

**THE MEETING OF
PATRIARCHS OF THE
MIDDLE EAST ORTHODOX CHURCHES
COMMON DECLARATION**

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

We, **Pope Shenouda III**, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, **Patriarch Mar 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 preparatory committee of this meeting who are with us, give thanks to God for bringing us together at the Monastery of the great Saint Bishoy in Wadi El Natroon, Egypt on Tuesday and Wednesday 10th and 11th of March 1998. We have gathered together as Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East to re-affirm our unity of faith and our common ministry in the life of our people in the Middle East and all over the world, and explore together the most efficient ways and means to strengthen our common presence and witness in the region.

On the basis of our Joint Agreed Statement issued on the 14th of June 1996 at the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, in Antelias, Lebanon, we studied a number of issues and questions of common concern. Hereunder we mention briefly some of the issues and perspectives which acquired an important place in our deliberations:

First : In our common witness to our faith in the Only Begotten Son, the Incarnate Logos, our Savior Jesus Christ, we hold firmly to the Apostolic Faith handed down to us from the Apostolic Fathers through the Holy Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, from the three Ecumenical Councils of Nicea (325A.D.), Constantinople (381A.D.) and Ephesus (431A.D.); and through the teachings of the saintly fathers of our three churches who have struggled in keeping the doctrines of our churches and the teachings of these Councils. In fact, our Churches have strived throughout their history and at the cost of the blood of their martyrs to keep intact the teachings of the Council of Ephesus concerning the incarnation of the Logos based on the teachings of **Saint Cyril the Great** (444A.D.) as well as the decisions of the said Council. We want

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¹ Ignatius Zakka I

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to mention here from among our Holy Fathers, especially **Saint Gregory the Illuminator, Saint Dioscorus of Alexandria, Mar Philixenus of Mabbugh, Mar Jacob Baradeus and Saint Nerses the Gracious** who have kept firm the Apostolic Faith and strongly defended the orthodoxy of the teachings of the first three Ecumenical Councils.

Second: The teachings of Saint Cyril the Great constitute the foundation of the Christology of our Churches. It was on the basis of these teachings that the Committee of the Joint Official Theological Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches was able to formulate a joint agreement which is now under study by the Holy Synods of both families. In fact, the following statement was mentioned at the beginning of this agreement: "We have found our common ground (i.e. in the Apostolic faith) in the formula of our common father Saint Cyril of Alexandria: "Μία Φύσις του Θεο Λογου σεσarkoumeni" **One Incarnate Nature of God the Logos** and in his dictum that "it is sufficient for the confession of our true and irreproachable faith to say and confess that the Holy Virgin Saint Mary is the Mother of God, the **Theotokos**."

Third : In accordance with and in faithful obedience to the faith, doctrine and teachings of our Holy Fathers, we firmly re-state our common rejection of all the heretical teachings of Arius, Sabellius, Apollinarius, Macedonius, Paul of Samosata, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius, Eutyches and of all those who follow these and other heretics and propagate their erroneous and heretical teachings.

Fourth : We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ the Logos, Son of God, came in His own person. He did not assume a human person, but He Himself by hypostatic union took full and perfect human nature; rational soul and body, without sin, from the Virgin Saint Mary through the Holy Spirit. He made His own humanity one incarnate nature and one incarnate hypostasis with His divinity in the very moment of incarnation through a true natural and hypostatic union. His divinity did not separate from His humanity even for a moment or a twinkling of an eye. This union is superior to description and perception. When we speak of "One incarnate nature of the Word of God" we do not mean His divinity alone or His humanity alone i.e. a single nature, but we speak of one united divine-human nature in Christ without change, without mixture, without confusion, without division and without separation. The properties of each nature are not changed and destroyed because of the union; the natures being distinguished from each other in thought alone (τῇ θεωρίᾳ μόνῃ).

Fifth : We agreed on the necessity of maintaining a common position of faith in all theological dialogues. Thus, henceforth, we will engage as a family of Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East in any theological dialogue with other churches and Christian world communions. We hope that this basic principle will also be accepted by other beloved churches of our family, as is happening now in many theological dialogues.

Sixth : We re-affirm the vital importance of establishing more organized and close collaboration between our churches to ensure the oneness of our faith, our full communion in the ecclesial and liturgical life, and our partnership in evangelism,

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diakonia and in witnessing Christ the Lord in the Christian world and to the entire humanity. We believe that this goal could be achieved by several means, some of which are :

- 1-To meet periodically and regularly every year.
- 2-To have a common doctrinal and theological attitude in all theological dialogues.
- 3-To have a common position on issues of vital concern for our churches in the Middle East Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, Pro Oriente and other ecumenical organizations.
- 4-To exchange teachers and students among the seminaries and theological institutes of our churches.
- 5-To exchange pastoral letters dealing with matters of faith and issues related to the witness, mission, evangelism and diakonia.
- 6-To exchange books, periodicals, and publications pertaining to Christian education, theological formation and moral teachings of our churches.
- 7-To exchange information related to the various activities of our churches.
- 8- To take a common stand on issues of justice, peace and human rights.
- 9- To encourage our clergy and people to establish close collaboration on the diocesan and parish levels in the Middle East and every where.

Seventh : We hope that through our common efforts the scope of our meetings will be widened in the near future to include other beloved churches of the Oriental Orthodox family, in continuation with the historic meeting of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1965.

Eighth : We wish to meet periodically with the Heads of Eastern Orthodox family to enhance our theological dialogue and strengthen further our ecumenical collaboration on local, regional and global levels.

Ninth : We discussed the celebration of the 2000 anniversary of the birth of Christ our Lord, and gave a special responsibility to the Standing Committee (ref. N. 11) to organize properly this important event.

Tenth : We discussed the prevailing situation in the Middle East. The difficulties that the peace process is facing actually are due to Israel's uncompromising and hard-line policy. We shall together exert strong and continuous efforts through the world-wide ecumenical fellowship and in international community so that the people of the Arab world may regain their violated rights in Jerusalem, Palestine, Golan, and South of Lebanon. It is also our demand that the embargo and sanctions imposed on the people of Iraq be lifted immediately. We pray that peace with justice prevails throughout the world.

Eleventh : A Standing Committee was appointed by us to implement the decisions of this meeting. This committee shall meet twice a year. The members of the Standing Committee are: H.E. Metropolitan Bishoy and H.G. Bishop Moussa from the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria; H.E. Metropolitan Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim and H.E. Metropolitan Mar Theophilus George Saliba from the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch; H.G. Bishop Sebouh Sarkissian and Archimandrite Nareg

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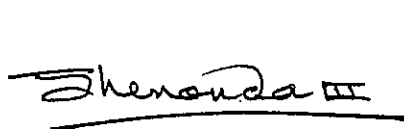
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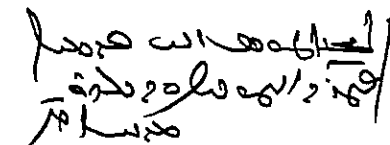
Alemezian from the Armenian Orthodox Church (the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia).

At the conclusion of our meeting we joyfully present our thanks to Almighty God who has promoted and sustained our endeavors. We ask Him to always assist our efforts for the well being of our churches, for the unity of all churches and the salvation of the world.

We thank the Church of Alexandria for its love and kind hospitality. We also thank all who prayed and worked for the success of this meeting. Glory be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, forever Amen.



Pope Shenouda III



Mar Ignatius Zakka I



Catholicos Aram I