

# **As some protest, Catholic-Orthodox dialogue discusses role of papacy**

VATICAN CITY -In the midst of a protest by a small number of Orthodox monks and faithful, the official Catholic-Orthodox dialogue commission met in Cyprus Oct. 16-23.

The meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church focused on a key factor in the ongoing division between Catholic and Orthodox: the role of the pope as bishop of Rome.

The protesters – who were arrested Oct. 20, the third day of their demonstration – claimed that the ongoing dialogue between the two churches was aimed at getting the Orthodox to submit to papal authority.

According to a statement released by the dialogue commission Oct. 23, the commission's Orthodox members discussed "the negative reactions to the dialogue by certain Orthodox circles and unanimously considered them as totally unfounded and unacceptable, providing false and misleading information."

The Orthodox delegates "reaffirmed that the dialogue continues with the decision of all the Orthodox churches and is pursued with faithfulness to the truth and the tradition of the church," said the statement released in Cyprus and at the Vatican.

At the Catholic Mass Oct. 17, Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and head of the Catholic delegation, "stressed that the spirit of humility and love should prevail in the work" of the commission.

Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus, host of the meeting, presided over the Orthodox Divine Liturgy Oct. 18. He said all the Orthodox churches are committed to a dialogue that holds firmly to the teachings of the ecumenical councils and the Fathers of the Church of the first 1,000 years of Christianity.

The joint sessions of the dialogue focused on discussing a draft report, "The Role of

the Bishop of Rome in the Communion of the Church in the First Millennium.” After discussing and amending the text, the commission decided to finalize it next September during a meeting in Vienna, Austria, the statement said.

The current round of the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue has been looking at questions related to the exercise of authority in the church.

The authority and decision-making structure of the Catholic Church today, particularly the role of the papacy, is much more centralized than any structure in the Orthodox churches. While the Orthodox recognize the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople as the “first among equals,” he has no direct authority over any of the individual Orthodox churches. In addition, the Orthodox patriarchs exercise their authority together with their synods of bishops.

Meeting in Ravenna, Italy, in 2007, the dialogue commission approved a statement on how communion and authority are expressed and exercised on a local, regional and universal level within the one church of Christ.

Before moving on to the crucial question of papal authority and papal infallibility, members decided to lay a foundation by discussing how the authority of the bishop of Rome was exercised when Christianity was still united.

The meeting in Cyprus was attended by 20 Catholic members of the dialogue commission and by representatives of 13 Orthodox churches, including the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Russian Orthodox delegation had walked out of the commission’s 2007 dialogue during an inter-Orthodox dispute over which Orthodox communities were qualified to send representatives to the meeting.