



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

Fourteenth Meeting

Rome, January 22-27, 2017

The fourteenth meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches took place in Rome from January 22 to 27, 2017, 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 and Catholicosate of the 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 Tewahedo Church was able to attend.

The two delegations met separately on January 22 and 23. Plenary sessions were held January 24-27, each of which began with a brief prayer service based on material prepared for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. During the first plenary session, recent developments in the relations between the two communions were discussed. These included: the visit of His Holiness Abune Mathias I to Rome (26-29 February), when he was received by His Holiness Pope Francis; the Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Armenia (24-26 June); the meeting of the General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches in Amman (6-8 September). The members also discussed the present situation of Christians in the Middle East.

Building upon the previous meeting's focus on the sacraments of Christian Initiation, the members turned in this meeting to the Holy Eucharist. Papers were presented by Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette; Rev. Father Columba Stewart, OSB; Metropolitan Youhanon Mar Demetrios; Metropolitan Theophilos Kuriakose; Metropolitan Theophilus George Saliba; Metropolitan Gabriel Mar Gregorios (sharing a paper prepared by Dr. B. Varghese); Bishop Paul Rouhana, OLM; Bishop Magar Ashkarian; Rev. Father Shahe Ananyan; Rev. Father Frans Bouwen, M.Afr.; Rev. Father Shenouda Maher Ishak; Rev. Father Daniel Seifemichael Feleke.

The papers considered the historical, theological, and ecclesiological aspects of the Holy Eucharist as celebrated in the various Churches. The recognition of a common heritage of early Christian liturgical texts that have shaped later theology and practice of the Holy Eucharist was complemented by descriptions of aspects particular to the different Churches. There was also discussion of modern pastoral issues, touching upon communities in diaspora, the challenges of secularism, reaching the younger generation, and the possibility of pastoral adaptation of traditional liturgies. The discussion affirmed a common understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, including agreement that all elements of the anaphora are necessary for eucharistic consecration. The members agreed that differences of practice in celebration of the Holy Eucharist such as the use of various anaphoras, or customary usage of leavened or unleavened bread, are not fundamental disagreements in matters of doctrine.

On the evening of Tuesday, January 24, many members were able to attend Vespers at the Benedictine Collegio di Sant'Anselmo at the kind invitation of the Right Reverend Gregory Polan, O.S.B., Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation, and to share supper with the community.

On Wednesday, January 25, the members remembered at their morning prayer the late Archbishop Mesrob Krikorian of Vienna, a founding member of the Joint Commission, and sent a letter of condolence addressed to His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians.

On the evening of Wednesday, 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 asked: "How do we proclaim this Gospel of reconciliation after centuries of division? Paul himself helps us to find the way. He makes clear that reconciliation in Christ requires sacrifice. Jesus gave his life by dying for all. Similarly, ambassadors of reconciliation are called, in his name, to lay down their lives, to live no more for themselves but for Christ who died and was raised for them (cf. 2 Cor 5:14-15). As Jesus teaches, it is only when we lose our lives for love of him that we truly save them (cf. Lk9:24). This was the revolution experienced by Paul, but it is, and always has been, the Christian

revolution. We live no longer for ourselves, for our own interests and "image", but in the image of Christ, for him and following him, with his love and in his love". He also observed, "Authentic reconciliation between Christians will only be achieved when we can acknowledge each other's gifts and learn from one another, with humility and docility, without waiting for the others to learn first." At the end of the service the Holy Father paused to greet personally many of the commission members.

On the evening of Thursday January 26, Cardinal Koch kindly hosted a dinner for the members of the Commission at the Casina Pio IV in the Vatican gardens.

At noon on Friday January 27, Pope Francis received the dialogue members in private audience. In his greetings to the Pope, Metropolitan Bishop reported on the work of the Joint Commission, thanked His Holiness for his hospitality, and then noted, "We appreciate Your Holiness's care and efforts to keep and preserve the Christian presence in the Middle East which has been undergoing serious difficulties in this last decade. We are worried about the forced emigration, displacements, kidnapping of both clergy and people, and the killing of groups of Christian people in this historical area for Christianity. We are sure that Your Holiness will continue your care for bringing peace to the Middle East."

In his response, Pope Francis asked the members of the Joint Commission to persevere in their efforts, to "facilitate the path towards that greatly desired day when we will have the grace of celebrating the Lord's Sacrifice at the same altar, as a sign of fully restored ecclesial communion." Noting Metropolitan Bishop's concern for the Christians of the Middle East, he continued, "Many of you belong to Churches that witness daily the spread of violence and acts of brutality perpetrated by fundamentalist extremism.... Saint Paul writes: 'If one member suffers, all suffer together' (1 Cor. 12:26). Your sufferings are our sufferings. I join you in praying for an end to the conflict and for God's closeness to those who have endured so much, especially children, the sick and the elderly. In a particular way, my heart goes out to the bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, and the lay faithful who have been cruelly abducted, taken hostage or enslaved.... Just as in the early Church the blood of the martyrs was the seed of new Christians, so in our own day may the blood of so many martyrs be a seed of unity between believers, a sign and instrument of a future of communion and peace."

The next meeting will take place in Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia, hosted by the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of All Armenians). The day of arrival will be Monday, 29 January. Separate family meetings will take place on the morning of Tuesday, 30 January, followed by plenary meetings on the afternoon of Tuesday, 30 January, and on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, 31 January-3 February. The members will participate in a special ecumenical service on Sunday, 4 February. Departures will be on Monday, 5 February.

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, 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; Reverend Father Shahe Ananyan, Director of the Intercultural Relationships Department, Etchmiadzin, Armenia;

Armenian Apostolic Church: Holy See of Cilicia: H.E. Archbishop Nareg Amezian, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church of Cyprus, Nicosia (unable to attend, represented by H.E. Bishop Meghrig Parikian, Catholicosate of the Holy See of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon); H.E. Bishop Magar Ashkarian, Proxy of the Armenian Prelacy, Teheran, Iran;

Coptic Orthodox Church: H.E. Anba Bishop, 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); H.G. Bishop Kyrillos, Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles and Dean of the St. Athanasius St. Cyril Coptic Orthodox Theological School (observer); Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church: no representative was able to attend;

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Archbishop Gabriel of Sidamo (unable to attend); 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 (unable to attend);

Most Reverend Youhanna Golta, Patriarchal Auxiliary Bishop of the Coptic Catholic Patriarchate, Cairo, Egypt;

Most Reverend Archbishop Basilio Georges Casmoussa, Syrian Catholic Patriarchate, Beirut, Lebanon;  
Most Reverend Peter Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Syria;  
Most Reverend Woldetensae Ghebregiorghis, Apostolic Vicar Emeritus of Harar, Ethiopia, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia;  
Most Reverend Paul Rouhana, OLM, Bishop of the Patriarchal Maronite Vicariate of Sarba, Jounieh, Lebanon;  
Most Reverend Boghos Levon Zekiyan, Archbishop of Istanbul and Turkey for the Catholic Armenians;  
Rev. Fr. Frans Bouwen, M.Afr., Sainte-Anne, Jerusalem;  
Rev. Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, Executive Director, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Professor of Theology, 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 (unable to attend);  
Rev. Fr. Mark Sheridan, OSB, Collegio di S. Anselmo, Rome;  
Rev. Malpan Fr. Mathew Vellanickal, Spirituality Center, Manganam, Kottayam, 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 27, 2017