



## UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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### RESPONSE TO THE JOINT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE REGARDING THE 'MUNICH DOCUMENT'

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Link to - ["The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity"](#) Munich, June 30 to July 6 - 1982

1. The Munich common statement of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church regarding "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity," dated July 6, 1982, is a landmark in the recent history of Orthodox/Roman Catholic relations. The text is a creative statement about the high degree of agreement that already exists between the two churches. The Commission deserves commendation for its achievement. What follows is a response to the text on the part of the Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States established by the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of America (SCOBA) and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) which was reached unanimously at its 26th meeting, May 23-25, 1983 in New York.
2. That a joint statement was published by the Commission is in itself an important achievement. The text moves us farther away from our history of mutual estrangement and allows the churches to speak with one voice on matters at the heart of the Christian faith. The decision to publish the text promptly for wider reaction was welcome. We hope that this procedure will be continued in the future.
3. The text requires careful reading, and to some its language may seem unfamiliar, despite many biblical and liturgical allusions. A clear attempt is made not to impose specific terminologies of either Roman Catholic or Orthodox theology. Rather, the text appropriately uses new formulations as needed in order to hand on the faith to men and women of our time. For example, use of the word "event" (*événement, to gegonos*) found in I, 1, bis; I, 2; I, 3; I, 4b; I, 5d, para. 2; II, 1, para. 3; II, 2, para. 3, is helpful in stressing the work of the Trinity. However, this word as well as others such as "sacrament," "mystery," "word," and "energies," are open to various interpretations and thus call for further elucidations.

4. We have several suggestions which, if followed, might facilitate discussion and assessment of this and future documents.
  1. It is not always clear to whom the document is addressed. If addressed to the Church at large, then much in the text is inaccessible.
  2. Criticism of omissions or overemphases could often be forestalled if the document were situated within the context of the long-range agenda of the Commission. The publication of an annotated text of this agenda would be appreciated.
  3. Publication of commentaries or background papers by the Commission would be helpful in explicating the document and would make it more accessible to non-specialists.
  4. In formulating texts, a more systematic and consistent numbering of paragraphs would be desirable.
  5. The document itself recognizes that this is but "the first step in the effort to fulfill the program." It is to be hoped therefore that this text will be reformulated in the light of critical responses and the developments of other sections of the dialogue. This process has proved extremely useful in other international dialogues.
5. Our Consultation took note of several specific doctrinal themes raised in the document. In discussing the *synaxis*, or eucharistic celebration (especially in I, 5, b, c and I, 6), the text states clearly that the eucharistic celebration is the *anamn'sis* of the work of Christ as savior made manifest by the Spirit, but also that the Spirit transforms the sacred gifts into the body of Christ in order to effect the growth of the Body of Christ which is the Church. Particularly welcome are the assertions that "the entire (eucharistic) celebration is an *epicl'sis*, which becomes more explicit at certain moments" and that "the Church is continually in a state of *epicl'sis* (I, 5, c).
6. The formulation of the relationship between the Son and the Spirit (I, 6, para. 2), though it does not address the *filioque* question directly, does state that "the Spirit which proceeds from the Father (Jn 15:26) as the sole source in the Trinity ... is communicated to us particularly in the eucharist by this Son upon whom he reposes in time and eternity." The text thus gives a solid basis for further statements about the Spirit in the treatment of the mission of the Spirit. Indeed the entire section which discusses the relation of the Spirit's activity to the historical mission of Christ and to the mystery of the Risen Christ (I, 4 to I, 6) is well formulated.
7. Collegiality and the synodal nature of the church are affirmed by the references to "communion in the same patriarchate" or "in some other form of regional unity" or "communion between sister churches" (III, 3, 6), as well as to a bishop's "solicitude for the local community" and "his care for the Church spread throughout the world" (III, 4, para. 2). However, the appeal to the term "sister churches" is unclear. Does it refer to patriarchates or jurisdictions in full communion or to the special relationship between the

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8. The expression the "*episkopos* of the entire Church" (III, 4, para. 2) needs further exploration in the context of the separated Christian churches. The way in which the document focuses on the "local church" through eucharistic ecclesiology does not readily correspond to the actual situation of bishops and their churches today. Although this model offers some useful insights, the character, numerical size, and geographical extent of most local churches makes application problematic.
9. Regarding the office of *episkopos* and other institutions, such as ordination and sacramental practices, the text does not pay sufficient attention to historical development, creating an impression of oversimplification. For example, the appeal to the "uninterrupted series of episcopal ordinations, beginning from the holy apostles" (II, 3), or the "college of the apostles" (III, 4, para. 2) needs refinement. Other statements about apostolicity and apostolic faith are better developed, as in II, 4, para. 2. Further, the use of New Testament texts lacks rigor and does not coincide with the requirements of responsible historical-critical scholarship.
10. The text should have discussed the diversity of ministries within the one body (cf. II, 1, para. 4); likewise, some reference to the priesthood proper to all the faithful would have been in order. The relation between the bishop's ministerial priesthood and that of all the faithful is not adequately explored. The relation of the bishop and the presbyter is not sufficiently addressed. We hope that significant aspects of these major problems will be addressed in future documents.
11. The sections of the document regarding kerygmatic aspects of *koinonia* and its relationship to the "unity in faith" (II, 2, para. 3) and "communion in the same *kerygma*, and so in the same faith" (III, 3, b, para. 2) need clarification. It is not always apparent that the text sufficiently distinguishes between faith (or credal) affirmations and theological explanations about faith that need not require unanimity.
12. The document is open to criticism for not sufficiently recognizing the social dimensions of church and eucharist. It seems to prescind from concrete social problems. When mention is made of social issues, this seems to be an afterthought (e.g., II, 4, para. 3). When the text mentions the transformative aspects of church and eucharist, this is usually in the context of individual repentance, conversion, self sacrifice (cf. I, 6, par a. 3; II, 1, para. 3; II, 2, para. 2). It neglects the Christian's vocation to contribute to the transformation of society (I, 1).
13. The sections which discuss the eucharist should situate it more clearly in the context of Christian initiation and the total sacramental life of the Church. It is encouraging therefore that the International Commission has taken as its next task the study of the sacraments of baptism, chrismation and the eucharist and the unity of the Church.

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