



NEWS

FILE COPY

DATE: June 6, 1994

FROM: William Ryan

O -202-541-3200

H -202-686-1824

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ORIENTAL ORTHODOX-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE MEETS ON MARRIAGES

WASHINGTON--Under the leadership of Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany and Syrian Orthodox Chorbishop John Meno, bishops and scholars of the Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches met for two days at Cardinal Spellman retreat house in New York late last month.

The main purpose of the meeting was to finalize the drafting of guidelines to help priests in preparing couples for interchurch marriages in which one partner comes from the Catholic while the other comes from the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church have been separated since the Council of Chalcedon (451) was not accepted by the Oriental Churches.

The Churches represented in this dialogue include the Ethiopian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian and Syrian Orthodox Churches. These churches are in full communion with one another, though they vary widely in their spiritual, liturgical and canonical traditions. Only the Syrian and Armenian churches permit interchurch marriages.

Although these churches have small populations in the United States, experts consider this dialogue important for both churches here. It is the only official conversation in which all of the Oriental Churches are represented together with official representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity sponsors several dialogues with particular churches in this tradition but does not

more...

OFFICE FOR MEDIA RELATIONS
UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
3211 4th STREET, N.E. • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20017-1194

have an official dialogue in which all of them are present. Significant progress has been made at the international level, including a Common Declaration between Patriarch Ignatius of Antioch and Pope John Paul II declaring full sacramental hospitality for Eucharist, penance and anointing. Pastoral support for these churches is important in the United States, say ecumenical experts, because they often suffer division and even oppression in their countries of origin, and their populations here are frequently immigrant.

Papers were presented by Msgr. Frederick McManus of the Catholic University of America, on marriage in the new Oriental Code of Canon Law, by Father Ronald Roberson, CSP, on the current state of the relationships between these two churches, by Father Aelred Cody, OSB, on the history of the 15 year dialogue, and by Fathers John Meno and Garabed Kochakian on Syrian and Armenian guidelines for interchurch marriages with Catholics. Reports were given on developments in the dialogues in other parts of the world, the situation of the churches in the United States and abroad, and developments that affect these relationships.

Bishop Hubbard reported on correspondence with Cardinal Edward Cassidy of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the correspondence of Cardinal Cassidy with Patriarch Vasken of the Armenian Church in Armenia, concerning proselytism.

There was extended discussion of the different theologies of the sacramentality of marriage in the two traditions. In the Orthodox traditions, marriage is a sacrament administered by the priest, whose blessing is the sacramental form. The Latin tradition understands the sacrament to be administered by the couple, with the exchange of vows being the sacramental form, the priest being a witness for the Church. The new Code of Canon Law for the Eastern Catholic Churches is open to both theological interpretations. While history shows that at one time churches

more...

were able to live in full communion while holding these different points of view, it was the consensus of the group that clergy need to be aware of this difference in understanding.

There was also extensive discussion of why the Coptic Orthodox Church, whose center is in Egypt, does not allow interchurch or interreligious marriages. In the Islamic context, the Church does not have jurisdiction over marriages which are performed between couples of different religions, even if both are Christian. Therefore, the Church would be unable to protect the bond of such marriages since they become subject to Islamic law in Egypt. The Coptic Church is critical of the Roman Catholic Church which, in Egypt and elsewhere, allows not only interchurch weddings but also marriages of Catholics with Muslims.

A memorial service was held for Father Gabriel Abdelsayed, Coptic Orthodox priest who had been the U. S. representative of Pope Shenouda, the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria. The new representative is Father Tadros Malaty of Jersey City.

#

94-088
CL