



THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

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

REPORT

First Meeting

Cairo, Egypt, 27-30 January 2004

Catholic and Oriental Orthodox representatives, delegated by their Churches, met 27-30 January 2004, 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 Nasr City (Cairo, Egypt) at the Saint Mark Centre, hosted by H.H. Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark. Letters of invitation to this meeting, signed by both co-chairmen, were sent to the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches: the Coptic Orthodox Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of all Armenians), Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of Cilicia), Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and Eritrean Orthodox Church. The same invitation was sent to the Catholic members through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

In their opening address the co-chairmen underscore the importance of the meeting marking the beginning of a new official theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches as a family. In the name of H.H. Pope Shenouda III, Metropolitan Bishop welcomed the participants, who on Wednesday evening 28 January had the opportunity to take part at the weekly sermon of Pope Shenouda III at Saint Mark's Cathedral in Cairo. His Holiness greeted all delegation members and recommended the new dialogue to the prayers of the faithful. In response, H.E. Cardinal Walter Kasper conveyed the brotherly greetings and presented a gift of H.H. Pope John Paul II. The Cardinal confirmed that Catholic and Oriental Orthodox faithful are united in the same faith in the Triune God and in the Saviour Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, that they venerate in common the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and that they share as common Fathers and Teachers of the Church Saint Athanasius and Saint Cyril of Alexandria. On Thursday afternoon 29 January, H.H. Pope Shenouda III came to Saint Mark Centre to greet and bless the Joint Commission, wishing full success for the dialogue and presented personal gifts to all participants.

The first part of the meeting was dedicated to a consideration of the many studies and activities which have taken place over the past thirty years. In this context were presented and discussed the following issues: (1) Unofficial Consultations held between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches (paper by Prof. Dr. Dietmar Winkler and presentation by H.E. Archbishop Dr. Mesrob Krikorian); (2) The official dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church (papers by H.E. Metropolitan Bishop and Rev. Father Frans Bouwen); (3) The official dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (paper on the official dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church by Rev. Father Mathew Vellanickal; paper of Rev. Father John Mathews, read in his absence by H.E. Archbishop Dr. Mesrob Krikorian); (4) The official declarations made by the Catholic Church and any Oriental Orthodox Church (paper by Rev. Father Johan Bonny; presentations by H.E. Archbishop George Saliba, H.E. Archbishop Dr. Mesrob Krikorian, H.G. Bishop Nareg Alemezian). Rev. Father John Long distributed the booklet sponsored jointly by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches in the USA concerning various aspects of their dialogue. These papers and presentations showed that considerable work has been done, which may be helpful for the future dialogue of the commission.

In the second part of the meeting, the Workplan and Agenda for the Dialogue as established in the Preparatory Committee Report were considered. It was decided that the next meeting will deal with the first part of ecclesiology "Church as communion" (items 1-6 and 8). Item 7 of the first part of ecclesiology (Oriental Churches in communion with Rome, their ecclesial and canonical implications) will be studied in a later stage. From each side, one paper will be prepared on the following topics: (a) Understanding of communion, Constitutive elements of communion; (b) Particular and universal communion; Meaning of sister churches and of church families; (c) Full communion and degrees of communion, Common ecumenical goal.

Second Meeting of the Commission

1. Preparations for the second meeting will be undertaken under the leadership of the co-chairs;
2. This meeting will take place from 25 January (arrival) to 30 January (departure) 2005, with the option of spending the weekend at the venue; the members of the Oriental Orthodox delegation will arrive on 24 January;
3. H.E. Cardinal Walter Kasper extended an invitation to have the second meeting of the Commission in Rome;
4. Papers will be sent to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican, by November 1st, 2004, for communication to the members of the Commission;
5. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity will offer co-ordinating facilities for the work of the Commission.

The sessions of the first meeting were held in the context of daily morning and evening prayer, and in a very cordial atmosphere. Separate meetings of the members of the two delegations enabled the co-ordinated contribution to the dialogue and sharing other concerns.

The members expressed their gratitude to the Coptic Orthodox Church and to the Director and staff-members of the Saint Mark Centre for providing accommodation and hospitality.

The members of the Commission were:

Representatives of the Oriental Orthodox Churches

Coptic Orthodox Church: H.E. Amba Bishop (co-chair), Metropolitan of Damiette, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church; H.G. Bishop Suriel, Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne (substitute of Mr. Yoftahe Dimetros, representative of the Eritrean Orthodox Church), Rev. Fr. Dr. Shenouda Maher Ishak;

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. Thomas Themotheos, Metropolitan of Kottayam (India); Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of all Armenians): H.E. Dr. Mesrob K. Krikorian, Archbishop of Vienna; Rev. Fr. Gabriel Sargsyan (substitute); Rev. Fr. Dajad Tsaturyan (observer);

Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate 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; Eritrean Orthodox Church: Rev. Fr. Kaleab Gebreselassie, Co-ordinator for Foreign Affairs; Mr. Yoftahe Dimetrios, General Director of the Eritrean Orthodox Church (prevented);

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: H.E. Philipos Mar Eusebios, Metropolitan of Pathanamthitta (prevented), Rev. Dr. John Mathews (co-secretary), Secretary Committee on Inter-Church Relations (prevented).

Representatives of the Catholic Church

H.E. Cardinal Walter Kasper (co-chair), President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity;

H.E. Mons. Paul-Werner Scheele, Bishop-em of Würzburg (Germany);

H.E. Amba Kyrillos William, Coptic Catholic Bishop of Assiut, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Egypt;

H.E. Mons. Jules Mikhael Al-Jamil, Procurator of the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate to the Holy See and Apostolic Visitor in Europe (prevented);

H.E. Mons. Boutros Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Syria;

H.E. Mons. Woldetensae Ghebreghiorghis, Apostolic Vicar of Harar (Ethiopia), President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea;

Rev. Fr. Mathew Vellanickal; Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry (India);

Rev. Fr. John Long SJ, Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; New York;

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. Mark Sheridan, OSB; Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, Rome;

Rev. Fr. Boghos Levon Zekiyan; Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome;

Rev. Fr. Paul Rouhana, OLM; Universite Saint-Esprit, Kaslik, Jounieh;

Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler; School of Theology, Boston University, USA;

Secretariat: Mgr Johan Bonny (co-secretary), staff-member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Metropolitan Bishop

Cardinal Walter Kasper

Cairo, 30 January 2004