



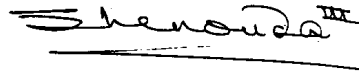
THE THIRD MEETING OF THE HEADS
OF THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES
IN THE MIDDLE EAST

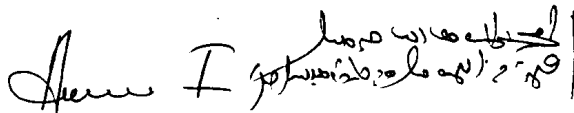
ARMENIAN CATHOLICOSATE OF CILICIA
ANTELIAS-LEBANON
MAY 4-9, 2000

COMMON DECLARATION

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We, **Pope Shenouda III**, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, **Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I**, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East and **Catholicos Aram I**, Catholicos of the Armenians of the Great House of Cilicia, and the members of the Standing Committee H.E. Metropolitan Bishoy, H.G. Bishop Moussa, H.E. Metropolitan Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, H.E. Metropolitan Theophilus George Saliba, H.G. Bishop Sebouh Sarkissian and Archimandrite Nareg Alemezian, who are with us, give thanks to God for bringing us together once again in the context of this Third Meeting of the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East, May 4-9, 2000, at the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias-Lebanon.


Shenouda III



Our meeting provided us the opportunity to pray and deliberate together on issues and perspectives pertaining to the life and witness of our Churches. We re-affirmed our unity in faith and our firm attachment to the first three Ecumenical Councils and the teachings of our fathers. We addressed a number of concerns and challenges related to the evangelistic, educational and diaconic tasks of our Churches particularly in the Middle East. We explored efficient and tangible ways of deepening our collaboration through joint programs and initiatives in the various spheres of the life of our Churches.

In fact, we strongly believe that the unity of faith must be translated into concrete action and deeper engagement in the life of our people and communities. We also believe that our Churches must responsibly and courageously face the new realities and challenges of contemporary societies by remaining faithful to the integrity of their Apostolic faith and centuries-old traditions on the one hand, and becoming sensitive and responsive to the new conditions and concerns, on the other hand.

We were led in our discussions and decisions by all these considerations and concerns, as well as by the ecumenical spirit of openness and dialogue.

Great Jubilee Celebration

On May 8, 2000 we celebrated the Second Millennium of the Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by a common prayer service in the St. Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia. The clergy and believers of our Churches took active part in this celebration. On this occasion we issued a Pastoral Letter addressed to our faithful all over the world.

We were rejoiced with the fact that several celebrations of the Great Jubilee are have taken place and will take place in our Churches. We believe that these celebrations will become a source of spiritual renewal for our faithful. We also believe that they will become a great challenge for re-strengthening the witness of our Churches in view of all temptations and trends that may undermine the vital importance of spiritual and moral values in the life of our communities.

Shenouda III
Pharos

17th Centenary Celebration of Armenian Christianity

In the year 2001 the Armenian Orthodox Church will celebrate the 17th Centenary of the Proclamation of Christianity in Armenia. On the blessed occasion of this historical milestone, Pope Shenouda III and Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I extend their congratulations to Catholicos Aram I and the faithful of the Armenian Orthodox Church, and respond warmly to bring their participation in the celebrations of this great event in the life of the Armenian Church.

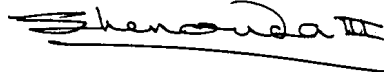
Official Theological Dialogues

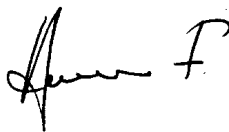
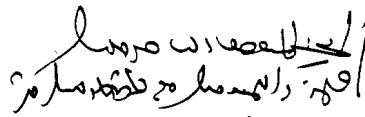
(a) Oriental Orthodox Churches-Eastern Orthodox Churches

We made a general assessment of the results of the 15 years-long Official Theological Dialogue between the Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox Churches, and underlined the necessity of its continuation aimed at the full communion of these two families of Orthodox Tradition.

In response to the invitation of His Holiness Alexy I, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, addressed in a letter to Pope Shenouda III dated April 12, 2000 to initiate a bilateral dialogue with the Coptic Orthodox Church and then the Oriental Orthodox Churches, we thought that it is more appropriate to continue in a more organized way the Official Theological Dialogue between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox families. Meanwhile, we welcome mutual pastoral visits with the clear understanding that they should not be selective and include all the Churches of the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox families.

We welcomed the pastoral agreement reached between the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa regarding the mutual recognition of the sacraments of holy matrimony blessed in their respective churches in case of mix marriages.



(b) Oriental Orthodox Churches-Roman Catholic Church

We were informed of the wish of the Roman Catholic Church to start an Official Theological Dialogue with the Coptic Orthodox Church with the possible extension of it to the Oriental Orthodox Churches. We believe that before our engagement in a formal Theological Dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, the following points should be taken into consideration:

- {1} the clarification of the future relations of the Oriental Orthodox Churches with the Pro Oriente;
- {2} the appointment of a mixed preparatory committee to prepare the agenda and discuss methodologies, procedures and other aspects related to this Dialogue.

After this preparatory work, our Churches will be ready to engage in an Official Theological Dialogue with the hope that in the near future other members of the Oriental Orthodox family will join us.

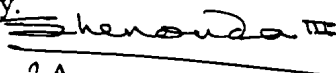
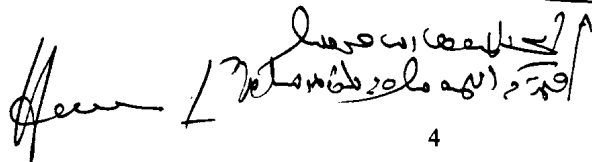
Pope Shenouda III and Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I asked Catholicos Aram I to discuss the modalities and other important matters related to this Dialogue both with the Roman Catholic Church and the other members of the Oriental Orthodox family.

(c) Oriental Orthodox Churches-Anglican Communion

As a follow up to a resolution passed at the Lambeth Conference 1998, His Grace George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, extended a formal invitation to the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches to start the Official Theological Dialogue between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Anglican Communion.

We decided to appoint a preparatory committee to meet with the representatives of the Anglican Communion to prepare the agenda and clarify the modalities of this Dialogue.

Again, Catholicos Aram I was asked to discuss this matter with the other Churches of the Oriental Orthodox family.

(d) Oriental Orthodox Churches-World Alliance of Reformed Churches

The first phase of this official dialogue will end in January 2001 by the meeting of the Commission at the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia. In light of our theological discussions with WARC in the last seven years, we found it important to continue this Dialogue if they would take the same position. It is however important that a new agenda, procedures and guidelines be set for the next period.

World Council of Churches and the "Special Commission for Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches"

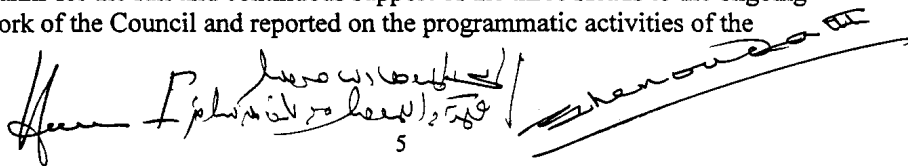
We expressed our deep satisfaction for the active participation of our Churches in the global ecumenical movement through the World Council of Churches. Ms. Teny Pirri-Simonian, Executive Secretary of Church & Ecumenical Relations and the official representative of the WCC to this Meeting, reported on the new programmatic framework, priorities and activities of the WCC in general, and the work of the "Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches" in particular. She underlined the positive impact of the Annual Meetings of the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East on the ecumenical movement and particularly on the Orthodox Churches-WCC relationship and cooperation.

We re-affirmed our commitment to the ecumenical movement through the World Council of Churches and our serious engagement in the work of the Special Commission that aims at a greater Orthodox participation and role in the WCC.

Middle East Council of Churches

We also expressed our deep satisfaction for the significant role that our Churches are playing in the Middle East Council of Churches.

Rev. Riad Jarjour, the General Secretary of the MECC, extended his thanks for the full and continuous support of the three Heads to the ongoing work of the Council and reported on the programmatic activities of the



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Council, highlighting some of the challenges and concerns that this regional ecumenical structure is facing.

We emphasized the vital necessity of re-evaluating the ecumenical work of the MECC vis-à-vis the changing conditions and new developments in the region.

Oriental Orthodox Youth

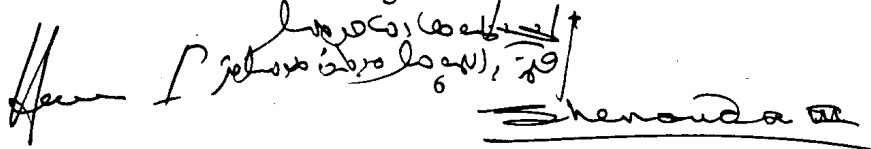
We appointed a Sub-Committee for the Oriental Orthodox Youth to prepare special programs for joint activities of the youth of our Churches. This Sub-Committee will convene its meeting in the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, in Antelias-Lebanon, in September 2000.

Theological Seminaries

A Sub-Committee composed of the Deans of the Oriental Orthodox Theological Seminaries was appointed. This Sub-Committee will explore practical ways and possibilities to organize mutual exchange of teachers and seminarians, as well as joint programs in the area of Christian education and ministerial formation. The meeting of this Sub-Committee will take place in the St. Ephrem Monastery, in Damascus-Syria, in October 2000.

Publications

We welcomed the recent translations of the books of Pope Shenouda III to Syriac and Armenian, and reprints of some of them in Arabic. Publications were considered a vital tool for Christian education and theological formation. Therefore, with the aim of further organizing and coordinating the efforts of our Churches in this area, we established a Sub-Committee for Publications. This Sub-Committee will meet in the St. Bishoy Monastery, in Cairo-Egypt, in November 2000. We recommended to this Sub-Committee to publish the history of our three Churches in Arabic, Syriac, Armenian and English, and to provide news related to our three Churches to be printed in our official newsletters in the "News From Sister Churches" section, and also to prepare the updated address book of our Churches and church-affiliated organizations.

The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to be the name 'Shenouda III'. There are some additional markings and lines around the signature, possibly indicating a date or a specific context.

The Standing Committee will coordinate and supervise the work of these three Sub-Committees, and report back to us.

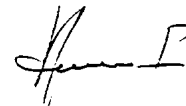
At the end of our Third Meeting, we give thanks to the Almighty God who has guided us in our deliberations and decisions. We ask Him to sustain our endeavors for the unity of the churches and the salvation of the world.

We thank the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia for its love and kind hospitality. We also thank all who prayed and assisted us for the success of this meeting.

Glory be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

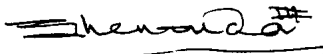


Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I



Catholicos Aram I

Pope Shenouda III



May 9, 2000

Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia
Antelias-Lebanon

