

**"The Unity of the Church up to the Fifth Century"**  
**The International Joint Commission**  
**between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church**  
**FULL TEXT**  
**Common Report**

**Towards a Christological Statement**

The participants felt it useful to prepare a statement on Christology which would be a definitive presentation of their thought concerning the christological understanding of both Churches. Using material contained in the Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III and the Commission's report of March 30, 1974, they unanimously agreed to the statement attached to this report.

This statement is submitted to the authorities of both Churches for their definitive judgement and use. However, the Commission requests that even if approval is given, the statement not be made public until some time in the future which will be mutually agreed upon by the two Churches.

**Theological studies**

In its report of October 1975, the Joint Commission had indicated a series of theological and historical subjects which must be studied as helps to achieve unity, and had expressed its hopes that these studies be achieved within a period of six years. Father Lanne's contribution to the Vienna meeting was helpful as a beginning of this process. However, the participants felt that procedures should be revised to speed up the process and to achieve concrete results within the next five years. They should not be merely academic studies but should be aimed at treating those specific subjects which are obstacles to full communion between the two Churches.

Furthermore they should be carried out in such a way that the proper authorities of the Churches would have the opportunity to pronounce on them within the next five years.

It is proposed, therefore, that two major studies be made in the period between now and October 1977. Each should be assigned to one or more experts from each side, each of whom would prepare a preliminary study on the topic assigned. They would exchange their studies for mutual criticisms and suggestions. After this, provision should be made for the experts to meet personally for whatever period of time is necessary to prepare together, by September 1977, conclusions to be presented to the meeting of the Joint Commission in October of that year. These conclusions should include points upon which agreement has been reached and those unresolved points for which the Commission will be asked to give its help and guidance. The Commission will determine whether it has sufficient material to be already presented in a preliminary way to its authorities.

At this same meeting, the Commission will determine the subjects to be treated for the following year.

The subjects to be studied during the coming year are:

1. With reference to Church unity: what were the roles of the Bishop of Rome and the Bishop of Alexandria in the Church in the first five centuries? What can this tell us about unity in the Church today?

2. With reference to Councils of the Church: What are the doctrinal and dogmatic points to be found in councils which have not been shared by the Catholic and Coptic Orthodox Churches. Are these acceptable? How can points of disagreement be resolved? How can a Church which has celebrated many councils be in communion with one which has not shared these councils? How much are the canons and anathemas of earlier councils binding today?

The experts who are to treat these subjects will be chosen by the end of October 1976.

### **Concerns and proposals about pastoral problems**

The Coptic Orthodox participants informed the meeting that during the proposed period of five years of study and cooperation, they are hesitant to inform people of the work being done or the results achieved. They feel that this could be used against them, especially among the simple faithful, to foster proselytism or expansion among them.

The Coptic Orthodox therefore proposed a series of actions to be taken or promoted by the Catholic authorities concerned in various areas of religious, pastoral, educational and social work as well as in the areas of the use of Church resources and structures. It was made clear that they were for a transitional period of five years, that they were not directed at the ordinary pastoral activities of the Catholic Church in favor of its own faithful and that their purpose was to create an atmosphere in which the projected common studies and activities during the next five years would be able to achieve significant results, aiming towards full communion.

It was agreed that no ecumenical activities between our Churches should be used to create confusion in the minds of the faithful or open the way to the expansion of the Catholic Church at the expense of the Coptic Orthodox. Anything of this kind would be opposed to what Pope Paul VI expressed to the Coptic Orthodox delegation in Rome in St. Peter's Basilica on May 6th, 1973 and in the Common Declaration signed by Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III on May 10th of the same year.

It was therefore agreed by the commission that the following recommendations be submitted to the authorities of the Catholic Church for their approval and action:

The authorities of the Catholic Church who are concerned direct the religious and pastoral activities of missionaries towards service of the religious and pastoral needs of the Orthodox Church.

Through contacts with Orthodox Church authorities, institutions involved in the educational and social activities of Catholic missions invite Orthodox to be members of board or other agencies which plan and administer these services.

The Catholic authorities authorize the local Joint Committee to examine existing social projects conducted by missionaries in regions where all, or almost all Christians are Orthodox, to see what can be conducted by the Orthodox or what could better be conducted under joint auspices, and to recommend to the authorities the proper action to be taken.

Orthodox projects should be considered among the programs supported by Catholic international agencies.

To help train Coptic Orthodox workers to run specific projects, a joint training institute should be established.

Church buildings of missionaries which are not being used or little used at present should be sold or given to Orthodox rather than to others, secular or religious.

The Coptic Catholic Church should refrain from expanding by not establishing new parishes or dioceses or nominating new bishops and by not establishing new monasteries or convents.

It was also recommended that the work of the Local Joint Committee be strengthened and that means be found for its work to be carried out on a regular basis. If necessary, additional members could be coopted, especially persons who are in a position to put into effect the recommendations of the committee. There is also need for the authorities of the Churches to clarify how the committee relates to persons and institutions and how its recommendations can be effectively carried out.

The participants in the Vienna meeting submit the above observations and recommendations to their respective authorities in the conviction that they are fulfilling the charge laid upon them as a joint commission to guide common study in theoretical fields and in the field of practical problems "so that by cooperation in common we may seek to resolve, in a spirit of mutual respect, the differences existing between our Churches and be able to proclaim together the Gospel in ways which correspond to the authentic message of the Lord and to the needs and hopes of today's world" (cf. Common Declaration). We pray that what the commission is doing will contribute, by God's grace, to achieving full unity between our Churches.

Vienna, August 29, 1976

#### **Coptic Orthodox Delegation**

His Grace Amba Gregorios

His Grace Amba Samuel

His Grace Amba Yohannes of Garbieh

Rev. Father Antonios Ragheb

Dr. George Bebawi

#### **Catholic Delegation**

Rev. Msgr. Charles Moeller

Rev. Msgr. Louis Abadir

Rev. Prof. Aloys Grillmeier S.J.

Rev. Prof. André de Halleux O.F.M.

Rev. John Long S.J.

Rev. Emmanuel Lanne, O.S.B. was also present for one day.