow;

— Bishop Ilian of Solnetchnogorsk;

— Archpriest Livery Voronov, professor of the theological academy and the seminary of Leningrad;

— Archpriest Vassily Stoikov, professor of the theological academy of Leningrad;

— Archimandrite Augustin (Nikitine), professor of the theological academy of Leningrad;

— Archpriest Vladimir Mustafin, professor of the theological academy of Leningrad;

— Mr. A.S. Buevsky, secretary of the Department of Foreign Church Affairs of the Patriarchate of Moscow;

— Mr. A.I. Ossipov, professor of the theological academy of Moscow;

— Mr. K.E. Skourat, professor of the theological academy of Moscow;

— Mr. V.V. Ivanov, professor of the theological academy of Moscow;

— Metropolitan Sergio of Odessa and Kherson attended the conversations as guest of honor.

Metropolitan Filaret and Cardinal Willebrands presided over the work. Before beginning the colloquy, the participants took part in a liturgical prayer service in the Church of the Virgin's Assumption at the monastery of Odessa.

The conversations were opened by Metropolitan Filaret, who placed them in the context of the development of relations between the two churches. He highlighted the interrelationship between these conversations and the preparation of the pan-Orthodox dialogue with the Catholic Church. Finally, Metropolitan Filaret read a report by Metropolitan Juvenaly of Krutitsy and Colomna, president of the Department for Foreign Church Affairs, on the main events of the Russian Orthodox Church's life since the last conversations, held at Trent in 1975, and the development of relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church during that period. Metropolitan Sergio of Odessa and Kherson greeted the participants in the name of the Odessa diocese, the monastery and the seminary.

For his part, Cardinal Willebrands reviewed recent events in the life of the Catholic Church, citing in particular the 1977 Synod of Bishops on catechesis, the "year of three popes" in 1978, and the broad outlines of Pope John Paul II's pontificate. Referring to the four previous series of conversations, he emphasized the natural and logical development of their themes.

The speakers' also commemorated the deceased metropolitan of Leningrad, Nikodim, who worked so hard to begin the conversations and continue their progress.

The main theme of the conversations was "the local church and the universal church." The issue had already been raised at Trent. On that occasion it was decided to take it into consideration again and deepen it. In the course of its work the group studied reports on issues of the nature of the church (Archpriests Vassily Stoikov and Vladimir Mustafin); the bishop's authority in the church (Archpriest Vassily Stoikov); the theology of the local church (Father Raniero Cantalamessa, director of the department of religious sciences of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, whose report was read by Father Duprey in the author's absence, with additional comments by Father Duprey); and finally, various theological and practical aspects of the relations among local churches and between them and the universal church (Canon Jacques Desseaux).

The authors of the reports tried to deepen the theme, basing themselves on the teachings of the fathers of the primitive, undivided church. Also taken into consideration were subsequent theological and canonical developments, verified in the course of centuries, in our two traditions, taking particular account of the decisions of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church,

and the various reflections of contemporary theologians of the two churches as well. The Catholic theologians informed their Orthodox brothers of some recent developments in the Catholic Church, citing specific examples of reinforcement of the principle of collegiality within their church.

The discussion on this theme was developed in a spirit of brotherhood and good will. It allowed participants to understand better each other's positions, the meeting points, and the divergences which, at the present moment, are hard to overcome.

The two parties found themselves in broad agreement on the following points:

1. The local church, in the ambit of the diocese, represents the people of God united around the bishop, legitimately ordained in an uninterrupted apostolic succession. The bishop, with whom the other members of the clergy collaborate and to whom they are subordinate, is the teacher of the faith, the minister of the sacraments, first of all of the eucharist, and the one in charge of the Christian life of his flock.

2. The concept of catholicity, understood as organic wholeness of the church, as the fullness of the possession of the truth revealed by God and of the means of grace given for men's salvation, was discussed. The presence of the episcopate in the local churches guarantees the fullness of their eucharistic life in grace. Particular attention was given to this aspect of catholicity, which implies the necessity of communion among the local churches.

Despite their state of separation, the Catholic and Orthodox churches recognize one another as sister churches. In the East, the local church is seen above all as an ensemble of different dioceses which, in the course of history, were brought together to respond to certain pastoral needs, in conformity with a set canonical tradition. For this, in the East the local churches, quite early on, overwhelmingly took on the form of autocephalous patriarchates with their own canonical structure, preserving among themselves communion in faith, sacramental life and brotherly relations.

In the West, dioceses were grouped together in ecclesiastical provinces or in the framework of geographical regions. Most recently these groupings have taken on, in the Catholic Church, the form of bishops' conferences. This development was favored by the internal role they played, by the principle of conciliarity.

Both parties recognized the importance of the

34th Canon of the Apostles, which serves as the norm in relationships between the bishops of the local churches and the first among them, even if there is not agreement about the levels at which the canon applies or the reasons why one bishop comes to be considered first among his equals.

There arose the issue of the role of the church of Rome and its bishop in the service of communion among the churches. In this regard the Catholic participants explained in detail their convictions. This allowed better clarification of the problems that still remain to be resolved between our churches, as was recognized by both parties. Among these problems are the dogmatic formulations of the First Vatican Council concerning the primacy and infallibility of the bishop of Rome. Despite these divergences, both parties agree on the fact that the authority or spiritual power of the church differs from any other power as regards its origin, the purposes for which it was constituted and the means by which these goals are pursued.

In the course of the conversations, the following themes were presented and discussed: the role of women in the church, and the bilateral and multilateral dialogues in which the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches are participating. Reporters for the first theme were Archbishop Lucas Moreira Neves and Archimandrite Augustin (Nikitine), and for the second theme Father Emmanuel Lanne, OSB, and Professor V.V. Ivanov.

The Christian faith has contributed to a deep renewal of the view of women: Men and women are equally creatures redeemed by the blood of Christ, called to become members of his body and to share in its glory. Still, much remains to be done so that the dignity of women will be fully recognized and expressed in actual life without any discrimination. There are, in fact, in many parts of the world, numerous situations that are the cause or result of discrimination against women at the cultural, social and political level.

In today's world in rapid and profound transformation, the role of women is growing in all areas of life. The church cannot remain indifferent to or outside of this important phenomenon of our times. It is concerned with giving its own contribution with openness and discernment. It does so to the degree that it stimulates the participation of women, in conditions of full equality and collaboration with men, to the pursuit of their proper social functions and, their tasks within the ecclesial community.

Above all this is a matter of revaluing in society the woman's function as wife, mother and educator, which are her primary and irreplaceable roles.

But the church does not forget the other functions of women, whether in the world or in consecrated life, in prayer and contemplation or in discerning service to the most needy. Within the ecclesial community, in both the Russian Orthodox and the Catholic churches, there are more and more women who are taking up over more varied tasks, such as education of new generations in the Christian faith, promotion of mutual aid in communities, etc.

Still, the two churches today consider as one of their main tasks that of facilitating, wherever possible, the access of women to posts of responsibility in the life of the church and inviting them to participate in the construction of peace and more just relations in society.

Nevertheless the two churches do not see how it is possible to change a universal and uninterrupted tradition, continued from the Lord and the apostles, of not allowing the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood.

As regards the theme of bilateral and multilateral dialogues, both parties have recognized their usefulness in the search for Christian unity, and for this they deserve considerable efforts by each of our churches. Professor V.V. Ivanov provided a detailed perspective of the various dialogues conducted by the Russian Orthodox Church. These dialogues are very similar to those being carried on by the Roman Catholic Church, whose approach was analyzed by Father Emmanuel Lanne. From the discussion there emerged the need to clarify the precise role of the church's magisterium in validating results of these dialogues and the significance and importance of their acceptance by the people of God.

In the course of the conversations, in several reports and interventions, the problems were addressed concerning the service that the two churches fulfil in promoting peace in today's world, seeking to reinforce the principles of peace and justice in the relationships among peoples, contributing to the progress of human society along the path of detente, encouraging the effort for disarmament by every means. The need to continue and intensify this important action of both churches was also emphasized.

The conversations were carried out in a candid atmosphere of brotherly love. In the course of their work the participants received strength from praying together. The Catholic participants learned about the religious life of Odessa and its environs. They met with the local clergy, monks and members of the local parishes. They prayed during the divine liturgy, celebrated in Sunday, March 16, with the assembly of bishops and members of the'

Orthodox clergy in Odessa's Assumption Cathedral. They celebrated holy Mass in the Catholic church of St. Peter in Odessa, with the members of the Orthodox delegation in attendance.

Professors and students showed their interest, assisting the participants in the conversations.

Metropolitan Sergius gave a reception in honor of the participants at his residence in the Assumption Monastery of Odessa, with representatives of the city's clergy and professors of the local theological seminary attending.

The participants in the conversations express their deep gratitude to His Eminence Metropolitan Sergio and to all those who gave them their affectionate and generous hospitality. It accompanied them throughout their unforgettable visit to Odessa.

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