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The eighth plenary session of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church was held at Mount Saint Mary's College and Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, USA, from July 9 to 19, 2000. The Commission was hosted with great generosity by Cardinal William H. Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore, with the assistance of the President, Rector and others of Mount Saint Mary's College and Seminary.

The meeting was co-chaired by Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and Archbishop Stylianos of Australia, Ecumenical Patriarchate. Roman Catholic members were: Archbishops, Bishops and scholars from the United States, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Germany, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Poland and Romania. Orthodox members were: Metropolitans, Bishops and scholars from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Moscow, and Romania and the Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Albania, Poland, Finland and Estonia.

During the week, the members of the Commission attended a number of acts of worship including a Service of Prayer at the Basilica Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Seton, a Doxology at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation in Baltimore, a solemn celebration of the Eucharist in the Catholic Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore and a Divine Liturgy in the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Saint Sophia in Washington. On all of these occasions they were received with great cordiality and hospitality by the local clergy and lay people of these

various places.

The theme discussed at this plenary session was the "Ecclesiological and Canonical Implications of Uniatism", based upon the preliminary document prepared in Ariccia/Rome (1998) by the Commission's Coordinating Committee, a subject which has assumed particular importance since the changes which occurred in Central and Eastern Europe over the last ten years.

The Joint International Commission has been particularly concerned with this question since its sixth plenary session in Freising (Germany) in 1990 and in its seventh session in Balamand (Lebanon) in 1993. Documents touching upon theological aspects as well as practical guidelines were issued by the Joint Commission in these meetings. Although reactions were generally positive, these documents met with some reserve and even outright opposition, sometimes from each side. Therefore, it was felt necessary to continue the reflection by the Joint Commission in order to find common understanding on this extremely thorny question.

The discussions of this plenary were far-reaching, intense and thorough. They touched upon many theological and canonical questions connected with the existence and the activities of the Eastern Catholic Churches. However, since agreement was not reached on the basic theological concept of uniatism, it was decided not to have a common statement at this time. For this reason, the members will report to their Churches who will indicate how to overcome this obstacle for the peaceful continuation of the dialogue.

The Commission sees the need for further study of the theological, pastoral, historical and canonical questions related to this issue. It understands well the complexity of the problems that are to be solved and at the same time the importance of this dialogue for the Churches. Despite all the difficulties, the Commission hopes that through this process it will be able to develop further its quest for full communion between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, a process which has already made notable progress in the plenary meetings of Munich (1982), Crete (1984), Bari (1986 and 1987) and Valamo, Finland (1988). This year, 2000 years after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Joint International Commission celebrates the 20th anniversary of the beginning of its work at Patmos and Rhodes in 1980. It is a beautiful opportunity to thank God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - for what has been accomplished together during these two decades.

The Commission expresses its gratitude to the staff of the Archdiocese and of the College and Seminary who contributed to making this first meeting on the North American continent so pleasant. In a special way, it thanks those individuals and groups who accompanied its work with their constant prayers.

Emmitsburg - Baltimore, July 19, 2000

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