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Necessity and Signs of “Communio” between the local Churches*

A paper presented by His Holiness, in Pro Oriente while he was Archbishop Mor Severios Zakka, at a Pro Oriente consultation.

The Local Church

In the early days of Christianity the term "Church" was not used to denote a house of worship. The early Christians did not have special houses for worship; they used to meet together in private houses or caves for prayer, the breaking of bread and receiving Communion. We read, however, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles: "Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. As things turned out they were to live together in that Church a whole year, instructing a large number of people,"¹ from which we infer that the reference to a place as a "Church" was a later development of the word. On the other hand, the traditional meaning of "Church" in its wider sense refers to that divine institution which embraces all the believers in Christ the Son of God, whatever their localities, nationalities or races. They are united by a true and common belief in the victory of Christ over Satan, sin and death, and in His final glorification. This is what the Lord meant by: "I will build my Church"², and what Luke meant by: "Day by day the Lord added to their community (Ecclesia) those destined to be saved;"³ and what the Apostle Paul meant by: "The Church of God which he bought with his own blood."⁴

The Lord Jesus, however, uses the term again in a different sense. He says, "But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community (Ecclesia)."⁵ The Apostle Paul says: "And the Church which meets in her house,"⁶ where the reference is to the local Church. He also uses the term in the plural: "The Churches of God in Christ Jesus,"⁷ and "All the Churches of Christ send greetings,"⁸ and yet again "as in all the Churches of the saints."⁹ We also read about "The Church in Jerusalem,"¹⁰ and "the Churches in Galatia,"¹¹ and also "All the Churches of Asia,"¹² and so on. From these quotations we conclude that the Churches in the early days of Christianity were named after the cities in which the Christian believers lived. Those early Christians who grouped together all over the known world formed many local Churches which were united by a common faith. Each of those local Churches constituted the mystical body of Christ as long as it bore the attributes of that body. The union of those Churches did not bring about a loss of identity or independence because Christ was the head. They did not only include their constituent members but also Christ himself in His living person who was active in their various sacraments and also the Holy Spirit their leader and guide to the truth. When the Church is separated from Christ and the Holy Spirit it becomes a mere social body unstable and unbalanced.

Each individual in the Church remains a living unit as long as he is united with Christ as the branch is united to the vine. Indeed, he himself is a Church headed by Christ. Mor Ephraim the Syrian (obit. 373) when advising the believer to concentrate during his prayer says, "Let your body become as a Church for you, and your mind as a glorified Altar;" in this he quotes the Apostle Paul, "Didn't you realise that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you?" and "Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you received him from God."¹³ That the relation of the individual to the Church is of the utmost importance is also demonstrated by the following statement of Saint Paul, "Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ in the one Spirit. We were all baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink ... as it is the parts are many but the body is one."¹⁴ The union of the local Church with the universal Church is similar to the union of the individual with the Church in that it does not strip him of his personal traits and individuality. Just as the believer who has received baptism and confirmation and has partaken of the body and blood of the Lord and has grown in grace would lose life in Christ if he were separated from the mystical body of Christ (which is the Church itself), similarly the local Church which has been endowed with graces and gifts and its proper autonomy would lose the divine grace if it were no longer united with the universal Church. When it is united with the universal Church in one faith it is a true representation of it and is equally considered the Divine Body of Christ.

Our belief in the Holy Sacrament (The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ) provides us with a clear example or rather a smaller picture of the relationship between the individual believer and the Church on the one hand and the relation between the local Church and the universal Church on the other. Each piece of the Sacrament, however minute it is, represents Christ in his totality as fully as does the complete Holy Sacrament. And when the believer takes a small part of the Holy Sacrament or a single drop of the Lord's cup, that is His Holy Blood, it is as if he had partaken of the Body and Blood of Christ in their entirety because the Body of Christ is indivisible in the Holy Sacrament.¹⁵ The division is only apparent; the Body remains completely present in every part of it. The existence of Christ in Heaven and in the Sacrament when it is validly consecrated represents His presence in the universal Church and in the local ones and in every true believer in Christ, the focal point and the living head of the Church.

By way of analogy we may cite the incident of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost when there occurred an apparent division of the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire which settled on the heads of each of the disciples, and the Holy Spirit in His entirety had entered each one of them. The local Church is related to the universal Church in a similar way; the local Church is a smaller version of the universal Church and the universal Church is a larger version of the local Church. They are completely identical in essence but different in size.

The Communion in one faith which binds all the local Churches into a universal Church is the Communion of the Holy Spirit and the Communion of the Saints.¹⁶ There appeared at the dawn of Christianity material communion also in the Church of Jerusalem, for example, where "The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common."¹⁷ But basically it was a spiritual unity of which the Apostle Paul says, "Thanking the Father who has made it possible for you to join the Saints," and, "after all, if you were cut from your natural wild olive to be grafted unnaturally onto a cultivated olive, it will be much easier for them, the natural branches, to be grafted back on the tree they came from." Saint Paul also draws attention to the meaning of Communion, "in making these gifts, he has given the guarantee of something very great and wonderful to come; through them you will be able to share the divine nature and to escape corruption in a world that is sunk in vice."¹⁸ This Communion transcends the earth's boundaries and takes the believer to heaven and hence to "the whole Church in which every one is a first-born son and citizen of heaven."¹⁹

The Attributes (Signs) of the Church

At the dawn of Christianity the Fathers of the Church defined four signs of the Church which later on came to be recognized as its distinctive features and were recommended by the Nicean Creed as follows: "We believe in One, Holy, Universal, Apostolic Church." Trying to understand the necessity of Communion between the local Churches it might be helpful to explain what is meant by that definition.

The Church is One

The One universal Church consists of all the local Churches which are united by a common faith. The Apostle Paul says in this context, "There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope ... and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all."²⁰ The Church therefore cannot have one body if the beliefs of its members were not one and the same faith. This faith is professed through practicing the Holy Sacrament. "Sacrament", as a theological term, refers to the Holy Act through which the believer receives an invisible and intangible grace through a visible and tangible substance. The purpose of this practice is justification and holiness.²¹ Hence St. Paul says, "In the one we were all baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink."²² Through baptism the believer receives justification and holiness, and the sacrament of baptism cannot be completed without the confession by the catechumen of the Orthodox faith in front of the authorized priest. And when he receives the sacrament of baptism he becomes a member of the one Body and a son of God by Grace and an heir with Christ and one of the faithful and he has the right to enjoy partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ. St. Paul explains this as follows: "The blessing-cup that we bless is a Communion with the Body of Christ. The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf."²³ The unity of the Church is therefore achieved through the partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lord which means that Communion cannot be consummated except by Jesus Christ, who, when He instituted the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, commanded His disciples to "do this as a memorial of Me."²⁴ Therefore, by participating in this Holy Sacrament, the faithful profess their belief in the incarnate Lord Jesus who died for the salvation of humanity and who rose from the grave glorified and ascended to Haven. They also proclaim this great yearning and expectation of His Second Coming, so that they all enjoy with Him the true light. This common belief, together with the practicing of the Sacrament of the Holy Church, is a clear sign of the spiritual Communion of the faithful in the one Body, both in words and actions. The Apostle says therefore, when he writes to the Corinthians, "All the same, I do appeal to you, brothers, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to make up the differences between you, and instead of disagreeing among yourselves, to be united again in your belief and practice. From what Chloe's people have been telling me, my dear brothers, it is clear that there are serious differences among you. What I mean are all these slogans that you have, like: "I am for Paul," "I am for Apollos I am for Cephas," "I am for Christ." Has Christ been parcelled out? Was it Paul that was crucified for you? Were you baptised in the name of Paul?"²⁵ This helps us to have a deeper understanding of the prayer of Lord Jesus that "there should be only one flock and one shepherd"²⁶ which implies that all Churches should unite in one faith both in words and actions.²⁷

The Church is Universal

The ecumenical Church is universal because it is not confined to one nation or one race or one language. It is for the whole world. This is how the Lord had wished it to be when he commanded his disciples "Go therefore, make disciples of all nations,"²⁸ and "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation"²⁹ and ". . . then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth."³⁰

So the Lord had wanted a universal Church embracing all races and nations quite different from the exclusive practices of the Jews. The Apostles carried out His mission as we read in the letter sent by Saint Paul to the Romans, "Your faith is spoken of all over the world."³¹ The concept of a universal Church does not at all imply that it should have a visible and central government - something that had no precedent in history - but that all the local Churches of the various races and languages should be united by a common faith in one universal Church. The Church is universal because it is one, and it is one because it is universal.

The Church is Holy

The Church is Holy because Christ has loved it and "sacrificed Himself for her to make her Holy. He made her clean by washing her in water with a form of words, so that when he took her to himself she would be glorious, with no speak or wrinkle or anything like that, but Holy and faultless."³² And since the Church concerns itself with the sinner and his salvation through the merits of the death of Christ and His Resurrection and with the justification and holiness, of its members it is a school for holiness. This holiness belongs to all members of the Church who are mentioned by the Apostle Paul as follows: "Not long ago, you were foreigners and enemies, in the way that you used to think and the evil things that you did; but now he has reconciled you by his death and in that mortal body. Now you are able to appear before him holy, pure and blameless."³³ "To the Church of God in Corinth, to the holy people of Jesus Christ, who are called to take their place among all the Saints everywhere."³⁴ The members of the Holy Church, therefore, are required to be Saints in accordance with the teaching of the Lord: "You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect."³⁵ And Christ prayed to His Father to "consecrate them in the truth..."³⁶ so that they would achieve that aim of perfection.

The sign of holiness is also attributed to the Church because it holds firmly to the truth and protects the jewel of the Orthodox faith and encourages virtuous conduct, and, in particular, because Christ Himself is the head, and because it has many witnesses who are the martyrs and the Saints who are the Church of the first-born whose names are written in Heaven and are the Victorious Church. But since the Church on earth is constantly struggling against sin, it must of necessity include among its members the good and the evil, just like the field which grows both wheat and tares. This, however, does not detract from its merits for the Lord has advised to "Let them both grow till the harvest."³⁷

The Church is Apostolic

The Lord Jesus has established His Church and transmitted his teachings through His Apostles. The Apostle Paul says, "You are part of a building that has the Apostles and Prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone."³⁸ The Church is therefore said to be Apostolic.

The Apostolic Authority

The Lord chose His Apostles and entrusted to them the affairs of the Church. He sent them to the whole world saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time."³⁹ The Lord authorized His Apostles to govern the Church, to look after its members and to guide them to the truth. The authority invested in the Apostles includes giving instruction guiding to holiness as well as caring for its members. The Lord commanded the faithful to obey them and threatened severe punishment to whomever disobeys them,⁴⁰ because obeying them means obeying Him and His Father.⁴¹ The Apostles have enjoyed and practiced those rights and privileges.⁴²

The Apostle's Successors

Anxious to organize and maintain the ecclesiastical life, the Apostles have appointed successors.⁴³ They have invested in them the authority which had been given them from the Lord. They entrusted to their successors alone the authority to ordain priests ie. the laying of hands on whomever they think is suitable for priestly service.⁴⁴ The Apostle Paul says to his disciple Timothy, "That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you," and "Do not be too quick to lay hands on any man."⁴⁵ And he said to his disciple Titus, "The reason I left you behind in Crete was for you to get everything organised there and to appoint elders in every town, in the way that I told you."⁴⁶ The Church is also called apostolic because its pastors have accepted the apostolic authority from the Lord through the apostles themselves and so they are the legitimate successors through a continuous succession. The Apostolic authority of each of the successors is confined to the boundaries of his See. Each participates with his colleagues, the other apostles, in their authority over the Church in general through the Council, following the example of the Apostles who used to convene a Council to solve controversial issues. The Council which they formed had the highest authority for drawing up the Creed and laying down Canons binding to the faithful. Their authority was even considered to be that of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts which was written after the Council of Jerusalem (AD 51). We read, "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to saddle you with any burden beyond these essentials; you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from fornication."⁴⁷ The participation of an Apostle in the Council of Apostles implies his participation in one faith. And this is imperative for each Apostle because if he isolates himself from that participation he severs himself from the Apostolic service, even from that of his own See. He becomes alienated from the Church as a whole and consequently from Christ Himself Who is the head of the Church. This, in fact, is what happened to Judas Iscariot who separated himself from the Council of his brothers, the Apostles, ceased to be one of them and perished, "After having been one of our number and actually sharing this ministry of ours,"⁴⁸ as the Apostle Peter said.

The Importance of the Apostolic Churches

As the Faith grew and the number of Churches increased in the world and the Apostolic Age came to an end, the Apostles were replaced by their disciples who were instructed by them and whom they ordained by the laying on of hands. These were succeeded by other bishops. There eventually appeared in the Church heresies alien to the true nature of Christianity and it was then that the significance of the Churches established by the Apostles themselves became clear. They were the Churches which faithfully preserved the written as well as the oral teachings as St. Paul says to his disciple Timothy, "You have heard everything that I teach in public; hand it on to reliable people so that they in turn will be able to teach others."⁴⁹ And so, when the local and then the ecumenical Councils were held to refute those heresies and to establish the true teachings and the orthodox faith, they relied on the evidence of the Apostles, both written and oral, and on the documents of faith which the Apostles had delivered to the Churches which they had established as local and universal Apostolic Churches.⁵⁰ This is clear from the statement of Tertullian (obit. 240), "If you want to try harder to achieve salvation go visiting the Apostolic Churches where the Apostolic Sees exist till the present time, where you can read their original letters reflecting their voices and images. If Achaia is far from you make for Corinth; if you live close to Macedonia go to Philippi, and if you can go to Asia there you can find Ephesus, and if you live near Italy go to Rome."⁵¹

Iraeneus (obit 202), the famous martyr Bishop of Lyon, said, "Whoever seeks the Truth should look at every Church which ordains Apostles, which are known all over the world. We can consider that all the Apostles who were ordained there as well as their successors to our day are Bishops in those Churches.

They were remote then from the ravings of the heretics." He then cites Rome which was the closest Church to him and which was considered to be the first Church in the West saying, "By this very same succession we receive the ordination of the Apostles and the true teaching of the Church. Polycarp, as well as being a disciple of the Apostles and having lived with many who had seen Christ, was made a Bishop by the Apostles in Asia of the Church of Izmir. We saw him in our youth because he lived long and he left this life an aged man, a celebrated and glorious martyr. The Church of Ephesus also, which was established by Paul and in which John lived till the time of Trajan, is further evidence of the truth of the ordination of the Apostles."⁵²

The Emergence of the Apostolic Sees

The Patriarch Ephrem Barsoum I wrote, "The Christians were united by an organized clerical system which has three orders: First, *the Bishop* who is the head of the clergy and of the Church; he governs and provides instructions and he ordains the clergy in their various ranks and orders. Secondly, *the Priest* who administers the Sacrament and preaches, and thirdly, *the Deacon* who attends the Bishop and the Priest in the performance of the Liturgy and the Divine Sacraments. Several districts were annexed to the episcopates of the large cities: the North African district was annexed to the Episcopate of Carthage; Syria, Palestine, Cilicia, Armenia, the Euphrates, Edessa, Mesopotamia and Persia were joined to the Episcopate of Antioch; Egypt and Kairouan and the neighbouring areas were joined with the Episcopate of Alexandria; Italy and the other European countries were joined to the episcopate of Rome. In the middle of the fifth Century each of the Bishops of the three major Sees, and of Antioch in particular, was called a Patriarch. As for the title of Pope it was given in the third and fourth centuries and even later than this, to several bishops. It was a long time afterwards that the Bishops of Rome restricted the titles to themselves. The ecumenical Councils defined the powers of the major Apostolic Sees and affiliated all the Episcopates with the diocese of a Metropolitan."⁵³

The sixth Canon of the Council of Nicea (AD 325) states the following: "The old practice should be maintained for Libya and the other five cities, so that the Bishop of Alexandria would have authority over these districts, just as the Bishop of Rome maintains a similar practice. This practice should also be maintained in Antioch and in the other Sees of the Church which still enjoy their old privileges. The very obvious general principle which underlies all this is that the Bishop who is ordained without the consent of the Metropolitan (the Bishop of the major city) is not considered a Bishop by the General Council which says that such a man should not be a Bishop."⁵⁴

The unity of the faith made it necessary for the new Bishop to send letters to his fellow bishops under the same See asking for a Sign of Communion. This letter should include a declaration of his faith, so that the Bishops would grant him the sign of Communion as an acknowledgement of his new rank. When one of them was elected Bishop to one of the major Apostolic Sees, he would send to the other Bishops of the major Apostolic Sees a similar confession of his faith. This letter would normally be written during the Council which had elected him and he would ask the Bishops to grant him Communion. After they had ascertained that his faith was sound they would write to him congratulating him, acknowledging his new position, and granting him the Sign of Communion in one faith.

It must be remembered that the reason why some of the Apostolic Sees were held to be superior to others was the higher worldly importance attached to them because of their political position. Such superiority is subject to change, however, and this is what happened to the See of Constantinople when the second ecumenical Council, which was held in Constantinople (AD 381) decided in the third Canon

that that See should rank before the See of Alexandria and after that of Rome, mainly because of the political importance which Constantinople had acquired. It had become an imperial city like Rome and was called New Rome.

It is worth mentioning that the practice of giving the Sign of Communion is an Apostolic tradition. The Apostle Paul wrote, "So, James, Cephas and John, these leaders, these pillars, shook hands with Barnabas and me as a sign of partnership. We were to go to the pagans and they to the circumcised."⁵⁵ It is a well known fact that the Canons of the Church prevent the Bishops from interfering in each other's Diocese and from carrying out ordinations outside their Diocese. The Council of Nicea decided in its fifth Canon that "Those who have been prohibited from Communion, be they clergy or laity, should be treated according to the rule, for those who are rejected by some people cannot be accepted by others."

The law, however, has allowed the Bishop to interfere in the affairs of another Diocese in one case only: when he feels that the Christian faith is threatened. That was the case of the Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria when he interfered with the affairs of Nestorius, who was Patriarch of Constantinople. He fought against the heresy of Nestorius, first by publishing his Easter manifesto and then by his letters to Nestorius and to the Monks and to the Kings and to the Clergy of Constantinople. He says, "The Council purifies the Church." He, following the recommendation of Canon 125 of the Council of Carthage, held a Council in Alexandria to discuss the views of Nestorius, exercising the right, given to a Bishop at the Council of Carthage, to interfere in the affairs of neighbouring Dioceses if the Bishop of that Diocese fails to refute heresies, let alone when he is the originator. Cyril also wrote to the Bishops of the major Sees after Nestorius had written to them, urging them not to be deceived by his teachings.⁵⁶

Local and Ecumenical Councils

When the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples on Pentecost and the Church was born in Jerusalem, it was considered the "Mother of Churches" because most of the Apostles were still living there and their combined decision had complete authority over the Church everywhere. It even had power over the Apostles themselves. Philip went to Samaria and preached the teachings of Jesus. Many believed and were baptised, "And when the Apostles heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God they sent Peter and John."⁵⁷ We also read in the Book of Acts about a visit by a group of disciples from Cyrene and Cyprus to Antioch where they proclaimed the teachings of Christ to the Greeks. Many believed in their mission and accepted the Lord, "The Church in Jerusalem heard about this and they sent Barnabas to Antioch."⁵⁸

The local Churches looked to the Apostles in Jerusalem for guidance and for a final decision when disagreements arose in the Church. This is what happened in the Church of Antioch concerning the question of circumcision when representatives were sent to Jerusalem seeking advice. A Council of Apostles was held in the year AD 51 and decided the issue.⁵⁹ The Church has continued this practice of holding Councils, because of its regulations and decree, as we have remarked earlier, that no Bishop should have authority over the Diocese of another Bishop. In the event of a disagreement between Bishops about an ecclesiastical problem it was found necessary to convene a Council of Bishops to settle the dispute. The old laws had specified that the local Council should meet twice a year.⁶⁰ Later Councils made the meetings less frequent because of the difficulties of travel and other difficulties. These resolutions simply indicate the significance of the local Church and the authority of the local Council within its recognized territory. It was on this basis that the Council of the Bishops of Antioch met in the 3rd Century to discuss the views of its Bishop Paul of Samosata and decided to excommunicate him.⁶¹ The local Council also had authority over the Bishops within its territory. It had the right to elect, ordain as well as transfer or dismiss the Bishops. The 27th Canon of the Fourth Council of Carthage (AD 256) decreed the following: "The Bishop should not be promoted simply to give him honour. But should the

needs of the Church require it and if his transfer has been requested by the clergy and the laity, the Council of Bishops should see to his transfer and another Bishop should be ordained to take his place."⁶²

The ecumenical Council, on the other hand, comprises clergy of all nationalities and languages, united by a common faith. It therefore represents the Holy Apostolic Universal Church which includes the local Churches all over the world. Bishops from all parts of the world are invited to attend it and taking into consideration the individual as well as the spatio-temporal circumstances of the Council, it could be rightly described as an "Ecumenical" Council. Furthermore it represents the Council of the Apostles, which means that it is the highest authority in the Church.⁶³ What it decrees is binding and must be followed by the Churches all over the world, whether they are represented in it or not. We cite as an example the ecumenical Council which was held in Constantinople in AD 381. The Bishop of Rome, Damasus, was invited and failed to attend or send a deputy.⁶⁴ This incident did not make the Council less valid. What the 150 Fathers of the Council decided, was based on the evidence of the Apostolic Churches and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and therefore binding on all the Churches.

The Responsibility of the Local Church

It is the duty of the local Church to protect the True Faith and maintain Christian morality. Taking this as the starting point the Church in the Second Century laid down a definite period during which the catechumen had to acquire a knowledge of the Christian Faith. After a strict supervision and examination about his good conduct and of the sincerity of his intentions, he is presented to the Bishop who examines him on his knowledge of the Christian Faith and on its Orthodoxy. If he was accepted he was baptized and became a living member of the Church, The learned Mor Iwanis Al-dari has explained in great detail the Rites of Admission of the Faithful to the bosom of the Church.⁶⁵

The local Churches have also preserved the traditions and the teachings of the Apostles which were verbally communicated to them. The Apostle Paul said, "Keep doing all things that you learned from me, and have been taught by me and have heard or seen that I do,"⁶⁶ and also, "The other matters I shall adjust when I come."⁶⁷ These "matters" refer to the Rites of the Church.⁶⁸ The Apostle John also says, "There are several things I have to tell you but I have thought it best not to trust them to paper and ink. I hope instead to visit you and talk to you personally, so that our joy may be complete."⁶⁹ As part of the protection of Christian morality the Church gave guidance to those who went astray and dismissed from Communion unrepentant sinners. It also laid down disciplinary and punitive laws against those who renounced their Faith but repented of it. It decided the duration of the penance and the moment of reconciliation as a loving and compassionate mother would treat her weaker children. By preserving its holiness both in Faith and conduct, the local Church has ensured the holiness of the universal Church.

The Local Churches Today

By the middle of the 5th Century the Christian Churches had disintegrated and pride had overpowered the Communion in one Faith. The Kiss of Peace was replaced by accusations and insults between the Churches. And in this atmosphere of rivalry, hatred and disputation, the laws of the Church were trampled underfoot. The Churches began to pay more attention to quantity rather than quality with regard to the selection of its members. The test of the beliefs of the candidate for baptism was neglected. The Church then turned into a social organisation, sometimes quite remote from the Spirit of Christ. The local Churches which shared the same Faith gathered around the Apostolic Sees and accepted the authority and decisions of their local as well as general Councils.⁷⁰

The Lord whom all Churches praise has appealed to His Heavenly Father "May they all be one"⁷¹ in Faith, Mind and Spirit. This has stirred many hearts in modern times into seeking unity. Some ecumenical movements one can be proud of, but others are based on emotions, which is a great danger, for this could lead the Churches to bargain with their Faith for the sake of achieving a superficial social agreement which definitely would be rejected by the Lord who said to the Pharisee, "Blind Pharisee: Clean the inside of the cup and dish first so that the outside may become clean as well."⁷² We cannot clean the inside of the cup and dish of our own Churches unless we humbly admit our faults and apply self-criticism, and recognize one another because Christ recognizes all. This reminds me of what John said to the Lord, "John spoke up 'Master' he said 'We saw a man casting out devils in your name, and because he is not with us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said to him, 'You must not stop him; anyone who is not against you is for you.'"⁷³ The first step therefore to be taken towards attracting the believers in Christ to the Communion of discipleship is not "to stop him; anyone who is not against you is with you." The next step would be to study with him the question of discipleship and to try to win his confidence. Lastly, he should be attracted to Communion in one Faith in Christ.

The Fathers of the Syrian Orthodox Church have taught us to respect our brothers despite the differences in their beliefs. This is what our great guide Mar Gregory John Bar 'Ebroyo (obit AD 1286) said to the hermits of all creeds and disciplines, "Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen."⁷⁴ It is clear that this statement does not suit every faith, and that when we define Faith in a way peculiar to us as Monastics we say that Faith is the agreement in the intention to teach the Gospel. This is achieved through a verbal statement and by keeping the Commandments. And since all contemporary Christians are agreed about the Statement of Faith which was decided at the Council of Nicea (AD 325) the Monastic should adhere to that alone. He should avoid disputes about the nature of persons. True Monastics discuss the way to behave only and do not discuss the subject of Faith at all.⁷⁵

This advice was addressed to the Monks of the 13th Century. If Bar 'Ebroyo had lived in our age, an age of broadening horizons, he would have advised us to continue praying for one another and with each other in order to restore the unity of Faith between our Churches, so that the Church of Christ becomes one. He also would have advised us to read out what the Anglican Church calls the "Canon of Faith of the Apostles" which is a summary of the Canon of Faith of the Nicean Council. In this way, we can avoid the disputes about the content of Faith, regarding the effusion of the Holy Spirit. Thus we can fulfil one of the fundamental conditions of public worship, to worship with a common purpose, purity of heart and a strong faith. Let the relationship between our Churches today be based on mutual respect, cooperation and the avoidance of disputes, hostilities and the enticing of individuals or groups. Only then will the atmosphere be suitable for discussing the content of Faith and for presenting the teachings which we received from our Fathers and which are universally regarded as evidence of the Apostles who had preached to our Fathers and established our Churches. Studying this evidence objectively would lead us to a better understanding of beliefs and to the Truth, and finally to the Communion of Faith, "there will be one Flock and one Shepherd."⁷⁶

The quotations were taken from the Jerusalem Bible.

1. Acts 11:26.
2. Matt. 16:28.
3. Acts 2:47.
4. Acts 20:28.
5. Matt. 18:17.
6. Col. 4:15.
7. I Thess. 2:14.
8. Rom. 16:16.

9. I Cor. 14:33.
10. Acts 8:1.
11. Gal. 1:2.
12. I Cor. 16:19.
13. I Cor. 3:16 & 6:19.
14. I Cor. 12: 12-20.
15. My book in Arabic *The Seven Sacraments* written in collaboration with the Very Rev. Isaac Sakka; published in Baghdad, 1970, p. 93.
16. Phil. 2:1 & II Cor. 13:14.
17. Acts 2:44-45 & 5:1-11.
18. Col. 1:12 & Rom. 11:23 & II Pet. 1:4.
19. Heb. 12:23.
20. Eph. 4:4-6.
21. *The Seven Sacraments*, p.8.
22. I Cor. 12:13.
23. I Cor. 10:16-17.
24. Luke 22:19.
25. I Cor. 1:10-13.
26. John 10:16.
27. Refer to Acts 4:32 & Eph. 4:1-3 and also I Pet. 3:8 & Gal. 1:8.
28. Matt. 28:19.
29. Mark 16:15.
30. Acts 1:8.
31. Rom. 1:8.
32. Eph. 5:25-26.
33. Col. 1:21-22.
34. I Cor. 1:2.
35. Matt. 5:48.
36. John 17:17 & 20.
37. Matt. 13:30.
38. Eph. 2:20.
39. Matt. 28:18-20. Compare with Mark 3:15 and Matt. 13:11 & Mark 4:11 and John 17:19-24; also Matt. 19:28 & 18:18.
40. Refer to Matt. 10:14-15 & 19:28; and also John 14: 1-3 & Luke 22:29-30.
41. Luke 10:16.
42. I Cor. 4:1 & 2 Cor. 5:20.
43. Acts 1:24.
44. *The Seven Sacraments*, p.147.
45. II Tim. 1:6 & I Tim 5:22.
46. Titus 1:5.
47. Acts 15: 28-29.
48. Acts 1:17.
49. II Tim. 2:2.
50. My lecture "The Reception of Councils" delivered in Vienna on September 5th, 1973, and published in "Wort und Wahrheit" No. 2, Review, Dec. 1974, pp. 85-94.
51. *Al-Boorban Al-Gati* written by Al-Barmooosy (Bishop Esodorus) Egypt 1893, p. 26.
52. Ibid, p.25.
53. *Al-Morid Al-'Atbb* by Patriarch Ephrem Barsoum, Homs, 1953, pp. 222-331.
54. The quote is a translation from the Arabic of *Al-Wad Al-Ilabi Fe Ta'sees Al Kaneesa* by The Patriarch of the Catholic Copts, Egypt, 1925, Vol III, p.30, and the *Patriarchs of the Orient (Batarikat Al-Sharq)*, by Patriarch Yacoub III, Damascus, 1969, p. 8., where His Holiness says about this Canon that it was one of the Canons forged by Zosimus of Rome (AD 418), who attributed it to the Council of Nicea in order to establish his presidency. He sent the claim to the African Council held in Carthage and which consisted of 217 Bishops, but they refuted his claim.
55. Gal. 2:9.
56. *Al-Boorhan Al-Gate*, p. 46.
57. Acts 8:14.

58. Acts 11:22.
59. Acts 15.
60. Canons 36 & 38 of the laws of the Apostles and 5 of the laws of the Council of Nicea, and 20 of the laws of the Council of Antioch.
61. Mujaz Tareekb Al-Masibiya, *A Summary of the History of Christianity* by Yassttoss al Doori, Egypt, 1949, Vol. III, p. 68.
62. Al-Rudud Al Orthozoksiya, *The Orthodox Replies* by Archdeacon of St. Peter's Church, Egypt, 1935.
63. My lecture "What makes the Council ecumenical" delivered in Vienna, 1972.
64. TaruCb Al Ensheeqaq. Jaraseemous Massara, *Alskadaria*, 1891, p. 198.
65. *The Seven Sacraments*, "Baptism".
66. Phil. 4:9.
67. I Cor. 11:34.
68. *Kanusatee* (My Church) by Dr. R. Abdul-Nur, Egypt, 1963, pp. 68-69.
69. II John 12.
70. A lecture delivered by the author in Vienna Sep 9, 1973.
71. John 17:21.
72. Matt. 23:26.
73. Luke 9:49-50.
74. Heb. 11:1.
75. *The Book of Dove*, Author's translation, into Arabic, 1974, pp. 153-155.
76. John 10:16.