

# Joint Statements and Agreements

between the Catholic and  
Oriental Orthodox Churches



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Oriental Orthodox Churches

Catholic – Oriental Orthodox  
Regional Forum

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Additional copies of this book can be obtained from:

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## Foreword by Archbishop McDonald

The Oriental Orthodox Churches have a small but significant presence in Britain.

The adherents to these Churches are the heirs to a tremendously rich vein of Christian wisdom and spirituality. They developed their specific and separate identity because of Christological disagreements in the fifth century. In the ensuing centuries they developed traditions of theology, liturgy and Church life that were quite distinctive both in relation to the Byzantine Churches of the East to the Catholic Church. The long centuries of estrangement meant that the riches of those Churches were little known and appreciated by Christians in the West. It also meant that when the Catholic Church began to reach out to other Churches and Ecclesial Communities at the time of the Second Vatican Council, it was with these Churches that there was most catching-up to do.

It is surprising therefore - and rather a well-kept secret - that **some of the most remarkable achievements of the ecumenical movement have been precisely with these Churches.** The **Joint Declarations** made by both Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II with the heads of the Coptic Church in Egypt and the Syrian Orthodox Church were real milestones. In these Declarations the leaders of long-separated Churches expressed their common Faith in Jesus Christ but without using the formulations that had been so divisive sixteen hundred years before. Of course, those Declarations did not heal all divisions nor did they establish Ecclesial Communion. But they were a real turning point and they created **a new situation.**

It was in this new situation that Catholics and Oriental Orthodox leaders in Britain began meeting together in friendship and dialogue in the context of the Catholic-Oriental Orthodox Regional Forum. The purpose of this volume is to draw attention both to our forum and to these texts. This is a timely initiative since the Oriental Orthodox Churches are and will be deeply affected by the tumultuous changes taking place in North Africa and the Middle East. It is a time for solidarity and prayer. We invite all who see this booklet to join us in both.

+Kevin McDonald

Archbishop Emeritus of Southwark

Co-Chairman of the Catholic-Oriental Orthodox  
Regional Forum





## Foreword by Bishop Angaelos

It is with great pleasure that I introduce you to what can no doubtedly be considered an unprecedented move towards an increased unity and a true notion of solidarity between Churches that have experienced their fair share of division and separation over centuries.

The Catholic-Oriental Orthodox Regional Forum (COORF) was established in 2007 to strengthen bonds and further establish and build on relationships based upon the shared Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. As co-Chair and co-founder of the COORF with HE Archbishop Kevin, I envision that with time, these bonds will only encourage further dialogue and discussion, leading to a more unified Body of Christ and a greater common and unified witness in our wider society.

At a time when the Middle East, North Africa, and indeed the world is experiencing incredible shifts, it is essential that the Church provides this powerful and unified Body with a solid foundation within which people may find direction, and even refuge. Although many challenges have sought to shake the Church at its very core, fora and relationships such as this can only provide hope for those seeking a Church that stands together in belief and principles.

The establishment of this Forum is unprecedented worldwide and provides a platform for shared life and witness between our ancient Churches, and in that same spirit, this book and the agreements published within it, show the commonalities that we have shared and continue

to share, which enable us to work together for the glory of God and the service of His people.

+ Angaelos

General Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Church, United Kingdom

President, Council of Oriental Orthodox Churches of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland

Co-Chair, Catholic-Oriental Orthodox Regional Forum



## The Catholic – Oriental Orthodox Regional Forum

The Catholic – Oriental Orthodox Regional Forum was established on 1 March 2007 and consists of Episcopal members of the Council of Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Department of Dialogue and Unity. The Forum meets twice a year to share common cultural and social concerns which call on common witness, rooted in shared belief in the Scriptures, sacraments and tradition.

1. The Catholic – Oriental Orthodox Regional Forum is the result of international dialogues but does not seek to duplicate the theological work of these dialogues.

2. The Catholic – Oriental Orthodox Regional Forum aims:

a) To receive and consider the documents from international dialogues between:

- The Catholic Church and the family of Oriental Orthodox Churches
- The Catholic Church and individual Oriental Orthodox Churches
- Other dialogues on both sides that impact on our relationship.

b) To take note of, discuss and explore relevant developments between both Communion, and to explore local relevance and implications.

- c) To encourage opportunities for common prayer and worship within the discipline of our respective Churches.
- d) To give our people and beyond, hope regarding the search for the greater unity of the Church.
- e) To discuss current pastoral, social, political and other issues and to explore and bear common witness.
- f) To discover and educate one another, our clergy and laity about each of our traditions.
- g) To work to achieve a greater unity expressed in common life and witness.
- h) To inform our respective Church hierarchies and faithful of the work of the Catholic – Oriental Orthodox Regional Forum.



## Common Statements

### **Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and of the Pope of Alexandria Shenouda III**

*Tower of St. John in the Vatican gardens*

Paul VI, bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and patriarch of the See of St. Mark, give thanks in the Holy Spirit to God that, after the great event of the return of relics of St. Mark to Egypt, relations have further developed between the Churches of Rome and Alexandria so that they have now been able to meet personally together. At the end of their meetings and conversations they wish to state together the following:

We have met in the desire to deepen the relations between our Churches and to find concrete ways to overcome the obstacles in the way of our real cooperation in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ who has given us the ministry of reconciliation, to reconcile the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:18-20).

In accordance with our apostolic traditions transmitted to our Churches and preserved therein, and in conformity with the early three ecumenical councils, we confess one faith in the One Triune God, the divinity of the Only Begotten Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Word of God, the effulgence of His glory and the express image of His substance, who for us was incarnate, assuming for Himself a real body with a rational soul, and who shared with us our humanity but without sin. We confess that our

Lord and God and Saviour and King of us all, Jesus Christ, is perfect God with respect to His Divinity, perfect man with respect to His humanity. In Him His divinity is united with His humanity in a real, perfect union without mingling, without commixtion, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without separation. His divinity did not separate from His humanity for an instant, not for the twinkling of an eye. He who is God eternal and invisible became visible in the flesh, and took upon Himself the form of a servant. In Him are preserved all the properties of the divinity and all the properties of the humanity, together in a real, perfect, indivisible and inseparable union.

The divine life is given to us and is nourished in us through the seven sacraments of Christ in His Church: Baptism, Chrism (Confirmation), Holy Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony and Holy Orders.

We venerate the Virgin Mary, Mother of the True Light, and we confess that she is ever Virgin, the God-bearer. She intercedes for us, and, as the Theotokos, excels in her dignity all angelic hosts.

We have, to a large degree, the same understanding of the Church, founded upon the Apostles, and of the important role of ecumenical and local councils. Our spirituality is well and profoundly expressed in our rituals and in the Liturgy of the Mass which comprises the centre of our public prayer and the culmination of our incorporation into Christ in His Church. We keep the fasts and feasts of our faith. We venerate the relics of the saints and ask the intercession of the angels and of the saints, the living and the departed. These compose a cloud of witnesses in the Church. They

and we look in hope for the Second Coming of our Lord when His glory will be revealed to judge the living and the dead.

We humbly recognize that our Churches are not able to give more perfect witness to this new life in Christ because of existing divisions which have behind them centuries of difficult history. In fact, since the year 451 A.D., theological differences, nourished and widened by non-theological factors, have sprung up. These differences cannot be ignored. In spite of them, however, we are rediscovering ourselves as Churches with a common inheritance and are reaching out with determination and confidence in the Lord to achieve the fullness and perfection of that unity which is His gift.

As an aid to accomplishing this task, we are setting up a joint commission representing our Churches, whose function will be to guide common study in the fields of Church tradition, patristics, liturgy, theology, history and practical problems, so that by cooperation in common we may seek to resolve, in a spirit of mutual respect, the differences existing between our Churches and be able to proclaim together the Gospel in ways which correspond to the authentic message of the Lord and to the needs and hopes of today's world. At the same time we express our gratitude and encouragement to other groups of Catholic and Orthodox scholars and pastors who devote their efforts to common activity in these and related fields.

With sincerity and urgency we recall that true charity, rooted in total fidelity to the one Lord Jesus Christ and in

mutual respect for each other's traditions, is an essential element of this search for perfect communion.

In the name of this charity, we reject all forms of proselytism, in the sense of acts by which persons seek to disturb each other's communities by recruiting new members from each other through methods, or because of attitudes of mind, which are opposed to the exigencies of Christian love or to what should characterize the relationships between Churches. Let it cease, where it may exist. Catholics and Orthodox should strive to deepen charity and cultivate mutual consultation, reflection and cooperation in the social and intellectual fields and should humble themselves before God, supplicating Him who, as He has begun this work in us, will bring it to fruition.

As we rejoice in the Lord who has granted us the blessings of this meeting, our thoughts reach out to the thousands of suffering and homeless Palestinian people. We deplore any misuse of religious arguments for political purposes in this area. We earnestly desire and look for a just solution for the Middle East crisis so that true peace with justice should prevail, especially in that land which was hallowed by the preaching, death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and by the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom we venerate together as the Theotokos. May God, the giver of all god gifts, hear our prayers and bless our endeavours.

*From the Vatican, May 10, 1973.*





## **Addresses of Pope Paul VI and Mar Ignatius Jacob III**

From October 25th to 27th, 1971, His Holiness Mar Ignatius Jacob III, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, paid an official visit to Rome. During this time he was the guest of the Holy Father. The Pope and the Patriarch met for a long private meeting on October 25th. At the end of this meeting they participated together in a Celebration of Prayer in the Matilda Chapel. During this celebration the following addresses were exchanged:

### **Address of Pope Paul VI**

Your Holiness,

With joy we extend our fraternal greeting as we welcome you to our home. In your person we salute a Church which sees in the faith and devotion of the apostolic community of Antioch the roots and foundation of its own Christian witness. We are particularly happy to welcome an exalted visitor from Damascus, where, in receiving the holy waters of baptism, the Apostle of the Nations, whose name we bear, began that life of total commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ which was to lead him to this city of Rome and the supreme sacrifice of his life out of love for that Lord.

Nine years ago, Your Holiness accepted the invitation of our predecessor of venerated memory, John XXIII, to be represented at the Second Vatican Council by a delegated observer. Since that time the exchange of letters between us and the visit of qualified members of our Church to Your Holiness have helped strengthen the relations between our Churches. Now we have the joy of meeting in person so that

we may share the thoughts and desires which animate us as we strive to fulfil God's wish for His Church and for the world redeemed by the precious Blood of His Son.

The history of the relations between our Churches shows many lights and shadows. We recognize that difficulties which have been created over centuries are not always easily overcome. Each of us is motivated by a sincere desire to be faithful to our Fathers in the faith and to the tradition they have handed down to us. Yet this very desire to be faithful to them impels us to search with ever greater zeal for the realization of full communion with each other.

We share a common sacramental life and a common Apostolic tradition, particularly as affirmed in what is popularly called the Nicene Creed. The dogmatic definitions of the first three Ecumenical Councils form part of our common heritage. Thus we confess together the mystery of the Word of God, become one of us to save us and to permit us to become in Him sons of God and brothers of each other.

It is in total submission to this Lord and Saviour, God the Son Incarnate, that we will be able to find the way towards that reconciliation which will bring us to perfect communion. The Syrian Orthodox Church in union with her sister Oriental Orthodox Churches, meeting in Addis Ababa in 1965, has already determined to press forward for a dialogue which will help overcome the misunderstandings of the past. Already theologians are working with renewed effort to throw new light on the mystery of the one Lord Jesus Christ. If they recognize that there are still differences in the theological interpretation of this mystery of Christ

because of different ecclesiastical and theological traditions, they are convinced, however, that these various formulations can be understood along the lines of the faith of the early councils, which is the faith we also profess (cf. Pope Pius XII, in Encyclical *Sempiternus Rex*, A.A.S. 1951, pp. 636-637).

We, as pastors, can encourage the common efforts being made for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of this mystery which, far from raising doubts about our two different ecclesiastical traditions, can reinforce them and show the basic harmony which exists between them.

The task is the more urgent because of the demands which are being made upon the Churches today. In a world which is struggling to give birth to new ideas, to new developments which can enable all men to share in the gifts of God's creation, to new relationships between men and nations which will ensure peace with justice, we are called to proclaim the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all" (Ephesians 4:5-6).

If we can carry on this task in fraternal communion we will contribute in an even more perfect way to that service of the world which is an essential part of the mission of the Church. We will be fulfilling our vocation to see the mystery of the compassion of God translated into Christian compassion between men and for men.

In the visit of Your Holiness we see a new testimony to our common desire to carry out this mission and fulfil this vocation. As we welcome you, we pray that God may guide

our steps for the glory of His name and the peace and reconciliation of all those who are called to be His sons.



## **Address of His Holiness Mar Ignatius Jacob III, Syrian Patriarch of Antioch and all the East**

Your Holiness,

In these joyous moments, we deem it our earnest duty, in our capacity as the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East and the Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, to hail Your Holiness and to greet Your Holy See in Your notable person, since today is a very unique and important day in the history of our two Apostolic Churches.

After 1520 years of break, mutual anathemas and the like, the heads of these two most ancient Churches in Christendom meet each other as brothers in an atmosphere of love and fraternity. Time is a healer of all wounds. It was at Chalcedon in 451 that the break took place. But now both Churches recognize that what took place there was, unfortunately, a stab to the heart of Christendom.

Thank God, those days of unhappy relations are now a thing of the past; and today there is real love and cooperation between our two Apostolic Sees, and Christian communion in general.

In the 20th century there has never been a movement more fruitful than the ecumenical movement, and we recognize with appreciation the constructive role Your Holiness's illustrious predecessor and your good self have played in this field. We on our part look forward to the day when we will have even a greater visible unity and that too without sacrificing our individuality and the cultural contribution each of our Churches can make towards the speedy speeding of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Your Holiness, please accept our sincere gratitude for your brotherly love and hospitality. May God protect Your good self and bless the great Church which, in the Providence of God, Your Holiness heads.

For two days the Patriarch and the archbishops who accompanied him visited the principal holy places of Rome and made contacts with various personalities of the Holy See. In the larger Synod Hall near the Court of Saint Damasus on the morning of 27 October, there took place the farewell visit of the Pope and the Syrian-Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. A large number of the Synod Fathers were also present. The Pope spoke as follows:

### **Address of Pope Paul VI**

Your Holiness:

Before this assembly of chosen representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, we would like to express once more our joy and our gratitude to God that we have had the opportunity to meet with the spiritual head of the Syrian Orthodox Church in an atmosphere of prayer, openness of spirit and fraternal respect and comprehension.

Throughout the centuries, in times of glory and in times of great suffering, your Church has given witness to Our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God made man for our salvation. Preachers, scholars and pastors have all contributed to deepening the understanding of the Incarnation of the Son of God and to making the significance of God's condescension towards man a living reality for your people. Many of them bore witness to their faith by the supreme sacrifice of their lives.

We are happy that Your Holiness has personally been able to visit the Church of Rome which, under God's grace, has also struggled to fulfil its mission through the devoted

actions of its own teachers, pastors and witnesses to her faith.

These Fathers in the faith and these saints and martyrs call out to us to apply ourselves with renewed dedication to that mission, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who is ever ready to offer us new light and strength. We ourself and our brothers in the episcopate, with humility but also with great confidence, are determined to listen to these promptings of the Spirit and to strive to carry them out to the best of our ability. That is the underlying principle of the work of this Synod of Bishops which is gathered here and which extends today its heartfelt greeting to Your Holiness.

All of us are encouraged by the fact that your own Church, in union with your sister Oriental Orthodox Churches, is also actively engaged in searching for new ways to carry on her mission in a spirit of unity and docility to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. Your visit to us makes us even more confident that our Churches will find means for greater cooperation in our common task and, at the same time, will open up the road to that full communion so ardently desired by all of us.

As we pray that the Lord of the Church may lead us to full reconciliation, we are mindful also of the particular needs of the Middle East where so many of your faithful are to be found. May this meeting with Your Holiness be a new stimulus to all Christians, especially to those of that area, to work for reconciliation in Christ among themselves and to search out, with imagination and tenacity, a durable peace with justice for all who dwell in those lands so dear to us.



Your Holiness, again we express our heartfelt thanks for your visit. As we take leave of you now, we do so with gratitude to God for what he has permitted us to accomplish up to now, with renewed confidence that the Holy Spirit will continue to show us the ways to accomplish the divine will, and with our prayers that almighty God will abundantly bless Your Holiness and all the clergy and faithful of your Church.



## **Address of His Holiness Mar Ignatius Jacob III**

Your Holiness:

We wish to express our gratitude to Your Holiness, to His Eminence, the President Delegate, and to the representatives of the Synod of Bishops, for this opportunity to reveal what lies in our heart as we prepare to leave the city of Rome.

We and our brothers the metropolitans who have accompanied us on this historic visit are deeply grateful for the love and respect Your Holiness and your collaborators have shown us. We are also thankful to have been able to visit this city blessed by the blood of so many martyrs, among them the great and holy Apostles, Peter and Paul. The faith they preached in Antioch, in Rome and in so many others parts of the world is the faith we too are trying to bring to men today. We are happy to be able to address these few words before bishops of the Roman Catholic Church who are meeting to study the ways by which this proclamation of the faith may be done most effectively so as to meet the needs of men today. May almighty God guide your efforts and bless them with success.

The joy of this occasion encourages us to look forward to the great day on which our common Lord will bring us together into the one visible Church that will manifest His own unique glory. Towards that end we and our clergy and people will work by our prayers, our studies and our action. It is our hope that this can be done in common with the members of your own Church wherever possible.

As we return from here, we carry with us profound memories of Your Holiness and your great Church, to be cherished forever in the annals of the Apostolic See of Antioch. May almighty God continue to sustain Your Holiness in good health and strength of spirit to carry on the great work of the Church in the world, to the glory of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

After the discourses, Cardinal Willebrands, President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, read the text of the "Common Declaration" given below, which was signed by the Holy Father and by His Holiness Patriarch Mar Ignatius Iacob III.

## **Common Declaration by Pope Paul VI and His Holiness Mar Ignatius Jacob III**

As they conclude their solemn meeting which marks a new step in the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Pope Paul VI and His Holiness Mar Ignatius Jacob III humbly render thanks to Almighty God, for having made possible this historic opportunity to pray together, to engage in a fraternal exchange of views concerning the needs of the Church of God and to witness to their common desire that all Christians may intensify their service to the world with humility and complete dedication.

The Pope and the Patriarch have recognized the deep spiritual communion, which already exists between their Churches. The celebration of the sacraments of the Lord, the common profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God made man for man's salvation, the apostolic traditions which form part of the common heritage of both Churches, the great Fathers and Doctors, including Saint Cyril of Alexandria, who are their common masters in the faith all these testify to the action of the Holy Spirit who has continued to work in their Churches even when there have been human weakness and failings. The period of mutual recrimination and condemnation has given place to a willingness to meet together in sincere efforts to lighten and eventually remove the burden of history which still weighs heavily upon Christians.

Progress has already been made and Pope Paul VI and the Patriarch Mar Ignatius Jacob III are in agreement that there is no difference in the faith they profess concerning

the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become really man, even if over the centuries difficulties have arisen out of the different theological expressions by which this faith was expressed. They therefore encourage the clergy and faithful of their Churches to even greater endeavours at removing the obstacles which still prevent complete communion among them. This should be done with love, with openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and with mutual respect for each other and each other's Church. They particularly exhort the scholars of their Churches, and of all Christian communities, to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of Christ with humility and fidelity to the Apostolic traditions so that the fruits of their reflections may help the Church in her service to the world which the Incarnate Son of God has redeemed.

This world, which God so loved as to send His only begotten Son, is torn by strife, by injustice and by the inhumanity of man towards man. As Christian Pastors, the Pope and the Patriarch raise their common appeal to the leaders of the peoples to increase the efforts towards achieving lasting peace among nations and towards removing the obstacles which prevent so many men from enjoying the fruits of justice and religious freedom. Their appeal is directed to all areas of the world and in particular to that land hallowed by the preaching, the death and the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



## **Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas**

1. His Holiness John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, kneel down with full humility in front of the exalted and extolled Heavenly Throne of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks for this glorious opportunity which has been granted them to meet together in His love in order to strengthen further the relationship between their two sister Churches, the Church of Rome and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch Y the relationship already excellent through the joint initiative of Their Holinesses of blessed memory Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Jacob III.

2. Their Holinesses Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Zakka I wish solemnly to widen the horizon of their brotherhood and affirm herewith the terms of the deep spiritual communion which already unites them and the prelates, clergy and faithful of both their Churches, to consolidate these ties of Faith, Hope and Love, and to advance in finding a wholly common ecclesial life.

3. First of all, Their Holinesses confess the faith of their two Churches, formulated by Nicene Council of 325 A.D. and generally known as "the Nicene Creeds". The confusions and schisms that occurred between their Churches in the later centuries, they realize today, in no way affect or touch the substance of their faith, since these arose only because of differences in terminology and culture and in the various

formulae adopted by different theological schools to express the same matter.

Accordingly, we find today no real basis for the sad divisions and schisms that subsequently arose between us concerning the doctrine of Incarnation.

In words and life we confess the true doctrine concerning Christ our Lord, notwithstanding the differences in interpretation of such a doctrine which arose at the time of the Council of Chalcedon.

4. Hence we wish to reaffirm solemnly our profession of common faith in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Jacoub III did in 1971.

They denied that there was any difference in the faith they confessed in the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become truly man. In our turn we confess that He became incarnate for us, taking to himself a real body with a rational soul. He shared our humanity in all things except sin. We confess that our Lord and our God, our Saviour and the King of all, Jesus Christ, is perfect God as to His divinity and perfect man as to His humanity. In Him His divinity is united to His humanity. This Union is real, perfect, without blending or mingling, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without the least separation. He who is God eternal and indivisible, became visible in the flesh and took the form of servant. In him are united, in a real, perfect indivisible and inseparable way, divinity and humanity, and in him all their properties are present and active.

5. Having the same conception of Christ, we confess also the same conception of His mystery. Incarnate, dead and risen again, our Lord, God and Saviour has conquered sin and death. Through him during the time between Pentecost and the Second Coming, the period which is also the last phase of time, it is given to man to experience the new creation, the kingdom of God, the transforming ferment (cf. St. Mt. XIII: 33) already present in our midst. For this God has chosen a new people, His holy Church which is the body of Christ. Through the Word and through the Sacraments the Holy Spirit acts in the Church to call everybody and make them members of this Body of Christ. Those who believe are baptized in the Holy Spirit in the name of the Holy Trinity to form one body and through the Holy Sacrament of the anointing of Confirmation their faith is perfected and strengthened by the same Spirit.

6. Sacramental life finds in the Holy Eucharist its fulfilment and its summit, in such a way that it is through the Eucharist that the Church most profoundly realizes and reveals its nature. Through the Holy Eucharist the event of Christ's Pasch expands throughout the Church. Through Holy Baptism and Confirmation, indeed, the members of Christ are anointed by the Holy Spirit, grafted on to Christ; and through the Holy Eucharist the Church becomes what she is destined to be through Baptism and Confirmation. By communion with the body and blood of Christ the faithful grow in that mysterious divinization which by the Holy Spirit makes them dwell in the Son as children of the Father.

7. The other Sacraments, which the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch hold together in one



and the same succession of Apostolic ministry, i.e. Holy Orders, Matrimony, Reconciliation of penitents and Anointing of the Sick, are ordered to that celebration of the holy Eucharist which is the centre of sacramental life and the chief visible expression of ecclesial communion.

This communion of Christians with each other and of local Churches united around their lawful Bishops is realized in the gathered community which confesses the same faith, which reaches forward in hope of the world to come and in expectation of the Saviour's return and is anointed by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in it with charity that never fails.

8. Since it is the chief expression of Christian unity between the faithful and between Bishops and priests, the Holy Eucharist cannot yet be concelebrated by us. Such celebration supposes a complete identity of faith such as does not yet exist between us. Certain questions, in fact, still need to be resolved touching the Lord's will for His Church, as also the doctrinal implications and canonical details of the traditions proper to our communities which have been too long separated.

9. Our identity in faith, though not yet complete, entitles us to envisage collaboration between our Churches in pastoral care, in situations which nowadays are frequent both because of the dispersion of our faithful throughout the world and because of the precarious conditions of these difficult times. It is not rare, in fact, for our faithful to find access to a priest of their own Church materially or morally impossible. Anxious to meet their needs and with their spiritual benefit in mind, we authorize them in such cases to ask for the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing

of the Sick from lawful priests of either of our two sister Churches, when they need them. It would be a logical corollary of collaboration in pastoral care to cooperate in priestly formation and theological education. Bishops are encouraged to promote sharing of facilities for theological education where they judge it to be advisable. While doing this we do not forget that we must still do all in our power to achieve the full visible communion between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and ceaselessly implore our Lord to grant us unity which alone will enable us to give to the world a fully unanimous Gospel witness.

10. Thanking the Lord who has allowed us to meet and enjoy the consolation of the faith we hold in common (cf. Rom I:12) and to proclaim before the world the mystery of the Person of the Word incarnate and of His saving work, the unshakeable foundation of that common faith, we pledge ourselves solemnly to do all that in us lies to remove the last obstacles still hindering full communion between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, so that with one heart and voice we may preach the word: "The True Light that enlightens every man" and "that all who believe in His name may become the children of God" (cf. St. John I: 9-12).

June 23 1984



## **Joint Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Vasken I, Supreme Catholicos-Patriarch of All Armenians**

Paul VI, Bishop of Rome, Pope of the Catholic Church, and Vasken I, Supreme Catholicos-Patriarch of all Armenians, thank the Lord for having permitted them to pray together, to meet each other and exchange the holy kiss of peace, especially during this period of preparation for the great feast celebrating the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles.

Conscious of their duties as pastors, they invite all Christians, especially those of the Catholic Church and the apostolic Armenian Church, to respond with greater fidelity to the call of the Holy Spirit stimulating them to a more profound unity which will accomplish the will of our common Saviour, and will render fruitful the service of the world by Christians.

This unity cannot be realized unless everyone, pastors and faithful, really strive to know each other. To this end, they urge theologians to apply themselves to a common study directed towards a more profound knowledge of the mystery of Our Lord Jesus Christ and revelation made in Him. Faithful to the tradition handed down by the Apostles and the Fathers, and at the same time, aware of the demands of a world seeking God in the new developments of our age, they will be able to open up new avenues which will overcome the differences that still exist and bring their Churches to a more perfect unity in the profession of their faith in the face of the world. On their part, the Pope and the Catholicos will strive to do all they possibly can to support these efforts and give them their pastoral blessing.

However, the efforts run the risk of remaining sterile unless they are rooted in the whole life of the entire Church. This is why we hope that a closer collaboration will develop in all possible domains of the Christian life. Prayer in common, mutual spiritual aid, joint efforts to find really Christian solutions to the problems of the world today, will be precious means in the service of this search for a full unity so greatly desired.

This search accomplished together, this collaboration must be based on the mutual recognition of the common Christian faith and the sacramental life, on the mutual respect of persons and their Churches. If the unselfish efforts they wish to foster wholeheartedly are inspired with this spirit and implemented in this manner, then we are confident that the Spirit of truth and love will give to the members of the Catholic Church and the apostolic Armenian Church this truly Christian fraternity which is the fruit of His action in them.

In the name of this fraternity, Pope Paul VI and the Catholicos Vasken I raise their voices in solemn appeal to all those who exert influence on the life of nations and peoples so that they may strive to seek and to find all possible means to end wars, hatred, moral and physical violence, any oppression whatsoever of man by man. May the One who is our peace grant that this appeal be heard.

From the Vatican, May 12th, 1970.



## **Common Declaration of John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I**

As they bring to a close their solemn meeting which they are deeply convinced has been of particular significance for the ongoing relations between the Catholic Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church, His Holiness John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and His Holiness Karekin I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, give humble thanks to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who has enabled them to meet in his love for prayer together, for a fruitful discussion of their common desire to search out a more perfect unity in the Holy Spirit, and for an exchange of views about how their Churches may give a more effective witness to the Gospel in a world approaching a new millennium in the history of salvation.

Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I recognize the deep spiritual communion which already unites them and the Bishops, clergy and lay faithful of their Churches. It is a communion which finds its roots in the common faith in the Holy and Life-giving Trinity proclaimed by the Apostles and transmitted down the centuries by the many Fathers and Doctors of the Church and the Bishops, priests, and martyrs who have followed them. They rejoice in the fact that recent developments of ecumenical relations and theological discussions carried out in the spirit of Christian love and fellowship have dispelled many misunderstandings inherited from the controversies and dissensions of the past. Such dialogues and encounters have prepared a healthy situation of mutual understanding and recovery of the deeper spiritual communion based on the common faith

in the Holy Trinity that they have been given through the Gospel of Christ and in the Holy Tradition of the Church.

They particularly welcome the great advance that their Churches have registered in their common search for unity in Christ, the Word of God made flesh. Perfect God as to his divinity, perfect man as to his humanity, his divinity is united to his humanity in the Person of the Only-begotten Son of God, in a union which is real, perfect, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without any form of separation.

The reality of this common faith in Jesus Christ and in the same succession of apostolic ministry has at times been obscured or ignored. Linguistic, cultural and political factors have immensely contributed towards the theological divergences that have found expression in their terminology of formulating their doctrines. His Holiness John Paul II and His Holiness Karekin I have expressed their determined conviction that because of the fundamental common faith in God and in Jesus Christ, the controversies and unhappy divisions which sometimes have followed upon the divergent ways in expressing it, as a result of the present declaration, should not continue to influence the life and witness of the Church today. They humbly declare before God their sorrow for these controversies and dissensions and their determination to remove from the mind and memory of their Churches the bitterness, mutual recriminations and even hatred which have sometimes manifested themselves in the past, and may even today cast a shadow over the truly fraternal and genuinely Christian relations between leaders and the faithful of both Churches, especially as these have developed in recent times.

The communion already existing between the two Churches and the hope for and commitment to recovery of full communion between them should become factors of motivation for further contact, more regular and substantial dialogue, leading to a greater degree of mutual understanding and recovery of the communality of their faith and service.

Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I give their blessing and pastoral support to the further development of existing contacts and to new manifestations of that dialogue of charity between their respective pastors and faithful which will bear fruit in the fields of common action on the pastoral, catechetical, social and intellectual levels.

Such a dialogue is particularly imperative in these present times when the Churches are faced with new challenges to their witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ arising out of the rapidly changing situations in the modern world so deeply affected by an extreme secularistic and secularizing pace of life and culture. It requires closer collaboration, mutual confidence and a greater degree of concern for common action. It presumes and requires an attitude of service which is not self-seeking and which is characterized by a mutual respect for the fidelity of the faithful to their own Churches and Christian traditions.

They appeal to their clergy and laity to carry out more actively and effectively their full co-operation in all fields of diaconia, and to become agents of reconciliation, peace and justice, struggling for the true recognition of human rights and dedicating themselves to the support of all those who

are suffering and are in spiritual and material need throughout the world.

John Paul II and Karekin I express a particular pastoral concern for the Armenian people, both those living in their historic motherland where freedom and independence were once more recovered and reestablished recently through the creation of the new Independent State of Armenia, those living in Nagorno-Karabakh in need of permanent peace, and those who live in a state of world-wide diaspora. Amid upheavals and tragedies, especially during this century, these people have remained faithful to the apostolic faith, the faith of martyrs and confessors, the faith of millions of unnamed believers for whom Jesus Christ the Son of God incarnate and Saviour of the world, has been the foundation of their hope and whose Spirit has guided them across the centuries. As they approach the 17th centenary of the official establishment of the Church in Armenia, may they receive the special blessings of the Triune God for peace with justice and for a renewed dedication to witnessing faithfully to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rome, 13 December 1996.





## **Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Aram I Keshishian**

At the end of their meeting on Saturday, 25 January, Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Aram I Keshishian signed a Common Declaration. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity "recalls the urgent need for full communion between Christians, for the sake of carrying out their essential mission which is first and foremost the witness to Christ who died and rose for humanity's salvation", they said in their joint statement, which was written in French. Here is a translation.

At the end of their official meeting, His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, give thanks to God who has enabled them to deepen their spiritual brotherhood in Jesus Christ and their pastoral and evangelizing vocation in the world. It was a privileged occasion to pray and reflect together, to renew their commitment to and their joint efforts for Christian unity.

The meeting between the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia and the Pope of the Catholic Church marks an important stage in their relationship. These relations, which date to the beginning of Christianity in Armenia, took on particular importance in Cilicia from the 11th to the 14th centuries, and continued after the Catholicosate of Sis was exiled from its see and established in 1930 in Antelias, Lebanon.

Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Aram I rejoice at their meeting in the context of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It recalls the urgent need for full communion

between Christians, for the sake of carrying out their essential mission which is first and foremost the witness to Christ who died and rose for humanity's salvation. For two millenniums, unity of faith in Jesus Christ, God's gift, was maintained as essential, despite Christological and ecclesiological controversies which were frequently based on historical, political, or sociocultural factors. This communion of faith, already affirmed in recent decades by their predecessors during their meetings, was solemnly reaffirmed recently at the meeting of His Holiness John Paul II with His Holiness Catholicos Karekin I. Today the Bishop of Rome, Successor of Peter, and the Catholicos of Cilicia pray that their communion of faith in Jesus Christ may progress because of the blood of the martyrs and the fidelity of the Fathers to the Gospel and the apostolic Tradition, manifesting itself in the rich diversity of their respective ecclesial traditions. Such a community of faith must be concretely expressed in the life of the faithful and must lead us towards full communion.

Thus the two spiritual leaders stress the vital importance of sincere dialogue bearing on theological and pastoral areas, as well as on other dimensions of the life and witness of believers. The relations already existing are an experience that encourages direct and fruitful collaboration between them. Their Holinesses are firmly convinced that in this century, when Christian communities are more deeply engaged in ecumenical dialogue, a serious rapprochement supported by mutual respect and understanding is the only sound and reliable way to full communion.

The Catholic Church and the Catholicosate of Cilicia also have an immense field of constructive cooperation before

them. The contemporary world, because of ideologies expressed in materialistic values and by reason of the harm done by injustice and violence, represents a real risk to the integrity and identity of the Christian faith. Now more than ever, Christ's Church must, by her fidelity to the Gospel, bring the world a message of hope and charity and become the ardent herald of Gospel values; Active collaboration must also be envisaged in the field of theological study and instruction, religious education, the evaluation of pastoral situations where common action is possible and the promotion of ethical values, furthermore, we must try to face together various problems related to **mission** and to **pastoral and spiritual commitment to the renewal of Christian life** and the **transformation of society**. The Pope and the Catholicos urge their clergy and faithful to take an active part in these efforts, which **must be made and organized at all levels**, especially the local, where believers are together confronted with difficult situations. The Christian faith is also an incentive to work together more effectively to promote the dignity and rights of every human being, as well as the right of all peoples to see their legitimate aspirations and cultural identity recognized.

Today the Armenian Church faces living conditions and challenges that are an invitation to give a more effective witness in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and the diaspora. Dispersed throughout the world, this Church's faithful live in circumstances where dialogue is indispensable for her life and witness.

In today's pluralistic society, marked by exchanges where cultures, religions and civilizations are permanently relating and interacting with one another, the Churches must

promote dialogue. The another, the Churches must promote dialogue. The Middle East context offers a source of mutual enrichment and a common witness for Christians who, to a large extent, share with their Muslim compatriots the same history, the same socio-economic problems and the same political destiny. Moreover, the Churches are convinced of the importance of dialogue with Muslims and this is one of the tasks where there is room for mutual agreement. Within this framework moreover, **dialogue does not remain intellectual and theoretical but has a concrete effect on elements of daily life.**

In the Middle East, the active presence and dynamic witness of Christians is particularly important, for they are engaged together in the struggle for justice and peace. It is therefore indispensable that a new impetus be given to the spiritual and social mission of the Churches in the countries of the Middle East, where the establishment of a just, total and lasting peace and an equitable and satisfactory solution to the problem of the Holy City of Jerusalem are seen as priorities.

Lebanon, where the Catholic Church and the Catholicosate of Cilicia have a tangible historical presence, is the particular context in which they carry out their mission. The efforts of the Lebanese for reconciliation and reconstruction of their country must not disregard the moral and religious values that constitute the identity of the great Lebanese family itself. They must also work to fully restore their country's identity, while respecting its freedom and pluralism, its unity, its sovereignty and its specific vocation in this region and in the world!

At the close of the second Christian millennium and the approach of the 17th centenary of the Armenian Church, His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Aram I thank and glorify the Holy Trinity who gives the spiritual strength to adhere firmly to the imperatives of the apostolic faith and the pastoral mission. They exhort their clergy and faithful to work ardently for the love, reconciliation, justice and peace demanded by the Gospel in anticipation of the coming of the kingdom of God.

Rome, 25 January 1997



## Joint Commission – Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church

### **International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Oriental Orthodox Churches**

#### INTRODUCTION

1. The International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches has been created by the highest authorities of the Churches concerned. The partners in this dialogue are, on the one side the Catholic Church, and on the other the family of Oriental Orthodox Churches, which comprises the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of all Armenians, Holy Etchmiadzin), the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias), the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church.

2. The agenda of the Joint Commission was established by a Preparatory Commission, which met in Rome (2003). The first meeting of the Joint Commission took place in Cairo (2004); it was devoted to the important ecumenical work achieved between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches during the last decennia, at different levels of official and non-official dialogue. **Particular attention was given to the Joint Declarations signed or commonly agreed upon by the Bishops of Rome and the Heads of particular Oriental Orthodox Churches in this**

period. The members of the Joint Commission also examined the materials and the conclusions made available over the years by a number of **academic conferences** and **unofficial dialogues**, such as those promoted by the World Council of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches and the Pro Oriente Foundation. Basic elements of these resources were selected to be **examined for further deepening and development**.

3. In a first phase, the Joint Commission has focused its activities on issues related to the nature, the constitution and the mission of the Church. **The present document is a synthesis** of some basic insights and conclusions, as they emerged from the dialogue meetings, particularly from the meetings that were held on the “Church as Communion” in Rome (2005), on “Authority in the Church” in Holy Etchmiadzin (2006) and on the “Mission of the Church” in Rome (2007). Some further issues related to ecclesiology that figure on the agenda of the Joint Commission have not yet been studied and discussed; they will be dealt with at a future stage.

4. The members of the Joint Commission give thanks to the authorities of their respective Churches for the mandate they received and they are honoured to submit in the present document some results of their shared activities. **It is their fervent hope and prayer that this document may become a helpful instrument and also a promising step forward along the way towards the restoration of full communion by achieving complete unity in faith.**



## I. THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

5. The Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church share the following constitutive elements of communion: they confess the Apostolic faith as lived in the Tradition and as expressed in the Holy Scriptures, the first three Ecumenical Councils (Nicaea 325 – Constantinople 381 – Ephesus 431) and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed<sup>[1]</sup>; they believe in Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word of God, the same being true God and true man at the same time; they venerate the Holy Virgin Mary as Mother of God (Theotokos); they celebrate the seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation and chrismation, Eucharist, penance and reconciliation, ordination, matrimony, and anointing of the sick); they consider baptism as essential for salvation; with regard to the Eucharist, they believe that bread and wine become the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ; they believe that the ordained ministry is transmitted through the bishops in apostolic succession; regarding the true nature of the Church, they confess together their belief in the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”, according to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

### I.A THE HOLY TRINITY AND THE CHURCH AS COMMUNION

6. The word “Church” (ekklesia) relates to the assembly of faithful convened by God the Father in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The intimate relation between the faithful and the Holy Trinity and also among the faithful themselves is expressed in New Testament Greek by the term koinonia,



which means “communion”. St John declares to his readers “that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have communion (koinonia) with us; and our communion (koinonia) is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:3). St Paul blesses the Corinthians with the prayer that “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion (koinonia) of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14).[2]

7. The term koinonia comprises **two essential dimensions**: (1) the **vertical-transcendent** communion of all the faithful with God the Father in the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and (2) the **horizontal communion** of all the faithful in all time and all space with each other, a special aspect of which is the communion of the one Church on earth and in heaven. Without either of these dimensions the Church would not be the Church.

8. The Johannine imagery of the vine and branches illustrates beautifully both these vertical and horizontal dimensions of ecclesial communion. The communion between the members of the Church has as its source and model their communion with Jesus: “Abide in me, and I in you” (Jn 15:4). At the same time, this communion takes the form of love, and has as its source and model the communion that exists between the Father and Jesus: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love” (Jn 15:9).

9. The ecclesial community has its origin in God the Father, from whom “every good endowment and every perfect gift” is coming (James 1:17). He calls the people of God together

by means of the Holy Covenant. In this way, he has established a relationship both with his people and among the people. The mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit for the Church is rooted in the Father. It is the Father who sends his only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit into the world. The Son prays to the Father for the unity of his disciples in the image of his own unity with the Father: “as you Father are in me and I am in you” (Jn 17:21b). **Everything in the life and mission of the Church is directed to the glorification of the Father** so that in the end, “God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28).

10. The intimate communion between the faithful and the Holy Trinity and also between the faithful themselves is the fruit of the reconciliation brought about by Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross: “for he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end” (Eph 2:14-16).

11. The image of the Church as the body of Christ casts light on the intimate bond between Christ and the members of the Church. Christ is the head of the Church, which is his body. As her head, he loves and gives himself up for her; he nourishes and tenderly cares for her (cf. Eph 5:22-30). His members are “in him” and he is “in them” (Gal 2:20); they are baptized “into him” (1 Cor 12:13). They suffer “with him”, so that they may also be glorified “with him” (Rom 8:17). He is the source of authority, which the whole body must honour and obey (cf. Col 2:10). He is also “the head

over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:22-23).

12. The **ecclesiology of communion** has been further developed by the Fathers of the Church in both East and West. Many of them relate the unity of the Church to the **unity of the divine Persons**, to the **unity of the body** of Christ and to **the Eucharist**. St Cyril of Alexandria (+444), for example, writes about the unity of Christ’s members that “by means of one body he (Christ) blesses those who believe in him and incorporates them in himself and in each other; and that body is his own. And who can divide and remove them from this mutual union [...] when they have been bound together in unity with Christ by means of that one holy body? We all partake of one bread, and so we are all made into one body: for Christ cannot be divided. Therefore the Church is called the ‘Body of Christ, of which each individual is a member’ as Paul understands. For we are all united to the one Christ, by means of his holy body, since we take him, the one and indivisible, in our own bodies [...] If we are all incorporated with one another in Christ, not only with one another but also with him who comes within us by means of his own flesh, then surely it is clear that we are all of us one, both with one another and in Christ. For Christ is the bond of unity, since he is God and man in one and the same person”.[3]

13. The Holy Spirit, sent by Christ from the Father (Jn 15:26), gives life, unity and movement to the one and whole body of Christ (cf. Gal 4:6). The Fathers of the Church therefore compared his task in the Church to that which is exercised by the life-giving principle of the soul in the human body.[4] Dwelling in those who believe and ruling

over the Church as a whole, **the Spirit also is the principle of the unity of the Church.** He works in many ways to build up the whole Body in charity, assuring the unity of the Church in the diversity of her members and ministries.



## I.B THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH

14. **The Church is one** because of her origin **in** the three Persons of the **one God**, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church is one also because of **her founder**, Jesus Christ, who has founded one Church and not many (cf. Mt 16:18), who has one single flock (cf. Jn 10:16; 21:15), who **has one Body** (cf. Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:27, Col 1:18; Eph 1:23) and one Bride (cf. Eph 5:27). The Church is one, finally, because she is the **Temple of the one Holy Spirit**, who builds, animates and sanctifies the Church. As Gregory of Datev (1346-1409) wrote, “The Church is called one not because she is in one place, but she is **one in faith** and in her calling in one hope, in one mother, and in her birth from the womb of the **one baptismal font**, in **one food of the divine books**, in one body and blood of the Saviour, in one head and crown and cloth that we put on: Christ”.<sup>[5]</sup>

15. The essential bonds of unity in the Church are assured **by the profession of one faith** received from the apostles, the common celebration of the sacraments and the apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Fraternal concord in the Church is maintained by charity, which “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:12-14) and by the sharing of one hope (cf. Eph 4:4).

16. The Church never lost the unity that is of her essence even if Christians have been divided by many ruptures, and their understanding of that unity may be different. Christians should therefore be committed to respond adequately to the prayer of the Lord Jesus “that they all may be one” (Jn 17:21) and to repair the broken bonds of communion between them.

17. The Church is holy because Christ loves the Church as his Bride and gave Himself up for her “that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:25-27). The Church is holy also because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of holiness who dwells in her, for the glory of God.

18. The holiness of the Church is a gift of God, related to the faith and the doctrinal teaching of the Church, to the celebration of the sacraments and to the apostolic ministry, even if the subjective or personal holiness of the individual members is not perfect and something yet to be acquired. The Church gathers sinners caught up in Christ’s salvation but still on the way to personal holiness. St Paul therefore addresses those who are “God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints” (Rom 1:7); he salutes the Corinthians as “those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Cor 1:2); while recognizing the community of Corinth as holy, he condemns sins committed by some of its members (cf. 1 Cor 5:6).

19. The Church is catholic because Christ is present in her and because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of humanity. Catholicity therefore means according to the totality or in keeping with the whole. According to St Cyril of Jerusalem “the Church is called ‘Catholic’ because it extends through all the world, from one end of the earth to another. Also because it teaches universally and without omission all the doctrines which ought to come to man’s knowledge, about things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly; and because it brings under the sway of true religion all classes of men, rulers and subjects, learned and ignorant; and because it universally treats and cures every type of sin, committed by means of soul and body and possesses in itself every kind of virtue which can be named, in deeds and words, and spiritual gifts of every kind”[6]. In the words Yovhan of Otzoun (650-728), “the Church is called catholic because it gathers all the people of the whole world in obedience illuminated by the baptism of the font and conceived and born in the inheritance of God by the sanctifying Holy Spirit”. [7]

20. The idea of catholicity does not by any means signify a type of bland uniformity. Rather, putting down roots in a variety of cultural, social and human terrains, the Church takes on different theological expressions of the same faith and different appearances in ecclesiastical disciplines, liturgical rites and spiritual heritages in each part of the world. This richness shows all the more resplendently the catholicity of the one Church.

21. The Church is apostolic because she is founded on the “the foundation of the apostles”, the witnesses chosen and

sent on mission by Christ himself (cf. Eph 2:20; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:7-8; Gal 1:1). With the help of the Holy Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps and hands on the teaching she has received from the apostles (cf. Acts 2:42; 2 Tim 1:13-14). All are urged by St Paul to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thes 2:15). The Church continues to be taught and guided by the apostles **through bishops** ordained in the apostolic succession, priests and deacons.

22. The fact that the ordained ministers have their authority from the apostles and the apostles from Christ was strongly emphasised by St Clement of Rome, before the end of the first century.<sup>[8]</sup> Since the earliest times, indeed, the sacred order of bishops was held to create a historical link between the Church of the apostolic times and the Church of today. The Church therefore teaches that **ordination in the apostolic succession is both a means and a guarantee for the apostolic continuation** in pastoral office and in the transmission of grace.

#### I.C GROWING TOWARDS **FULL COMMUNION**



23. Full communion comprises and **requires unity in faith, in sacramental life** and **in apostolic ministry**. The unity of the Church should be assured, therefore, by visible bonds of communion, which include the profession of the faith received from the apostles, the common celebration of the sacraments, especially of the Eucharist, and the exercise of apostolic ministry.

24. Eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion are intrinsically related to one another. Therefore, as long as fundamental disagreements in matters of faith persist and the bonds of communion are not fully restored, celebrating together the one Eucharist of the Lord is not possible. Fortunately, through ecumenical dialogue, significant progress has been made between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches toward a common understanding of the constitutive elements of faith, particularly in the area of Christology. Though the full consensus in matters of faith, which would allow a common celebration of the Eucharist, has not yet been reached, these developments in doctrinal understanding hold the promise of further convergence and deserve appropriate attention.

25. All agree that the present division among Christians is a scandal to the world and wounds the God-given unity of Christ's Church. The search for Christian unity is a response to the Lord's call "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17:21). All Christians have a God-given responsibility to promote the restoration of full and visible unity among them. The Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches continue to pray for Christian unity in their prayer services and also in their liturgical celebrations. The ecclesial patrimony stemming especially from the apostolic times and the first centuries of Christianity, which they largely share with one another, should enlighten and inspire their common path towards the restoration of full communion by achieving complete unity in faith.







## I.D POINTS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

26. The Catholic Church, because of the many shared ecclesial elements with other Christians, uses the phrases “real though incomplete communion,” and “degrees of communion” in reference to them. These ecclesiological expressions need further explanation for the Oriental Orthodox. The Oriental Orthodox Churches, being in full communion with each other in faith and sacraments, refer to their unity by the term “family of churches.” The content of this way of thinking about the communion of churches will require further explanation for Catholics. Full communion is the ultimate goal of the ecumenical work of all our churches.



27. Where full communion is still unattainable for historical or canonical reasons, advanced convergence in matters of faith should allow further theological and pastoral agreements to be made between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, particularly in answering to the urgent needs of their communities, where they live together. In this effort, our Churches will have to address the questions of mutual recognition of baptism and mixed Christian marriages.



## II. BISHOPS IN APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

### II.A BISHOPS

28. Our understanding of bishops and apostolic succession is founded on the college of the apostles in the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus Christ chose his apostles to be authorized witnesses to his life, mission and resurrection (cf. Lk 24:46-48; Acts1:21, 3:15). They were to continue his ministry and mission in the world (cf. Jn 20:21; Acts1:8), and as such they constitute the foundations of the Church (cf. Eph 2:20). He sent them to proclaim the Good News to all the nations of the world (cf. Mt 28:19) and gave them authority “to bind” and “to loose” (Mt 18:18). Theirs was a unique ministry that ended with the demise of the last apostle. At the same time, the apostles took care that the mission entrusted to them by Christ be continued after their departure by their immediate co-workers and by proven persons.[9]

29. Pastoral service and authority in the apostolic time was exercised through a variety of charisms and ministries (cf. Rom 12:4-8; Eph 4:11; Phil 1:1; Heb 13:7; Tit 1:5-8). This variety gradually converged into the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters (priests) and deacons. At the beginning of the second century, St Ignatius of Antioch gives evidence of this threefold ministry, which he considers irreplaceable for the Church.[10] The Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches have maintained the threefold order of bishops, presbyters (priests) and deacons as essential to the apostolic structure and the ministry of ordained priesthood in the Church.

30. Bishops are the successors of the apostles in exercising pastoral care over the churches. As such, they are responsible to give witness to and safeguard within their churches the Apostolic Tradition by preserving communion

in the apostolic faith and by fidelity to the demands of Christian life, as taught by the apostles.

31. Bishops receive their ministry through the sacrament of orders by prayer and the laying on of hands within the Eucharistic community. By his ordination, a bishop is made the head of a local/diocesan church and also the representative of that local/diocesan church in the universal communion of churches. As a norm, at least three bishops should participate in the consecration of a new bishop, with the consent of the highest authority of their Church.<sup>[11]</sup> This is to ensure that the new bishop is ordained in the apostolic succession and to illustrate that he is introduced into the college of bishops, which is the continuation of the college of apostles. The office of the bishop in the Church is collegial by nature.

32. The ministry of the bishop (episkopos) is one of oversight (episkopé) and consists in teaching, sanctifying and governing the community of the faithful. St. Peter, in his first epistle, wrote about the Lord Jesus Christ that you “have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian (Episkopos, Overseer) of your souls” (I Peter 2:25). It is our common understanding that the source of the priesthood of the bishop is the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Great High Priest (cf. Hebr 4,14-16). The bishop is the icon of Christ the servant among his brethren. In the power of the Holy Spirit, he continues to preach the Gospel, to administer the sacraments and to lead the Christian community into growing communion with God. It is in presiding over the Eucharistic assembly that this multiple role of the bishop finds its full expression.

33. The ministry of the bishop, as the Head of his diocese, is essential for the Church's life and structure and for her unity. It is, among all charisms and ministries that the Holy Spirit raises up, a ministry of presiding for gathering the community in unity. According to St Ignatius of Antioch, the bishop and the community of faithful essentially belong together; he admonished the Smyrnaens that "you must all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and follow the presbytery as you would the apostles; respect the deacons as the commandment of God. Let no one do anything that has to do with the church without the bishop. Only that Eucharist which is under the authority of the bishop (or whomever he himself designates) is to be considered valid. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church".<sup>[12]</sup> The local church is centred around the bishop, who builds up the unity of all and who guarantees the presence of the fullness of the Church in it. Particularly when gathered around her bishop for the celebration of the Eucharist, the local church makes manifest the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ.



## II.B APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

34. The apostolic succession of bishops finds its meaning within the mystery of the Church as communion. The apostolic succession of bishops, therefore, cannot be limited to a question of individual ministers, seen in isolation from the community of faithful. Every ministry in the Church is originally founded on the apostolic ministry, that is, on the

vocation and the authority of the eyewitnesses of the risen Christ. The bishops, ordained by the laying on of hands, are the sign and instrument of the apostolic succession, which is conceived mainly as standing in fidelity to the apostolic faith and practice handed down by the apostles.

35. In each local church, the bishop is the first guarantor of apostolicity. Through his ordination, he becomes in his church a successor of the apostles, whatever the rank or prerogatives of his church among the other churches may be. His task is to pass on the teaching of the apostles in matters of faith and Christian life, and to model his whole life to them.<sup>[13]</sup> Through the Holy Spirit, he has to preserve the faith of the apostles and to guide his church in giving witness to it.

36. The apostolic succession of bishops has both a historical and an eschatological significance, connecting each community to both the original community and the eschatological community of faithful. From the historical perspective, bishops ordained in apostolic succession are a guarantee that the Church remains faithful to the apostolic heritage, to what the apostles have transmitted about what Jesus did and taught (cf. Eph 2:20). From the eschatological perspective, they represent the apostles as the indivisible college surrounding Christ in his glory, representing the final convocation of all nations and peoples into the new Jerusalem, the community of the last days (cf. Mt 19:28; Rv 21:14). A full understanding of the apostolic succession of bishops implies both the historical and the eschatological perspective, as they converge in the liturgical celebration of the sacraments of the Church, particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist.

37. Because bishops are successors of the ‘apostles’, inheriting the apostleship of “the Twelve”, episcopal ministry in the Church is collegial by its nature. The Lord Jesus called and commissioned “the Twelve” as a unit, as a symbol of the new people of God grouped around the Messiah, as a remnant gathered from the twelve tribes, as the beginning of the new Israel that was to remain for ever. Each individual member of the apostolic college has significance only as constituting the group of “the Twelve” together with the others.

38. The apostles guaranteed the bond of unity between the local churches scattered over various cities and regions. This became most visible at the council of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15). Consequently, an essential part of the exercise of collegial authority of the bishops is the preservation of and the search for unity in the Church.

### III. SYNODALITY/COLLEGIALITY AND PRIMACIES



#### III. A LOCAL/ DIOCESAN CHURCHES AND THEIR BISHOPS

39. The Church as **the people of God**, the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit is called to live in **worship** (leiturgia), **witness** (martyria) and **service** (diakonia). For that mission, the Church implores and receives from the Holy Trinity all necessary means of grace through reading the Holy Scriptures, celebrating the Sacraments and remaining in the living Tradition of the Church. All these gifts and duties are enacted in the local/diocesan church. Through baptism in a local/diocesan church, each faithful is

initiated into the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Particularly when gathered for the celebration of the Eucharistic, under the presidency of her own bishop, each local/diocesan church is truly and fully church.

40. Each local/diocesan church in communion with her own bishop is a concrete realization of the mystery of the Church, endowed with all the qualities that Christ gives to his Church, through the Holy Spirit. Through her own bishop, each local/diocesan church also remains in communion with the bishops and the faithful of all other local/diocesan churches, both synchronically with all churches of today and diachronically with the churches of all ages. No local/diocesan church, indeed, can exist in and by itself. Only in communion with all other local/diocesan churches can it constitute the fullness of the one ecclesial body of Christ.

41. In the course of history, communion among bishops has been expressed sacramentally through the common celebration of Eucharist and the attendance of one another's episcopal consecration, as well as fraternally through the exchange of letters, the visits of one church to another and the gathering of episcopal synods/councils. The whole history of the Church has been punctuated by councils and synods that concretely shaped communion among bishops at the local, regional and universal levels.

42. Communion of faith and sacramental life among local/diocesan churches requires and preserves the maintenance of their particular character. The unity we envisage in no way means absorption of one church by the other or domination by one church over the other. This

unity is at the service of each to help each live better the proper gifts it has received from the Holy Spirit.



### III.B RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SYNODALITY, CONCILIARITY AND PRIMACIES

43. Communion among bishops is expressed and realised through the exercise of both synodality/conciliarity and primacies in the Church. From the first centuries onwards a distinction and hierarchy has been established between churches of earlier foundation and churches of more recent foundation, between mother and daughter churches, between churches of capital cities and churches of rural areas. For some geographical areas, this distinction and hierarchy has found a canonical expression in the canons defined by the early councils.<sup>[14]</sup> Canonical regulations assigned to bishops occupying certain metropolitan or major sees a place and prerogatives recognized in the organization of the synodal life of the Church. Thus appeared in the course of history the sees of archbishops, metropolitans, primates, and catholicoi or patriarchs, endowed with a particular primacy among the bishops of their region.<sup>[15]</sup>

44. Synodality/conciliarity and primacies are essentially related to one another. This inter-relatedness is well expressed in the common tradition of the Church, for example by the 34th Apostolic Canon: “The bishops of each province should know the first among them (protos) and recognize him as the head, and do nothing that exceeds their authority without his consideration. Each should carry



out only that which relates to his own diocese and to areas belonging to it. But the first among them should also do nothing without the consideration of all, for so there will be unanimity and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit”.<sup>[16]</sup> This canon indicates both the collegial and hierarchical interrelation between the bishops of a region and the one who is the “first” (protos) among them. Canon 6 of the Council of Nicaea illustrates this interrelation.<sup>[17]</sup>

45. Bishops who are “**primates**” in their region are endowed with an executive, supervisory and jurisdictional role among their fellow bishops for the sake of unity. Their role is **essentially required for the preservation and promotion of unity among the local/diocesan churches of a region** and among their bishops. No “primate” however should act as an isolated leader, somehow independent of the larger body of bishops and faithful to which he belongs. He is a part of the people of God and a part of the synod over which he presides.

46. Synodality/**conciliarity and primacies** are expressed in different ways on the different levels in the life of the Church. These ways and levels have been **articulated differently in the Catholic and in the Oriental Orthodox traditions,** both in the past and in the present.



### III.C ECCLESIOLOGICAL MEANING OF SYNODS AND COUNCILS

47. Synods/councils have deep roots in the New Testament (e.g. Acts 15) and in the life of the early Christian communities. They flow from the very essence of the

Church as a communion. Synodality/collegiality is a permanent dimension of the life of the Church, even during periods when synods/councils are not being held. Always and everywhere the Church should exist as a living communion of local churches with their leaders embracing one another in faith and charity.

48. Synods/councils are signs of the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. At the end of the council of Jerusalem, the apostles wrote in their letter to the Christians in Antioch that “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things” (Acts 15:28). Whenever bishops come together in synods/councils to deliberate and to legislate as responsible shepherds, they manifest the nature of the Church, which is built up by the Holy Spirit as a communion. However, as synods/councils also have a human dimension, they require practical rules for convoking, organizing and presiding over them.

49. The synodal/conciliar dimension of episcopal activity manifested itself especially in questions which interested several local churches or all local churches as a whole. Since earliest times, different types of local and regional synods/councils were organised in each region. They could be convoked for different reasons and in different circumstances; their forms could change according to different places and times. More recently in the Catholic Church conferences of bishops have been organised on the national and regional levels. The guiding principle however always was the same, namely to make efficacious the mystery of the Church as a communion by joint action

among the bishops, under the presidency of the one whom they recognized as the first among them.

50. Synods/councils (local, regional and universal) aim at safeguarding the faith of the Church and at building the Church as a communion at all levels and in all fields (faith, discipline, sacraments, liturgy, theology, proclamation and diakonia). They also assure consensus in teaching and in discipline. This **consensus** has **two** **dimensions**: **diachronically** with the uninterrupted tradition of the Church and **synchronically** with the community of all churches at a given moment.



51. Synods/councils are mainly gatherings of bishops. The bishop who presides at the celebration of the Eucharist also presides over the life of the local community and therefore represents his church in the meeting of synods/councils.



**Priests, deacons and lay persons can play their specific role in the synodical/conciliar life of the Church and in the process of decision making.** The final decisions however belong to the bishops, who approve the acts of the synods/councils.

52. In ecumenical councils, convened in the Holy Spirit in times of crisis, bishops have decided together about questions of faith and discipline. They issued canons to affirm the Tradition of the apostles in circumstances that threatened the faith, unity or sanctifying work of the whole Church, and put at risk the very existence of the Church and her fidelity to Jesus Christ. Our Churches agree on the supreme authority of ecumenical councils. They represent a

final instance in decision making and teaching in matters of faith and discipline.



### III.D POINTS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

53. While our Churches are in basic agreement concerning the functioning of primacy and synodality/conciliarity at the local and regional levels, they differ on the way these concepts can be applied at the universal level. The Catholic Church upholds the need for a Petrine ministry in the Church, exercised by the Bishop of Rome for the sake of ensuring the communion of the particular churches throughout the world. The Oriental Orthodox Churches, on the other hand, do not have a single centre of universal communion, but function on the basis of an independent and universal, with common doctrinal faith model. Our commission intends to examine these two paradigms more fully in order to determine what we have in common and what differences must still be resolved.

54. The Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches conjointly accept the definitions and decrees of the first three Ecumenical Councils (Nicaea 325 – Constantinople 381 – Ephesus 431). Some doctrinal definitions or disciplinary decrees of later councils from both sides belong in point of fact to the common teaching of our Churches (e.g. condemnation of the Eutychian heresy), others do not. On some conciliar definitions that traditionally divided our Churches, common agreements have been signed in recent times between the Catholic Church and individual Oriental Orthodox Churches.<sup>[18]</sup> In



order to clarify questions related to the ecumenical councils, our commission plans further study on issues such as the criteria for identifying ecumenical councils, the number of ecumenical councils, the authority of councils for Churches that did not take part in them, the binding character of canons and anathemas stemming from the early councils (including local and regional councils), the way to resolve points of disagreement regarding conciliar definitions that traditionally divided us.

55. The reception of conciliar decisions is part of the synodical/conciliar process that aims at associating the entire Christian community in the consensus building. Reception of decisions and definitions makes this process complete, though bishops gathered in synods/councils are recognised to teach with authority, in virtue of their apostolic mission and authority, even before the reception process is completed. **The reception process** cannot be accomplished by individuals or authorities in isolation; **it must be an act of communion, including the whole Christian community together with its pastors.** Our commission envisages further reflection and discussion on questions related to the concept of reception. Can a difference be made, in the process of reception, between the essence of faith and its expressions by varying ecclesial traditions and schools of theology, between dogma and theologoumena? How can we define and receive together our common faith, understood as “what has been believed everywhere, always, by all”, according to the rule of Vincent of Lérins?<sup>[19]</sup> **What about the role of the Holy Spirit** in the process of reception?



#### IV. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

56. The Church is missionary by her very nature. Her mission flows from the command with which St. Matthew's Gospel closes: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). As the Lord Jesus Christ was sent to proclaim and realise the kingdom of God, he has sent the Church to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God among all peoples. The Lord himself, who abides with his followers, works with them and through them (Cf. Mk 16:20) for the fulfilment of his mission among all peoples until the end of the world.

57. At the heart of the Lord's command is the mandate to baptise "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Through faith and baptism a Christian is initiated into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection: "we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). What begins in baptism is gradually developed in and through the celebration of the other sacraments of the Church. They further confer the grace of the Holy Spirit to the individual faithful and also to the whole community of believers.

58. All the members of the Church are called to take part in the mission that God has entrusted to her, in accord with the condition proper to each. Though the official proclamation of the Gospel is entrusted to the bishops, priests and deacons, all Christians are called upon to cooperate with them in this mission. Christian lay people have a particular responsibility in giving witness to Christ in

their family life, in their social or professional commitment, in their cultural or political endeavours.

59. The liturgical life of the Church too is directed towards the proclamation and spreading of the kingdom of God. The Church serves the kingdom not least by her intercession, since the kingdom by its very nature is God's gift, as we are reminded by the parables and by the prayer which Jesus taught us (cf. Mt 6:10).

60. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper, so also liturgy and service belong together. He demands of all his disciples that they follow his example: "for I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:15). The Lord placed a variety of activities under service, such as giving food and drink, extending shelter, providing clothes and visiting the sick and prisoners. The notion of service embraces the full sense of active Christian love for others: "truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Without these acts of service and charity there can be no proclaiming of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

61. Notwithstanding the joy inherent in proclaiming the Gospel, there is often pain and suffering in witnessing, as signified by the very word *martyria*. The Lord Jesus Christ was clear about the cost of discipleship when he charged his disciples to bear witness to him (cf. Mt 10:16-42). Not only in remote but also in recent times, Christians throughout the world have lived through most dramatic circumstances, giving their lives for Christ, even to the shedding of their blood. The history of many Churches has been written in

the red colour of martyrdom. The radiance of martyrdom not only gives proof of God's victory over the forces of hate and evil, it also carries the promise of new life and fruitfulness for the Church as a whole. Martyria receives its power from the Cross of Christ, since "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). The martyrs of all times and places, standing before the throne of the Lamb, will also be the glory of the Church in God's eternal Kingdom (cf. Rev 7:13-17).

62. The ecumenical commitment essentially belongs to the mission of the whole Church, including all her members. The fact that the Good News of reconciliation is preached by Christians who are still divided among themselves weakens their witness. Working for Christian unity is urgent, so that our Christian witness and missionary activity can be more effective. Moreover, efforts towards unity are themselves a sign of the work of reconciliation that God is bringing about in our midst. Christians should therefore persevere in finding new ways and means of closer cooperation in carrying out their common mission of evangelisation, as circumstances of time, place and culture permit.

63. It is regrettable that proselytism has wounded the Christian mission. Instead of witnessing the love of God to all peoples according to the missionary mandate, attempts have been made to recruit other Christians by means that are antithetical to love. Instead of strengthening Christian solidarity, proselytism damages it by using dishonest means to urge members of other Churches to transfer allegiance. Instead of becoming a reality and being constantly enhanced, common witness is endangered and distorted.



“We reject all forms of proselytism, in the sense of acts by which persons seek to disturb each other’s communities by recruiting new members from each other through methods, or because of attitudes of mind, which are opposed to the exigencies of Christian love or to what should characterize the relationships between Churches. Let it cease, where it may exist. Catholics and Orthodox should strive to deepen charity and cultivate mutual consultation, reflection and cooperation in the social and intellectual fields”. [20]

64. The missionary activity of the Church presupposes the right of all persons to follow their conscience and enjoy religious freedom understood as “the right of all persons to pursue the truth and to witness to that truth according to their conscience. It includes the freedom to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and the freedom of Christians to witness to their faith in him by word and deed. Religious freedom involves the right to freely adopt or change one’s religion and to “manifest it in teaching, practice, worship and observance”, without any coercion which would impair such freedom”. [21]

65. If a Christian, for reasons of conscience, convinced of truth and free of any pressure, asks to enter into full communion with another Church, this is to be respected, as an expression of religious freedom. In such a case, it would not necessarily be a question of proselytism in the negative sense of the word, which should always be rejected. The notion of religious freedom, however, should not be abused to justify activities of proselytism.

66. It is not enough to denounce proselytism. The pastors and faithful members of our Churches need to continue to

prepare themselves for genuine common Christian witness through common prayer, shared religious education, respect for one another in religious discourse, coordinated pastoral activities and a common service (diakonia) in humanitarian and social matters. It is particularly important therefore that there be frequent and regular contacts between Catholic bishops and other religious superiors, and those of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.



## CONCLUSION

67. The members of the Joint Commission are grateful to God for having been able to prepare this document, which displays a large base of agreement in fundamental matters of ecclesiology between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. It is their expectation and commitment that on the firm ground of this document further study and discussion will be possible on remaining questions that are on the agenda of the commission (refer to the agenda). Some of these questions figure in the original working plan of the Joint Commission; others have been specified in the document at hand. The Commission intends to continue its work on the whole of these questions in an order that will best facilitate the deepening of mutual understanding and common witness on our way towards full communion by achieving complete unity in faith. We rely on the grace of God in this endeavour, and submit this document to the authorities of our Churches for their consideration and action.

Rome

January 29, 2009

## NOTES

[1] In the original Greek version.

[2] Biblical citations are mostly taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Collins, 1973. The RSV translates the original Greek term “koinonia” as “fellowship”.

[3] Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on St John, 17:20-21; Book 11, chapter 11.

[4] Augustine, Serm. 268, 2; John Chrysostom In Eph. Hom 9, 3; Didymus the Blind, Trin, 2, 1.

[5] Gregory of Datev, Book of Questions, “Why the Church is one?”, St. James Printing House, Jerusalem, 1993, p. 533.

[6] St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, 18:23.

[7] Yovhan of Otzoun, Armenian Classical Authors, Volume VII, Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon 2007, p. 96.

[8] Cf. 1 Clement 44.

[9] Cf. Acts 20:28; The Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians (1 Clement), 42-44.

[10] “Similarly, let everyone respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, just as they should respect the bishop, who is a model of the Father, and the presbyters as God’s council and as the band of the apostles. Without these no group can be called a church”; in: Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Trallians, 3,1; English translation from The Apostolic Fathers, ed. by Michael W. Holmes, Baker Books, 1999, p. 161.

[11] First Council of Nicaea, can. 4: “It is by all means desirable that a bishop should be appointed by all the bishops of the province. But if this is difficult because of some pressing necessity

or the length of the journey involved, let at least three come together and perform the ordination, but only after the absent bishops have taken part in the vote and given their written consent. But in each province the right of confirming the proceedings belongs to the metropolitan bishop”. English translation from *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 1, ed. by Norman P. Tanner, London /Washington 1990, p. 7.

[12] Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 8:2; in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. by Michael W. Holmes, Grand Rapids 1999, pp. 189-199.

[13] Cf. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 26, 5: “It is where the charisms of God have been planted that we should be instructed in the truth, that is, among those in whom are united succession in the Church from the apostles, unassailable integrity of conduct and incorruptible purity of doctrine”.

[14] E.g. First Council of Nicaea, can. 6: “The ancient customs of Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis shall be maintained, according to which the bishop of Alexandria has authority over all these places, since a similar custom exists with reference to the bishop of Rome. Similarly in Antioch and the other provinces the prerogatives of the churches are to be preserved.” English translation from *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 1, ed. by Norman P. Tanner, London/Washington 1990, pp. 8-9.

[15] In the early times of the Church regional primacies were founded inside the Roman Empire (e.g. in Rome, Alexandria, Antioch) as well as outside the borders of the Roman Empire (e.g. in Armenia, Georgia, and Caucasian Albania); also in more recent times regional primacies were founded in different countries (e.g. in Ethiopia and India).

[16] *Canones Apostolorum*, VIII, 47, 34; ed. by F.X. Funk, I, pp. 572-574.

[17] First Council of Nicaea, can. 6: “In general the following principle is evident: if anyone is made bishop without the consent of the metropolitan, this great synod determines that such a one shall not be a bishop. If however two or three by reason of personal rivalry dissent from the common vote of all, provided it is reasonable and in accordance with the church’s canon, the vote of the majority shall prevail”. English translation from Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. 1, ed. by Norman P. Tanner, London/Washington 1990, p. 9.

[18] E.g. Christological agreements signed between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

[19] English translation from The Commonitory, Chapter II n. 6, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church, Vol. 11, p. 132.

[20] Cf. Common Declaration signed by Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III, 10 May 1973.

[21] The Joint Working Group between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness, 1995, n. 15.