



THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN UNITY

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

REPORT

Tenth Meeting

Rome, January 23 to 27, 2013

The tenth meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches took place in Rome from January 23 to 27, 2013, 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), the Armenian Apostolic Church (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 Tewahdo Church was able to attend.

The two delegations met separately on the morning of January 23. The Joint Commission held plenary sessions on January 23, 24, 25 and 26, each of which began with a brief prayer service using material prepared for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

At the beginning of the first session, Cardinal Koch noted with sadness that the heads of two of the Oriental Orthodox Churches had passed away since the last meeting: His Holiness Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, and His Holiness Abuna Paulos I, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church who had hosted the 2012 meeting of the dialogue. The members observed a moment of silent prayer for the repose of the two patriarchs, and also for Bishop Mikhael Al-Jamil, Procurator General of the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate, a member of the dialogue who died in December 2012. Prayers were also offered for the new Coptic Orthodox Patriarch, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, and for the new Coptic Catholic Patriarch, His Beatitude Ibrahim Isaac Sidrak. The members congratulated Most Reverend Paul Rouhana on his ordination as Maronite Bishop of Sarba in July 2012, and regretted very much that Armenian Catholic Archbishop Peter Marayati of Aleppo was not able to attend because of the dramatic situation in his city.

At this tenth meeting, the members continued their study of the ways in which full communion among our churches was expressed in the first five centuries. In particular, the role of mutual recognition of saints was examined. His Eminence Dr. Gabriel Mar Gregorios presented a paper, "Saints as an Element of Communion and Communication in the Early Church: A Biblical-Theological Perspective," and Father Mark Sheridan, OSB, read his parallel study, "The Saints as an Element in the Communion and Communication in the Early Church." The commission also considered the procedures employed by their churches to recognize new saints. Father Ronald Roberson, CSP, offered a paper entitled "The Process of Recognition/Canonization of Saints in the Catholic Church in History and Today," which was coupled with a study by His Eminence Archbishop Nareg Alemezian, "The Procedure for Introducing a Saint into the Church Directory of Feasts – Recognition/Canonization in the Armenian Apostolic Church." Briefer summaries of the canonization/recognition procedures in their own churches were offered by Metropolitan Bishop (Coptic Orthodox Church), His Eminence Metropolitan Theophilus George Saliba (Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch), Father Daniel Seifemichael Feleke (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church), His Eminence Metropolitan Youhanon Mar Demetrios (Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church), and His Eminence Metropolitan Theophilose Kuriakose (Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church). Based on these studies, the members noted that the mutual recognition of saints – which in the first five centuries was largely a local phenomenon – was a constitutive element in the expression of full communion at that time.

On September 13 and 14, 2012, a drafting committee met in Rome and produced an initial draft document entitled, "The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for our Search for Communion Today." The bulk of the commission's time at this tenth meeting was spent carefully examining this draft text, to which a section on the mutual recognition of saints will also be added. The comments and observations of the members were noted by the drafting committee and will be taken into account as it prepares a more ample text for consideration at the next meeting.

On January 25, the Commission was received in audience by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. Metropolitan Bishoy extended greetings to the Holy Father on behalf of the members of the commission. He thanked him for the condolences he expressed upon the recent deaths of the Coptic and Ethiopian patriarchs, and for his congratulatory message to Pope Tawardos II. He also presented him with a hand painted icon of the Blessed Virgin Saint Mary the Mother of God as a gift.

Pope Benedict then addressed the Commission in these words: "It is with joy in the Lord that I welcome you, the members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Through you I extend fraternal greetings to the heads of all the Oriental Orthodox Churches. In a particular way I greet His Eminence Anba Bishoy, Co-President of the Commission, and I thank him for his kind words. Before all else I would like to recall with appreciation the memory of His Holiness Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, who died recently. I also remember with gratitude His Holiness Abuna Paulos, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church, who last year hosted the Ninth Meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I was saddened, too, to learn of the death of the Most Reverend Jules Mikhael Al-Jamil, Titular Archbishop of Takrit and Procurator of the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate in Rome and a member of your Commission. I join you in prayer for the eternal rest of these dedicated servants of the Lord. Our meeting today affords us an opportunity to reflect together with gratitude on the work of the International Joint Commission, which began ten years ago, in January 2003, as an initiative of the ecclesial authorities of the family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. In the past decade the Commission has examined from an historical perspective the various ways in which the Churches expressed their communion in the early centuries. During this week devoted to prayer for the unity of all Christ's followers, you have met to explore more fully the communion and communication which existed between the Churches in the first five centuries of Christian history. In acknowledging the progress which has been made, I express my hope that relations between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches will continue to develop in a fraternal spirit of cooperation, particularly through the growth of a theological dialogue capable of helping all the Lord's followers to grow in communion and to bear witness before the world to the saving truth of the Gospel. Many of you come from areas where Christians, as individuals and communities, face painful trials and difficulties which are a source of deep concern to us all. Through you, I would like to assure all the faithful of the Middle East of my spiritual closeness and my prayer that this land, so important in God's plan of salvation, may be led, through constructive dialogue and cooperation, to a future of justice and lasting peace. All Christians need to work together in mutual acceptance and trust in serving the cause of peace and justice in fidelity to the Lord's will. May the example and intercession of the countless martyrs and saints who down the ages have borne courageous witness to Christ in all our Churches, sustain and strengthen all of us in meeting the challenges of the present with confidence and hope in the future which the Lord is opening before us. Upon you, and upon all those associated with the work of the Commission, I cordially invoke a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom, joy and peace. Thank you for your attention."

Later on the same day, the members attended the Vespers Service presided over by Pope Benedict XVI in the Basilica of Saint Paul the Apostle Outside the Walls for the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Cardinal Koch hosted a meal at the Domus Sanctae Marthae in the Vatican on Thursday evening, January 24 for the members of the dialogue commission and the staff of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. His Eminence Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, also attended the dinner.

The eleventh meeting of the International Joint Commission will take place in Kerala, India, hosted by the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. The members will plan to arrive on Monday, January 27, 2014. Separate family meetings will take place on January 28, followed by plenary sessions on January 29, 30, 31, and February 1.

The members concluded with joyful thanks to God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for what has been accomplished at this meeting.

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, Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church, 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 (unable to attend, represented by Reverend Father Shahe Ananyan, Etchmiadzin, Armenia); H.E. Archbishop Yeznik Petrossian, General Secretary of Bible Society of Armenia, Etchmiadzin, Armenia;

Armenian Apostolic Church: Holy See of Cilicia: H.E. Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy in the USA, New York; H.E. Archbishop Nareg Amezian, Ecumenical Officer of the Holy See of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon;

Coptic Orthodox Church: H.E. Anba Bishoy (co-chair), Metropolitan of Damiette, Egypt; Rev. Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak, West Henrietta, New York, USA; H.G. Bishop Daniel of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Sydney, Australia (observer); Bishop Barnaba of Torino and Rome (observer);

Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church: Rev. Fr. Kaleab Gebreselassie Gebru, Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Patriarchate, Asmara, Eritrea (unable to attend);

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Archbishop Markos of Eastern Gojjam (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, Diocese of Trivandrum, India; H. E. Metropolitan Dr. Youhanon Mar Demetrios, Bishop of Delhi (co-secretary), Delhi, India.

Representatives of the Catholic Church

His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch (co-chair), President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Most Reverend Paul-Werner Scheele, Bishop Emeritus of Würzburg, Germany;

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 (observer);

Most Reverend Peter Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Syria (unable to attend);

Most Reverend Woldetensae Ghebregiorgis, Apostolic Vicar of Harar, Ethiopia, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea;

Most Reverend Paul Rouhana, OLM, Maronite Bishop of Sarba and General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, Jounieh, Lebanon;

Rev. Fr. Frans Bouwen M.Afr., Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Jerusalem;

Rev. Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, Executive Director, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, 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;

Rev. Fr. Mark Sheridan, OSB, Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, Rome;

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

Rev. Fr. Boghos Levon Zekiyan, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome;

Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler, Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Salzburg, Austria.

Rev. Fr. Gabriel Quicke, Official of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome (co-secretary).