

The Commission of Dialogue.

The history of the Commission is summarized in :

http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/o-rc/i_o-rc-info.html

There was no plenary meeting of the Commission between the Balamand meeting (1993) and the Belgrade meeting (2006). Between both meetings, some committees published texts on uniatism, which is a major obstacle for the Orthodox. Since there should be one bishop for one Church (local), the double hierarchy established by the Catholics is perceived as an insult. Although they would accept some pastoral ministry for the “foreign” Catholics of Latin rite in “Orthodox countries” (in the same way in which they have some ministry to Orthodox emigrants in Western countries), the fact itself of Catholic Byzantine Churches can’t be justified, according to them.

It is interesting to see Card. Kasper’s article on that question, related above all to the Russian situation: Walter Kasper, “Le radici teologiche del conflitto tra Mosca e Roma”, *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3642, 16 Maggio 2002, p.531-541

Kasper criticizes the idea of “canonical territory”, which is crucial to the Orthodox.

Finally the Commission could meet again. It has to go on with the work of the previous Commission.

The Ravenna Document (2007).

The last document of the International Commission is on the site:

http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/o-rc/doc/i_o-rc_ravenna.html

The real topic is given in the second subtitle: *Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority*.

It builds on a general agreement on the sacramental structure of the Church, and therefore on the episcopacy. The crucial point is the possibility of some primate in the Universal Church.

As the Orthodox traditionally refuse that the bishop of Rome might more than *primus inter pares*, a key is given in § 10:

10. This conciliar dimension of the Church’s life belongs to its deep-seated nature. That is to say, it is founded in the will of Christ for his people (cfr. Mt 18:15-20), even if its canonical realizations are of necessity also determined by history and by the social, political and cultural context. Defined thus, the conciliar dimension of the Church is to be found at the **three levels of ecclesial communion, the local, the regional and the universal**: at the local level of the diocese entrusted to the bishop; **at the regional level of a group of local Churches with their bishops who “recognize who is the first amongst themselves” (Apostolic Canon 34)**; and at the universal level, where those who are first (protoi) in the various regions, together with all the bishops, cooperate in that which concerns the totality of the Church. At this level also, the protoi must recognize who is the first amongst themselves.

If there is a primacy at the regional level (metropolitans, patriarchs), then the bishops are not simply “pares”, although they are at the sacramental level. This opens the way to a distinction at the universal level.

It was not obvious to address the question of the Universal Church. Some (Zizioulas, copresident of the Commission) tended to refuse the idea itself. For Zizioulas the Church is fully Church when it celebrates the Eucharist with the bishop.

Part 3 (§§ 32-44) addresses this question.

§ 33 states clearly that there is a Church “universal”:

one and the same faith is to be confessed and lived out in all the local Churches, the same unique Eucharist is to be celebrated everywhere, and one and the same apostolic ministry is to be at work in all the communities...

§ 39 mentions the very delicate idea of some primacy both in the Catholic and in the Orthodox Church:

both Churches continued to hold councils whenever serious crises arose. These councils gathered together the bishops of **local Churches in communion with the See of Rome or, although understood in a different way, with the See of Constantinople**, respectively.

After the meeting of the Commission in Belgrade (2006), bishop Ilarion Alfeyev, representative of the Russian Church (he recently succeeded Metropolitan Kyril – new Patriarch – as chairman of the Department of External Church Relations) contested the parallel between Rome and Constantinople. He made his disagreement public.

§ 43 prepares the next steps, with a description of agreements and disagreements:

1. Primacy at all levels is a practice firmly grounded in the canonical tradition of the Church.
2. While **the fact of primacy at the universal level is accepted** by both East and West, there are **differences of understanding with regard to the manner in which it is to be exercised**, and also with regard to its scriptural and theological foundations.

The Commission will have to deal with the disagreements. The next meeting will start with the historical question; above all: how was the primacy received in the East during the first millennium.

The Question of Estonia.

At the beginning of the Ravenna meeting, the Russians delegates left. The reason was not their relation with the Catholic Church, but a problem between Moscow and Constantinople (seemingly supported by the other Orthodox Churches), namely the presence of delegates of the Orthodox Church of Estonia.

The Georgians also left shortly after the Russians, officially for a different reason (an anniversary of their Church).

A good summary of the history of the Estonian Church can be found in:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estonian_Apostolic_Orthodox_Church

I highlight the main points:

- After the Estonian Republic was proclaimed in 1918, **the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, St. Tikhon, in 1920 recognised the Orthodox Church of Estonia (OCE) as being independent**. Archbishop Aleksander Paulus was elected and ordained as the head of the Estonian church. In 1923 Abp. Aleksander **turned to the Patriarch of Constantinople to receive canonical recognition**. The same year the OCE was canonically subordinated to the Ecumenical Patriarchy of Constantinople and gained extensive autonomy.
- **In 1940, Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union, whose government undertook a general programme of the dissolution of all ecclesiastical**

independence within its territory. From 1942 to 1944, however, autonomy under Constantinople was temporarily revived. In 1945, a representative of the Moscow Patriarchate dismissed the members of the OCE synod who had remained in Estonia and established a new organisation, the Diocesan Council. Orthodox believers in occupied Estonia were thus subordinated to being a diocese within the Russian Orthodox Church.

- Just before the second Soviet occupation in 1944 and the dissolution of the Estonian synod, the primate of the church, Metropolitan Aleksander, went into exile along with 21 clergymen and about 8,000 Orthodox believers. **The Orthodox Church of Estonia in Exile with its synod in Sweden continued its activity according to the canonical statutes, until the restoration of Estonian independence in 1991.**
- **In 1978, at the urging of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Ecumenical Patriarch declared the charter (tomos) of the Church, as granted in 1923, inoperative.** The church ceased to exist until the breakup of the Soviet Union.
- **On February 20, 1996, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I formally reactivated the tomos granted to the OCE in 1923, restoring its canonical subordination to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This action brought immediate protest from the Estonian-born Patriarch Alexei II of the Moscow Patriarchate,** which regarded the Estonian church as being part of its territory. The Patriarch of Moscow temporarily removed the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch from the diptychs.
- The Orthodox community in Estonia, which accounts for about 14% of the total population, remains divided, with the majority of faithful (mostly ethnic Russians) remaining under Moscow.

The presence of the Estonian Church in the meeting with the Catholics offended the Russians (who nevertheless never left the Commissions with the Anglicans and the Lutherans, where the Estonians are also present). The Russians say that if an Orthodox Church not accepted by all Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches is present at such a meeting, then others should be invited: e.g. the Orthodox Church in Japan (accepted by the Russians) and the one in America.

This question highlights several difficult questions:

- The idea of “canonical territory”
- The divisions among Orthodox in the previous Soviet Union (above all in the Ukraine, where there are 3 Orthodox Churches on top of the Eastern Catholics): one can suspect the fear of some contamination of the Estonian situation
- The relationship between **the biggest Orthodox Church (Moscow) and the “first” but small one (Constantinople)**: the Russians very openly use that argument
- History does not help: in the past Constantinople recognized new 1. autonomous or 2. autocephalous Church or 3. Patriarchates (different levels). But the new canonical status applied to what had been until then in the “canonical territory” of Constantinople. Estonia had been in the “canonical territory” of Moscow, which is a different case. The decision of the Patriarch of Moscow in 1920 had been taken in a situation of obvious weakness.

The Estonian question is typical of some problem with Orthodoxy, and affects the dialogue with the Catholics: an agreement between Catholics and Orthodox, but without the Russians, would have a limited meaning...