



# NEWS

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Office for Media Relations

3211 Fourth Street, N.E. Washington, DC 20017-1194

DATE: June 20, 1995

FROM: William Ryan

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## ORIENTAL ORTHODOX-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE MEETS

WASHINGTON--Clergy and scholars representing the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the United States held their annual dialogue session at the Cardinal Spellman Retreat House in New York, June 5-6. The group was led by the two co-chairmen, Syrian Orthodox Chorbishop John Meno and Roman Catholic Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany.

At the meeting, the commission finalized plans for a book on inter-church marriages and other pastoral relationships which will be issued in September by the publishing arm of the Catholic Bishops' Conference. The book gathers together several important church documents concerning the relationship between the two communions, and provides pastoral guidelines for clergy and others who are involved in preparing Catholic-Oriental Orthodox couples for marriage.

Among other topics discussed were the joint christological declaration signed last November by Pope John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East; the ecumenical significance of the election of Karekin I as Catholicos and Supreme Patriarch of All Armenians last April; and two recent papal documents, the apostolic letter *Oriente Lumen* and the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*.

Having completed this phase of the dialogue, the consultation considered topics for future study. It was decided that the next meeting, scheduled for June 17-18, 1996, will focus on monasticism as it relates to the growing unity between the two churches. Two papers will be prepared, one from the perspective of each tradition.

Dialogue members visited St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral in Teaneck, New Jersey for a prayer service in memory of a long-time member of the consultation, His Eminence Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of the United States and Canada, who died April 16, 1995. The service was followed by a meal prepared by the parishioners.

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The official Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States held its first meeting in 1978. It is sponsored by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches, which includes the Armenian Apostolic, the Coptic Orthodox, the Ethiopian Orthodox, and the Syrian Orthodox Churches in this country.

NOTE: Available upon request are a letter of Cardinal Edward Cassidy to Catholicos Vasken I; a letter of Pope John Paul II to Catholicos Karekin I on the occasion of his election; and a letter of Cardinal William Keeler, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, to Catholicos Karekin I on the occasion of his election.

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## Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs

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### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Bill Ryan  
**FROM:** Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC  
**DATE:** June 12, 1995  
**RE:** REPORT ON THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX DIALOGUE

Attached you have some background for a press release on the recent Oriental Orthodox/ Catholic dialogue in the Bronx. If you need more background, you may wish to call Father Ronald Roberson, CSP 269-2506, as I will be out of town, and he prepared this release.

The significance of the Cassidy letter is that it was done in response to a 1992 concern of the Armenian Church about Roman Catholic activities in Armenia, and an encyclical by the Armenian Catholic Patriarch, Jean Pierre. The Armenian Archbishop in the United States, Khajag Barsamian, lead a delegation of Bishops to visit the Holy Father to discuss with the Holy See the situation. The US dialogue, in 1992, discussed the interchange in some detail and Bishop Hubbard wrote to Cardinal Cassidy. This correspondence has not been made public, but it has played a part in the communication of the Holy See, and this positive response. Another note as to why this letter is still "news:" it was lost in the mails, apparently, and was only received in 1994 when it was sent a second time through the nunciature. It has come to our attention through its release in Armenia. The carefully crafted letter again reiterates the Roman Catholic policy toward our relations in Eastern Europe, and Armenia in particular, what ever might be the experience of Catholic behavior in actual practice.

The other two letters of greeting are self explanatory. We have received a very positive response to Cardinal Keeler, dated May 29. Again Father Roberson helped the Cardinal in the formulation, and plans to visit in Armenia this summer, so he can fill out further detail, should that be of help.

## ORIENTAL ORTHODOX-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE MEETS

WASHINGTON--Clergy and scholars representing the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the United States held their annual dialogue session at the Cardinal Spellman Retreat House in Bronx, New York, June 5-6. The group was led by two Co-Chairmen, Syrian Orthodox Chorbishop John Meno and Roman Catholic Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany.

At its June meeting the commission finalized plans to publish a book on inter-church marriages and other pastoral relationships under the auspices of the Publications Department of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The book, due to appear next September, gathers together a number of important church documents and papers concerning the relationship between the two communions, and provides pastoral guidelines for the clergy and others who are involved in preparing Catholic-Oriental Orthodox couples for marriage.

In addition, a wide variety of topics of mutual interest were discussed. Among these were the joint christological declaration signed last November in Rome by Pope John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East; the ecumenical significance of the election of Karekin I as Catholicos and Supreme Patriarch of All Armenians last April; and two recent papal documents, the Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen* and the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*.

Having completed this important phase of the dialogue, the consultation considered topics that could be studied in the future. It was decided that the next meeting, scheduled for June 17-18, 1996, will focus on monasticism as it relates to the growing unity between our churches. Two papers will be prepared, one from the perspective of each of our traditions.

The dialogue members visited St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral in Teaneck, NJ, on the evening of June 5th and attended a prayer service in the cathedral in memory of a long-time member of the consultation, His Eminence Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of the United States and Canada, who passed away on April 16, 1995. The service was followed by a meal prepared by the parishioners.

The Official Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States of America held its first meeting in 1978. It is sponsored by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches, which includes the Armenian Apostolic, the Coptic Orthodox, the Ethiopian Orthodox, and the Syrian Orthodox Churches in this country.

### Appendices:

- The letter of Edward Cardinal Cassidy to Catholicos Vasken I
- The letter of Pope John Paul II to Catholicos Karekin I on the occasion of his election.
- The letter of William Cardinal Keeler to Catholicos Karekin I on the occasion of his election.

5 July 1993

*To His Holiness Vasken I  
Patriarch-Catholicos of All the Armenians*

Your Holiness,

Returning from Lebanon, where the annual meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church has just taken place -- and during which I was able to meet His Holiness Karekine II Sarkissian -- I would like to inform you of the way in which His Holiness Pope John Paul II has followed through on the visit to Rome of a delegation from the Armenian Apostolic Church on 26 and 27 October 1992.

I would like first of all to thank you for having blessed this initiative of the Armenian bishops. As we have just happily experienced it at Balamand, Lebanon, His Holiness Pope John Paul II has always been convinced that "in cases such as these disputes over relatively contingent and practical matters, dialogue still remains the best instrument for embarking upon a fraternal exchange which aims at settling the issue in a spirit of justice, charity and forgiveness" (*Letter to the Bishops of Europe on Relations Between Catholics and Orthodox in the New Situation of Central and Eastern Europe*, §2, 31 May 1991).

The communiqué published after the meeting of Tuesday 27 October between the Armenian delegation, Cardinal Silvestrini (Prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches) and myself clearly indicates our desire to maintain not only good relations between our churches, but also active collaboration according to the principles and methods that should characterize relations between two sister-churches. I want to assure you that these remain absolutely unchanged. This is why, in complete conformity with what has been affirmed on a number of occasions in the most official documents, I desire to repeat to Your Holiness that the Catholic Church rejects "all undue forms of proselytism, with the avoidance in the most absolute way in pastoral action of any temptation to violence and any form of pressure" (*Ibid.*, §5). "In fact, the way to achieve Christian unity is certainly not proselytism but rather fraternal dialogue between the followers of Christ--a dialogue fostered by prayer and developed in charity..." (The Pontifical «Pro Russia» Commission: *General Principles and Practical Norms for Coordinating the Evangelizing Activity and Ecumenical Commitment of the Catholic Church in Russia and in the Other Countries of the C.I.S.*, §6, 1 June 1992).

Therefore it is clear that the Catholic Church, although it has the duty to care for the spiritual welfare of its own communities, cannot at any time consider the Armenian Apostolic Church as the object of its missionary activity.

As we also assured the delegation of Armenian Apostolic Bishops, the Synod of the Armenian Catholic Church which took place in Rome from 19 to 30 November 1992 turned towards the future and examined the possibility of pastoral collaboration between our two churches, because "brothers who once shared the same suffering and the same trials must not oppose each other today, but rather envisage together the future that opens before us with promising signs of hope."

It is in this spirit that the Holy Father addressed the Armenian Catholic Bishops in the speech he gave at the opening of the Synod: "I have a heartfelt desire, as I am

sure you do as well, that the day may soon come when you can pray, meditate, decide and exhort in full communion with the Bishops of the Armenian Apostolic Church. You are all sons of the same people, all begotten by the same Christ, all configured to him, the supreme Head and Pastor of the Church. We will continue to hold out our hand, despite every difficulty, in accordance with the Lord's command. For now, we offer to God our suffering for whatever still divides us, in the certainty that he, the artisan of all unity, will some day make our desire a reality. We are mindful that commitment to ecumenism remains a primary duty for the Church. The world cannot wait: it needs all believers in Christ to live fully the communion which they invoke and the love which they preach" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 2 December 1992). The Holy Father then emphasized at least three areas in which our two churches could be enriched and help each other in a special way: fidelity to Armenian identity and roots, the study and reform of the liturgy, service and charity.

The Armenian Catholic Bishops carefully examined this appeal during their deliberations. After having examined the three pastoral themes that seemed to be of immediate urgency (liturgical reform, catechesis and the formation of candidates for the priesthood), they expressed their desire to undertake their apostolic task in "ecumenical understanding with the Armenian Apostolic Church" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 May 1992). There can be no doubt that the Congregation for the Eastern Churches and our Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity will offer their active assistance to the Armenian Catholic hierarchy so that this willingness might become a concrete reality at the local level.

Along these lines the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, which I officially presented last June 8th, will be of great assistance in promoting knowledge and understanding of these orientations, as well as the practice of the Catholic Church concerning ecumenism.

May the clarifications made during this meeting, and above all the spirit of collaboration shown by the Armenian Catholic Bishops, assure you that we share with you the desire not only to continue but also to deepen this dialogue of sincere love between our churches. We are confident that it will bring us to the day, so much desired by Christ himself, when we will finally be able to drink of the same cup and partake of the same table of the Lord.

It is with thoughts such as these that I wish Your Holiness long life and assure you of my respectful and fraternal good wishes.

Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy  
President



## Office of the President

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William Cardinal Keeler, D.D., J.C.D.  
 Archbishop of Baltimore  
 President

April 6, 1995

His Holiness Karekin I  
 Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos  
 of All Armenians  
 Katolicossaran Amenain Hayotz  
 SU-378310 Etchmiadzin, ARMENIA

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To Ron Robertson	From Jeff [Signature]	
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Your Holiness,

With joy I have received the news of your election by the National Ecclesiastical Assembly to the office of Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. Allow me to take this opportunity to extend to Your Holiness my heartfelt congratulations on behalf of the Catholic Church in the United States of America.

Your election as Catholicos comes at a crucial time in the history of the Armenian nation as your people struggle to establish a democratic society in an independent state after nearly seven decades of Soviet rule. The Armenian people will now benefit once again from a Catholicos who is able to articulate the Christian moral principles upon which such a society can be constructed. In addition, it will be your task to oversee the renewal of the Armenian Apostolic Church in its homeland, a church that will be forever nourished by the blood of its countless martyrs.

I note with interest Your Holiness' long history of contacts with the Catholic Church. Indeed, as Rector of the Armenian Seminary at Antelias, you represented the Catholicate of Cilicia as an observer at three of the four sessions of the Second Vatican Council. In this way you gained valuable first-hand knowledge of the life of the Catholic Church. You made clear your desire for closer relations between our two churches when you spoke these moving words in April 1983 on the occasion of your visit to Pope John Paul II in Rome: "For we believe that brotherhood becomes authentic, takes on its dimension of lived truth, when it is expressed through the meeting of brothers, through mutual knowledge and through common witness. Brothers become brothers by seeing one another, by conversing with one another, and by working together in the vineyards of the Lord."

I wish to assure Your Holiness that the Catholic Church in the United States is committed to the development of such a fraternal relationship with the Armenian Apostolic Church in our country. We are appreciative of the contacts of our Bishops' Conference with you when you were at the Prelacy in New York. Our national

His Holiness Karekin I  
Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos  
of All Armenians  
April 6, 1995  
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consultation with the Oriental Orthodox has already borne much fruit, and I am confident that with your encouragement even more progress will be made.

It is my prayer, Your Holiness, that God will grant many blessings to you and to all Armenian Orthodox clergy and faithful as you assume the holy Throne of Saint Gregory.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

William Cardinal Keeler  
Archbishop of Baltimore  
President, National Conference  
of Catholic Bishops

cc: The Most Rev. Bishop Khajag Barsamian  
The Most Rev. Howard J. Hubbard



# L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

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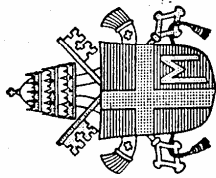
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## While we deepen bonds of unity, we must foster our good relations and intensify our collaboration

The Holy Father sent a letter to Kardek in Sarkissian, the new Supreme Patriarch and Catholics of all the Armenians, congratulating him on his election and installation. Here is a translation of the French-language text of the Pope's letter, which was dated 5 April.



To His Holiness  
Supreme Patriarch and Catholics  
of all the Armenians

With great joy I offer you my sincere congratulations on the occasion of your election and installation as Supreme Catholics of all the Armenians. May the Holy Trinity protect your person and grant that your new pastoral ministry bear abundant apostolic fruit! I also wish you to know that the Church of Rome shares, in thought and in fervent prayer, in the spiritual joy that the faithful of the Holy See of Echmiadzin must be feeling at this time. I also send my greetings to all the children of the Armenian Apostolic Church; I ask God to keep them con-

stantly faithful to their Christian identity. On this feast day, the blessed memory of your venerable predecessor, His Holiness Vasken I is present in my prayers. I do not forget that the relations between the Holy See of Echmiadzin and the Catholic Church were given a new impetus by his decision to send observers to the Second Vatican Council. This rapprochement became even closer at the time of the memorable visit made by the late Catholics to Pope Paul VI in the month of May 1970. At their meeting, they jointly signed an important common declaration. Since that time delegations from our two Churches have not ceased to exchange visits in order to deepen the bonds of unity that one day must gather us around the same Eucharistic table.

While we await this time which we hope is not far off, my sincere wish — which, I am sure, you share — is not only to maintain these good relations between our Churches but also to intensify our relations and to collaborate more actively. In my recent Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, addressed to the Catholic Bishops, clergy and lay faithful on preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, I had hoped that Christians might show themselves at the end of the second millennium, if not completely united, at least much closer (cf. n. 34). And, so that "unity among all Christians of the various confessions will increase until they reach full communion", I expressed the hope "that the Jubilee will be a promising opportunity for fruitful co-operation

in the many areas which unite us; these are unquestionably more numerous than those which divide us. It would thus be quite helpful if, with due respect for the programmes of the individual Churches and Communities, ecumenical agreements could be reached with regard to the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee! In this way the Jubilee will bear witness even more forcefully before the world that the disciples of Christ are fully resolved to reach full unity as soon as possible in the certainty that 'nothing is impossible with God'." (ibid., n. 16).

This certainty of the Father's "power" will be vividly manifested at Easter in the Resurrection of his Son: death is overcome; it is swallowed up in Christ's victory (cf. 1 Cor 15:54). This event was impressed upon the disciples almost 20 centuries ago, and since then, no one has been able to efface it. Today this is our faith, this is our hope, this is the source of our joy, the Easter joy which is given to us and which we proclaim together before the world: Christ is truly risen, alleluia!

With these sentiments and with renewed trust in the extraordinary force of the Spirit of God, I assure you, beloved Brother, of my deep and fraternal love.

From the Vatican, 5 April 1995.

Joannes Paulus n. II