

3rd meeting

EDITOR: NC Photos is issuing a three-col. photo to go with this story.
CATHOLICS, ORTHODOX DISCUSS INTERCOMMUNION 5/9/67 - Tu.

By Owen J. Murphy, Jr.
(NC News Service)

May 5-6, 1967.

WORCESTER, Mass.--An atmosphere of optimism prevailed here (May 6) following the third consultation between Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians.

This was true despite the fact that certain positions held by the churches seemed to be more absolute following the two-day meeting than they had appeared previously.

Possibly the most important development was the recommendation that intercommunion between members of the separate Churches not be permitted at this time under any circumstances.

This position was consistent with recent statements by both the standing conference of Orthodox Bishops of America and the Easter encyclical letter of Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople, but at variance with the position of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. In the decree treating Eastern Catholic Churches, council authors said that under certain broad conditions, Orthodox Christians could receive the sacraments of Penance, the Eucharist and the anointing of the sick from Catholic priests, and Catholics could request these sacraments from Orthodox priests.

In the position paper on intercommunion drawn up at the meeting here, however, the absolute prohibition was suggested because of the stands taken by the Orthodox bishops and the patriarch and also because the group found an inconsistency between the statements by the council in the Decree on the Eastern Churches and the council's Decree on Ecumenism, where it is said that common worship should signify the unity of the Church and that this fact "generally rules out common worship."

The treatment of intercommunion was one of three principal discussions held during the meeting here. The others were on "Theological Diversity and Unity" and "Common Witness in Theological Education."

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Some 17 of the 20 members of the two groups, members of the American Catholic bishops' ecumenical subcommission on relations with the Orthodox and the Orthodox bishops' ecumenical commission, attended the meeting. Bishop Bernard J. Flanagan of Worcester, chairman of the Catholic bishops' subcommission, and Archbishop Iakovos, chairman of the Orthodox Bishops' Conference, presided.

Each of the three papers adopted during the sessions was adopted "as a basis for further study." Minutes of the meetings were to be presented, with recommendations, to the meeting of the Orthodox Bishops' Conference (May 9).

In the discussion on theological education, it was suggested that "every occasion for communication" between seminarians and their professors be utilized. It asked that seminaries of both Churches insure "an accurate presentation" of the history and faith of the other; that exchanges of seminarians studying common fields, such as catechetics or pastoral counselling, be encouraged, and that inter-seminary social activities and prayer services be encouraged.

In discussing the education proposals at a press conference after the meeting, Father William Schneirla, general secretary of the Orthodox Bishops' Conference, said "we were amazed at the number of direct and indirect contacts already being made between the students and faculty of our respective seminaries." But, he said, discussions will continue.

The talks on intercommunion also brought out discussion on the problems of intermarriage. Drawing attention to the fact that the Catholic bishops had recently been given greater latitude in the handling of such marriages, Father Schneirla said "in this area we come into a direct conflict of approach." The Orthodox, he explained, look upon the priest's role at a marriage as that of the minister of the sacrament, while the Roman Catholics look upon him as simply the official witness, with the partners to the marriage actually conferring the sacrament on one another.

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He said he saw no indication that the Orthodox bishops would reciprocate immediately and recognize as valid marriages between an Orthodox partner and a Catholic in a Catholic church, as Catholic bishops may now do with similar marriages contracted before an Orthodox priest in an Orthodox church.

However, the joint commission did vote to send a questionnaire on the matter to all American Orthodox bishops. They will be returned, Father Schneirla said, to Bishop Flanagan.

The paper on intercommunion, prepared by Father John Meyendorff, a Russian Orthodox professor at St. Vladimir's Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y., and Msgr. Myles Bourke, former professor at St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, N.Y., and now pastor of Corpus Christi parish in New York City, makes clear that the position of the two Churches in communion is a "positive, not a negative" one. It cites the belief of the Orthodox Church "that the practice of intercommunion can be highly detrimental to ecumenism. either by reducing the sacraments to a pious art of fellowship, which does not imply commitment to full unity, or by creating an illusion of unity where it does not really exist."

Also, the paper states, "the scandal of divisions existing between the disciples of the one and common Lord Jesus Christ...is obviously most painful when one is facing the impossibility of partaking together of the one bread and of the one chalice. It is when we will be able to confess in common a single allegiance to a single Christian truth, that this pain will disappear and we will be able to taste together the Eucharistic banquet."

"Obviously," the paper states, "perfect unity of faith does not exist between Catholic and Orthodox. But even if it did, it would not constitute a legitimate basis for intercommunion. One who does not recognize the celebrant of the Eucharist as Christ's representative in teaching and ruling the Church does not have that unity with him, and with the other members of the Church, of which the Eucharist is both sign and cause."

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All three reports adopted at the meeting will be expanded, with the assistance of other scholars, for the next meeting of the Catholic-Orthodox group to be held in the fall.

No details of the fall meeting were decided. However, the atmosphere was one of exuberance as it was discussed. More informal discussions between the scholars of the separate traditions will be held in the intervening months, it was noted.

Bishop Flanagan commented that each of the talks "opened up discussions of the finer points of differences existing between us." Father Schneirla commented that "we had union once. There has been no great difference since. We speak the same language and, therefore, there are only graduations of differences."

"However," Father Schneirla added, "we don't mean to oversimplify the differences that do exist. The emphases on doctrine may differ, but we have a common belief and a tradition that has had a parallel, although separate, development."

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CARDINAL ESTIMATES 2 YEARS WORK TO FINISH CANON LAW REVISION

5/9/67 - Tu.

By Robert P. Murray
(NC News Service)

PROVIDENCE, R.I.--Giovanni Cardinal Colombo of Milan, Italy, estimated that it will be two more years before the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law completes its work.

The cardinal, a member of the commission, said here that the work is just beginning. Preliminary studies for revisions are now in progress in a number of fields, he said, and no report concerning the revision will be available when the worldwide synod of bishops meets at the Vatican Sept. 29.

The revised code of laws will be simpler than the present code, he speculated. The commission seeks to make the revision a pastoral one, while filling the need of the Church for a code of law, he said during an interview.

On a four-day visit here (May 5 to 8) the cardinal participated in the Catholic phase of the Italian Festival of Rhode Island. He offered a special Mass in the Providence's Sts. Peter and Paul cathedral; received honorary degrees from Our Lady of Providence Seminary and from Providence College; attended civic celebrations connected with the festival, and officiated at the confirmation of 160 children at St. Mary's church, Cranston, R.I.

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