



NEWS

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DATE: September 25, 1992

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**COPTIC CHURCH OF EGYPT IS THEME OF THE
ORIENTAL ORTHODOX/ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE**

WASHINGTON-The principles which underlie the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church with the Coptic Church of Egypt were among the main discussion points at the meeting of the Oriental Orthodox/Roman Catholic dialogue in the United States. The dialogue has been underway in this country for the past fourteen years.

The meeting was held in New York last week under the leadership of Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany and the Most Reverend John Meno of the Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese.

Co-sponsored by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, the dialogue includes the Syrian Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Coptic (Egyptian) Orthodox, and Armenian Orthodox Churches' jurisdictions in this country.

Through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Roman Catholic Church has international relationships with this family of churches, especially with the Syrian Orthodox, in both the Middle East and India and the Coptic Church of Egypt. But the dialogue is considered unique in this country in that it brings all of these churches together in direct conversation with Roman Catholic counterparts.

The themes of this meeting centered around the principles of Roman Catholic relationship with the Coptic Church of Egypt. Father John Long of the Pontifical Russian College in Rome

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presented a paper reviewing 1977 and 1979 documents from the Holy See and signed by Pope John Paul II and Pope Shenouda III outlining the principles underlying the dialogue.

The principles articulated by the Popes include 1) Commitment to efforts toward full communion in faith and sacramental life as sister churches; 2) Recognition of one another as Apostolic Churches in which full sacramental, Eucharistic life is possessed; 3) Working toward resolution of differences in order to give more adequate expression to the communion that already exists, and to give more perfect witness to their faith and life in Christ; 4) Recognition that unity will not mean absorption or domination of one by the other; 5) Recognition that unity presupposes that the two Churches will have the right and power to govern themselves according to their own traditions and disciplines when unity is restored; 6) new contacts and mutual understanding of relationships will need to develop, including a better understanding of the meaning and extent of primacy in the Church; Differences will need to be resolved in the light of these principles; 8) In seeking this unity, pastoral activity, mutual collaboration and common witness should take place. The passing of people from one Church to another can never be the objective of these principles.

The implication of these principles for Roman Catholic and Oriental Orthodox pastoral practice in the United States and the present state of relationships worldwide were discussed in detail. Many of the initiatives of the Roman Catholic and Coptic Church in Egypt had to be put aside in the 1980's when Pope Shenouda was imprisoned. On the other hand, in the present context these principles, and those enunciated by Cardinal Willebrands and Philippe in 1977 become more urgent as Coptic Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians come into contact where their communities exist side by side, as in the United States. By extension, the principles enunciated in this dialogue inform Roman Catholic relationships to other Oriental Orthodox Churches in full communion with the Copts.

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A second discussion was held on "Guidelines for Oriental Orthodox/Roman Catholic Marriages" under the leadership of Armenian Father Garabed Kochakian and Syrian Father John Meno, chancellors of their respective dioceses. Among the Oriental Orthodox Churches there is a variety of canonical discipline relative to interchurch marriage. Extended discussion was meant to clarify the difference in practice among these churches as well as between them and the Roman Catholic Church so that a common approach might be arrived at.

Plans for a publication including history, pastoral guidelines and documentation were approved. Reports were given on recent guidelines from the Vatican Secretariat of State and Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on Catholic approaches to Armenia and other areas of Eastern Europe, on the situation in the Ethiopian Church and the Patriarchal elections, and on the status and progress of the international dialogues. The dialogue group prayed together in forms derived from the Roman Catholic and Ethiopian Orthodox traditions.

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NOTE: Additional information on the meeting is available from Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC, of the NCCB Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, at 202-541-3020.

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