



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

Twelfth Meeting

Rome, January 24 to 31, 2015

The twelfth meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches took place in Rome from January 24 to 31, 2015, hosted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. It was chaired jointly by His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and by His Eminence Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette.

Joining delegates from the Catholic Church were representatives of the following Oriental Orthodox Churches: the Antiochian Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of All Armenians), the Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia), the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. No representative of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church was able to attend.

The two delegations met separately on January 26. Plenary sessions were held on January 27, 28, 29 and 30, each of which began with a brief prayer service based on material prepared for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

At the beginning of the opening session, Cardinal Koch noted first of all that since the last meeting Pope Francis had appointed a member of the dialogue, Archpriest Levon Boghos Zekiyian, as Apostolic Administrator *sede plena* of the Archeparchy of Istanbul of the Armenians, elevating him to the dignity of Archbishop. He also congratulated Archbishop Nareg Alemezian on his appointment as Archbishop of the Armenians in Cyprus (Holy See of Cilicia). During the past year His Holiness Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, visited Pope Francis in Rome on May 8 and His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, visited him on June 5. The Cardinal also noted with sadness the passing away of His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of the Antioch and All the East, on March 21. The Cardinal represented Pope Francis at the enthronization of the new patriarch, His Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II, in Syria on May 29, and extended to him warm congratulations. Metropolitan Bishop thanked Cardinal Koch for hosting the meeting and spoke briefly about the centenary of the Armenian and Syrian Genocide which is commemorated this year. The major achievement of this meeting was the final approval given to the second common document produced by the dialogue. It will now be submitted to the concerned authorities of the churches for their consideration and action. It is entitled, "The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for our Search for Communion Today." In 74 paragraphs, the document examines in detail the nature of the relationships that existed among the member churches in the period leading up to the divisions of the 5th century. It shows that the full communion that existed among the churches was expressed in many different ways in a vast web of relationships founded on the common conviction that all of the churches shared the same faith. These expressions of communion were manifested in at least six areas: 1) through the exchange of letters and visits (both formal and informal) extending even beyond the borders of the Roman Empire; 2) through synods and councils held to resolve problems of doctrine and discipline; 3) through prayer and similar liturgical practices; 4) through sharing in the veneration of common martyrs and saints; 5) in the development and spread of monasticism to all the churches; 6) through pilgrimages to the shrines of the various churches. In the conclusion of the document, the dialogue members note that many of the relationships that existed among the churches in the early centuries have continued to the present day in spite of the divisions, or have been recently revived. In view of these developments, they will examine in a positive way remaining divergences in doctrine and practice, and determine to what extent those divergences can be accepted as legitimate and not compromising the essence of the faith. This question will continue to be addressed as they take up the Sacraments of Initiation and other sacraments in the next phase of the dialogue. They will be asking themselves to what extent a restoration of the relationships that existed in the early centuries would be sufficient to restore full sacramental communion today. In time, this will include, among other important issues, a consideration of the place of the Bishop of Rome in that communion, a question that is being broadly re-examined in all the churches.

In keeping with the theme of the next phase of the dialogue, several papers were presented on the Sacraments of Initiation. These included: "The Historical Development of the Sacraments" by Rev. Father Mark Sheridan,

OSB; "The Seven Sacraments of the Church According to the Tradition of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch" by Archbishop Theophilus George Saliba; "Baptism and Chrismation: The Historical Development and Actual Practice in the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church" by Metropolitan Gabriel Mar Gregorios; "Sacraments of Initiation in the Armenian Church Tradition: An Overview of Historical and Theological Development" by Rev. Father Shahe Ananyan; "The Bari Document: 'Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church'" by Rev. Father Ronald G. Roberson, CSP; "Actual Liturgical Practice of the Sacraments of Initiation: Coptic Orthodox Perspective" by Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette; "Actual Liturgical Practices of the Sacrament of Initiation in the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church" by Archbishop Gabriel and Rev. Father Daniel Seifemichael Feleke; and "Theology of the Sacraments of Initiation" by Bishop Paul Rouhana, OLM.

On the evening of Sunday January 25, the members attended the Vespers Service at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls on the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle which was presided over by Pope Francis to conclude the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. In his homily, in which he extended his best wishes to the dialogue members, Pope Francis observed that "So many past controversies between Christians can be overcome when we put aside all polemical or apologetic approaches, and seek instead to grasp more fully what unites us, namely, our call to share in the mystery of the Father's love revealed to us by the Son through the Holy Spirit." He also reflected on the witness of the many martyrs who have given their lives for Christ in recent times, many of them members of the churches that participate in this dialogue: "In this moment of prayer for unity, I would also like to remember our martyrs, the martyrs of today. They are witnesses to Jesus Christ, and they are persecuted and killed because they are Christians. Those who persecute them make no distinction between the religious communities to which they belong. They are Christians and for that they are persecuted. This, brothers and sisters, is the ecumenism of blood." At the end of the service the Holy Father paused to greet personally many of the commission members.

On the evening of Thursday January 29, Cardinal Koch kindly hosted a dinner for the members of the Commission at the Casina Pio IV in the Vatican gardens. They were joined by His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State, and by His Eminence Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

At noon on Friday January 30, Pope Francis received the dialogue members in private audience. In his greetings to the Pope, Metropolitan Bishop reviewed the progress of the dialogue over the past 12 years, and formally presented him with an icon and a copy of the new common document. He also assured Pope Francis of the prayers of the heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches for the success of the dialogue, and asked him for his prayers and support, especially for Christians in the Middle East. This was a major concern of the members that was discussed during the dialogue.

In response, the Pope said, "With great joy I welcome you, the members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Through you, I offer fraternal greetings to my venerable brothers, the heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. I thank His Eminence Anba Bishop, Co-President of the Commission, for his kind words. It is gratifying to reflect on the work of your Commission, which began in January 2003 as a joint initiative of the ecclesiastical authorities of the family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. In the last ten years the Commission has examined from an historical perspective the ways in which the Churches expressed their communion in the early centuries, and what this can mean for our pursuit of communion today. In the course of this week's meeting you have also embarked upon a deeper examination of your work on the nature of the sacraments, and of baptism in particular. I express my hope that this work will bear rich fruit for our common theological research and help us to experience ever more fully our fraternal friendship. With deep appreciation I recall the inspiring commitment to dialogue shown by His Holiness Ignatius Zakka Iwas, Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East, who died this past year. Together with you and his own clergy and faithful, I pray for the eternal rest of this dedicated servant of God. At this time we especially feel dismay and deep sadness at what is happening in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria. I think of all those living in the region, including our Christian brothers and sisters, and many minorities, who are experiencing the effects of a prolonged and painful conflict. I join you in praying for a negotiated solution and in imploring God's goodness and mercy upon all those affected by this immense tragedy. All Christians are called to work together, in mutual acceptance and trust, in order to serve the cause of peace and justice. May the intercession and example of the many martyrs and saints who have borne courageous witness to Christ in all our Churches sustain and strengthen you and your Christian communities. Dear brothers, I thank you for your visit. Upon you and your ministry I invoke the Lord's blessing and the maternal protection of Mary Most Holy. Please pray for me."

The next meeting will take place in Cairo, Egypt, hosted by the Coptic Orthodox Church. The day of arrival will be Saturday January 30, 2016. Separate family meetings will take place on Monday February 1, followed by plenary meetings on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday February 2, 3, 4, and 5. Departures on Saturday, February 6.

The members of the Commission are:

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, Beirut, Lebanon; H.E. Kuriakose Theophilose, Metropolitan of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary and President of the Ecumenical Secretariat of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church in India, Ernakulam, India;

Armenian Apostolic Church: Catholicosate of all Armenians: H.E. Khajag Barsamian, Archbishop of the Eastern Diocese of the USA, New York; H.E. Archbishop Yeznik Petrossian, General Secretary of Bible Society of Armenia, Etchmiadzin, Armenia (unable to attend, represented by Reverend Father Shahe Ananyan, Director of the Publishing Department, Etchmiadzin, Armenia; H.G. Bishop Hovakim Manukyan, Ecumenical Officer, Etchmiadzin, Armenia (Observer);

Armenian Apostolic Church: Holy See of Cilicia: H.E. Archbishop Nareg Alemezian, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church of Cyprus, Nicosia; H.E. Bishop Magar Ashkarian, Armenian Prelacy, Teheran, Iran;

Coptic Orthodox Church: H.E. Anba Bishoy, Metropolitan of Damiette, Egypt (co-chair); Rev. Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak, West Henrietta, New York, USA; H.G. Bishop Daniel of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Sydney, Australia (Observer); H.G. Bishop Barnaba El Soryany, Rome, Italy (Observer);

Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church: Rev. Fr. Kaleab Gebreselassie Gebru, Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Patriarchate, Asmara, Eritrea (unable to attend);

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Archbishop Gabriel of Sidamo; Rev. Fr. Daniel Seifemichael Feleke of Holy Trinity Theological University College in Addis Ababa;

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: H.E. Metropolitan Dr. Gabriel Mar Gregorios, President of the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Metropolitan of the Diocese of Trivandrum, India; H.E. Metropolitan Dr. Youhanon Mar Demetrios (co-secretary), Metropolitan of the Diocese of Delhi, India.

Representatives of the Catholic Church

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

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

Most Reverend Youhanna Golta, Patriarchal Auxiliary Bishop of the Coptic Catholic Patriarchate, Cairo, Egypt (unable to attend);

Most Reverend Archbishop Basilio Georges Casmoussa, Syrian Catholic Patriarchate, Beirut, Lebanon;

Most Reverend Peter Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Syria;

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

Most Reverend Paul Rouhana, OLM, Bishop of the Patriarchal Maronite Vicariate of Sarba, Jounieh, Lebanon;

Most Reverend Boghos Levon Zekiyan, Titular Archbishop of Amida, Apostolic Administrator sede plena of Catholic Armenians of Istanbul and Turkey;

Rev. Fr. Frans Bouwen M.Afr., Sainte-Anne, Jerusalem;

Rev. Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, Executive Director, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Saint John's Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA;

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

Rev. Fr. Mark Sheridan, OSB, Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, Rome, and Dormition Abbey, Jerusalem;

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

Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler, Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Salzburg, Austria.

Rev. Monsignor Gabriel Quicke, Official of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome (co-secretary).

Rome, January 30, 2015