

SIXTH PLENARY MEETING OF THE JOINT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

At the end of its sixth plenary session the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (Freising, June 6-15, 1990) approved the text which we publish below.

This document is a first step of the Commission in the study of a complex problem of which all aspects must be considered. Along with the Report of the special sub-commission which met in Vienna, January 26-30, 1990, the present document constitutes the point of departure for the study which the three joint sub-commissions must continue, with the aim of presenting before May 1, 1991, a comprehensive report to the Joint Coordinating Committee.

1. The Commission held its plenary session under the co-presidency of the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Australia, His Eminence Stylianos and the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, His Excellency Monsignor Edward Idris Cassidy from 6th to 15th June, 1990 in Freising, at the "Kardinal-Döpfner House", where it enjoyed the generous hospitality of the Archbishop of Munich and Freising, His Eminence Cardinal Friedrich Wetter.

2. During this year 1990, the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church finishes ten years of systematic and fruitful work accomplished in a spirit of understanding and fraternal cooperation.

3. Already two years ago, the Commission thought the time had come to pass on to the study of the theological and canonical consequences of the sacramental structure of the Church, and particularly to take up the question of the reciprocal relationship between authority and conciliarity in the Church. At the same time, the Commission thought it also necessary to take up directly the theological and practical questions facing the Orthodox Church as a consequence of the origin and present existence of the Catholic Churches of byzantine rite. This intention was announced at the fourth session in Bari (1987) and began to be put into effect during the meeting of Valamo (1988). A sub-commission was formed with the mandate to study the subject and report on it to the Commission. This sub-commission met in Vienna in January 1990.

4. When this sub-commission was formed, no one could foresee the developments which would

take place in Eastern Europe and the flowering of religious liberty these have allowed.

The return of vast regions to religious liberty is for Orthodox and Catholics alike, who have both suffered persecutions during decades, a reason for deep thanksgiving to God, who has shown once more that it is He who is the Lord of history.

5. The problem of the origin and existence of the Catholic Churches of byzantine Rite has accompanied the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches since well before the commencement of their dialogue and has been constantly present from the beginning of this dialogue. The way in which they will be able to search out a solution of it together will be a test of the solidity of the theological foundation which has already been laid and which it will be necessary to develop. Because of recent events, the whole meeting has been dedicated to the study of the questions posed by the origin, the existence and the development of the Catholic Churches of byzantine Rite which are also called "Uniate Churches".

6. As a result of the discussions, which have taken place in a very sincere and fraternal atmosphere, the Commission wishes to express the following reflections.

a) Because of the conflictual situation existing in some regions between the Catholic Churches of byzantine Rite and the Orthodox Church, "Uniatism" is an urgent problem to be treated with priority over all other subjects to be discussed in the dialogue.

b) The term "Uniatism" indicates here the effort which aims to bring about the unity of the Church by separating from the Orthodox Church communities or Orthodox faithful without taking into account that, according to ecclesiology, the Orthodox Church is a sister-Church which itself offers the means of grace and salvation. In this sense and with reference to the document issued by the Vienna sub-commission, we reject "Uniatism" as a method of unity opposed to the common Tradition of our Churches.

c) Where "Uniatism" has been employed as a method, it failed to achieve its goal of bringing the Churches closer together; rather it provoked new divisions. The situation thus created has been a source of conflict and suffering, and these have deeply marked the memory and the collective consciousness of the two Churches. On the other hand, for ecclesiological reasons, the conviction has grown that other ways must be sought out.

d) Today, when our Churches meet on the basis of the ecclesiology of Communion between sister-

Churches, it would be regretful to destroy the important work for the unity of the Churches accomplished through the dialogue, by going back to the method of "Uniatism".

7. However, beyond historical and theological ways of approaching the subject, practical initiatives should be taken in order to avoid in good time the consequences of dangerous tensions which exist in various Orthodox countries. In this regard, the following may be of help.

a) Religious liberty for persons and communities is not only a right which must be totally respected. For Christians living with the same divine life, it is also a gift of the Spirit in view of the building up of the Body of Christ to its full stature (cf. Eph. 4,16). This liberty excludes absolutely all violence, direct or indirect, physical or moral. It requires, as do all the gifts of the Spirit, which are always granted for the good of all (1 Cor. 12,7), fraternal collaboration among pastors with a view to healing the wounds of the past and arriving at guiding the faithful towards a deep and lasting reconciliation, which permits them to recite together, in all truth, the prayer which the Lord has taught to his own.

b) Consequently, it is necessary that the responsible ecclesial authorities, in the spirit of dialogue and taking into account the wishes of the local communities, strive to solve the concrete points of friction.

c) Every effort aimed at having the faithful of one Church pass to another, which is commonly

called "proselytism", should be excluded as a misuse of pastoral energy. In addition, it would be a counter-witness to those who observe critically the way the Churches use their new liberty and who are ready to detect and utilize every sign of rivalry. This means that the pastor of a community should not interfere in a community entrusted to another pastor, but rather should work in agreement with this other pastor and with all others, in order that all their communities progress towards the same goal, that of a common witness given to the world in which they live.

d) When a bilateral agreement has been reached and approved by the respective authorities, it is absolutely necessary that it be implemented.

8. It is our conviction that dialogue, which is the most suitable way to work for unity, is also the most appropriate forum for confronting problems, particularly that of "Uniatism". For this reason the dialogue must continue. For the present our attention will focus on the study of this particular question.

9. We think that the presence of the Orthodox Churches which could not attend this meeting would be useful for the successful result of this study.

10. Following the path opened by the Vienna meeting, the study of this question will be carried forward, since this obstacle has in fact to be overcome if we wish to continue our progress towards unity.

Freising, June 15th, 1990