



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

Finland, June 19-27, 1988

The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church has agreed upon a common statement, "The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church", at its fifth plenary session, meeting from 19th June to 27th June 1988 at Valamo Monastery in Finland. The participants were guests of the Monastery and of the Orthodox Church of Finland. At the conclusion of the plenary session it was decided that the next theme to be the object of a common document will be: "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental structure of the Church. Conciliarity and Authority in the Church". This will be considered at a meeting to be held in Munich in 1990.

Twenty-two of the Orthodox members and twenty-five of the Roman Catholic members of the fifty-six commission members were present at the meeting in Finland which was conducted by the co-chairmen, His Eminence Archbishop Silyianos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia and His Eminence Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, President of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. Delegations from fourteen Orthodox Churches hold membership in the commission.

The principal work of the session was the discussion and revision of the new statement, whose full title is: "The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church, with particular reference to the importance of the Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God". A first draft of the document, based upon the work of three subcommissions, had been prepared by the Commissions's Joint Coordinating Committee at its meeting in Opole, Poland, in 1985. It was first discussed by the full commission at a plenary session in Bari, Italy, in 1986, and then revised for its final consideration and agreement at Valamo after prolonged discussion and further amendment.

The statement on the Sacrament of Order is the third in a series of documents submitted by the Joint International Commission to the authorities of the participating Churches. They are intended as a substantial contribution toward the goal of the dialogue most recently stated by His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I at their meeting in Rome during December of last year. This goal is to re-establish full communion in faith and sacramental life between the two Churches. The first statement, agreed upon in 1982 at the second plenary session in Munich was entitled, "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity". The second statement, "Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church", was published in 1987, after the second part of the fourth plenary session in Bari.

Some fifty-five paragraphs comprise the Valamo statement. After the introductory paragraphs, the headings of the four sections indicate the content and development of the text. They are (1) Christ and the Holy Spirit. (2) The Priesthood in the Divine Plan of Salvation. (3) The Ministry of the Bishop, Presbyter, and Deacon. (4) Apostolic Succession.

The Commission followed its earlier pattern. It did not intend to present a complete and systematic theology of the subject. Rather the text is a reflection upon those aspects of sacramental ordination, Church structure, and the apostolic succession which involve agreement or divergence between the Churches.

The theological dialogue between the Churches has found that there is a common tradition concerning ordained ministries, concerning the sacramental structure of the Church and concerning the Apostolic succession. The structure of the Church is expressed in the sacramentality of the ordination of bishops, presbyters, and deacons. This fact makes clear that the dialogue, begun at Patmos and Rhodes (1980), and continued in Munich (1982), in Crete (1984), and in Bari (1986 and 1987), was again successfully continued in New Valamo.

During the period of common history, in the East and in the West, sacramental and synodical communion between the bishops was the seal and confirmation of communion in the faith and in the sacraments. This does not mean that the Churches have now arrived at full unity and sacramental communion. There still remain serious questions to resolve in order to arrive at agreement concerning diverging opinions, among which is the question of the form of authority in the Church.

The new statement will be transmitted without delay to the authorities of the several Churches which participate in the theological dialogue. It will be made public on 1st September, 1988.

As agreed by the Commission at its 1987 meeting in Bari, the question of the Eastern Catholics in communion with the Holy See of Rome was also discussed as a serious factor in the relations between the Roman

Catholic and Orthodox Churches. A joint sub-commission was established to carry on the consideration of ecclesiological and practical aspects of the question. The subcommission met for the first time at Valamo under the co-chairmanship of Cardinal Willebrands and Archbishop Stylianos.

At this meeting the new subcommission agreed to arrange for a series of studies which will be discussed by it in conjunction with the next meeting of the Commission's Joint Coordinating Committee in February 1990. While able to call upon the assistance of outside specialists, the subcommission remains subject to the authority of the full Joint International Commission. The latter alone will issue statements and recommendations in this matter. In the course of the week-long meeting, the participants experienced the warm and spiritual hospitality of the monastic community and cultural center of New Valamo, as well as that of the Finnish Orthodox Church as a whole, as conveyed especially by Archbishop John of Karelia and All Finland. The happy ecumenical relationships within Finland were demonstrated by gatherings hosted by the Evangelical-Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The civic authorities of the region, Hainavesi, Joensuu, and Kuopio, the Finnish Ministry of Education and the University of Joensuu also graciously received the Commission.

Presence by Commission members at a number of liturgical celebrations demonstrated the spiritual milieu in which the theological discussions took place, with daily services of prayer. The Orthodox members were present for the Eucharistic liturgy concelebrated by the Catholic members with Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President of the Pontifical Commission "Justice and Peace" as first celebrant. The Catholic members were present at the Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox, both the liturgy celebrated at the church of Valamo with Archbishop Stylianos as first celebrant and the liturgy at the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in Kuopio celebrated by Archbishop John. The Commission was also present at Vespers at the Evangelical-Lutheran church of Joensuu and, at the conclusion of the plenary session, at Vespers at Uspenski Cathedral in Helsinki.

The co-chairmen expressed, on behalf of the Joint International Commission, the gratitude of all the participants to their hosts and to all who shared in the planning of the program and the religious and civic receptions.

Although there was lengthy discussion of the appropriate method to be followed in the drafting of future statements, it was finally decided to leave this question to the Joint Coordinating Committee, which will make recommendations in 1990 at Munich. In the meantime the method already in use will be followed in drafting the next statement, "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Structure of the Church. Conciliarity and Authority in the Church". Three joint subcommissions consisting of both Orthodox and Roman Catholics will meet and prepare draft documents on the topic. These in turn will be reviewed and a common document will be prepared by the Joint Coordinating Committee. At the plenary session in 1990, one or two days may be devoted, as has been the practice in the past, to separate meetings of Orthodox and Roman Catholic delegations before the entire commission meets for discussion and final revision of the draft.

The planned fourth statement is expected to follow closely upon what is said in the Valamo document. The Church's sacramental structure, based upon the threefold sacramental orders, not only is a guarantor of apostolic succession, but also has implications for a doctrinal understanding or theology of the Church (ecclesiology) and for Church order as expressed in canons. Both Churches have traditions of conciliarity or synodality which will be examined in the expectation of finding areas of agreement and in the hope that areas of divergence do not create anymore obstacles to full communion. Authority in the Church, especially episcopal authority, will be considered not only in the communion of Churches as a whole and within particular areas but also within the individual or local Church.

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