



CONSEIL PONTIFICAL  
POUR LA PROMOTION  
DE L'UNITÉ DES CHRÉTIENS

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

REPORT

Second Meeting

Rome, Italy, 26-29 January 2005

Catholic and Oriental Orthodox representatives, delegated by their churches, held their second meeting from 26-29 January 2005, as members of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, under the co-chairmanship of H.E. Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and H.E. Metropolitan Amba Bishoy of Damiette, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The meeting was held in Rome at the Domus Internationalis Paulus VI, hosted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Delegates were present from the Catholic Church and from the following Oriental Orthodox Churches: the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of All Armenians), the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of Cilicia), the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church.

The representatives of the Oriental Orthodox Church held their separate preparatory meeting on Tuesday 25 January 2005. Both delegations held additional separate meetings during the dialogue. Each working day commenced with morning prayers and concluded with evening prayers and the meetings were conducted in a very cordial atmosphere.

The delegates were invited to attend the ecumenical vespers traditionally celebrated at the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul (25 January) at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, which were presided over by H.E. Cardinal Walter Kasper.

The members of the Commission were received in audience by H.H. Pope John Paul II on Friday 28 January 2005. On behalf of the Commission Metropolitan Amba Bishoy addressed the Pope conveying the greetings of the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and the Pope responded with a brief message of welcome and encouragement.

On Friday 28th January the Commission was invited to share in vespers and a meal with the Benedictine Community of Sant' Anselmo.

As had been agreed upon at the first meeting of the International Joint Commission in Cairo in January 2004, the principal themes were: a) Understanding of Communion, Constitutive Elements of Communion; b) Particular and Universal Communion, Meaning of Sister Churches and of Church Families; c) Full Communion and Degrees of Communion, Common Ecumenical Goal.

During the course of the meeting papers were presented from the Catholic Church and Oriental Orthodox Churches on these themes: 1) "The Church as Communion in Early Christian Thought" (Fr. Mark Sheridan); 2) "Communion-Sister Churches-Church Families" (Archbishop Mesrob K. Krikorian); 3) "Full Communion and the Degrees of Communion, Common Ecumenical Goal" (Fr. Philippe Luisier); 4) "Full Communion and Degrees of Communion, Common Ecumenical Goal" (Metropolitan Amba Bishoy and Fr. Shenouda Maher); 5) "Particular Church/Universal Church, Sister Churches, Ecclesial Families" (Fr. Paul Rouhana); 6) "Understanding Communion, Constitutive Elements of Communion" (Rev. Megabe Biluy Seife Selassie Yohannes and Lique Hiruyan Getachew Guadie).

Discussion in the plenary sessions on the papers allowed the participants to reach the following common affirmations:

1) The Church by its very nature is a communion, which finds its source and model in the communion of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This communion finds its expression in conciliarity/collegiality. The question of primacy should be further studied.

2) The constitutive elements of communion include:

a. the Apostolic faith as lived in the Tradition and as expressed in the Holy Scriptures, the first three ecumenical councils, and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed; we believe in Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word of God, the same being true God and true man; we venerate the Holy Virgin Mary as Mother of God;

b. the celebration of the seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation/ chrismation, eucharist, penance/ reconciliation, ordination, matrimony, anointing of the sick); we consider baptism as essential for salvation; with regard to the Eucharist, we believe that it is the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ;

c. the ordained ministry in Apostolic succession.

However, from a Catholic point of view, the question of the mutual recognition of baptism must be a point of further discussion,

3) Thanks to the many shared elements of communion, the Catholic Church uses the phrases "real though incomplete communion" and "degrees of communion". However, from the point of view of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, these terms require further study.

4) The Oriental Orthodox Churches, being in full communion with each other in faith and sacraments, refer to their unity by the term "family of Churches". However, from the point of view of the Catholic Church, this concept requires further study, since it is not a part of its tradition.

The next meeting of the International Joint Commission will be hosted by the Catholicosate of All Armenians at Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia, from Wednesday 25 January (day of arrival) till Tuesday 31 January 2006 (day of departure). Both delegations will have separate meetings on Thursday 26 January. Friday 27, Saturday 28 and Monday 30 will be full meeting days for the Joint International Commission.

Three papers from each side will be prepared on the following issues:

1. Bishops in Apostolic Succession;
2. Primacy and Synodality/Conciliarity;
3. Synods, local and ecumenical (their ecclesiological meaning).

Papers will be sent to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican, by November 15th, 2005, for communication to the members of the Commission, not later than December 1st, 2005.

The members of the International Joint Commission were:

Representatives of the Oriental Orthodox churches

Coptic Orthodox Church : H.E. Amba Bishoy (co-chair), Metropolitan of Damiette, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church; Rev. Fr. Dr. Shenouda Maher Ishak (Rochester, U.S.A) ;

Syrian Orthodox Church : H.E. Mor Theophilus George Saliba, Archbishop of Mount Lebanon, Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church; H.G. Dr. Kuriakose Theophilose, M.S.O.T. Seminary, Vettickal, India;

Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of all Armenians): H.E. Dr. Mesrob K. Krikorian, Archbishop of Vienna; H.E. Khajag Barsamian, Archbishop of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America;

Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of Cilicia): H.E. Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy in the U.S.A.; H.G. Bishop Nareg Alemezian, Ecumenical Officer of the Catholicosate of Cilicia;

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church: Rev. Megabe Biluy Seife Selassie Yohannes, Member of the Scholar Council of the Patriarchate; Lique Hiruyan Getachew Guadie; Head of Department of Foreign Relations;

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: H.E. Philipos Mar Eusebios, Metropolitan of Pathanamthitta; Rev. Dr. John Mathews (co-secretary), Secretary of the Committee on Inter-Church Relations;

Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church: Rev. Fr. Kaleab Gebreselassie, Co-ordinator for Foreign Affairs; H.G. Bishop Abuna Shenouda Zeamanuel (Rome), substitute for Mr. Yoftahe Dimetrios, General Director of the Eritrean Orthodox Church (prevented).

Representatives of the Catholic Church

H.E. Cardinal Walter Kasper (co-chair), President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity;

H.E. Paul-Werner Scheele, Bishop em. of Würzburg, Germany;

H.E. Amba Kyrillos William, Coptic Catholic Bishop of Assiut, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Egypt;

H.E. Mons. Jules Mikhael Al-Jamil, Procurator of the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate to the Holy See and Apostolic Visitor in Europe;

H.E. Mons. Boutros Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Syria;

H.E. Mons. Woldetensae Ghebreghiorghis, Apostolic Vicar of Harar (Ethiopia), President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea;

Rev. Fr. Mathew Vellanickal, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry, India;

Rev. Fr. Ronald Roberson, Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, USA;

Rev. Fr. Frans Bouwen, M.Afr., Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Jerusalem;

Rev. Fr. Philippe Luisier, S.J., Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome;

Rev. Fr. Mark Sheridan, O.S.B., Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, Rome;

Rev. Fr. Boghos Levon Zekiyian, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome;

Rev. Fr. Paul Rouhana, O.L.M., Université Saint-Esprit, Kaslik, Jounieh, Lebanon;

Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler, School of Theology, Boston University, USA;

Msgr. Johan Bonny (co-secretary), staff-member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Metropolitan Bishoy

Cardinal Walter Kasper

Rome, 29 January 2005