



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

Fourth Meeting

Rome, Italy, January 28 to February 3, 2007

The fourth meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches took place in Rome from January 28 to February 3, 2007, under the co-chairmanship of His Eminence Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and His Eminence Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The meeting was originally scheduled to take place in Lebanon at the kind invitation of His Beatitude Patriarch Nasrallah Pierre Sfeir of the Maronite Church. Regrettably, the political situation in that country did not allow the members to meet there at this time. Instead, the meeting was held in Rome at the new offices of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The members were hosted at the Domus Romana Sacerdotalis. Joining the delegates from the Catholic Church were representatives of the following Oriental Orthodox Churches: Coptic Orthodox Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of All Armenians), Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia), Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and Eritrean Orthodox Church.

The Oriental Orthodox delegation met separately on January 29 and 30 in order to discuss themes in ecclesiology. During the course of these meetings, they produced a draft report that was later given to the Catholic members. The Catholic delegation met separately on January 30. The full International Joint Commission met on three consecutive days, on January 31, February 1 and 2. Each day began with a brief prayer service using material that had been produced for this year's Prayer for Christian Unity.

The members of the international commission were received in audience by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on February 1. His Eminence Anba Bishop greeted His Holiness the Pope on behalf of the members of the dialogue and thanked him for his efforts to promote dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox. He also presented him with an icon hand painted by Coptic Orthodox nuns in Egypt. Addressing the group, Pope Benedict said, "Your meeting concerning the constitution and mission of the Church is of great importance for our common journey towards the restoration of full communion. The Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches share an ecclesial patrimony stemming from apostolic times and the first centuries of Christianity. This 'heritage of experience' should shape our future 'guiding our common path towards the re-establishment of full communion' (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 56)." The Pope also expressed his concern for the situation of Christians in the Middle East, calling upon them to be "courageous and steadfast in the power of the Spirit of Christ."

Following the plan for the dialogue that was adopted at the Preparatory Meeting in 2003, the following papers were presented during the course of the meeting: "Mission, Witness, Service and the Problem of Proselytism," by Archbishop Khajag Barsamian; "The Mission of the Church," by Bishop Paul-Werner Scheele; "The Salvation of Non-Believers in the Patristic Period," by Rev. Mark Sheridan, OSB; "The Church and the Salvation of Non-Christians in the Second Vatican Council and Afterwards," by Msgr. Johan Bonny; "The Salvation of Non-Believers," by Metropolitan Bishop, "Marriage Between Catholics and Muslims: A Catholic Perspective," by Archbishop Peter Marayati, and "Mixed Marriages With Non-Christians," by Metropolitan Bishop.

Because of technical difficulties, the drafting committee that had been named at the third meeting of the dialogue in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, was not able to meet. Its membership was modified, and is now composed of Catholic members Fr. Frans Bouwen, Fr. Mark Sheridan, Msgr. Johan Bonny, and Prof. Dietmar Winkler, and Oriental Orthodox members Metropolitan Bishop, Metropolitan Theophilus George Saliba, Archbishop Mesrob Krikorian, and Bishop Nareg Alemezian. The drafting committee will meet in Rome on May 29 and 30, 2007.

On the evening of January 30, the members of the commission attended a Vespers service at the Church of the Transfiguration, a Catholic parish in Rome that also hosts a Coptic Orthodox community. The commission members later met with the parishioners and attended a festive meal provided by the parish. On the evening of February 1, His Eminence Cardinal Kasper hosted a meal at the Domus Sanctae Marthae in the Vatican to welcome the members to Rome. They were joined by a number of officials of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and other dicasteries of the Roman Curia. Metropolitan Bishop thanked Cardinal Kasper and the staff of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity for hosting the meeting.

The fifth meeting of the International Commission will take place at Saint Ephrem Syrian Orthodox Monastery in Maarrat Saydnaya near Damascus, Syria, at the invitation of His Holiness Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. The Oriental Orthodox delegation will plan to arrive on January 27, and the Catholics on January 28, 2008. The two delegations will meet separately, and have full joint sessions on January 30, 31, and February 1, with departure on February 2. At this meeting the text prepared by the drafting committee will be considered, and one paper from each side will be presented on the goal of the ecumenical dialogue.

The members of the Commission were:

Representatives of the Oriental Orthodox Churches (in alphabetical order)

Antiochian Syrian Orthodox Church: H.E. Mor Theophilus George Saliba, Archbishop of Mount Lebanon, Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church; H.E. Kuriakose Theophilose, Metropolitan of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kerala, India;

Armenian Apostolic Church: Catholicosate of all Armenians: hhhhhH.E. Mesrob K. Krikorian, Archbishop of Vienna and Patriarchal Delegate for Central Europe and Scandinavia; H.E. Khajag Barsamian, Archbishop of the Eastern Diocese of the USA;

Armenian Apostolic Church: Holy See 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 Holy See of Cilicia;

Coptic Orthodox Church: H.E. Anba Bishoy (co-chair), Metropolitan of Damiette, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church; Rev. Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak, West Henrietta, NY;

Eritrean Orthodox Church: Rev. Fr. Kaleab Gebreselassie Gebru, Coordinator for Foreign Affairs;

Ethiopian Orthodox Church: Rev. Fr. Megabe Biluy Seife Selassie Yohannes, Lique Hiruyan Getachew Guadie (prevented);

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 (prevented; substituted by Rev. Fr. Abraham Thomas, London).

Representatives of the Catholic Church

His Eminence Cardinal Walter Kasper (co-chair), President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity;

Most Reverend Paul-Werner Scheele, Bishop Emeritus of Würzburg (Germany);

Most Reverend Amba Kyrillos William, Coptic Catholic Bishop of Assiut, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Egypt;

Most Reverend Jules Mikhael Al-Jamil, Procurator of the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate to the Holy See and Apostolic Visitor in Europe;

Most Reverend Peter Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Syria;

Most Reverend Woldetensae Ghebreghiorgis, Apostolic Vicar of Harar (Ethiopia), President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea;

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

Rev. Fr. Philippe Luisier SJ, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome;

Rev. Fr. Ronald Roberson, CSP, Associate Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC;

Rev. Fr. Paul Rouhana, OLM, Université Saint-Esprit, Kaslik, Jounieh, Liban;

Rev. Fr. Mark Sheridan, OSB, Rector, Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, Rome;

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

Rev. Fr. Boghos Levon Zekiyan, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome;

Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler, Paris Lodron Universität, Salzburg, Austria;

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

Rome, February 2, 2007