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

REPORT
Sixth Meeting
Rome, Italy, January 26 to 30, 2009

The sixth meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches took place in Rome from January 26 to 30, 2009. The meeting was chaired jointly by His Eminence Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and His Eminence Metropolitan Bishoy of Damiette, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Joining delegates from the Catholic Church were representatives of the following Oriental Orthodox Churches: the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of All Armenians), the Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia), the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church.

As the members gathered for the meeting, they learned with great sadness that His Grace Philipos Mar Eusebius, Metropolitan of Thumpamon, India, a representative of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church since the inception of the dialogue, had passed away only a few days earlier, on January 21. They expressed their condolences to the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

Most of the members attended the Vespers Service presided over by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI at the Basilica of St. Paul's Outside the Walls on the evening of January 25 for the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The two delegations met separately on January 26, and held plenary sessions each day from January 27 to January 30. The first part of the meeting was devoted to the examination and approval of a common document entitled "Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church." The document describes broad areas of consensus regarding fundamental ecclesiological principles, and outlines areas that require further study. This common document of our dialogue is a major achievement and will be submitted to the authorities of our churches for their consideration and action. It is also recommended to all the faithful of our churches so that they also can participate in the growing understanding between us.

In line with the 2003 Agenda of the dialogue, the members of the commission also heard four papers regarding the nature of the communion our churches shared in the first half of the first millennium. These papers were "The First Three Ecumenical Councils and Their Significance for the Armenian Church" by Archbishop Mesrob Krikorian (read in his absence), "Reception of Councils in the First Five Centuries" by Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler, "The Exercise of Communion Among the Churches in the First Five Centuries" by Fr. Frans Bouwen, and "The Exercise of Communion Among the Churches and the Reception of Ecclesiastical Councils in the First Five Centuries" by Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak.

On Tuesday evening January 27, Cardinal Kasper hosted a dinner for the members at the Domus Sancta Martha in the Vatican. Each day began with a prayer service in which the members asked for the Lord's blessings on their work. The members also signed a letter expressing their best wishes to Most Reverend Johan Bonny who, before he was consecrated Bishop of Antwerp, Belgium, earlier this month, had staffed the dialogue on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity since it began. The two chairpersons also sent a congratulatory letter to Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad on his election as Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia in the name of the members of the Commission.

On Friday January 30, the members of the Joint Commission were received in audience by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. Metropolitan Bishoy extended the greetings of the commission members to the Holy Father, and presented him with an icon of the Blessed Virgin Saint Mary "Mother of God" painted by Coptic nuns in Egypt. In his response, the Pope said, "The world needs a visible sign of the mystery of unity that binds the three divine Persons and, that two thousand years ago, with the Incarnation of the Son of God, was revealed to us. The tangibility of the Gospel message is conveyed perfectly by John, when he declares his intention to express what he has heard and his eyes have seen and his hands have touched, so that all may have fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4). Our communion through the grace of the Holy Spirit in the life that unites the Father and the Son has a perceptible dimension within the Church, the Body of Christ, 'the fullness of him who fills all in all' (Eph 1:23), and we all have a duty to work for the manifestation of that essential dimension of the Church to the world. Your sixth meeting has taken important steps precisely in the

study of the Church as communion. The very fact that the dialogue has continued over time and is hosted each year by one of the several Churches you represent is itself a sign of hope and encouragement."
The seventh meeting of the International Commission will take place at the Catholicosate of the Armenian Apostolic Church – Holy See of Cilicia, Antelias – Lebanon, at the invitation of His Holiness Catholicos Aram I. Arrival will be Sunday January 24, with separate meetings on Monday January 25, commission meetings Tuesday through Friday January 26 through January 29, with departures on Saturday, January 30, 2010. At this meeting more papers will be presented exploring the ways in which the churches expressed their full communion with one another during the first five centuries with particular emphasis on the churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Armenia, Persia and India. The session concluded with a prayer asking the Lord's blessing upon the continuation of the dialogue's work.

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, Ernakulam, India;
Armenian Apostolic Church: Catholicosate of all Armenians: H.E. Khajag Barsamian, Archbishop of the Eastern Diocese of the USA, New York; hhhhhH.E. Archbishop Yeznik Petrossian, General Secretary of Inter-Church Affairs of the Holy See of 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.G. Bishop Nareg Alemezian, Ecumenical Officer of the Holy See of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon;
Coptic Orthodox Church: H.E. Anba Bishoy (co-chair), Metropolitan of Damiette, Egypt, General Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church; Rev. Fr. Shenouda Maher Ishak, West Henrietta, New York, USA; H.G. Bishop Daniel of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Sydney, Australia (observer);
Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church: Rev. Fr. Kaleab Gebreselassie Gebru, Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Patriarchate, Asmara, Eritrea (unable to attend); H.G. Bishop Atnatyos Sibhatlaab of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church in Europe (observer); Rev. Fr. Ephrem Ghirmay, Administrator of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church of Milan, Italy (observer);
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church: Rev. Fr. Megabe Biluy Seife Selassie Yohannes, Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate, Addis Ababa; Lique Hiruyan Getachew Guadie, Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate, Addis Ababa (unable to attend);
Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: H.G. Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, Metropolitan of Bombay Diocese, India; Rev. Dr. John Mathews (co-secretary), Secretary of the Committee on Inter-Church Relations, Kottayam, India.

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 Youhanna Golta, Patriarchal Auxiliary Bishop of the Coptic Catholic Patriarchate, Cairo, Egypt;
Most Reverend Jules Mikhael Al-Jamil, Procurator of the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate to the Holy See and Apostolic Visitator in Europe, Rome;
Most Reverend Peter Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, Syria;
Most Reverend Woldetensae Ghebreghiorghis, 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, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome;
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. Paul Rouhana, OLM, Université Saint-Esprit, Kaslik, Jounieh, Lebanon;
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, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome;
Prof. Dietmar W. Winkler, Paris Lodron Universität, Salzburg, Austria.

Rome, January 30, 2009