

**JOINT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION  
FOR THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN  
THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

**14<sup>th</sup> PLENARY SESSION  
Chieti, Italy, 16-21 September 2016**

**COMMUNIQUE**

The fourteenth meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church was held from 16 to 21 September 2016 in Villa Maria, Francavilla al Mare (Chieti). The meeting was generously hosted by His Excellency Bruno Forte, Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto, a member of the Commission, with the support of the Italian Bishops' Conference.

All the Orthodox Churches, with the exception of the Patriarchate of Bulgaria, were represented, namely the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Patriarchate of Antioch, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Patriarchate of Moscow, the Patriarchate of Serbia, the Patriarchate of Romania, the Patriarchate of Georgia, the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece, the Church of Poland, the Church of Albania and the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia. A corresponding number (26) of Catholic members, coming from different countries, were present.

The Commission worked under the direction of its two co-presidents, Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and Archbishop Job of Telmessos, of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, assisted by the co-secretaries, Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima (Ecumenical Patriarchate) and Msgr. Andrea Palmieri (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity). Since the last plenary meeting, Archbishop Job had replaced Metropolitan John Zizioulas who had retired for health reasons. The Commission expressed its profound gratitude to Metropolitan John Zizioulas for his long and dedicated leadership of the Commission as co-president.

At the opening plenary session held on Friday, 16 September, the Commission was warmly welcomed by the host, Archbishop Forte, and by the Mayor of Francavilla al Mare, Sig. Antonio Luciani.

The two co-presidents expressed their gratitude for the hospitality offered by the Archdiocese and underlined the will to continue the journey towards the unity of the Churches, in order to strengthen Christian witness in the world and to bring the healing message of the Gospel to suffering humanity.

On Saturday, 17 September, the Catholic members celebrated the Eucharist in the Cathedral of Saint Justin of Chieti, presided over by Cardinal Kurt Koch, in the presence of the Orthodox members and many local authorities and people of the area. They were later welcomed by the mayor of Chieti, Sig. Umberto di Primio, in the Municipal Theater where they attended the traditional "Miserere" of Selecchy, performed by the chorus of the "Sacro Monte dei Morti" Confraternity. Later they were hosted by the Prefect, Dott. Antonio Corona, in the Palazzo del Governo, where a dinner was offered by the Governor of Abruzzo, Hon. Luciano D'Alfonso.

On Sunday, 19 September, the Orthodox members celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the Shrine of Manoppello, where the precious relic of the Holy Face is preserved. The celebration was concelebrated by Archbishop Job of Telmessos, together with His Grace Bishop Ilia of Philomelion (Church of Albania) and His Eminence Archbishop George of Michalovce and Košice (Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia), in the presence of the Catholic members. Present at the Divine Liturgy were a large number of faithful from the local Orthodox parish, as well as numerous Catholic faithful. The Capuchin Friars, guardians of the Shrine, offered a lunch and gave each participant a souvenir of the visit.

In the afternoon, the Commission visited the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Vasto where they venerated the relic of the Holy Thorn. They visited the co-cathedral of Saint Joseph and paid homage to a revered triptych of the Virgin, Saint John the Baptist and Saint Catherine of Alexandria painted in the 14th century, of Albanian origin. On various occasions the area of Chieti-Vasto was described as a bridge between the two shores of the Adriatic, between the traditions of East and West. The Commission then visited the historic monastery of San Giovanni in Venere, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Benedictine Abbey now cared for by the Passionist fathers. These visits offered the participants an insightful experience of the profound devotion of the people of the Archdiocese and of their attachment to the Church and their Archbishop.

On the first day of the meeting, as is customary, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox members met separately to coordinate their work. The Commission then met in plenary session to examine the Amman text on the exercise of synodality and primacy in the first millennium, which had been revised by the Drafting Committee in June 2015 and further revised by the Joint Coordinating Committee in September 2015. A first reading of the text brought numerous suggested amendments and revisions, which were then elaborated by a Drafting Committee composed of three Orthodox and three Catholic members. This revised text was then submitted to the plenary, which discussed it in detail and reached agreement on the document, called "Synodality and Primacy in the First Millennium. Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church". Disagreement with some

paragraphs of the document was expressed by the delegation of the Georgian Patriarchate.

The discussion focused on the significance and interrelatedness of synodality and primacy in the history of the Church in the first millennium in the varied and changing situations in East and West. While recognizing diversity present in the Church's experience, the Commission acknowledged the continuity of theological, canonical and liturgical principles, which constituted the bond of communion between East and West. This common understanding is the point of reference and a powerful source of inspiration for Catholics and Orthodox as they seek to restore full communion today. On this basis, both must consider how synodality, primacy and the interrelatedness between them can be conceived and exercised today and in the future.

In discussing the future of the dialogue, the Joint Commission agreed that the Coordinating Committee will meet next year in order to decide on the theme and issues to be further elaborated in the dialogue.

Throughout these days, the members of the Commission prayed often for the suffering populations of the Middle East, where many of the Churches present are rooted, as well as those in Europe and other parts of the world. The martyrdom and kidnapping of many people, including Metropolitan Pavlos of Aleppo, a member of this Commission, and of Metropolitan Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, was deeply felt as a witness to the profound unity of all Christians and as an incentive to work all the more for progress on the path to full communion between the Churches.

The members of the Joint Commission greatly appreciated the generous hospitality of the host Church and the spirit of friendship and solidarity of all present. They trust that their work will contribute to hastening the day when the prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper, "That all might be one", will be fulfilled. They ask all the faithful to pray for this intention.

Chieti, 21 September 2016.