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**FREIBURG IM BREISGAU - 24.09.2011 - 17:15**

**Seminary - Hörsaal**

**Meeting with the Representatives of Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches**

### Official translation

Dear Cardinals, Brother Bishops,  
Distinguished Representatives of Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches!

It is a great joy for me that we have come together here today. From my heart I thank all of you for coming and for the possibility of this friendly exchange. I offer a particular word of thanks to Metropolitan Augoustinos for his words, so full of confidence. Gladly I repeat in this setting what I have already said elsewhere: among Christian Churches and communities, the Orthodox are theologically closest to us; Catholics and Orthodox both have the same basic structure inherited from the ancient Church. So we may hope that the day is not too far away when we may once again celebrate the Eucharist together (cf. *Light of the World. A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, p. 86).

With interest and sympathy the Catholic Church follows the development of Orthodox communities in Western Europe, which in recent decades have grown remarkably. In Germany today there are approximately 1.6 million Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Christians. They have become a constitutive part of society that helps bring alive the treasury of the Christian cultures and the Christian faith of Europe. I welcome the increase of pan-Orthodox cooperation, which has made significant progress in recent years. The founding of Orthodox Episcopal Conferences in places where the Orthodox Churches exist in the Diaspora is an expression of the consolidation of intra-Orthodox relations. I am pleased that this step has also been taken in Germany in the past year. May the work of these Episcopal Conferences strengthen the bond between the Orthodox Churches and hasten the progress of efforts to establish a pan-Orthodox council.

Since the time when I was a professor in Bonn and especially while I was Archbishop of Munich and Freising, I have come to know and love Orthodoxy more and more through my personal friendships with representatives of the Orthodox Churches. At that time the Joint Commission of the German Bishops' Conference and the Orthodox Church also began its work. Since then, through its texts on pastoral and practical questions, it has furthered mutual understanding and contributed to the consolidation and further development of Catholic-Orthodox relations in Germany.

Equally important is the ongoing work to clarify theological differences, because the resolution of these questions is indispensable for restoration of the full unity that we hope and pray for. Above all it is on the question of primacy that our continuing efforts towards a correct understanding must be focused. Here the ideas put forward by Pope John Paul II in the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (no. 95) on the distinction between the nature and form of the exercise of primacy can yield further fruitful discussion points.

I also express my appreciation of the work of the Mixed International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. I am glad, distinguished Eminences and Delegates of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, that you are here representing the Churches that are taking part in this dialogue. The results so far obtained allow us to grow in mutual understanding and to draw closer to one another.

In the present climate, in which many would like, as it were, to "liberate" public life from God, the Christian Churches in Germany – including Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Christians – are walking side by side along the path of peaceful witness for understanding and solidarity among peoples, on the basis of their faith in the one God and Father of all. At the same time they continue to place the miracle of God's incarnation at the centre of their proclamation. Realizing that on this mystery all human dignity depends, they speak up jointly for the protection of human life from conception to natural death. Faith in God, the Creator of life, and unconditional adherence to the dignity of every human being strengthen faithful Christians to oppose vigorously every manipulative and selective intervention in the area of human life. Knowing too the value of marriage and the family, we as Christians attach great importance to defending the integrity and the uniqueness of marriage between one man and one woman from any kind of misinterpretation. Here the common engagement of Christians, including many Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Christians, makes a valuable contribution to building up a society equipped for the future, in which the human person is given the respect which is his due.

Let us direct our gaze, finally, to Mary, the *Hodegetria*, the "Guide along the Way", who is also venerated in the

**West under the title “Our Lady of the Way”. The Most Holy Trinity has given the Virgin Mother Mary to mankind, that she might guide us through history with her intercession and point out to us the way towards fulfilment. To her we entrust ourselves and our prayer that we may become a community ever more intimately united in Christ, to the praise and glory of his name. May God bless you all!**

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