



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. ORTHODOX/CATHOLIC CONSULTATION RESPONDS TO BARI STATEMENT

WASHINGTON--The Eastern Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States has unanimously approved a response to the "Bari Statement" issued in Bari, Italy, in 1987 by the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Meeting May 31-June 2 in Crestwood, New York, the U.S. Consultation sent its response to the leadership of the Joint International Commission prior to its June 19-26 meeting in New Valamo, Finland. Both the international and the U.S. groups attempt to bring about closer relations between the Orthodox and Catholic churches.

In attendance at Crestwood were 11 Orthodox and 11 Catholic members of the Consultation. Greek Orthodox Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh presided over the sessions.

The Bari Statement, entitled "Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church," spells out areas where the Orthodox and Catholic churches agree in the doctrine concerning the three

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sacraments of initiation (baptism, eucharist, and christmation or confirmation). The statement also identifies areas where differing liturgical practices may reflect underlying doctrinal differences that might seriously impede unity. Some liturgical differences are:

--Orthodox baptize by immersion, whereas Catholics usually baptize by infusion (pouring).

--The priest is the ordinary minister of baptism in the Orthodox church, whereas priests and deacons are the ordinary ministers of baptism in the Catholic church.

--Orthodox administer the three sacraments of initiation together in infancy, whereas Catholics administer these three sacraments at the same time only for adults and children of catechetical age (i.e., above seven years old). Catholics postpone confirmation and the eucharist until later years when children are baptized as infants.

--The Orthodox church has serious reservations about the common Catholic practice of admitting baptized persons to the eucharist prior to confirmation. For Catholics the rite of confirmation presumes that first communion follows. Episcopal conferences, however, may decide to postpone confirmation until after first communion.

The U.S. Consultation's response hailed the Bari Statement as a step which "moves us farther away from our long history of mutual estrangement" and praised its non-polemical tone. It also commended the statement's sensitivity in such areas as the

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relation between local, or particular, churches and the Church universal.

The Consultation, however, also offered several suggestions in the hope that the International Joint Commission might "seriously consider a future revision" of the statement. Among its criticisms were:

--Scripture is used too sparingly in the statement.

--The word "faith" is confusingly and incompletely explained.

--The importance of baptism as the sacrament of admission into the divine community is not sufficiently emphasized.

The U.S. Consultation's response also offered several corrections to the English translation of the Bari Statement, which was originally issued in French.

In an unrelated action, the U.S. Consultation prepared a generally favorable series of replies to a document which clarifies several important points concerning Orthodox-Catholic marriages. The document, originally prepared by the Metropolitan New York/New Jersey Orthodox-Roman Catholic Dialogue, had been reviewed by the Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops in November, 1987.

The document, which calls for some changes in current policy and practice, makes ten recommendations for the Orthodox and Catholic churches to implement. According to Dr. John Borelli of the Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, "The critical areas of concern for Orthodox-Catholic

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couples are addressed in these recommendations--recognition of the validity and sacramentality of these marriages performed in either church, the roles of officiating and guest priests, the raising of the children in either church, and showing respect for the requirements and practices of both traditions."

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