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

REPORT
Thirteenth Meeting
Cairo, Egypt, January 30 to February 6, 2016

The thirteenth meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches took place at the Saint Mark Coptic Center in Cairo, Egypt, from January 31 to February 6, 2016, hosted by the Coptic Orthodox Church. It was chaired jointly by His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and by His Eminence Metropolitan Bishoy 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.

In the afternoon of Sunday January 31, the members of the Joint Commission, accompanied by the Apostolic Nuncio, traveled to St. Bishoy Monastery in Wadi Natrun in order to be received by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church. His Holiness received the members very warmly in the new church headquarters that has been built within the monastic compound. In his spontaneous address, he spoke about the present state of the Coptic Orthodox Church and offered his prayerful good wishes for the success of the dialogue. Pope Tawadros then gave the members a tour of the new headquarters, including the new hall that has been constructed for meetings of the Holy Synod. His Holiness announced that he considered the presence there of the members of the Joint Commission to constitute the formal opening of the new Synod hall. The members also visited St. Bishoy monastery itself along with the tomb of Pope Shenouda III before returning to Cairo.

The two delegations met separately on February 1. Plenary sessions were held on February 2, 3, 4 and 5, each of which began with a brief prayer service based on material prepared for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. In the evening of Thursday February 4, the members attended a reception in their honor at the Apostolic Nunciature hosted by His Excellency Archbishop Bruno Musarò, Apostolic Nuncio in Egypt and the Arab League.

During the first plenary session, which was also attended by Archbishop Musarò, recent developments in the relations between the two communions were discussed. Among these was the presence of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians and His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia at the Holy Eucharist celebrated by His Holiness Pope Francis on Sunday April 12, 2015 in St. Peter's Basilica to commemorate the Armenian genocide and to proclaim Saint Gregory of Narek as a Doctor of the Catholic Church. On June 18, 2015, Pope Francis received His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East. From 22 to 25 April 2015, Cardinal Koch traveled to Armenia to attend the canonization of Armenian Martyrs and the commemoration of the centenary of the Armenian genocide that took place in the Holy See of Etchmiadzin. From 17 to 20 July 2015, Cardinal Koch traveled to Lebanon to attend the celebration of the blessing of the Holy Myron and the commemoration of the centenary of the Armenian Martyrs, held in the Holy See of Cilicia (Antelias). During the opening session congratulations were also extended to Fr Shahe Ananyan, a representative of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of All Armenians), who has been appointed as the Director of the Catholicosate's Ecumenical Relations Department, replacing His Grace Bishop Hovakim Manukyan, who is now serving as the Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian church in Great Britain and Ireland.

During the course of the meeting, the Sacraments of Initiation in the participating churches stood at the center of a substantial discussion. Papers were presented by Metropolitan Bishoy of Damiette; Rev. Father Mark Sheridan, OSB; Archbishop Theophilos George Saliba; Rev. Father Frans Bouwen, M.Afr.; Bishop Paul Rouhana, OLM.; and Rev. Father Columba Stewart, OSB (read in his absence). Consideration was given to the scriptural and patristic foundation of baptism, the specific developments in the Latin tradition of the Sacraments of Initiation, and the correlation between Church and sacraments. There was general agreement that Baptism is the pathway and key of all sacraments. The members found that a deeper examination of this topic would be beneficial within the Joint Commission's broader study of the sacraments and their relationship to the Church.

The next meeting of the Joint Commission will take place in Rome, hosted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Members will plan to arrive on January 21, 2017, with family meetings on January 23, followed by plenary meetings January 24, 25, 26, and 27 with departures on January 28.

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 H.G. Armash Nalbandian, Bishop of the Armenian Orthodox Diocese of Damascus); Rev. Father Shahe Ananyan, Director of the Department of Ecumenical Relations, Etchmiadzin, Armenia (unable to attend);
Armenian Apostolic Church: Holy See of Cilicia: H.E. Archbishop Nareg Alemezian, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church of Cyprus, Nicosia; H.G. Bishop Magar Ashkarian, Armenian Prelacy, Teheran, Iran (unable to attend);
Coptic Orthodox Church: H.E. Anba Bishoy, Metropolitan of Damiette, Egypt (co-chair); Rev. Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak, West Henrietta, New York, USA; H.G. Bishop Daniel of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Sydney, Australia (Observer); H.G. Bishop Barnaba El Soryany, Rome, Italy (Observer);
Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church: Rev. Fr. Kaleab Gebreselassie Gebru, Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Patriarchate, Asmara, Eritrea (unable to attend);
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Archbishop Gabriel of Sidamo; 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 and Metropolitan of the Diocese of Trivandrum, India; H.E. Metropolitan Dr. Youhanon Mar Demetrios (co-secretary), Metropolitan of the Diocese of Delhi, India.

Representatives of the Catholic Church
His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (co-chair);
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 Basilios Georges Casmoussa, Syrian Catholic Patriarchate, Beirut, Lebanon;
Most Reverend Peter Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Syria (unable to attend;
Most Reverend Woldetensae Ghebreghiorghis, Apostolic Vicar of Harar, Ethiopia, President of the Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea;
Most Reverend Paul Rouhana, OLM, Bishop of the Patriarchal Maronite Vicariate of Sarba, Jounieh, Lebanon;
Most Reverend Boghos Levon Zekiyan, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Istanbul and Turkey;
Rev. Fr. Frans Bouwen M.Afr., Sainte-Anne, Jerusalem;
Rev. Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, Executive Director, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Saint John's Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA (unable to attend);
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, and Abu Ghosh, Israel;
Rev. Malpan Fr. Mathew Vellanickal, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry, India;
Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler, Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Salzburg, Austria.
Rev. Monsignor Gabriel Quicke, Official of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome (co-secretary).