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

PRESS RELEASE

London, November 25, 2004

The Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue (JCTD) between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East held its 10th annual meeting on 19–22 November 2004 at Allen Hall College in London (Chelsea).

First, the members of the JCTD returned to the proposed "Common Statement on Sacramental Life" and some final amendments, which the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East suggested to be inserted. They also discussed a convenient way and moment for this proposed Common Statement to be officially signed by the competent authorities of both Churches.

Secondly, a paper was prepared and presented by Dr. Theresia Hainthaler on "*Elements of Christology in the Synodicon Orientale and in Mar Bawai*". This paper was the last one in a series of studies regarding the theological tradition of the Church of the East. Scholarly research gives evidence indeed to the particular contribution made by prominent authors from the Mesopotamian area to the development of Christian doctrine and teaching. As an outcome of these studies, the members of the JCTD decided to proceed to the preparation of a conclusive document on the early theological heritage of the Church of the East. This document should give evidence to the historic significance of this particular heritage and also to the way the Church of the East at present reads and understands it.

Thirdly, the members of the JCTD paid ample attention to the main issue of this meeting, related to "*Patterns of Communion Through History*". This issue fits in the third phase of the JCTD program, which deals with the constitution of the Church. From the Assyrian side, a key paper was presented by Mar Bawai Soro on "*Patterns of Communion according to Church of the East Tradition: from the Apostolic Era to the Present Time*". From the Catholic side, four papers were presented on the present teaching of the Catholic Church regarding the ecclesiology of communion: according to the Decree "Unitatis Redintegratio" of the Second Vatican Council (paper prepared by Fr. Mathew Vellanickal); the Encyclical Letter "*Ut Unum Sint*" of Pope John Paul II (paper prepared by Bishop Sarhad Jammo); the Apostolic Letter "*Orientale Lumen*" of Pope John Paul II (paper prepared by Archbishop Cyril Boustros); and the Letter "*Communiois Notio*" of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (paper prepared by Bishop Antoine Audo). The members of the JCTD agreed that in matters of ecclesiology, the tradition of the Catholic Church and of the Assyrian Church of the East have much in common. This common patrimony can be retrieved in the theological, liturgical and canonical sources of both traditions. History, moreover, offers a complex picture of the relations, which existed during the centuries between the Church in Rome and the Church in Mesopotamia. All these elements, according to the members of the JCTD deserve further study and reflection, not only for the sake of history, but first of all for the sake of our common journey towards the restoration of full communion.

Fourthly, the members of the JCTD discussed several issues related to the future activities of this Joint Commission. All agreed that it should be possible for this official dialogue to continue its research and discussion on issues related to the constitution of the Church and to our search for the restoration of full communion. They also agreed that clergy and lay people on either side should be better informed about the real proceedings and results of this dialogue, so as to favour their reception and to avoid possible misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Efforts should also be made to make these documents available in several languages, according to the regions where faithful of our Churches live together.

Finally, in the margin of this JCTD meeting, representatives of the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East decided to undertake the necessary steps so as to reactivate the "*Joint Commission for Unity between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*". The task and agenda of this "Joint Commission for Unity" were first laid

down in a “*Joint Synodal Decree for Promoting Unity between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church*”, signed on August 15th, 1997, by H.B. Mar Raphael I Bidawid, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans and H.H. Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. The resumption of this program should also allow the activities and the results of the JCTD to receive a more concrete and effective reception among the clergy and faithful of both particular Churches.

The meeting took place in a most cordial and constructive atmosphere. On Sunday, November 21st, all members of the JCTD attended the Holy Qurbana celebrated by H.G. Mar Narsai at St. Mary’s Assyrian Church of the East in Ealing. This celebration of the Holy Eucharist was also attended by H.G. Mar Odisho, Assyrian Church of the East Bishop for Europe. Afterwards, at the Assyrian Society of Great Britain, a dinner-reception was offered by the local Assyrian community to the members of the JCTD and to a large representation of both the Assyrian and the Chaldean communities in London.

The participants from the Assyrian Church of the East were: Metropolitan Mar Narsai de Baz (co-chair), Metropolitan Mar Aprem George Mookan, Bishop Mar Meelis Yousep Zaia, Bishop Mar Bawai Soro (co-secretary), Rev. Archdeacon Yonan Y. Yonan, Rev. Father George Toma and Rev. Father William Yakob. The participants from the Catholic Church were: Bishop Brian Farrell (co-chair), Bishop Antoine Audo, Bishop Sarhad Jammo, Rev. Father Matthew Vellanickal, Dr. Theresia Hainthaler (consultant) and Mgr Johan Bonny (co-secretary); Archbishop Cyrille Selim Boustros could not take part in the meeting.

The next meeting of the Joint Commission is planned to be held in Rome, from November 2nd (arrival) to November 6th (departure) 2005. Three major themes will be on the agenda. First, the discussion and further elaboration of a comprehensive document on the theological heritage of the Church of the East. Secondly, regarding the constitution of the Church, a paper will be presented on “*Patterns of Communion according to the Church of the East Tradition: from the 16th century to the present time*”; thirdly, regarding the search for the restoration of full communion, three papers will be presented on “*Future Models of Ecclesial Communion between the Church of the East and the Catholic Church*”; these papers will be prepared from three complementary perspectives: the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Church and the Catholic Church.

London, 25 November 2004

[<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/en1.html>]