

# Roman Catholic – Eastern Orthodox Rapprochement

Colleagues,

Paul Goetting, like me, is a retired ELCA pastor with LCMS roots. We were classmates in seminary days—class of '55—and teaching colleagues at Seminex. Paul and wife Trudy (nursing instructor—specialty midwifery) have been short-term missionaries off and on for a number of years. Their venues of service include India, Afghanistan (in earlier days when that was still possible), Egypt. In 5 days they are heading to Ghana in West Africa for a semester of work at the Good News Theological College and Seminary in Accra. Good News seminary teaches students from the so-called African Indigenous Churches [AICs]. AICs might be compared to storefront churches in the USA, but not very far. With no connection to the historical “main-line” denominations, AICs regularly arise around a charismatic prophet (man or woman). They produce their own blend of Good News and local African culture—consciously syncretistic, sometimes heretical, but magnetic in its drawing power. They constitute a huge segment of today's African Christianity. Some of the AICs have membership in the millions. I hope we can pass on to ThTh readers postings from the Goettings when they are at work on location.

All the above may seem like a strange segue to a very “main-line-churches” topic: Roman Catholic – Eastern Orthodox Rapprochement. The connection is that we got it from the Goettings. They sent us this about two months ago. It was forwarded to them, they said, by “our friend, Sister AnneMarie, an RC nun, Luther Scholar, teaching at U.of Paris with whom we became friends when we were at the Tantur Ecumenical Study Center, near Bethlehem in the West Bank.”

Sister Anne's note says: Quand le temps est un peu morose, les éclaircies sont bienvenues! [When times are a bit glum, breaks in the clouds are welcome!] So for your first days of Advent 2000, this welcome break in the clouds.

Peace & Joy!  
Ed Schroeder

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 5, 2000

## **ORTHODOX AND CATHOLIC BISHOPS ADOPT DIALOGUE STATEMENT AT CONCLUSION OF MEETING IN CRETE**

**CHANIA, CRETE** – The North American Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops adopted a statement on the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue at the conclusion of its 17th meeting, which was held on the island of Crete near Chania, Greece, from October 2nd to 4th. The statement, the full text of which is found below, takes stock of the dialogue between the two churches at both the international and national levels, and calls for an intensification of their relationship, since “continued dialogue in love is the only way that our churches can be faithful to Our Lord’s command to love one another, and to be reconciled.” The bishops joined their “prayer to those of Orthodox and Catholic faithful around the world that our churches may continue to set aside the animosities of the past and look forward in hope to that blessed day when we shall once again be united around the common table of our Lord.”

Before the meeting several of the Catholic and Orthodox bishops made a pilgrimage to monastic communities on Mount Athos, the

renowned center of Orthodox monasticism, where they were warmly received. This pilgrimage was in preparation for a discussion of monasticism in the East and West. Roman Catholic Archbishop Rembert Weakland presented a paper entitled The Apostolic Letter *Orientale Lumen* and Monasticism East and West, and Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh responded. The bishops also heard a paper by Archbishop Vsevolod of Scopelos: *Primacy and Conciliarity*. The role of the laity in our churches was the theme of the final session. Archbishop Weakland presented a paper entitled, *The Role of the Laity: from Vatican Council II to the Bishops' Synod of 1987*, and Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh offered a response from an Orthodox perspective. After each paper a lively discussion ensued.

In the information session, the bishops exchanged views on recent events that affect the relationship between our churches, such as the situation in Ukraine and Kosovo, and discussed recent documents such as *Dominus Iesus* and the Note on the term "sister churches" from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

This meeting of the Joint Committee of Bishops took place at the Orthodox Academy of Crete, a center of learning and dialogue founded in 1968 under the spiritual protection of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The bishops expressed their gratitude to Dr. Alexandros Papaderos, the Director of the Academy. They were also honored to meet the venerable local hierarch, Metropolitan Irenaeos of Kissamos and Selinon, as well as Metropolitan Irenaeos of Chania and other local leaders and friends of the Academy at a dinner on the evening of October 2nd. Both hierarchs welcomed the group to Crete and expressed strong support for ongoing ecumenical dialogue between our churches.

The Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops was established in 1981 and is currently under the joint

chairmanship of Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh and Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee. Other Orthodox members include Archbishop Peter of New York (Orthodox Church in America), Archbishop Vsevolod of Scopelos (Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA), Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese), Metropolitan Christopher (Serbian Orthodox Church), Metropolitan Nicholas of Amissos (Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese), Bishop Seraphim of Ottawa and All Canada (Orthodox Church in America), and Bishop Dimitrios of Xanthos (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, staff). Other Catholic members of the Committee include William Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore, Archbishop Alexander Brunett of Seattle, Archbishop Oscar Lipscomb of Mobile, Bishop Robert Mulvee of Providence, Bishop Dale Melczek of Gary, Bishop Edward Kmiec of Nashville, Bishop Nicholas Samra, Auxiliary of the Melkite Greek Catholic Eparchy of Newton, and Rev. Ronald G. Roberson, CSP (staff). In addition to this Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops, a North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation has been meeting continuously since 1965.

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## **Statement**

On the Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue At the Dawn of a New Millennium

The North American Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops Orthodox Academy of Crete, Chania, Greece October 4, 2000

Our Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops was founded in 1981 as a forum where Orthodox and Catholic hierarchs from the United States and Canada could discuss pastoral matters of concern to both our churches. Gathered together now at our 17th

meeting, we wish to take stock of our Joint Committee's work, and to affirm the importance of continued and intensified dialogue between our two communions.

We look back with joy on the dramatic events of the 1960s that brought an end to the many centuries of hostility that kept us apart from one another. The meeting between Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI in Jerusalem in 1964 was followed by the formal lifting of the 1054 anathemas on December 7, 1965. Those excommunications were reversed, to be replaced by relationships of love – they were “erased from the memory of the Church” and “consigned to oblivion.” The growing dialogue of charity between Catholics and Orthodox led finally to the establishment of an official International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church by Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I and Pope John Paul II when the Pope visited Istanbul in November 1979. This renewed relationship has been symbolized by the semiannual exchange of delegations between the sister churches of Rome and Constantinople on their respective feast days, and a rejection among our faithful of “every form of proselytism, every attitude which would or could be perceived as a lack of respect” (Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I, December 7, 1987).

With gratitude we note that this theological dialogue was anticipated by almost 15 years in the United States. Prior to the establishment of our Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops in 1981, an official Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation had been meeting since September 9, 1965, even before the excommunications were lifted. In North America, where Catholics and Orthodox live side by side in a place that is to a large extent free of the political and religious tension that has often been present in our countries of origin, our theological dialogue has been able to make much

progress and to address various theological and pastoral questions touching upon our relationship. At its June 2000 meeting, our North American Theological Consultation issued a document entitled, "Sharing the Ministry of Reconciliation: Statement on the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue and the Ecumenical Movement." We wish to express our satisfaction with this important text, and we recommend it warmly to our faithful. We make our own its evaluation of the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue and the broader ecumenical movement as rooted in the very actions of God who "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4).

The fall of communism in Eastern and Central Europe and the establishment of religious freedom in those countries ten years ago now is a source of deep joy for all people of faith. But these profound changes also unleashed hostilities between our communities there that had remained under the surface, unaddressed during the long years of persecution, isolation, and silence. These problems focused on the status of the Eastern Catholic Churches and questions of property. At the same time, strident currents emerged in both our churches in those areas, fueled in part by the suspicion that ecumenism was a betrayal of the true faith, and that it had been manipulated by the communist authorities for their own ends in an attempt to weaken authentic Christian witness. This points to the urgent need to present the true nature of ecumenical dialogue, not as a betrayal of anyone's faith, but as an effort to understand what we truly have in common at a level deeper than our divisions and theological formulae.

All this has had a negative impact on the international dialogue which for the past ten years has been struggling to deal in a satisfactory way with the question of the status of the Eastern Catholic Churches. We regret that the Eighth Plenary Session of the international dialogue, held in July 2000 at Emmitsburg,

Maryland, was unable to make progress on this and other significant issues.

The difficulties that have recently beset the international dialogue do not alter our conviction that continued dialogue in love is the only way that our churches can be faithful to Our Lord's command to love one another, and to be reconciled. Indeed, when difficulties arise the need for dialogue becomes even greater. As we look back on our experience of dialoguing with one another as bishops of the Orthodox and Catholic churches, we realize that through an honest and well informed exchange of views a solution to even the most persistent disagreements can be perceived. Our Joint Committee of Bishops has issued statements dealing with Ordination, Mixed Marriages and the recent tensions in Eastern and Central Europe, and we are confident that much more progress can be made on these and other issues. We encourage our Orthodox and Catholic faithful everywhere to engage one another in an exchange of views in a spirit of openness and humility so that the Spirit's work of reconciliation might continue, for the glory of God.

Our Joint Committee is meeting on the island of Crete, whose soil has been fed by the blood of a host of martyrs, and whose history has not been unaffected by our sad divisions. We take this opportunity to give thanks to God for the great strides that have been made to overcome what divides us. As the new millennium dawns, we join our prayer to those of Orthodox and Catholic faithful around the world that our churches may continue to set aside the animosities of the past and look forward in hope to that blessed day when we shall once again be united around the common table of our Lord.