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TEOLOGICO TRA LA CHIESA CATTOLICA E LE CHIESE ORIENTALI ORTODOSSE**

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Alle ore 12 di questa mattina, nella Sala del Concistoro del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI riceve in Udienza i Partecipanti alla riunione della Commissione Mista Internazionale per il Dialogo Teologico tra la Chiesa Cattolica e le Chiese Orientali Ortodosse.

Pubblichiamo di seguito le parole di saluto che il Papa rivolge ai presenti:

● **SALUTO DEL SANTO PADRE**

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Brothers in Christ,

It is with great joy that I welcome you, the members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Through you I gladly extend fraternal greetings to my venerable Brothers, the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

I am grateful for the work of the Commission which began in January 2003 as a shared initiative of the ecclesial authorities of the family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

As you know, the first phase of the dialogue, from 2003 to 2009, resulted in the common text entitled *Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church*. The document outlined aspects of fundamental ecclesiological principles that we share and identified issues requiring deeper reflection in successive phases of the dialogue. We can only be grateful that after almost fifteen hundred years of separation we still find agreement about the sacramental nature of the Church, about apostolic succession in priestly service and about the impelling need to bear witness to the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the world.

In the second phase the Commission has reflected from an historical perspective on the ways in which the Churches expressed their communion down the ages. During the meeting this week you are deepening your study of the communion and communication that existed between the Churches until the mid-fifth century of Christian history, as well as the role played by monasticism in the life of the early Church.

We must be confident that your theological reflection will lead our Churches not only to understand each other more deeply, but resolutely to continue our journey decisively towards the full communion to which we are called by the will of Christ. For this intention we have lifted up our common prayer during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which has just ended.

Many of you come from regions where Christian individuals and communities face trials and difficulties that are a cause of deep concern for us all. All Christians need to work together in mutual acceptance and trust in order to serve the cause of peace and justice. May the intercession and example of the many martyrs and saints, who have given courageous witness to Christ in all our Churches, sustain and strengthen you and your Christian communities.

With sentiments of fraternal affection I invoke upon all of you the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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