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JOINT COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE
BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST

PRESS RELEASE
Rome, 1 November 2003

The Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue (JCTD) between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East held its 9th annual meeting on 28 October – 1 November 2003, at Domus Internationalis Paulus VI in Rome.

The members of the JCTD first discussed a paper prepared by Fr. Mathew Vellanickal on "*The Local Church and the Universal Church*". This paper fitted in with the third phase of the JCTD program, dealing with questions related to the constitution of the Church. The core issue of the discussion was the relation of mutuality or of intrinsic reciprocity between the local Churches and the universal Church. The JCTD members agreed that this relation is essential for the building of the Body of Christ and for the mission of the Church. Different views however still exist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church as to how this relation can or should be articulated in concrete patterns or canonical structures of communion.

With regard to Christology, the JCTD continued its study of the Christological tradition of the Church of the East. Three papers were presented related to this issue: *Christological Patrimony of the Church of the East* (Aphrahat the Persian Sage, Ephrem the Syrian, Narsai, Habib, John of Dalyatha, Timothy I) by Dr. Theresia Hainthaler; *Christology of Mar Abdisho of Soba* by Metropolitan Mar Aprem; *The Church of the East Liturgy as an expression of Faith and Christology* by Bishop Mar Bawai Soro. As it results from these papers, the main authors of the Church of the East, who belonged to the Mesopotamian area, developed a particular Christological terminology and reflection. These particularities were partly determined by their cultural background which was neither Greek nor Latin but Syrian, and by their defence of Christian orthodoxy against some local heresies. If rightly understood and interpreted, the teaching of these authors can be considered a significant contribution to the development of Christian doctrine.

The delegations also discussed some issues related to the past and future activities of the JCTD. As to the past, they discussed how the Common Statement on Sacramental Life, which encompasses and represents the results of the second phase of dialogue, could be brought to final ratification and publication. As to the future, they discussed how to organise the third phase of dialogue, related to the constitution of the Church, based on a feasible and mutually acceptable road-map.

On Friday, October 31st, Holy Qurbana was celebrated by H.G. Mar Aprem in the chapel of Domus Internationalis Paulus VI. This liturgy was attended by the Catholic and Assyrian bishops members of the JCTD; it was also attended by the priests of both the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, who study or live in Rome. On Saturday November 1st, Feast of All Saints, the delegation members attended the Holy Eucharist celebrated by Cardinal Walter Kasper in the Church of All Saints, which is the Cardinal's titular church. After the Eucharistic celebration, a festive lunch was offered by the parish priests and the community to the Joint Commission members.

The next meeting of the Joint Commission is planned to be held in England or Sweden, from November 18th (arrival) to November 24th (departure) 2004. Two major themes will be on the agenda. Firstly, regarding the Christological tradition of the Church of the East a paper will be prepared by Dr. Theresia Hainthaler on "*Elements of Christology in the Synodicon Orientale and in Mar Babai*". Secondly, regarding Ecclesiology, research and dialogue will focus on "*Patterns of Communion Through History*". From the Assyrian side, papers will be prepared on various 'patterns of communion' as they emerged during four successive periods: (1) the Apostolic period, (2) the Fathers of the Church until 533, (3) from 533 to 1553, and (4) from 1553 to the present times. From the Catholic side, four papers will be prepared on the present teaching of the Catholic Church related to the same issue in (1) the Decree "*Unitatis Redintegratio*" of the Second Vatican

Council, (2) the Encyclical Letter "*Ut Unum Sint*" of Pope John Paul II, (3) the Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II "*Orientalis Lumen*" and (4) the Letter "*Communio Notio*" of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The participants from the Catholic Church were: Bishop Brian Farrell (co-chair), Archbishop Cyrille Selim Boustros, Bishop Antoine Audo, Bishop Sarhad Jammo, Rev. Father Matthew Vellanickal, Dr. Theresia Hainthaler (consultant) and Mgr Johan Bonny (co-secretary). The participants from the Assyrian Church of the East were: Metropolitan Mar Aprem (co-chair), Bishop Mar Bawai Soro (co-secretary), Rev. Archdeacon Yonan Y. Yonan, Rev. Father George Toma and Rev. Father William Yakob.

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[<http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiesa-assira-dell-orientale/commissione-internazionale-di-dialogo-tra-la-chiesa-cattolica-e-/sessione-plenarie---rapporti/en2.html>]