

**Office of Information and Communication of the  
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**Old Catholic delegation visits the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople**

A delegation from the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference has had talks with the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, in Constantinople from 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> September. The delegation was under the leadership of Archbishop Dr. Joris Vercammen. He was accompanied by Prime Bishop Robert Nemkovich from the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) of America and Prof. Dr. Urs von Arx from Switzerland. His Eminence Jeremy, Metropolitan of Switzerland, also took part in the reception and the talks.

Patriarch Bartholomew received the delegation most hospitably and proved to be extremely interested in the internal developments of the Old Catholic Churches. Amongst other things, Archbishop Vercammen informed Patriarch Bartholomew about the state of affairs with regard to the reception of the dialogue in the Old Catholic Churches which was concluded in 1987.

The delegation had a meeting lasting several hours, in the course of which all important points were discussed, with the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Commission for Relations between Christian Churches. Amongst other things, the full communion with the Anglican Church, which is regarded as a problem on the Orthodox side, and women's ordination were discussed. These questions were, however, definitely seen as putting a strain on the relations between the Old Catholic and the Orthodox Churches, and not as blocking them.

A further theme of the talks was the future organisation of relations between the Old Catholic and the Orthodox Churches, including a suggestion for the foundation of a common body, which would give these relations form and substance. This suggestion was taken up with interest on the side of the Orthodox. The Commission for Relations between Christian Churches is to work out the establishment of this body for the attention of the Holy Synod, i.e. the executive committee of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. An answer to the suggestion may be expected towards the end of this year.

The responsibilities of this body would include the exchange of information and the development and accompaniment of various initiatives for cooperation on a national and local level. The putting into practice of the common dialogue could also be an important task. The 26 texts of the official dialogue, which took place from 1975-1987 and was successfully completed with common signatures, are based on the patristic theology of the Old Church. Those taking part in the talks were agreed on the necessity of translating the texts of the dialogue for today's world. How that is to be achieved will have to be the content of further talks.

The visit to Constantinople can be seen as a new starting point, after a period of stagnation, for the further development of relations between the Old Catholic and the Orthodox Churches.

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