



NEWS

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ORIENTAL ORTHODOX/ROMAN CATHOLIC CONSULTATION SAYS DIALOGUE PARTICIPANTS MUST BE 'EQUALS'

WASHINGTON--Participants in the Oriental Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation have issued a statement saying "What is demanded of dialogue in general must be found in this dialogue between members of the churches of the Oriental and Roman Catholic traditions. The partners of the dialogue should consider each other as 'equals.'"

"This means," they said, "that each should view the other as faithful to the Gospel according to his lights; each should regard the other as possessing the Spirit and so capable of teaching or learning in speaking or listening through the Spirit; both partners share in common the fundamental spiritual goods which are the mutual possession of both churches."

The statement, entitled "Purpose, Scope and Method of the Dialogue Between the Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches" was adopted at the seventh meeting of the Oriental Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation (USA), co-sponsored by the four member-Church hierarchies (Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, and Syrian) and the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB). The meeting took place in Jamaica, N.Y.,

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November 14-15.

The meeting was chaired by Auxiliary Bishop J. Francis Stafford of Baltimore, representing the NCCB Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, and Bishop Papken Varjebedian of the Armenian Church of America.

The statement noted that while the principle of equality between the members of the dialogue must be affirmed, "the churches which they represent have developed characteristic theological approaches to the Christian economy of salvation to which correspond differences in the organizational form of church life, liturgy and spirituality."

"Since we reject that form of doctrinal indifferentism which claims that all positions held by the churches of Jesus Christ have equal validity, the partners of this dialogue are committed to seek together resolutions to those seemingly incompatible divergencies in context and expression of doctrine and the variations in the concrete style of ecclesiastical life which derive from them," the statement said.

Since the main concern of the dialogue, according to the statement, is the fostering of conditions "which favor full communion between our churches, it has both a practical and doctrinal orientation," the statement continued. "It looks to ways of deepening unity in Christ through both concrete acts of love and theological discourse."

The statement pledged the churches to avoid efforts to proselytize individual members and local communities. "This

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practice is contrary to the demands of an ecclesial dialogue in love which assumes that both churches, as churches of Jesus Christ, should live in a communion which respects the ancient traditions and styles of life of one another."

It also pledged participants to consider practical means of cooperation "in the social, moral and political spheres; whatever means can be employed to afford the faithful of both churches the experience of their oneness in Christ.

"Beyond this the dialogue intends to respond...to the needs of other churches, especially in lending support to heal schisms wherever they exist," the statement said. "Finally it accepts the task of developing practical suggestions for ways by which the two churches can effectively cooperate in common witness to the Gospel before the world."

Participants in the meeting heard an address by Father Aidan Kavanagh, O.S.B., Professor of Liturgics at the Yale University Divinity School, on "The Eucharistic Liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church." Father Kavanagh described the evolution of the Mass as an illustration of the Catholic Church's continuing concern for unity in faith by one altar, one bread, and one cup in one communion of Churches. "A closer approximation and appreciation of eucharistic performance among these Churches," he said, "while maintaining respect for the differences in idiom represented by each might provide the practical impetus which could lead to the reestablishment of

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communion among the historic apostolic Churches of east and west."

Father Sarhad Y. Hermiz Jammo, pastor of the Chaldean Catholic parish of the Mother of God in Detroit, presented a summary of his recently published critical history of the Liturgy of the Word in the East-Syrian (Chaldean) tradition. He discussed similarities and differences in Eastern and Western eucharistic theology as manifested in the texts and rites of the several traditions.

Members of both committees attended a Roman Catholic Mass celebrated by Bishop Stafford in the chapel of the Passionist Monastery in Jamaica.

Participants in the meeting, in addition to the two episcopal co-chairmen, were Archbishop Athanasius Y. Samuel, Very Reverend K.M. Simon (Syrian Church), Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, Father Arten Ashjian, Father Michael Buttero (Armenian Church), Abuna Nesehaq (Ethiopian Church), Deacon Kamal K. Farag (Coptic Church). Roman Catholic participants included Professor Thomas E. Bird, Father Gabriel Duffy, Father Sarhad Y. Hermiz Jammo, Father Edward Kilmartin, S.J., Father John F. Long, S.J., Father Robert F. Taft, S.J., and Father Joseph Witmer, Associate Director of the NCCB secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

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