



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

Saint Mark Centre, Nasr City  
Cairo, Egypt  
21<sup>ST</sup> October, 2004

COMMON DECLARATION

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

**H.H. Pope Shenouda III**, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, **H.H. Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I**, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East and **H.H. Catholicos Aram I**, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia of the Armenian Orthodox Church, and the members of the Standing Committee H.E. Metropolitan Bishoy, H.G. Bishop Moussa, H.E. Metropolitan Theophilus George Saliba, H.E. Metropolitan Elia Bahy, H.E. Archbishop Schouh Sarkissian, and H.G. Bishop Nareg Almezian, who are with us, give thanks to God for bringing us together once again in the context of this meeting of the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East, 20-21 October 2004 at St. Mark Centre, Nasr City, Cairo, Egypt.

Throughout history, we lived a concrete unity in faith, theology and doctrines. We experienced our oneness through the first three Ecumenical Councils of Nicca 325, Constantinople 381, and Ephesus 431. We continue to live our unity of faith through church life, and in inter-church and ecumenical relations.

In this seventh meeting we had long discussions on many topics and issues and hereby we present our summary of our deliberations.

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# I- Inter-Church Relations and Bilateral Dialogues

## A- Oriental Orthodox Churches-Eastern Orthodox Churches

- 1- We are saddened by the tragic passing of His Beatitude Petros VII the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria and all Africa who was a sincere friend to our family of churches and a distinct church leader committed to work for orthodox unity.
- 2- We extend our congratulations to H.B. Theodoros II Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria and all Africa for his election and upcoming enthronement and wish him a fruitful ministry.
- 3- We have been informed about the discussions that occurred between Metropolitan Bishoy (co-chairman of theological dialogue) and the monks of the Monastery of St. Gregory in Mount Athos, Greece, concerning the Agreed Statements between the two families of Orthodoxy (1989 and 1990). In the context of his discussions Metropolitan Bishoy presented four papers. His Eminence received an extensive written response exposing their views, concerns and objections, and expressing the progress they noticed in some areas of Christology.
- 4- The second meeting between our Churches and the Russian Orthodox Church will be hosted by Pope Shenouda III from 13-17 December 2004, at Saint Mark Centre, Nasr City, Cairo. One of the main topics in this meeting is the Christology of the Syrian Orthodox Church, as expressed in the teachings of their highly venerated Saint, Patriarch Severus of Antioch
- 5- In the first meeting of the Joint Commission for Relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East, in Moscow (September 2001) many obstacles were removed, and several questions raised were answered.
- 6- In the meeting between Pope Shenouda III and H.H. Bartholomaios I the Ecumenical Patriarch (September 2001) it was clarified that this is the mandate of the joint commission with the Russian Church, and that any theological agreement with them if needed should be conducted in consultation with the Plenary Commission of the dialogue between the two Families.
- 7- H.E. Metropolitan Bishoy and the new co-chairman H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel of France will continue their efforts of reassuring the process of theological dialogue of the dialogue between the two Families.

## B- Official Theological Dialogue between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Anglican Communion

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- 1- The Church of Eritrea was officially invited to this dialogue which was postponed because of the ordination of Gene Robinson, the openly homosexual bishop (2 November 2003).
- 2- To follow up our Theological dialogue with the Anglican communion, which was suspended by us because of the ordination of an Anglican homosexual bishop in the USA, we discussed the matter in light of the Lambeth Commission Report. This report was shared with us on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury by Rt. Rev. Bishop Mouneer H. Anis.  
We have noted that this issue remains a major concern for the Anglican communion. Once again we affirm our position that all practice and behavior related to marriage and sexual orientation must be in accord with the biblical and moral teachings of our Churches.  
We hope that in the near future the Anglican Communion will solve this matter which will enable us to resume our theological dialogue with the Anglican Communion.

### **C. Official Theological Dialogue Between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church**

1. The International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches had its first meeting, hosted by H.H. Pope Shenouda III at Saint Mark Centre, Nasr City, Cairo, from 27 to 30 January 2004.

2. During the opening session of that meeting, the Co-Chairman of the Commission, H.E. Metropolitan Bishop read a message from Catholicos Aram I, concerning the use of the title "Catholicos" and "Catholicosate" by the new Armenian Catholic Patriarch and his headquarters. This usage is deemed unacceptable by the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia.

The response of the Catholic Co-Chairman of the Commission, H.E. Cardinal Walter Kasper was that he exerted and is still exerting efforts to stop and that the Vatican considers the titles of "Patriarch" and these practices on the part of the Armenian Catholic Patriarch may jeopardize the participation of our three churches in the Official Dialogue with the Catholic Church by our three Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East. This issue will be carried by our representatives to the meeting at the Vatican in November 2004 which will coincide with the celebrations of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Meanwhile Catholicos Aram I, will inform in writing the Heads of all Oriental Orthodox Churches and explain to them the situation. Catholicos Aram I, will also write to H.E. Cardinal Walter Kasper that a delegation of the

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30 January 2004

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Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East will discuss this matter with him at the Vatican in November 2004 in a special meeting notifying him if this problem is not solved our Churches will not participate in the official theological dialogue with the Catholic Church.

3. Concerning our long standing all kinds of unofficial dialogue in Pro-Oriente, we decided in view of the initiation of the official dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church to stop our unofficial dialogue with Pro-Oriente. The authorities of Pro-Oriente should be informed through the Standing Committee of this decision.

4. Presenting his paper on the Official Dialogue between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, H. E. Metropolitan Bishoy gave an important remark that the Assyrian Church of the East is publishing on its official website ([www.cired.org](http://www.cired.org)), what they called erroneously "St. Nestorius' Counter Anathemas against Cyril," with the first anathema stating "If anyone says that the Emmanuel is true God...; and if anyone calls Mary the Mother of God the Word ..., let him be anathema." We wondered how this could fit with the Christological Agreement between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East signed in November 1994. This concern was shared with the Roman Catholics.

5. The first part of ecclesiology on the agenda which deals with the church as communion was chosen as the topic of the next meeting of the Commission in Rome, 25-30 January 2005. Points 1-6 and 8 will be taken for discussion according to the agenda prepared by the Preparatory Committee.

6. Representatives from our Churches, other Churches and ecumenical associations are invited by the Vatican to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican. This event will take place near the city of Rome, 11-13 November 2004. We will send our representatives to take part in this celebration.

**D. Official Theological Dialogue between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (W.A.R.C).**

The Executive Committee of W.A.R.C. is considering the possibility of embarking on the second phase of this dialogue. We have decided to publish the final report of the first phase of the dialogue to replace the incorrect and incomplete reports, published by W.A.R.C. under the title of "First Draft" while the meetings was in progress.

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## **II. ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES**

### **A. Consultative Committee**

1. Representatives of our Oriental Orthodox Churches have agreed to meet on 24 January 2005, in Rome, as a consultative committee of our Family of Churches. This will take place one day before the second meeting of the International Joint Commission with the Catholic Church. This consultative committee will meet on every occasion of theological dialogues or ecumenical meetings to coordinate all the operation and standpoints of our Family.

2. The Family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches is composed of seven delegations (Coptic, Syrian, Armenians of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenians of the Great House of Cilicia, Ethiopian, Indian and Eritrean). In all bilateral dialogues and ecumenical gatherings when we participate as one Family this structure should be kept. Therefore we recommend that all the diocesan bishops follow the recommendations in all ecumenical gatherings.

### **B. Orthodox Church of Eritrea:**

1. A new Patriarch, H.H. Abune Antonios I, was elected in the Orthodox Tewahedo Church of Eritrea on 5 March 2004 and enthroned as the third Patriarch of this Church, on Sunday, 25 April 2004. Pope Shenouda III presided at the consecration and enthronement in Asmara, together with the Holy Synod of the Eritrean Orthodox Church and a Coptic Orthodox Delegation that accompanied him. Our congratulations are expressed to H.H. Abune Antonios I and to the clergy and laity of this Church.

2. Responding to the need of the Church of Eritrea to consecrate Holy Myron (Chrism) in Asmara, H.H. Pope Shenouda III together with a Coptic delegation traveled to Asmara from 17-24 September, 2004, where he consecrated the Holy Myron together with H.H. Abune Antonios I and the Holy Synod of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church. H.H. Pope Shenouda III, with the concelebration of H.H. Abune Antonios I, also presided at the consecration of the newly built church in the headquarters at the Eritrean Patriarchate in Asmara.

3. The laying of the foundation stone of St. Mark Theological College was celebrated by Pope Shenouda III and H.H. Abune Antonios I in the presence of the President of Eritrea, His Excellency Isaias Afwarki.

### **C. Upcoming Celebrations**

1. The Silver Jubilee of the Enthronement of Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I will be celebrated on 14 September 2005, in Damascus, Syria.

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In the start of his silver Jubilee year Patriarch Mar Zakka I visited India and received by his clergy and people (2million members of Church), Catholicos Mar Basilios Thomas together with his 17 metropolitans and bishops, met with the official meeting with the president and prime minister of India. The prime minister of Keralla (in India) was in permanent company along the visit of the Antiochene Pontiff>

2. The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Consecration of H.H. Catholicos Aram I and the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Theological Seminary of the Catholicosate of Cilicia will be celebrated 20-27 June 2005, in Antelias, Lebanon.

#### **D. Activities of sects in countries where the faithful of the Oriental Orthodox Churches live**

It is clearly noticed that under the western pressure, many countries where Oriental Orthodox Churches exist dangerous sects, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Adventists etc, are now being allowed or may be allowed in the near future to have recognition from the states and to start their manipulating activities against the Orthodox Christian faith, supported by huge financial resources coming from the West, with suspected Zionist support. It is our duty to reinforce the understanding of our people to their Orthodox beliefs and to be prepared to respond to the claims of these heretical groups. Many publications, audio-visual and electronic programs, youth and Sunday School curriculum should be produced, together with visitations by the clergy to the homes of the faithful. Our faithful should be alerted to the visits by these sects home by home. With great pain we learned that in Armenia of a new law recognizing Jehovah's Witnesses as a legal religious organization.

### **III. ECUMENICAL COLLABORATION**

#### **A. World Council of Churches**

As members of the WCC we support the work of the Council and through our representatives we continue to bring our active participation in the ecumenical work of the Council.

We were informed that the WCC Commission on Faith and Order met in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia from 28 July – 6 August. We were informed that the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the WCC will be held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006. An Orthodox Pre-Assembly Meeting will convene 10-17 January 2005, in Rhodes, Greece. We also learned that the WCC will convene the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Athens, Greece May 2005.

#### **B. Middle East Council of Churches**

1. The MECC remains for our Churches in this region and important ecumenical organization. We have been founders of the MECC and our Churches have played an important role in the work of the Council. We will continue to encourage and support fully the work of this Council.

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2. The Eighth General Assembly held in Cyprus in December 2003 elected Pope Shenouda III as the President representing the Oriental Orthodox Family of Churches. The General Assembly also elected, Mr. Guirguis Ibrahim Saleh, nominated by the Oriental Orthodox Family in the Middle East, to become the new General Secretary. We appreciate and we support all his plans and his work aimed at re-strengthening the MECC. We would like to express our full support and appreciation to Mr. Guirguis Saleh, since we have seen how he is capable and able to perform his ecumenical role through increasingly developing relations with the Heads of Churches in the Middle East. His spiritual trends are clearly affecting the daily life of the personnel of the Council.

The Executive Committee appointed Mr. Razig Suriani as the director of the Unit on Education and Renewal for a second term and Mrs. Seta Khedishian as the director of the Unit on Life and Service.

3. The Association of Theological Institutes in the Middle East (ATIME) in its last planning committee meeting in Cairo, held in October 2004 elected Rev. Fr. Daniel Korea from the Syrian Orthodox Church was elected upon the nomination of H.H. Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I, as the new Executive Secretary of ATIME for a three year term, which can be renewed.

4. We welcome the decision taken by the Executive Committee of the MECC to reemphasize the importance of Christian-Muslim dialogue in the region and give more visibility and efficiency to this concern by establishing a new committee. We expect that these decisions will be implemented soon because we believe that Christian-Muslim dialogue is of special importance to the region.

#### **C. The Consultation between the Representatives of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the United Bible Societies (U.B.S.)**

1. The first meeting with the U.B.S. was held at the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon, 11-12 February 2004, by the invitation of H.H. Catholicos Aram I. It was agreed that the request of the Oriental Orthodox Churches to have special translations of the Holy Bible for their churches fully coinciding with their canons and dogma in full accordance with the original texts of the Holy Bible in its original language.

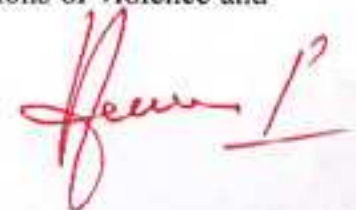
#### **IV. ORIENTAL ORTHODOX SUBCOMMITTEES**

We were informed of the activities of the three subcommittees respectively the Subcommittees for Theological Seminaries, Youth and Publications. We bless and encourage them to continue their fruitful activities for our churches.

#### **VI. JUSTICE AND PEACE**

The prevailing situation in the world in general and in the Middle East in particular has been part of our constant concern and ongoing discussions. We renew the commitment of our Churches to peace with justice. We strongly condemn all forms and expressions of violence and

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urge all to engage in processes and actions aimed at conflict resolution through mutual love, respect and trust.

The escalation of violence and confusion in Iraq worries us, in this situation, this country is losing its people either by killing or immigration. We urge all the citizens of Iraq of all religions and culture to feel their responsibility towards their country and one another. We call on all nations to help the people to Iraq to restore their country to its independence and sovereignty with the full participation of all Muslim and Christian communities in Iraq.

We renew our calls for a return to the peace process with a particular focus on the establishment of a Palestinian state and the right to return for the Palestinians. True and lasting peace will only be realized when justice and dignity is upheld and maintained and when Israel according to U.N. Security Council Resolutions withdraw from Arab and Palestinian territories.

We look towards the Holy Lands in the Middle East, in which our Lord Jesus Christ was born, and pray that it may become again a land of peace and tolerance with rights returning to the deprived.

## VII. NEXT MEETING OF THE HEADS AND THE STANDING COMMITTEE

God willing, the next meeting will be held in St. Ephrem Monastery, Ma'arat Sadnaya, Damascus, Syria, from 6-8 December 2005 for the Standing Committee and from 9-10 December 2005 for the Heads.

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Having completed this meeting, we offer prayers of thanksgiving to the Lord for guiding our deliberations and work. We ask our Lord to grant us His grace and wisdom to continue our efforts in maintaining and preserving the Apostolic faith and the unity of His holy Church. We pray that God may grant to our people and to the world the hope that His peace, justice and goodness will prevail.

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We thank the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria for its fraternal love and gracious hospitality. We extend our thanks to all those who labored, prayed and assisted us for the success of this meeting.

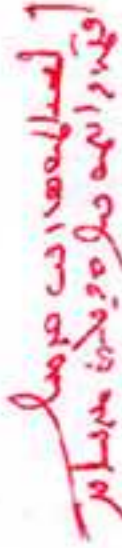
Glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

21 October 2004

St. Mark Centre of the Coptic Orthodox Church  
Nasr City, Cairo Egypt

  
Pope Shenouda III

Pope Shenouda III



Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I



Catholicos Aram I