

Joint Statement on Tension in Eastern Europe Related to 'Uniatism'

The most recent (43rd) meeting of the U.S. Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, Massachusetts, May 26-28, 1992, focused upon the question of "Uniatism" and reviewed a number of recent statements regarding religious conflicts in Eastern Europe. Included among these texts were: the joint text of the Roman Catholic Church and Russian Orthodox Church (January 17, 1990), the Freising Statement of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholics Church and the Orthodox Church (June 15, 1990), our Consultation's previous joint communique on "Current Tensions between Our Churches in Eastern Europe" (October 20, 1990), the Ariccia draft statement of its Coordinating Committee on "Uniatism as a Method of Union in the Past and the Present Search for Full Communion" (June 15, 1991), the statement of the U.S. Orthodox and Roman Catholic bishops Commission (September 19, 1991), and the "Message of the Primates of the Most Holy Orthodox Churches" from the fourteen primates of patriarchates and autocephalous and autonomous churches (March 15, 1992). We, the members of this Consultation, formulate this joint statement of concern.

1. Our own experience of cooperation and dialogue in North America has generally been a harmonious and fruitful one. This experience convinces us that resolution of the present difficulties will be possible only through prayer and a deepened dialogue in truth and love.
2. We recognize that it is not always possible for us to judge the accuracy of reports on abuses of justice or proselytism in distant parts of the world. We decry publication of unverified alleged events or incidents that only fan the feelings of fear and prejudice as well as inflammatory reactions to verified incidents. We also decry one-sided or prejudicial reporting on religious developments in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, which, through emotionalism or sensationalism, would tend to undercut efforts toward genuine cooperation and reconciliation. We therefore appeal to world-wide human rights' agencies and the media to lend their service for a balanced presentation of events and we commit ourselves to the task of sharing and attempting to verify such information as we receive.
3. We recognize that, because of the burden of past history and the painful actions of governments and churches, there exist among Christians in many parts of the world, especially Eastern Europe, a high degree of resentment, antipathy, suspicion and even fear of other Christian communities. If such attitudes are to be overcome, it is essential that our churches together formulate and implement practical recommendations, such as those presented in the Ariccia working draft, the January 1990 agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, and elsewhere, effectively addressing the specific issues that divide us.
4. Therefore, we encourage mutual consultation at all levels, particularly before any activities are undertaken which might even inadvertently give offense to others. Such consultation

would help all parties to avoid needless misunderstandings.

5. In reviewing the various documents which have dealt with recent tensions between our churches, we find that expressions like "Uniatism" have been used and understood in diverse ways. We believe that such expressions require more careful analysis. Among other things, a distinction should be made between "Uniatism" understood as inappropriate, indeed unacceptable, model or method for church union, and "Uniatism" understood as the existence of convinced Eastern Christians who have accepted full communion with the See of Rome as part of their self-understanding as a church. "Uniatism" in the former sense is no longer accepted by either of our churches.
6. We are convinced that in countries previously under Communist oppression, as well as elsewhere, a healthy interaction between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church or even between the Orthodox Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches could lead to important developments in theological renewal, liturgical reform, and useful formulation of Christian social and political doctrine.
7. We recognize the importance of participating jointly in and sharing the results of theological, ecclesiastical, and historical research among clergy, seminarians and laity, especially in countries where freedom of the press and easy access to international scholarship have been systematically hindered.
8. The present difficulties offer theologians opportunities to explore, from a new perspective, certain theological themes which have been discussed repeatedly in recent ecumenical dialogues. We are challenged, to give only two examples, to explain what "mutual recognition as sister churches" means in practice, and to explore structures needed for achieving communion among the worldwide community of local churches.

Brookline, MA
May 28, 1992
43rd Meeting