



CONSEIL PONTIFICAL
POUR LA PROMOTION
DE L'UNITÉ DES CHRÉTIENS

JOINT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE
BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

15th PLENARY SESSION

Alexandria, Egypt, 1-7 June 2023

The fifteenth plenary meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church was held from 1 to 7 June 2023 in Alexandria, Egypt. The meeting was most generously and paternally hosted by His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa.

Eighteen Roman Catholic members were present, a few were unable to attend. Ten Orthodox Churches were represented, namely the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Patriarchate of Romania, the Patriarchate of Georgia, the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece, the Church of Poland, the Church of Albania and the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

The Commission worked under the direction of its two co-presidents, Metropolitan Job of Pisidia (Ecumenical Patriarchate) and Cardinal Kurt Koch (Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity), and assisted by the co-secretaries, Protopresbyter Alexis Torrance and Monsignor Andrea Palmieri.

At the opening plenary session held on Thursday, 1 June in the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Commission was warmly welcomed by the host, His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch Theodoros II, who emphasized that 'the theological dialogue needs to be cultivated, to progress, to bear fruit at all levels, with honesty, dignity, and mutual respect'.

In response the two co-presidents expressed their thanks for the hospitality offered by the Patriarchate of Alexandria and conveyed to His Beatitude the greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis and of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, underlining the significance of gathering in the land of so many great Fathers and luminaries of the Church.

On the first day of the meeting, as is customary, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox members met separately to coordinate their work. The Commission then convened in plenary session in the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Annunciation to examine the draft text produced by the Coordinating Committee in the meetings of Bose, Italy (2018 and 2019), and Rethymno, Crete (2022). A first reading of the text over several days brought numerous suggested amendments and revisions, which were then implemented by a drafting committee composed of three Orthodox and three Roman Catholic members. During the discussion there was an exchange of different views. The revised text was then submitted to the plenary, which discussed it in detail and reached agreement on the document, entitled 'Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium and Today'. Disagreement with some paragraphs of the document was expressed by the delegation of the Patriarchate of Georgia.

The discussion focused on synodality and primacy in East and West over the course of the second millennium, giving as far as possible a common reading of that history, and affording each other the opportunity to dialogue in a spirit of openness so as to 'further the mutual understanding and trust that are essential prerequisites for reconciliation at the start of the third millennium'. In its Conclusion, the document adopted by the Commission stated that 'the interdependence of synodality and primacy is a fundamental principle in the life of the Church' and that this principle 'should be invoked to meet the needs and requirements of the Church in our time'.

Moreover, the Commission took into consideration that some misunderstanding was evident in the reception of the line 'Appeals regarding disciplinary matters were also made to the see of Constantinople, and to other sees' in the Chieti Document (2016), paragraph 19. The Commission resolved that the aforementioned line should be read in light of Canon 9 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon 451): 'if a bishop or clergyman should have a disagreement with the metropolitan of the province, let him have recourse to the Exarch of the Diocese, or to the throne of the Imperial City of Constantinople, and there let it be tried'.

On Saturday, 3 June, the Roman Catholic members celebrated the Eucharist in the Cathedral of Saint Catherine presided over by Cardinal Kurt Koch, in the presence of His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch Theodoros II and the Orthodox members. The Apostolic Nuncio in Egypt, His Excellency Archbishop Nicolas Thévenin, and the Apostolic Vicar of Alexandria, Bishop Claudio Lurati, attended the celebration together with clergy and faithful of the local community. Following the service, a reception was hosted by the Franciscan Community of Alexandria.

On Sunday, 4 June, the Orthodox members celebrated the Divine Liturgy for Pentecost in the Monastery of Saint Sabbas in Alexandria. The celebration was presided over by His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch Theodoros II, in the presence of the Roman Catholic members. Later, a reception was kindly offered by the Greek Community of Alexandria. In the afternoon, the members visited the famous library of Alexandria.

During the services celebrated on Saturday, 3 June, and Sunday, 4 June, prayers were offered for peace in Ukraine, and for the repose of the recently departed members of the Commission.

On Tuesday, 6 June, the members of the Commission were welcomed and hosted by the Consul General of the Hellenic Republic in Alexandria, Athanassios B. Kotsionis, with the Patriarch in attendance.

On Wednesday, 7 June, the delegates visited the Library and Museum of the Patriarchate of Alexandria. In the evening, the Coptic Catholic Patriarch of Alexandria, His Beatitude Ibrahim Isaac Sidrak, hosted a delegation from the Commission to meet the Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchs of Egypt.

During the meeting's closing session, the Joint Commission expressed the desire to hold a meeting of the Coordinating Committee next year to continue the Commission's work.

The meeting of the Joint Commission was marked by a spirit of friendship and collaboration based on trust. The members greatly appreciated the generous hospitality of the host Church, and were deeply grateful for all the efforts of the Chief Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, His Eminence Metropolitan Panteleimon of Naucratis, and the Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria, His Eminence Metropolitan Narcissus of Pelusium, for coordinating the logistics of the meeting. The members strongly commend the continuing work of the dialogue to the prayers of the faithful.

Orthodox Members present:

Ecumenical Patriarchate

His Eminence Job, Metropolitan of Pisidia (Co-President)

His Eminence Maximos, Metropolitan of Selymbria

Fr Alexis Torrance (Co-Secretary)

Patriarchate of Alexandria

His Eminence Gennadios, Metropolitan of Botswana

His Eminence Petros, Metropolitan of Akkra

Patriarchate of Jerusalem

His Eminence Nektarios, Archbishop of Anthidonos

Professor Theodore Giagkou

Patriarchate of Romania

His Eminence Iosif, Metropolitan of Western and Southern Europe

Rev. prof. dr. Patriciu Vlaicu

Patriarchate of Georgia

His Eminence Theodoros, Metropolitan of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti

Fr. Georgios Zviadadze

Church of Cyprus

His Eminence Vassileios, Metropolitan of Konstantia and Famagusta

Archimandrite Gregorios Ioannides

Church of Greece

His Eminence Chrysostomos, Metropolitan of Messenia

Archimandrite Amphilochius Miltos

Church of Poland

Professor Jerzy Ostapczuk

Professor Jerzy Betlejko

Church of Albania

His Eminence Johannes, Metropolitan of Korçë

Nathan Hoppe

Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia

His Eminence Georgios, Metropolitan of Michalovce and Cassovia

Fr Kyrill Sarkissian

Catholic Members present:

His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch (Co-President), Prefect, Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity
His Eminence Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, Archbishop of Newark
Most Reverend Claudio Gugerotti, Prefect, Dicastery for the Eastern Churches
Most Reverend Roland Minnerath, Archbishop emeritus of Dijon
Most Reverend Bruno Forte, Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto
Most Reverend Brian Farrell, Secretary, Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity
Most Reverend Krzysztof Nitkiewicz, Bishop of Sandomierz
Very Reverend Msgr. Piero Coda, Sophia University Institute
Very Reverend Msgr Iwan Dacko, Mitrierter Protopresbyter und Prälat
Very Reverend Msgr. Paul McPartlan, The Catholic University of America, Washington
Rev. P. Milan Zust, S.I., Pontifical Gregorian University
Rev. P. Hyacinthe Destivelle, O.P., Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity
Reverend Sabino Chiala, Priore Monastero di Bose
Reverend Fr Thomas Pott, O.S.B., Monastère de l'Exaltation de la Sainte Croix
Prof. Theresia Hainthaler, Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Sankt Georgen
Prof. Barbara Hallensleben, Institut für Ökumenische Studien, Universität Freiburg
Prof. Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, Roma III University
Very Reverend Msgr. Andrea Palmieri (Co-Secretary), Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity

Alexandria, Egypt, 7 June 2023.