



PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO  
PER LA PROMOZIONE  
DELL'UNITÀ DEI CRISTIANI

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

Bari, Italy, June 9-16, 1987

The Joint International Commission for theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church has completed the second period of its fourth plenary session. The meetings were held at the Oasi Santa Maria, Cassano delle Murge, near Bari (Italy) from June 9th to 16th, 1987 and the participants were the guests of Archbishop Mariano Magrassi and the clergy and people of the Archdiocese of Bari-Bitonto. This meeting was the continuation of an earlier one also held at Cassano delle Murge in 1986. At that time, a number of delegations were not able to be present and the work of the commission was only partially completed. Twenty five Roman Catholics and twenty Orthodox members of the fifty six members' commission took part under the co-presidency of His Eminence John Cardinal Willebrands and His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia.

The principal work of this meeting was the final discussion and approval of a common document on the subject "Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church". It follows upon the common document already published by the Commission, "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity". These studies are part of a series planned as an aid for the dialogue aimed at reestablishing full communion in faith and sacramental life between the two Churches.

The document is composed of two parts. The first presents essential themes for the arriving at complete communion: the profession of a common faith, the liturgical expression of the faith, the formulation of the faith and various "symbols" of the faith, conditions for communion in faith, the true faith and communion in the sacraments, the unity of the Church in the faith and in the sacraments. The second section treats of the sacraments of Christian initiation in their relation with the unity of the Church. The liturgical celebration of these sacraments in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches contain many differences: immersion or infusion in baptism, the separation in time of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation (chrismation) and eucharist, the rather recent practice of inverting the traditional order by admitting baptized Christians to the eucharist before they have been confirmed. These differences have created questions among Orthodox concerning the changing of tradition and the theological and liturgical principles behind such changes.

Progress was made in resolving these questions and in recognizing the legitimacy of the existence of different traditions in each Church but the Commission noted that there remains the need for further serious consideration to be given to the theological and liturgical questions raised during the discussion.

One of the principles adopted by the Commission at its first meeting in Rhodos (1980) for guiding its work is that the dialogue of love should continually accompany the theological dialogue to facilitate the solution of difficulties and to strengthen the deepening of fraternal relations between the two Churches on both the local and more general levels. In the spirit of this principle, the members of the Commission repeat the condemnation of proselytism already expressed on many occasions by authoritative leaders and groups of both Churches. Every form of proselytism is to be avoided in the relations between our faithful or eliminated where it may possibly exist.

Relations between Catholics and Orthodox should be rooted in a total fidelity to Christ and in a mutual respect of each other's traditions. They should bear fruits of disinterested collaboration on the level of common pastoral, social and intellectual action with mutual respect for each one's fidelity to his or her own Church. Every element which can reinforce the bonds of love and common action is to be encouraged and promoted; whatever harms this love and common action is to be eliminated with the grace of God and the creative force of the Holy Spirit. The International Joint Commission intends to keep this question under consideration and study.

In making this general declaration, this joint commission expresses its great desire that these principles be adopted on the local and regional levels and where deemed necessary, that appropriate structures for mutual consultation and action be established.

For its next session the principal consideration of the Commission will be given to the subject "The Sacrament of Order (Ordination) in the sacramental structure of the Church, in particular the apostolic succession for the sanctification and the unity of the people of God". A first draft of this document has already been prepared and its consideration has already resulted in significant progress.

At previous meetings, the Commission expressed its concern for the problem of "uniatism" as a serious factor in the relations between our two Churches. During this meeting at Bari, it considered further concrete ways by which the ecclesiological and practical aspects of this question may be studied.

During the week of meetings, the members of the commission experienced again the warm hospitality and the deep spirituality of the local Church of Bari and its people. On June 10th, they assisted at a service of prayer in the parish church of Cassano delle Murge, and received a very warm reception by the civil officials and population. Saturday evening, June 13th, in the cathedral-basilica of Bari, the Catholic members of the commission concelebrated Mass with Archbishop Magrassi and bishops of the regions of Puglia for the episcopal ordination of His Excellency, Mgr Francesco Cacucci, auxiliary bishop of Bari-Bitonto. The Orthodox members were present in places of honor in the sanctuary. The very impressive ceremony was particularly appropriate to the discussions now taking place in the commission. The following day, the Orthodox members celebrated the Orthodox Eucharistic Liturgy in the Basilica of Saint Nicholas under the leadership of Archbishop Stylianos and in the presence of the Catholic members. All were later guests of the Dominican Fathers, custodians of the Basilica, for a fraternal dinner. On the eve of their departure they were present at a celebration of sacred music in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Cassano delle Murge.

The next plenary session of the Commission will be held in June 19th to 27th, 1988 when the members will be guests of the Orthodox Church of Finland, in the monastery of New Valamo.

The participants once more are extremely grateful to Archbishop Magrassi, to the priests, sisters and lay people, and to the civil authorities who by their prayers and extraordinary services in many ways helped the commission and its individual members to carry out the serious work entrusted to them by their Churches in the service of reconciliation and the unity of the people of God. They express their particular gratitude to the Director and the sisters of the Oasi Santa Maria and to the Ecumenical Commission of the Archdiocese of Bari for the organization of the meeting and the charity and dedication which characterized their work.

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