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• PREPARATORY COMMITTEE MEETING FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH-ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE (ROME, ITALY, 27-29 JANUARY 2003)

Catholic and Oriental Orthodox representatives, delegated by their Churches, met 27-29 January 2003, as members of the Preparatory Committee for the Catholic Church-Oriental Orthodox Churches International Joint Commission for Dialogue, under the co-chairmanship of His Eminence Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and His Eminence Metropolitan Bishoy of Damiette of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The meeting was held in Rome, Italy, at the offices of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, in response to a letter dated 10 September 2002, and addressed to all the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches by Cardinal Kasper, inviting them to engage in an official dialogue with the Catholic Church. Comprising the Oriental Orthodox Churches are: Coptic Orthodox Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of all Armenians), Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of Cilicia), Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and Eritrean Orthodox Church.

In his opening address, Cardinal Kasper welcomed the participants by saying: *"I greatly appreciate your willingness to take part in this meeting, which hopefully may become a new and promising step in our journey towards full communion"*, and referring to the work accomplished in the past, he stated: *"This meeting is not the*

first, nor will it be the last along the path of our ecumenical venture. Much has been achieved in previous years, and still more remains to be done in the years to come".

The members noted that unofficial consultations held between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches (*Pro Oriente*, started in September 1971, in Vienna, Austria), the official declarations made by the Catholic Church and any Oriental Orthodox Church and other dialogue agreements reached on a regional basis between the Catholic Church and any Oriental Orthodox Church, already provide valuable background for the initiation of the official dialogue. This dialogue has as its aim the fostering of a better understanding and relationship between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches by addressing issues of common concern, in response to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's prayer that His disciples, given to Him in the name of His Father, might be one as He and the Father are one (ref. John 17.11).

The Preparatory Committee members were received in audience by His Holiness Pope John Paul II on Tuesday, 28 January. After an introduction and an address made by Cardinal Kasper, His Holiness delivered a message of welcome, extending his fraternal greetings to the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and expressing the wish that the *"efforts to establish a Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue prove a major step forward towards full communion in truth and charity"*.

The Preparatory Committee officially established the rules of membership of the Catholic Church-Oriental Orthodox Churches International Joint Commission for Dialogue and set up the work plan, agenda, membership, procedures, methodologies and timetable for the Joint Commission. The first meeting of this Joint Commission is foreseen for the end of January 2004.

The six sessions of the meeting were held in the context of daily morning and evening prayer, and in a very cordial atmosphere. Separate meetings for the representatives of the two Church families enabled the co-ordinated contribution to the overall planning process.

The members expressed their gratitude to the Catholic Church for providing accommodations and hospitality.

The members of the Preparatory Committee were:

Representatives of the Oriental Orthodox Churches

Coptic Orthodox Church: H.E. Amba Bishoy, Metropolitan of Damiette, General Secretary of the *Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church*

Syrian Orthodox Church: H.E. Mor Theophilos Georges Saliba, Archbishop of Mount Lebanon, Secretary of the *Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church*

Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of all Armenians): H.E. Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the *Eastern Diocese of the USA*

Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of Cilicia): H.E. Bishop Nareg Alemezian, Ecumenical Officer of the *Catholicosate of Cilicia*

Eritrean Orthodox Church: Rev. Fr. Kaleab Gebreselassie, Co-ordinator for Foreign Affairs

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: Rev. Fr. John Mathews, Secretary *Committee on Inter- Church Relations*

Representatives of the Catholic Church

H.E. Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the *Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*

H.E. the Most Reverend Brian Farrell, Secretary of the *PCPCU*

Mons. Eleuterio F. Fortino, Under-Secretary of the *PCPCU*

H.E. the Most Reverend Paul-Werner Scheele, Bishop of Würzburg (Germany), President of the *Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Germany*

H.E. the Most Reverend Kyrillos William, Coptic Catholic Bishop of Assiut, President of the *Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Egypt*

H.E. the Most Reverend Jules Mikhael Al-Jamil, Procurator of the *Syrian Catholic Patriarchate* to the Holy See and Apostolic Visitor in Europe

H.E. the Most Reverend Boutros Marayati, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo, President of the *Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Syria*

H.E. the Most Reverend Woldetsensé Ghebregiorghis, Apostolic Vicar of Harar (Ethiopia), President of the *Ecumenical Commission of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia*

Rev. Fr. John Long, sj, member of the Catholic-Eastern Orthodox dialogue, Ecumenical Lecturer and Consultant

Secretariat: Msgr. Johan Bonny, staff-member of the *PCPCU*

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