



THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN UNITY

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

REPORT

Third Meeting

Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 27 – 30 January 2006

Catholic and Oriental Orthodox representatives, delegated by their churches, met 27-30 January 2006, as members of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, 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 held in Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia, at the Catholicosate of All Armenians, hosted by H.H. Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. Delegates were present from the Catholic Church and from the following Oriental Orthodox Churches: the Coptic Orthodox Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of All Armenians), Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia), and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Delegates from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Church were unable to attend. The meeting was originally scheduled to begin on January 26, but was delayed one day because of severe winter weather.

Each working day began with morning prayers, and the sessions took place in a cordial atmosphere. The Catholic and Oriental Orthodox members held separate meetings at various times during the dialogue.

The members of the international commission were received by H.H. Catholicos Karekin II on January 27. He expressed his pleasure at being able to host this session of the dialogue, and encouraged its work. There was an exchange of gifts between the two co-chairmen and himself. The members were invited to attend a Divine Liturgy presided over by H.H. the Catholicos, and celebrated by His Grace Bishop Yeznik Petrossian, Ecumenical Officer of the Catholicosate of All Armenians, in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin on Sunday January 29. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, there was a special requiem service for H.H. Baselius Mar Thoma Mathews II, the Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, who entered into eternal life on January 27.

In accord with the plan for the dialogue that was adopted at the Preparatory Meeting in 2003, papers were presented during this session by Catholic and Oriental Orthodox members on three topics: "Bishops in Apostolic Succession" (by Fr. Matthew Vellanickal/Fr Ronald Roberson, CSP and by Fr. John Panicker), "Primacy and Synodality/Conciliarity" (by Bishop Nareg Alemezian and by Prof. Dietmar Winkler), and "Synods, Local and Ecumenical" (by Archbishop George Saliba and by Fr Frans Bouwen).

After an in-depth discussion of the papers and the progress of the dialogue, the commission decided to further develop its methodology. A drafting committee has been appointed that will study points of consensus and difference found in the papers presented at the dialogue so far, and produce a draft common text on these subjects for examination at the next meeting. The drafting committee will be composed of Catholic members Fr. Frans Bouwen, Fr. Mark Sheridan, Msgr. Johan Bonny, and Prof. Dietmar Winkler, and Oriental Orthodox members Metropolitan Kuriakose Theophilose, Bishop Yeznik Petrossian, Bishop Nareg Alemezian, and Fr. John Panicker. The next meeting will also include one paper from each side on "Mission, Witness Service, and the Problem of Proselytism."

During the course of the meeting the international commission members attended a reception given by H.E. Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, the Apostolic Nuncio to Armenia, a dinner hosted by H.H. the Catholicos, and a Buffet dinner hosted by the Ambassadors of Egypt and Lebanon and the chargé d'affaires of Syria at the residence of the Egyptian Ambassador. In addition, on the evening of January 28, the members attended a presentation of the life and work of Mekhitar of Sebastia, the founder of the Mekhitarist community. On the evening of January 29 the members venerated the relics of Saint Gregory the Illuminator at the new cathedral in Yerevan dedicated to him.

The fourth meeting of the International Commission will take place from January 28 (day of arrival) until February 3, 2007 (day of departure). On January 29 the Catholic and Oriental Orthodox members will meet separately. January 30-31 and February 1-2 will be full working days. The meeting will be hosted by the Catholic Church at a location to be determined.

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: H.E. Khajag Barsamian, Archbishop of the Eastern Diocese of the USA; H.E. Mesrob K. Krikorian, Archbishop of Vienna (prevented; substituted by H.G. Bishop Yeznik Petrossian, Director of the Department for Interchurch Relations of the Catholicosate of All Armenians);

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 Catholicosate 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; Bishop Daniel of Sydney, Australia (observer);

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

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

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: H.E. Philipos Mar Eusebios, Metropolitan of the diocese of Thumpamon; President of the Department of Ecumenical Relations; Rev. Dr. John Mathews (co-secretary), Secretary of the Committee on Inter-Church Relations (prevented; substituted by Rev. Fr. John Panicker).

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 (prevented);

Most Reverend Boutros 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, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 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, Universite Saint-Esprit, Kaslik, Jounieh;

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, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 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.

Etchmiadzin, 30 January 2006