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◆ **UDIENZA AI PARTECIPANTI ALLA RIUNIONE DELLA COMMISSIONE MISTA INTERNAZIONALE PER IL DIALOGO TEOLOGICO TRA LA CHIESA CATTOLICA E LE CHIESE ORTODOSSE ORIENTALI**

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Alle ore 11.45 di questa mattina, nella Sala dei Papi 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 Ortodosse Orientali.

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 joy in the Lord 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 extend fraternal

greetings to the heads of all the Oriental Orthodox Churches. In a particular way I greet His Eminence Anba Bishoy, Co-President of the Commission, and I thank him for his kind words.

Before all else I would like to recall with appreciation the memory of His Holiness Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, who died recently. I also remember with gratitude His Holiness Abuna Paulos, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church, who last year hosted the Ninth Meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I was saddened, too, to learn of the death of the Most Reverend Jules Mikhael Al-Jamil, Titular Archbishop of Takrit and Procurator of the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate in Rome and a member of your Commission. I join you in prayer for the eternal rest of these dedicated servants of the Lord.

Our meeting today affords us an opportunity to reflect together with gratitude on the work of the International Joint Commission, which began ten years ago, in January 2003, as a initiative of the ecclesial authorities of the family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. In the past decade the Commission has examined from an historical perspective the various ways in which the Churches expressed their communion in the early centuries. During this week devoted to prayer for the unity of all Christ's followers, you have met to explore more fully the communion and communication which existed between the Churches in the first five centuries of Christian history. In acknowledging the progress which has been made, I express my hope that relations between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches will continue to develop in a fraternal spirit of cooperation, particularly through the growth of a theological dialogue capable of helping all the Lord's followers to grow in communion and to bear witness before the world to the saving truth of the Gospel.

Many of you come from areas where Christians, as individuals and communities, face painful trials and difficulties which are a source of deep concern to us all. Through you, I would like to assure all the faithful of the Middle East of my spiritual closeness and my prayer that this land, so important in God's plan of salvation, may be led, through constructive dialogue and cooperation, to a future of justice and lasting peace. All Christians need to work together in mutual acceptance and trust in serving the cause of peace and justice in fidelity to the Lord's will. May the example and intercession of the countless martyrs and saints who down the ages have borne courageous witness to Christ in all our Churches, sustain and strengthen all of us in meeting the challenges of the present with confidence and hope in the future which the Lord is opening before us. Upon you, and upon all those associated with the work of the Commission, I cordially invoke a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom, joy and peace. Thank you for your attention.

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