



## THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES

June 23, 2022  
*Nativity of St John the Baptist*

Paone 16, 1738  
*Abba Nofer the Anchorite (Coptic)*

### YOUR HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS OF ROME:

**F**raternal greetings from all Their Holinesses the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Family of Churches whom we are representing in this meeting today, namely the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and all the East, the Armenian Orthodox Catholicosate of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Armenian Orthodox Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewaheedo Church and the Indian Orthodox Syrian Catholicosate of Malankara. I also carry special greetings from His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, a dear brother and friend to Your Holiness for many years.

Among the challenges we face today is that of war between Russia and Ukraine. Over 500,000 Armenians who live in Ukraine are suffering along with them. We continue to pray for peace, and all those who are suffering as a result.

This is our 18th meeting of our International Theological Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and our Family of Churches, and the 9th time we meet here in Rome, where we are enjoying the hospitality of Your Holiness together with the hospitality of His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, co-chairman of the Commission.

Since we last met with Your Holiness, we concluded our dialogue on the Sacraments and concluded our common document summarizing our discussions. We also began our study on the Holy Virgin Mary. As Your Holiness is well aware, the discussions related to these doctrines have always been contentious.



At the same time this journey is most blessed. Speaking about her, studying about her, listening to the praises and declarations of the church regarding her fills us with a sustaining hope and unspeakable joy. We ask for her continual intercessions to guide and support us along this journey towards unity.

We are also planning for our gathering next year, which will mark 50 years since many of our patriarchs met with Pope Paul VI in 1973 and signed various agreements which initiated this dialogue. We hope to dedicate next year to evaluating all the accomplishments and challenges that have taken place over the past 50 years.

On behalf of my dear brothers of the Commission I would like to present Your Holiness with a Coptic icon representing the Council of Ephesus. Here, St. Cyril of Alexandria met with approximately 200 bishops and representatives to declare our faith in the Holy Theotokos, and the mystery of the Incarnation against the teachings of Nestorius. Alongside him is Pope Celestine, whom in the Coptic Synaxarium celebrates together with St Cyril about two weeks from now on July 10. While many of our churches also commemorate the two saints in June and July, this is the only occasion I am aware in which the two popes of Rome and Alexandria are commemorated together. They represent for us the very last time that we gathered together in one spirit and shared the Table of the Lord. The Lord, with His blessed Mother, are blessing the event above.

It is in this hope that we gather, asking for Her intercession, and the prayers of St. Cyril, St. Celestine, and the fathers gathered together with us to labor towards reclaiming this unity.

Bishop Kyrillos  
Co-Chairman of the Commission  
Auxiliary Bishop in the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles  
Dean of St Athanasius and St. Cyril Theological School