

START OF DELIBERATIONS OF THE JOINT THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE COMMISSION BETWEEN THE ORTHODOX AND ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN ALEXANDRIA

On the morning of June 1, 2023, the official opening ceremony of the deliberations of the international Joint Theological Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church took place in the Throne Room of the Patriarchal Palace of Alexandria.

Welcoming the 24 Orthodox and 18 Roman Catholic participants, Cardinals, Metropolitans, Priests and lay theologians, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa said: "It is with sacred emotion and a special joy that we welcome, with a deep love and honour their Eminences the co-chairpersons and the members of the Joint Committee of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, here at the Seat of the Apostolic and Patriarchal Throne of the Holy and glorious Apostle and Evangelist Mark, the historical place of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, the Second Thone of the Orthodox Church with its bimillennial Apostolic heritage, its turbulent history and hope-filled future. We address you with the brotherly greeting, "welcome".

Looking back at the developments in the relations to date between the two sister-churches, we call to mind the excellent relations between the Venerable Thrones, that of Rome and Alexandria, especially through our common Saint, our predecessor Eulogius, who exchanged a multitude of letters with Pope Gregory I of Rome, the 'Dialogist' in combatting the heresies of the day.

We bless the Name of our Lord and Chief-shepherd and ascribe sincere thanks to God in Trinity, who deemed us worthy to traverse together a significant distance on the path of His Will and serve the spirit of reconciliation, of peace, of love and of honest brotherly cooperation.

The Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church sojourning in this dialogue of love, technically constituted two Committees of theologians to prepare for the theological dialogue between the two Churches. These two Committees together set-up one joint coordinative body that came together in Rome in March of 1978, under the co-chairmanship of our ever-memorable Predecessor and Spiritual Father, Metropolitan Parthenios of Carthage, who would later become Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, and that of the esteemed Bishop Ramon Torrella.

The work achieved by the Joint Commission undoubtedly constitutes a milestone in history and a precious chapter in the life and way forward of our two Churches. This chapter is already at our disposal and awaits us to utilize it. It is at the general disposal of all Christianity in the service of the ideal of unity. It is confessed by all that the theological dialogue needs to be cultivated, to progress, to bear fruits in all levels, with honesty, dignity, and mutual respect.

For the Orthodox Church, contacts, conversations, understanding to use one word, 'dialogue' are all actions interwoven with Her very being. Our journey to this day in theological dialogue between the two Churches, has shown us that for a dialogue to develop, conditions of mutual trust and goodwill need to be cultivated. Conditions of freedom and love. All very significant.

Also, what has been achieved to date, remind us of course of our duty and responsibility to continue to further the work of unity. They strengthen the hope that the Lord will bless our efforts from here on. We must not however forget that we have to traverse a long and arduous path, to cover long distances through a

systematic effort, to dispel preconceived ideas and to be taught by the mistakes of the past.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate as "First-Throned among equals", in the period of the Dialogue of Love, had very rightly asserted that the "the issue of union is great and sacred, that it is not an issue of persons, but of Orthodoxy itself, and that it is imperative that it is studied in awe and the appropriate respect and always in cooperation with all the regional Orthodox Churches, avoiding any hastened action".

My beloved,

We ought to become ministers of the union of the Church in the love of Christ's Truth and with the Truth of His Love, to go forward with daring and courage. In closing our greeting, we thank you all, reverend and dear brothers in Christ, for the honour of this blessed meeting and exchange with you. We pray that the Lord bless our common efforts for the fulfilment of His Holy Will and to the glory of His Holy Name. We wish to ask of you that during the time of your stay in our Seat, the Great City of Alexandria, you feel at home. We do not consider you foreigners, but brothers. Welcome!"

In his reply, the Roman Catholic Co-Chairman of the Committee, His Eminence Kurt Cardinal Koch, expressed the gratitude of the Most Holy Bishop of Rome to His Beatitude for hosting the historic theological meeting at the Apostolic and Patriarchal See of Saint Mark, as well as his heartfelt prayers for full success in the theological discussions.

He also presented a valuable gift from Pope Francis to His Beatitude the Patriarch of Alexandria – a copy of the foundation stone, which was laid by Pope Alexander VII on August 28, 1657, at the start of the construction of the surrounding colonnades of St. Peter's Square in Rome by the famous architect Bernini – underlining with emphasis that "it is a rare event that the Primate of Supreme Rome sends a gift outside of the Holy See through his representative".

The Orthodox Co-Chairman of the International Committee, His Eminence Metropolitan Job of Pisidia, also addressed a greeting to His Beatitude, conveying the prayers and gratitude of His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch for the holding of this great event in the City of Alexander the Great, the Apostle Mark, of the Great Alexandrian Fathers and the Venerable Monks.

This was followed by a private meeting of His Beatitude with Their Eminences Metropolitans Job of Pisidia, Maximos of Silivria, as well as the Exalted Cardinals Kurt Koch and Joseph W. Tobin, after which the session of the Joint International Commission of Theological Dialogue began.

*From the Chief Secretariat of the Holy and Sacred Synod
of the Patriarchate of Alexandria*