

Holy Apostles Seminary  
Cromwell, CT  
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From Unia to Koinonia

It is well known that it was in Antioch that the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth were called Christians for the first time (Acts 11: 26) .This indicates the importance of the Antiochian Metropolis in the history of the Church. Therefore, I am sure that if the ecumenical movement will succeed in the Church of Antioch, it would be a blessing for the ecumenical efforts worldwide.

The very name of our Church is in itself a sign of our role: we are a Greek Church and we represent the heritage of the Greek language and culture in the whole Middle East; we are a Melkite Church, and that means our inculturation in our Arab world; we are a Catholic Church, and that corresponds to the universal character, in addition to our communion with the Apostolic See of Rome.

The initiative taken by our Holy Synod in 1996 was a consequence and a manifestation of our ecumenical role, but it does not cover all the different aspects of that same role. Anyway, if the Orthodox-Catholic, dialogue is successfull in the framework of the Antiochian area, it could be an example for all the other efforts elsewhere.

In fact, His Holiness Pope John Paul II several times has encouraged the dialogue at local levels as a preparation for and a contribution to wider dialogues. In his speeches during his visit to Syria, last year, the Holy Father encouraged our Church to continue in the way of ecumenical initiatives, especially in view of the common date for the celebration of Easter, and generally for the promotion of ecumenism. The work for unity is, indeed, an essential dimension of the existence of our Church. It is a **must**, a **to be or not to be** present in the field of ecumenism.

The Melkite-Greek Catholic Church has been and still is always deeply concerned by the ecumenical problems on local as well as international levels. It is a consequence and a result of the proper mission and historical identity of our Church.

The 1996 initiative was minded and elaborated to restore the communion, between Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics, in the framework of our Antiochian Patriarchate. I consider .it is 'necessary to know and to read the full text of that Document. Hereby; the full English translation: of the statement. adopted and published by our Holy Synod and the late Patriarch Maximos V on July 27, 1996:

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The local and international reactions to our initiative were great. And, now, we continue the march toward unity, together in our own name and in the name of our faithful. If this initiative were successful, even after a long time, a new way should be open in the road toward unity on the Antiochian and on the international levels. Therefore, there is no turn back.

We must express special thanks to our Greek Orthodox brothers for their remarks and objections, and for the special position they adopted in their 1997 Holy Synod.

Our initiative is an answer to the desire and the prayer of Jesus. We want to realize this unity in the way He means. For that reason, we shall continue the effort to realize our initiative with all those who are working for unity; at the same time, we would like to make them sensible to such a holy duty, and we ask for their help so that, together, we may succeed, in several items.

We are certainly in full communion with the Apostolic See of Rome, and we do want to keep the fullness of that unity. The letter sent to my predecessor Maximos V, after the publication of our 1996 document, by Cardinals Joseph Ratzinger, Achille Silvestrini and Edward Idris Cassidy, clearly states their willingness to help. And now we are preparing, within our Holy Synod, a reduced "ad hoc" committee, in charge of continuing the dialogue with Rome on that matter .

We hope to have a deep cooperation with the Greek Orthodox Churches and theologians, not only in the Middle East (that is to say with the Patriarchates of Antioch, of Alexandria and of Jerusalem), but also in the world (beginning with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and then with the Churches of Greece, Russia, Georgia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and so on).

Of course, we are also wishing to receive help and support from the theologians who are especially experts about Eastern theology, as it was done with my predecessor Maximos IV during the Second Vatican Council. ,

And, naturally, we want to cooperate with our Greek-Catholic brothers in the world, with all the Catholic Churches of Byzantine tradition, in Ukraine, Romania, Italy, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Macedonia, Greece, the United States, Canada, etc.

Next year, in 2003, we shall have a special session of our Patriarchal Holy Synod, and we have invited to attend its work representatives of the Catholic Byzantine Churches all over the world, as well as orientalist theologians and observers from local and other Churches of Western and Eastern traditions.

In the framework of our own Church, we will deeply continue the inside work, on the level of the pastors as well as on the level of the faithful. We have a special duty on the ecclesiological and theological levels, and' we must form a special theological commission to study the different ecumenical aspects, dimensions and difficulties of our initiative.

The 1996 initiative is an ineluctable concern of our Melkite tradition since the times of my predecessors Boutros III and Gregory II, until Maximos IV and Maximos V. It is our basic vocation, as it corresponds to the very signification of our existence, as Melkite-Greek Catholics, in the Catholic Church of Christ. Therefore, it must be our most important task in the new Millennium.

The relationship between Antiochian Greek Catholics and Greek Orthodox is an absolutely specific one, as our Greek Orthodox brethren also have a proper desire of unity. Nobody, indeed, can fulfill the endeavour in our place.

It is necessary to recognize that our 1996 initiative is, in a great part (but not exclusively, since the ecumenical efforts and research of Archbishop Elias Zoghby were previous to Balamand and begun decades earlier), a consequence and a result of the Balamand document about the Eastern Churches presently in communion with the Church of Rome. As it is well known, the Balamand statement considers that our communion with Rome since 1724 and its continuation to our days represent an ecclesiological failure. And this initiative of our Church is the will to correct such a failure.

We hope that our initiative could be an example to be followed by other Catholic Eastern Churches (of the Syrian, Armenian and Coptic traditions, as well as the Chaldean Church with the Assyrian Church) .Such moves from those Churches could then support our own march. All similar initiatives would be in line with the spirit of ecumenism which started from the Second Vatican Council.

It is evident that, to achieve the aim of our initiative in the Antiochian Patriarchate, several and different steps are needed. And, in that dimension, we must work in cooperation with our Orthodox brethren on the levels of theological studies and specific theological formation for priests, male and female religious and laity.

The evidence and clearness of our sincere will to continue the march could be . elements that give courage to our faithful, give confidence to their hearts and animate the holy faith in their souls.

We consider that our role is not only local, in the Middle East area, but also international and worldwide. Like what happened during the Second Vatican Council, through our initiative in the Antiochian area, we invite the Christian world to move in the same direction; as it was during the Second Vatican Council, the world is waiting for our voice.

The ecclesiological dimension has the leading role in the ecumenical movement in the world. But why is the ecumenical movement now in deep crisis, quite in agony? After the meeting in Balamand, the International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches met once in the United States (in Baltimore), without any result, and since then has not met any more.

All these things are urging us to go ahead in our prophetic role, in the line of my predecessors Gregorios II and Maximos IV.

But we must not forget that the official theological position of Rome does not represent the position of all Western Catholics. As it was recently underlined by Archbishop John Raphael Quinn, there are Roman Catholic theologians who do not completely and fully accept the ecclesiology of the First and Second Vatican Councils. This is why our firm decision to achieve our initiative will let us get into the arena of the international ecumenical movement and work.

My predecessor Maximos V had chosen as his "motto" the word of the Lord: "Put out into deep water" (Luke 5:4). Our Lord encourages us when He says: "Do not live in fear, little flock" (Luke 12:32).

Our ecumenical line and vision includes several levels and endeavours.

On the synodal and ecclesiological levels, we have to study and deepen our ecclesiological theology and thought. Especially, we have to determine our theological position about the points the Greek Orthodox asked for, after our 1996 statement. We must, also, study the implications and consequences of the already mentioned letter of the three Cardinals after our 1996 initiative, and study them with the present persons in charge in the Vatican, namely Cardinal Ignace Moussa I Daoud and Cardinal Walter Kasper.

It is also clear that new possibilities have been opened by the visit of Pope John Paul II to Syria last year. And we must study, with a special attention, the present, ecumenical position of the Antiochian Greek Orthodox after the Holy Father's visit to Damascus, as it has been expressed in the address of His Beatitude Ignatius IV to the Pope of Rome, and later after the visit to Assisi and Rome by Patriarch Ignatius IV and his new meeting with Pope John Paul II (October 2001).

Obviously, to continue the initiative of 1996, it is necessary to re-activate both "ad hoc" committees then created by our respective Holy Synods.

On the pastoral level, we have to set up a detailed list of dogmas, uses and traditions that are common to us: theology, ecclesiology, Liturgy, Sacraments, etc. Among our common uses, we must give a special attention to the forms of popular devotion, fasting, processions, memorials, vows, liturgical music, etc.

We have to emphasize the fact that what unites us is not only the heritage of the first Millennium, but also the Orthodox heritage until 1724.

We must explain and clarify the topics that are obstacles to our full communion: Primacy of the Pope of Rome, Western Councils which cannot be recognized as Ecumenical Councils (as it has been admitted by highly qualified Western theologians since Pope Paul VI), theological dogmas formulated in Western vocabulary and concepts (Immaculate Conception and Assumption of the Theotokos, infallibility of the Pope of Rome).

Finally, to ensure the diffusion of the theological and pastoral aspects of our thought, so that the ecumenical concern will become general on the popular level as well as on the academic one, it would be useful to have a common publication of Orthodox and Catholic documents and pastoral letters, showing the concrete progress of the ecumenical endeavour .

The coming theological path and stage is to move from **Unia** (that is to say "Uniatism") to **Koinonia** (Communion).

The Document of Balamand established that our 1724 experience was not the best ecclesiological solution. Certainly, we do exist, and we have the right to live, but our situation cannot be considered as an example for the future.

Our initiative of 1996, after the Document of Balamand, was willing to correct the mistakes of 1724, with the intention of clarifying our relations with the Church of Rome, as well as with the Orthodox Church, through the path from **Unia** to that of **Koinonia**. We have to take into account, also, that often we receive splendid documents from the Pope of Rome, but we have been living, at the same time, the experience of a behavior of Departments of the Roman Curia which does not correspond to the aforesaid Pontifical documents.

In 2000, the Council of the Catholic Eastern Patriarchs issued a statement in which a more real autonomy is required for our Eastern Churches, together with an urgent revision of the recently promulgated *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, and also a new modality of mutual relations (of the Eastern Churches with Rome, and of Rome with the Eastern Churches), not based upon authority, but characterized by, consent and reciprocal consultations.

Our path from **Unia** to **Koinonia**, in addition to the solution of the present stagnation of ecumenism, could be of great utility for the Church of Rome and for the Orthodox Churches. The last ones could understand that their future communion with the Church of Rome would not be according to the Unia conception, but in the framework of a spirit of Koinonia, which was the characteristic of East-West ecclesiological relations in the first Millennium, and was not only in two directions (from Rome and towards Rome), but multidirectionnal, between Rome and the Patriarchal and Metropolitan Sees, and between the last ones, from See to See, on all levels.

It is our future, it is the future of ecumenism, for the Church of Rome as well as for the Orthodox Churches.