

File 1

Identity, Vocation and Mission of the Maronite Church

Text 2 : Identity, Vocation and Mission of the Maronite Church

Introduction

1. Ever since our Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church launched the project of her Patriarchal Council, she has attached great importance to the questions of identity, vocation and mission, whereby she placed them foremost among the Synodal subjects for discussion. This Synodal project, which prompts the Maronite Church to undertake a comprehensive review of her ecclesiastical affairs, will not reach its desired objective unless it is in harmony with the essential elements that constitute her identity, and in their light, her vocation is made manifest and her mission specified. This text aims at highlighting these elements in their correlation and integration, prior to tackling other Synodal texts individually, pointing out the characteristics of each. These elements together constitute the living heritage which gives the Maronite Church her particularity within the Universal Church in living the mystery of salvation through Jesus Christ and witnessing to him in the Antiochene Domain and in the Countries of Expansion. Today, as before, our Church is striving, in this particularity of hers, to be loyal to this mystery from which it sets off and on which every genuine Christian identity is built. Inasmuch as these elements are tied to the person of Jesus Christ, who “is the same, yesterday, today and forever,” (Hebrews 13:8) they take the place of a throbbing heart in the conscience of Maronites.

2. It must not be remiss in the minds of the sons and daughters of the Maronite Church, as they seek to throw light upon the elements of their identity, that their Patriarchal Church is, before all else, the realization of the mystery of the One, Universal, Holy and Apostolic Church in the special environment in which they were called to bear witness to their Apostolic faith and to their evangelical values, and consequently not willing to be led, in their endeavor, into mere cultural, national or political considerations. For them, the Church is the salvific work of God the Father through His son Jesus Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit, as they proclaim, chanting during the Sunday liturgy of the Renewal and Consecration of the Church, “*Glory be to the Father who founded the Church from of old. Adoration to the Son who has given her his Body for the forgiveness of sins; and thanksgiving to the Spirit who descends, settles on and sanctifies; He is the hidden and unfathomed Mystery. Glory be to Him.*”¹

3. In trying to discover the constituent elements of the identity of the Maronite Church, it becomes apparent how much these elements, in their essence, are common to all the Antiochene and Syriac Churches, and even though through the effect of time they took a distinctive Maronite

1. Refer to *Albeit Ghazo al-Marouni* Add 14.701 (1263 AD), Volume I. Introduced and translated by Abbot Youhanna Tabet, Institute of Liturgy USEK publications, series *Al-Masadir al-Liturgia al-Marounia* (Maronite Liturgical Sources), No. 1, Kaslik, Lebanon, 2000, p. 47.

character, this did not obscure their Antiochene and Syriac origin. Therefore, returning to this common heritage is, for the Maronite Church, an ecumenical commitment contributing to the recovery, by our Churches, of that complete communion between them, while “living the truth with love” (Ephesians 4:15), for the purpose of consolidating her evangelical presence in this East and in the world, faithful to the calling of her Master.

4. There is no doubt that the phenomenon of the extensive Maronite emigration from Lebanon and neighboring countries to other countries of the world has contributed to making the issue of the identity of the Maronite Church a Synodal priority. It was essential for this Church, wherever her sons and daughters settled, to highlight the fundamental elements of her identity, the foundation of her vocation and mission, working to update them, to make them compatible with the culture of the people whom her sons and daughters joined, so as to curb their scattering or their dissolution, to preserve their unity for the sake of consolidating the special Christian mission entrusted to them.

5. In the light of the foregoing, the text introduces the essential elements of the identity of the Maronite Church and it becomes apparent that she is firstly, an Antiochene Syriac Church, with a special liturgical heritage; secondly, a Chalcedonian Church; thirdly, a Patriarchal Church with an ascetic and a monastic aspect; fourthly, a Church in full union with the Apostolic Roman See; fifthly, a Church incarnated in her Lebanese and Eastern environment, and the Countries of Expansion. Since the Maronite Church’s vocation and mission cannot be separated from her identity, this calls for showing them in succession, beginning with the elements that constitute that identity.

6. Before embarking on the presentation of these elements, we must remember that the name Maronite derives from Saint Maron, who died around 410, and to the monastery built and named after him, soon after the Council of Chalcedon (451) in the region of Apamea, in *Syria Secunda*, according to the Roman organization of Syria at the time. The monastery of Saint Maron is indeed considered to be the cradle of the Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church which emerged under its auspices and in its environ, as an independent patriarchate at an unspecified date, between the end of the seventh century and the first half of the eighth (refer to text 3). Saint Maron, the patron of our Church, whose feast day is celebrated on the ninth of February, introduced a unique kind of eremitical life in Mount Cyrrhus in *Syria Prima* based on living in the open air. Theodoret of Cyrrhus (459+) wrote his biography and that of his disciples in his famous book about Syrian monks and hermits between the beginning of the fourth century and the middle of the fifth century.²

2. Refer to Saint Maron’s biography in the book of Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus, *Tareekh Asfia’ al-Laah* (History of God’s Chosen) translated from the original Greek by Archimandrite Adrianus Shaccour, Paulist Press, 1987, pp. 145-146. Some Archeological researchers are of the opinion that Fort Kalota on Mt. Simon, some 30 kilometers from Aleppo, is probably where St. Maron practiced his ascetic way of life and that his relics were placed in the nearby city of Barad.

Chapter One: A Syriac Antiochene Church with a Special Liturgical Heritage

7. The Maronite Church developed within the Antiochene Church, which came into existence through the evangelization by the Apostles, thus acknowledging her Petrine origin. It was in Antioch, the capital of the Eastern region of the Roman Empire, that “the disciples were first called Christians,” (Acts 11:26) which is the common attribute among the followers of Jesus and the solid base of every genuine ecclesiastic identity. In Antioch too, the Church opened up to all nations, and duly became the “daughter of nations.”

8. Since her inception, the Antiochene Church has been distinguished by the unity in faith and the communion within plurality, which marked the peoples of that region through a diversity of civilizations, cultures and languages. This plurality earned the Antiochene Church a spiritual and intellectual fertility as well as an apostolic zeal that distinguished her from other Churches. The Christian Antiochene heritage is still considered one of the richest and most profound in the world. It had greatly influenced the Church’s history and life, particularly during the first six centuries, as it allowed Christian theology the opportunity to express itself through two main interacting cultures, the Aramaic-Syriac and the Hellenic. The Aramaic culture was prevalent in the cities of the interior and in the countryside, while the Hellenic culture was more predominant in some coastal cities.

9. Many local Churches sprang up in Antioch in the midst of this cultural and linguistic diversity, whereby each was characterized by her own distinguishing features, yet safeguarding the ecumenical structure on which the early Church was reared. This structure ties the bonds of communion among the members of the one local Church, with their diverse talents and functions, for the sake of building the One Body of Christ. We have many examples in the New Testament that testify to its existence and importance in the safeguarding of communion and unity (Refer to Acts 2:44; 4:32; 15:1-29, 1 Corinthians 12:12-30).

10. In Antioch, we came to know the first theology of the local Church, which reveals her unity and universality in the Eucharistic celebration. Saint Ignatius of Antioch reminded all Churches he wrote letters to, encouraging them in times of persecution and bolstering their unity: “Do not participate except in only one Eucharist. For, Our Lord has only one body, one chalice that unites us in his blood, and one altar, one bishop along with many deacons who are my partners in service. In this way, you would fulfill God’s will in everything.”³ The Bishop is the successor of the Apostles, and, in the structure of the assembly and in the service of unity, he occupies the first position of the first who watches over the proclamation of the Word in his local Church, to safeguard the orthodoxy of the faith in it, and to bring unity through harmonious diversity. He is responsible for discerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the faithful, being continuously vigilant in order to identify them and employ them toward the building of the One Body of Christ. It is needless to say that this spiritual communion reaches its climax and is

3. Refer to *Rasa’il Ra’awia* (Pastoral Letters), Second Century, translated and introduced by George Saber; the series *Al-Ousoul al-Maseehia ash-Sharkia* (Eastern Christian Origins), 1, Beirut, 1972, p. 129.

distinctively proclaimed in the Eucharistic communion presided by the bishop or whomever he delegates for this mission.

11. This Episcopate Synodal System is at the root of the patriarchal system that is still prevailing in the East and also at the base of the Episcopal assembly whose spheres are spacious enough to encompass the Universal Church. Regional councils and patriarchal synods were and still are the place where communion between local churches is proclaimed through the practice of this Episcopal assembly in a spirit of consultation, love and deliberation on common issues and the adoption of appropriate decisions. We find strong echoes of this Synodal spirit in the writings of many of the saintly fathers, since it is the guarantee of unity in the Church. This is why the Church, since her first epoch, has adopted the convoking of councils and the exchange of association and greeting letters as signs of communion among the various churches.

12. Our Maronite Antiochene Church belongs to the family of Churches of Syriac heritage in its “Western and Eastern” branches. This division refers to Syriacs living in regions west or east of the Euphrates River. This heritage, in its theological, spiritual and liturgical dimensions, has been enriched by Syriac Fathers who expressed their Christian faith through a Semitic language that was very close to the language of the Old Testament. Their intellectual and ecclesiastical activities were centered around the theological schools of Antioch, Edessa and Nisibis. At the liturgical level, this heritage was expressed in poetic prayers written by poet theologians such as Ephrem (+373), James of Serug (+521), Balai (+after 432) and others. These prayers still remain the main source for the Maronite office in its two formats, manuscript and print. We continue to find in these poetic prayers a deep spirituality that is rich in references from both the Old and the New Testaments of the Holy Bible. These prayers have a distinctive Marian character and a persistent call to repentance in the hope of meeting the groom at the end of time. The hopeful return to this common heritage, which was formed in its segments and basic characteristics before the Maronite Patriarchate came to be between the end of the seventh century and the first half of the eighth century, makes of Maronite believers partners with their Antiochene and Syriac brethren in the one workshop. In this way, they strive to rediscover, revive and benefit from this heritage, in trustworthiness to their common identity and enrichment of the Universal Church.

13. Our Synod lauds all the efforts and the many important accomplishments made during recent decades, in Lebanon and overseas, thanks to the Maronite universities, seminaries, and others as well as the efforts of those individuals who researched the Antiochene Syriac heritage, in its theological, spiritual, and liturgical dimensions. They have presented it in a new attire, making it accessible to the sons and daughters of our Churches wherever they settle. Our Synod also urges these universities and seminaries to continue supporting this project that it may not remain a concern just for some Orientalists, who have rendered great service in this field and still do. All eparchies and orders are to select those in whom they discern scientific skills and the love of ancient and modern languages, encouraging them to dedicate themselves to this difficult yet fruitful task, providing them with the required spiritual and material support. Consecration to this theological task is a necessary service for consolidating the mission of our Church and updating it in the light of its traits.

Chapter Two: A Chalcedonian Church

14. By declaring that our Church is Chalcedonian, we mean that she perseveres in being faithful to “the mystery of the plan of salvation,” as it was professed and witnessed to by the monks of Saint Maron’s monastery, the cradle of our Church, in accordance with the Creed defined by the Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon in 451. This Creed teaches that Christ has two full distinct natures, divine and human, united in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the distinctiveness of these two natures is maintained after that unity. This is confirmation of the humanity of Christ our Lord and of the reality of the incarnation and salvation.⁴

15. The Fathers of the Council, in their definition, relied upon the letter of Pope Leo the Great, addressed in the year 449 to Flavius the Patriarch of Constantinople (446-449), in which he condemned the monk Eutyches’ for saying that Christ had only one nature after the Incarnation, which would lead to the dissolving of the human in the divine and would consequently empty the Incarnation event from its real salvific meaning. The Fathers considered this Papal letter to be “conformal with the great declaration of Peter as a common pillar against those with erroneous opinions.”⁵ The firm commitment of Saint Maron’s Monastery to the Chalcedonian “Creed,” in the context of Pope Leo’s letter, was undoubtedly one of the most important elements that later consolidated the full communion of the Maronite Church with the Roman Apostolic See (No. 29). Our Maronite liturgy eloquently expresses the effects of the mystery of the Incarnation in the life of the people, when we repeat daily during the Divine Liturgy: “You have united, O Lord, your divinity with our humanity, and our humanity with your divinity, Your life with our mortality and our mortality with Your life. You have assumed what is ours and you have given us what is yours, for the life and salvation of our souls. To You, O Lord, be glory for ever.”

16. However, from the beginning, the Chalcedonian “Creed” met with stiff opposition, for theological and non-theological reasons, to the point of rejection by most Eastern Christians in our East, who form what is now called the community of the Eastern Orthodox Churches.⁶ Their position was mainly a refusal of the distinctiveness between the two natures after the Incarnation, in order to preempt any split between the divinity and the humanity of Christ, thus safeguarding the unity in the person of Jesus Christ, as was decreed by the Fathers of the Council of Ephesus in 431. Our Church must be thankful to God for the positive results of the theological discussions, formal and informal, concerning the mystery of the Incarnation, which has taken

4. We cite extracts from the Chalcedonian Creed: “Following the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity.... the same Christ, Lord, and only-begotten Son, acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division and separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union...” *Al-Kanisa al-Catholikia fi Wathai’qiha* (The Catholic Church in Her Documents), Dentzinger-Honerman, Part 1, Series *Al-Fikr al-Masihi bain-al Amss wal-Yaoum* (Christian Thought Between Yesterday and Today), No. 27, Paulist Library Publications, Jounieh, 2001, pp. 104-105.

5. *Ibid*, p. 104.

6. This family encompasses the Copts, Syrians, Armenians, Ethiopians, Eritrean, and Orthodox Malankar.

place between the Catholic Church and the community of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. These results have proven that faith in this mystery is one in essence and yet varied in expression. This diversity is seen no longer, as was the case in the recent past, a sign of division and separation between the Churches which would weaken the Christian testimony, but rather, a rich and common heritage, where merely one expression is incapable of grasping this great mystery or enveloping it in an exclusive and definitive form.⁷

17. In this context, even if this diversity afflicts utterances and expressions without infringing on the essence, we can still maintain that it has contributed in crystallizing the patterns of a differing, yet integrated ecclesial life, which has affected the spirituality of our Churches and their mission in their environment. In the light of her long history, the Maronite Church realizes that her faith in the Mystery of the Incarnation, according to the Chalcedonian formula, has contributed to developing a Maronite spirituality embodied in her Lebanese and Eastern environment. This became apparent in the persistent strive of her sons and daughters, along with their partners in destiny, Muslims and Christians, to work together in the various cultural, social, economic and political domains, to elevate every human being, to reclaim, through Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, his dignity and the image of God in him (See Chapter five).

Chapter three: Patriarchal Church with Monastic and Ascetic Features

18. The Syriac Antiochene Maronite Patriarchate came into existence in the bosom of Saint Maron's Monastery, at an unspecified date, between the close of the 7th century and the first half of the 8th century, within religious, cultural, political, and social circumstances, in which some of its features have not yet come to light. In their totality, these circumstances led to a chasm in the Melkite Antiochene See between the "Maronites" and the "Greek". Our Synod depends upon those specialized in ecclesiastical history to clarify the history of the Maronite Church during that delicate phase, that it may be an introduction to the writing of a common and "ecumenical" history of the Antiochene See, bearing in mind the Apostle Paul's saying: "living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). Since the 8th century, the Maronites have emerged as an independent ecclesiastical body within the Antiochene See, along with the Orthodox Syriac Church on the one hand⁸ and later, the Greek Orthodox Church, on the other hand.⁹ This founding event had a great impact imprinting the Maronite Church, clergy and laity alike, with a distinctive ascetic and monastic character that influenced her spirituality and her ecclesiastical structure. Here she is today, through her patriarchal synod, still seeking ways to update this character in order to perform her evangelical mission in her own environment according to her special gift.

⁷ These discussions were held under the auspices of the World Council of Churches (Geneva) and the Catholic Austrian Association *Pro Oriente* (For the Orient) in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Rome). A brief extract of these deliberations and communiqués can be found in Pope John Paul II's Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (On Commitment to Ecumenism) (1995), paragraphs 62-63.

⁸ The Syriac Orthodox used to be known as the Jacobites, after Bishop Jacob Baradaeus (+578), the organizer of this Antiochene Church that was against the Council of Chalcedon.

⁹ In the 18th Century, because of the very active movement of union with Rome, these two churches suffered an internal schism that led to the creation of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church and the Syrian Catholic Church (1724 and 1783 respectively).

19. The ascetic and monastic origin of the Maronite Patriarchate does not mean that our Church is the result of an independent monastic movement within the Antiochene See. The Monastery of Saint Maron was integrated in the structure of the Antiochene Church since her foundation after the Council of Chalcedon (451) and until the creation of the Maronite Patriarchate within its walls. This is asserted by the presence of monks-bishops, at least in the 8th century, who headed this monastery, according to an old ecclesiastical tradition in our Eastern Churches. This harmony between bishops and monks shows that the Monastery of Saint Maron and its monks, as well as all monasteries and Christian communities around it, were represented in the Antiochene structure through the bishop of the monastery and bishops of neighboring monasteries. All this shows that the monastery of Saint Maron was in continuous conformity with the ecclesiastical role entrusted to it by the Antiochene Church in the 6th century, when the Superior of the “Monastery of Blessed Maron” was appointed “exarch” over the monasteries of *Syria Secunda*, that is, the overseer and a mediator between them and the Antiochene Patriarch on the one hand, and the Emperor on the other hand.¹⁰

20. In this context, and according to an old tradition conveyed to us by Patriarch Stephen Doueihy (1670- 1704), our Church considers Saint John Maron, who was first a monk and then the superior of the Monastery of Saint Maron, the first Antiochene Patriarch of the Maronites and the Church celebrates his feast day on March 2.¹¹ John Maron was the first of a series of monk-patriarchs that continued uninterrupted till the 17th century. During that period, the monastic state was tied to the Episcopal or patriarchal ministry in our Church. In fact, after their ordination as bishops, the monks would continue to live the monastic life they had embraced. This means that the monastic state was pastoral as much as it was evangelical in its beginnings and objectives.¹²

21. These strong ties between the monastic and the Episcopal states started changing when, under the influence of the Roman Church, (conveyed through the Maronite School of Rome (1584)) the Episcopal or patriarchal function was assigned, as in the West, to those who are in a state of celibacy, regardless of their diocesan or monastic state. Despite this change, the Maronite “Ash-Shartounia,” that is, the Book of Ordinations has kept, to this very day, these traditional ties, since he who is chosen to the episcopate dons the monastic cowl if he is not in the ranks of the monks.

10. The function of an exarch emerged in the 6th century of Emperor Justinian (527- 565) law 133 concerning dealing with the life of monks and nuns.

11. Refer to the life of Saint John Maron in Patriarch Doueihy’s book, *Ash-Sharh al-Mukhtasar fi Asl al-Mawarina* (Brief Explanation of the Origin of the Maronites), published by Father Antoine Daou under the title, *Asl al-Mawarina* (The Origin of the Maronites), Ehden, 1973.

12. These monk-bishops were in line with what Theodoret of Cyrrhus wrote in the early life of Abraham the Hermit, a disciple of Saint Maron, after he became the bishop of Haran: “It is not permissible to overlook the mention of the amazing Abraham under the pretext that, after his ascetic life, he embellished the bishopric. In fact, it is for this same reason that we should keep his memory more than any other, because, having had to change his function, he never changed his lifestyle, rather, he carried with him the austerity of the eremitic life, and combining the duties of the eremitic life and those of the bishopric, living his entire life in toil”. Refer to Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus’ book, *Tareekh Asfia’ Allah* (History of God’s Chosen), previously cited, p. 149. At the end of his life, Abraham the Ascetic Bishop, the Bishop of Cyrrhus repeats in summary what he stated in the beginning (p. 152).

22. No doubt this ascetic and monastic origin of the Maronite Patriarchate turned the Maronite Church, throughout her long history, primarily into a big monastic community, it is the “Patriarch’s Parish,” a parish centered on the monastery of the Patriarchal See. It saw in the patriarch “a father and a head,” and the protector of her unity. This foundation had a huge effect on the ecclesiastical organization of the Maronites and remained very much alive until the Lebanese Synod convoked in 1736. Throughout that period, they constituted one congregation, with the patriarch singularly watching over its affairs even if he was sometimes assisted by some leading figures in managing temporal affairs, and, by auxiliary bishops, who living with him in the monastery or in neighboring ones, aided him in the pastoral affairs. He also delegates them to carry out pastoral visits on his behalf. Despite the sporadic opposition to the absolute authority of the patriarch, this system remained nevertheless a living testimony of an on-going Episcopal, Synodal assembly centered on the constant monastic life communion whose mainstay was prayer of the divine office, meditation on the Bible, manual work, and fasting.

23. These methods of practicing that Episcopate Synodal System have changed since the Fathers of the Lebanese Synod (1736) issued the law concerning the distribution of eparchies and ordered bishops to reside in their own eparchies.¹³ Despite the urgent pastoral need for this eparchial reform, it became apparent, that for a long while, such reform was met by cautious acceptance or even refusal on the part of some groups, perhaps for reasons of safeguarding the unity of this sizeable “monastic congregation” around its shepherd. As for today, almost three centuries after the Lebanese Synod, the experience of the Episcopate Synodal System, according to “the monastic rhythm,” still remains entrenched in the Maronite memory, especially during times of hardship, in what it represents by way of genuine ecclesiastical communion between the patriarch and the bishops, a rhythm able to inspire and strengthen the practice of the Episcopate Synodal System nowadays.

24. Simultaneously with this change, whereby the monastic state no longer accompanied that of the episcopate, another change befell the canonical status of monastic life in our Patriarchal Church. Since the end of the seventeenth century, our Church had witnessed monastic reform on a very large scale. Its pioneers tried to reconcile the authentic Eastern spirituality with Western organization and that brought about the emergence of monastic orders in their present form. What is striking with respect to this reform, on both the ecclesiastical and canonical levels, was the upholding of the Canons of these monastic orders at the hands of the Roman Apostolic See, after having been established in their original form by the Patriarchal See in Qannoubine. This, of course, entailed a “pontifical right” that these orders still enjoy and an independent jurisdiction from the patriarchal structure.¹⁴

25. This change won acceptance at the time by the Maronite Patriarchate. The explanation to that is the mounting awareness of the sons and daughters of the Maronite Church, clergy and laity, that the Patriarchal Church is an indivisible part of the Catholic Church shepherded by the

13. Concerning the matter of the partitioning of eparchies, refer to *Thail al-Majmaa’ al-Lubnani* (Appendix to the Lebanese Synod), chapter 41, “On the Appointment of Maronite Bishops’ Sees and their Boundaries,” translated by Bishop Youssef Najem, Al-Arz Press, Jounieh, 1900, pp. 180-182. Refer to what the Fathers of the Synod said about the Antiochean Patriarchate in Part III, Chapter 4, No. 8, pp. 350-361.

14. Refer to the letter of Pope Clement XII on the confirmation of the canons of Syriac Maronite Monks known by the name of the Lebanese Monks of Saint Anthony the Great (1732), in the *Thail al-Majmaa’ al-Lubnani* (Appendix to the Lebanese Synod), No. 16, p. 44-49.

Bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter, who enjoys, in accordance with the principles of “Catholic ecclesiology,” effectual primacy over the entire Church. This is the continuity of Peter’s primacy over the Apostles and over the early Church, the assurance for the unity of Christ’s visible Church, and for the accretion of her mission in the world. Today, in the light of the concept of the Church communion at the local and the universal levels, in accordance with the teachings of Vatican II, it would be fitting for our Patriarchal Church, which is endowed with a “particular right,” to give this concept due theological attention, seeking to crystallize the practical means which would ensure the consolidation of the spirit of communion between her sons and daughters at all levels. This is achieved at the structural level through the exercise of the Episcopate Synodal System between the patriarch and the bishops on the one side, and by the activation of mutual relations between the religious orders, which are of “pontifical right” and the patriarchate, on the other. The patriarchal structure would thus become, in time, the true ecclesiastical communion link between the Maronite Church, clergy, monks, nuns and laity, as well as the Roman Apostolic See.

26. There is no doubt that these transformations have, over the years, altered the traditional monastic character which has distinguished our Patriarchal Church. Our Synod is aware that this character will not be regained by merely returning to the stage preceding these transformations. Therefore, with an ecclesiastical spirit, we must search for ways to ensure the restoring of the essence of this heritage. It may not be appropriate, at least in the short run, to pose this issue from the canonical standpoint. In fact, the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* specifies very accurately the status of the monastic orders with “pontifical right” within the Patriarchal Church with a “particular right” on the one hand, and the relationship of the Patriarchal Church and these orders with the Roman Apostolic See, on the other hand.¹⁵ What can be done in this specific field, without delay, is the resumption of work in the Patriarchal Curia to coordinate between the bishops and the religious orders, so as to promote the mission of our Church and the spirit of communion among her sons and daughters.

27. Our Patriarchal Synod realizes that concern for the recovery of the ascetic and monastic character of our Church does not stop at that level of coordination between bishops and the religious orders. If monastic life is the “soul of the Eastern Churches,” as Pope John Paul II says, (*Lumen Orientalis*, The Light of the Orient, 9) for us it is a founding evangelical gift (“charisma”) that molded our Antiochene Church and marked her throughout her long history. This urgently calls us, clergy, monks and laity, to discern the meaning of this founding gift and its prerequisites. This founding gift was, and still is, evangelical *par excellence* in that it calls on believers to take seriously all that is required to walk in the footsteps of Christ as stated in the Gospel: “Then he said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me’” (Luke 9:23). This charisma is embodied in continuous prayer, in raving about God’s word, in true repentance for the sake of the kingdom, in the simple life, and in brotherly solidarity as a testimony of love. What is most splendid about this gift is to stress on the state of vigilance, with the power of hope that does not disappoint (Romans 5:5) and reverence for the judgment, while awaiting the second coming of Christ the Lord, to judge the living and the dead (the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed) raising all toward his Father “so that

15. Concerning patriarchal Churches, refer to the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Chapter four, laws 55-150; concerning monks, refer to Chapter 12, laws 410- 572 (law 412, concerning Pontifical Orders).

God may be all in all” (1 Corinthian 15:28). Those who believe in Christ bear witness to the evangelical virtues in the light of “the mystery of the plan of salvation” with all its dimensions, and this is a mystery that finds its perfection in the event of the Second Coming. The sons and daughters of our Maronite Church “remember” this coming as if it has already happened, that is, they make it present, and that is in the celebration of the Eucharist when, in the Anaphora of Saint Mark, the celebrant announces: “Lord Jesus Christ, we recall your plan of salvation for us: your conception, birth, and holy baptism, your saving passion, life-giving death, your burial for three days, your glorious resurrection, ascension to heaven, your sitting at the right hand of the Father, and your wondrous, awesome and royal return, when you shall judge all people.”¹⁶

28. In this context, concern for the recovery of the ascetic and monastic character of the Maronite Church matters all her sons and daughters in the diversity of their talents as well as the patterns of their lives. As that concern expresses an evangelical choice accompanying their formation, they have to progress toward launching “a new start through Christ,”¹⁷ transforming them into “a consecrated community” to the Lord, and a sign of His kingdom. Our Patriarchal Synod is aware of the importance of this new start through Christ so as to achieve the desired pastoral and spiritual renewal in our Church, which is the title of the Second File, especially what is related to the renewal of persons: the patriarch, bishops, priests, monks, laity, families and youth (texts 6-11).

Chapter Four: A Church in Full Communion with the Roman Apostolic See

29. Communion with the Roman Church represents an essential and deep rooted element of the identity, mission and vocation of our Maronite Church. Even though the scope of this communion in its known historical form became evident at the beginnings of the second millennium, for our Church, such communion was never a passing matter dictated by historical circumstances. Its constant continuity to this very day is a splendid expression of her steadfast faithfulness to a deep rooted ecclesiastic heritage common to both East and West, entrusting the Bishop of Rome, successor of Peter, Head of the Apostles, with the charge of watching over the visible unity of Christ’s Church and serving the communion among the Churches. The ecclesiastical independence of the Maronite Church may have been what has kept the Maronites in this tradition, ever since the 8th century. They do not seem to have been affected by the theological conflicts long outstanding between “the Latins and the Greeks” over the nature and structure of the Church --conflicts that led, in the 11th century, to the severance of the canonical communion between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople. As this Synodal text (No. 15) states, the Antiochene Maronite Church is aware that her faith in the Mystery of the Incarnation according to the Chalcedonian formula was also one of the main factors that consolidated her full communion with the Roman Apostolic See.

16. Refer to the book, *Al-Quddass bi Hasab Taqss al-Kanisa al-Antakia Ass-Siryania al-Marounia* (The Qorbono According to the Rite of the Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church), Bkerke, 2005, p. 826. Also refer to the Anaphora of Saint James p. 779.

17. The expression between quotation marks is the title of the teachings of *Majma’ Muasasaat al-Hayat al-Mukarrasa wa Jami’aat al-Hayat ar-Rasoulia* (The Council of Institutes for the Consecrated Life and Apostolic Life Associations), May 16, 2002; it concerns the renewed commitment to the consecrated life in the third millennium.

30. This communion with Rome did not create divisions among the Maronites between those who oppose it and those who favor it. This is contrary to what has happened with the other Eastern Churches starting in the 16th century, when a movement of union with Rome produced a duality in the ecclesiastical authority and serious divisions among the children of the same Church. The status of the communion between the Maronite Church and the Roman Apostolic See, distinguished by its historical roots and its uniqueness, gives our Church a special ecumenical role in this region that she is called upon to undertake for the sake of developing the theological dialogue and the dialogue of love between these Churches and the Catholic Church. This role is reasserted thanks to the great common heritage that unites our Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church with the other Eastern Churches. Despite the flaws that affected the communion between the Maronite Church and the Roman Apostolic See over their long history, the status of their communion could still set a modest example for reclaiming the unity of the Universal Church through full communion among the Churches.

31. However, the experience of communion between the Maronite Church and the Roman Church led the Maronites, at the beginning of the 15th century, into the concept of a Church which is in fact a complicated mixture of a patriarchal system, typical of Eastern Churches throughout the first millennium, and a Roman hierarchical system for the Catholic Church, which has unilaterally developed since the start of the second millennium. As already stated in the text above (No. 25), the Maronites have become part of the Church headed by the Bishop of Rome, while retaining a large portion of their liturgical rituals and ecclesiastical organization. Our Patriarchal Synod appreciates the many positive aspects that adorned the history of communion between the Maronite Church and the Roman Church, allowing our Church to perform her mission in her environment with great vitality and effectiveness through her openness to the West, thus, benefiting from its scientific and intellectual capacities. With time, this openness has contributed to crystallizing the unique identity of Lebanon based on cultural pluralism. However, adopting the Roman concept of the Church as the sole model for participating in this communion had, in certain circumstances, its marked effect in introducing what is usually termed as the “Latinization” which has befallen some liturgical sections, particularly the theology of the Mysteries. On the ecclesiastic organizational level, applying this concept in the manner indicated above has contributed to the weakening of the unity of the Patriarchal Church through the limiting of the authority of the Patriarch, the symbol of her unity.

32. To reveal the history of communion between the Maronite Church and the Roman Church in its various dimensions, our Synod relies on those with expertise to carefully review the fundamental stages that constituted that history, giving special attention to the Council of Florence (1439), especially with regard to its vision on Church unity between East and West; the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and its affirmed effect in the founding of the Maronite College in Rome (1584)¹⁸; the Maronite synods that were held under the presidency of the Apostolic Delegates, Eliano and Dandini, (1578-1579; 1580-1582; and 1596)¹⁹; and, the Lebanese Synod (1736) and the issue of its acceptance in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was common knowledge

18. Concerning the Maronite College in Rome, refer to Nasser Gemayel's, *Les Echanges culturels entre les Maronites et l'Europe* (Cultural Exchanges between the Maronites and Europe), 2 volumes, Beirut, 1984.

19. Concerning the Maronite Synods refer to Joseph Feghali's, *Histoire du Droit de l'Eglise Maronite* (History of the Law of the Maronite Church), volume 1, Ed. Letouzey et Ané, Paris, 1962.

that the laws of that Synod, in their majority, were derived from the reform canons of the Council of Trent.²⁰

33. In the twentieth century, a new chapter in the history of communion between the Maronite Church and the Roman Church opened since the convocation of the Vatican Council II in Rome (1962-1965). Our Church participated in the works of this Council through her patriarch and bishops. This undoubtedly was the first motivating element in the launching of the renewal workshop in our Church at the various levels, despite the temporary stumble caused by the recent Lebanese war (1975-1990). Our Patriarchal Synod is directly involved in this movement of renewal, although “some ecclesiastic and lay voices had been calling for a new Maronite Synod since the beginning of the twentieth century.”²¹ In this context, and in this Synodal venture of hers, our Church accords great importance to the Apostolic Exhortation: *New Hope for Lebanon* (1997), which crowned the works of the Special Assembly of Bishops for Lebanon (1995), convoked by Pope John Paul II. Our Church is aware that this exhortation has set the basis of the ecclesiastic renewal emanating from the teachings of the Vatican Council II and the common heritage of our Eastern Churches, Catholic and Orthodox, materializing in its principles and aspirations as a founding constitution for the mission of our Churches in Lebanon and the Arab world.

34. One of the achievements of Vatican II is that it has set up a theological concept for the communion-Church, which, in its fundamental facets, is a retrieval of a common biblical and patristic tradition that has prevailed in the East and the West during the first millennium. In this context, our Synod urges all Maronite clergy, monks, nuns and laity to delve into the mystery of communion and to discern its practical significance, either on the level of our Patriarchal Church or on the level of its relationship with the Roman Apostolic See. Our Church, along with other Eastern Catholic Churches, is also keen on pursuing dialogue with the Roman authorities in the light of the theology of the communion-Church to surmount whatever canonical difficulties remaining that may prevent the patriarchs of these Churches from exercising their full pastoral duties toward their sons and daughters residing outside the boundaries of the Antiochene Patriarchal Domain.²² The pursuit of this dialogue in the Catholic Church undoubtedly has its effects on the future of the ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches. This is in line with the initiative of Pope John Paul II of September 29, 1998, when he invited five Eastern Catholic Patriarchs, as being shepherds of Churches sharing with Orthodox Churches a common theological, liturgical, spiritual and canonical heritage, “to search with him for the most appropriate means for the Petrine ministry to achieve the service of love in a method acknowledged by all” (No. 4).²³

20. Concerning the Lebanese Synod, refer to Elias Atallah’s, *Le Synode Libanais de 1736* (The Lebanese Synod of 1736), 2 volumes, co-Ed. CERO- Letouzey et Ané, Antélias (Lebanon) Paris, 2001.

21. Refer to Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir’s letter, in *The Maronite Patriarchal Synod*, 2003, p. 11.

22. Refer, in this context, to the text of the document, in French, signed by the seven Catholic Patriarchs of the East, which they dispatched to the Roman authorities, entitled: *Relations Between the Catholic Patriarchal Churches and the Roman Apostolic See*, in Father Elie Haddad’s book, *Al-Majma’ia Al-Usqofia fil-Kanai’ss Ash-Sharqia* (The Episcopal Synods in the Oriental Churches) (The Experience of the Melkite Catholic Church), publication of the Higher Institute for Religious Sciences, Saint Joseph’s University, Beirut, 2003, p. 257- 273.

23. Refer to the speech delivered by Pope John Paul II in *La Documentation Catholique*, no. 2192 (1998), pp. 951-953.

Chapter Five: A Church Incarnated in its Lebanese and Eastern Environment and in the Countries of the Expansion

35. While our Synod is in search of the identity of the Maronite Church, its vocation and mission, we pause to reflect on the relationship of the Maronites with their environment. This prompts us to meditate on the organic link between God's Church and the environment in which it is incarnated in, but without identifying with it, and always keeping in mind that the Kingdom of God is not "of this world" (John 18:36). Every group of people, collectively called by God, becomes "a Church," in Jesus Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. In as much as they experience this calling, through faith, they end up being entrusted with a mission allocated to them by God. Then the Church takes form in the human environment to which her sons and daughters belong to, with the ideals of the Gospel blooming in the midst of their original culture and civilization, for the sake of furthering the kingdom of God. The Church also believes that "the mystery of the plan of salvation" of which God made us bear witness to in this world is first and foremost for the salvation of human beings, in time and space. All that this and other Synodal texts would bring, will assuredly find a way into their daily lives so they may experience that their Church is really "a mystery of salvation," that is, a sign for this plan, and a means through which it materializes and develops in the environment where they were called upon to live in.

36. If the legal boundaries of the Maronite Church is the Antiochene Patriarchal Domain which nowadays includes the region of the Middle East in general, it has been willed for Mount Lebanon, and thereafter Lebanon in its present borders, which is a part of that domain, to enfold the majority of Maronites ever since the Maronite Antiochene Patriarchate moved in, from the 10th century until this very day.²⁴ However, the Maronite presence is no longer limited to the Antiochene Patriarchal Domain, but, went beyond it, extending rapidly and astonishingly to become a worldwide presence. This expansion was the result of the movements of emigration and dislodgement that forced Maronites and others, from the second half of the nineteenth century up to the present, to leave their homeland and take up residence in other host countries, which soon after have granted them citizenship.

37. This phenomenon of emigration evoked a series of central queries concerning the relationship between the Church and her environment on the one hand, and the way to preserve the unity of the Maronite Church in the diversity of her presence around the world, on the other. After a long period of confusion and disorientation, the Maronite Church realizes, day by day, that her new state of affairs will undoubtedly lead her to a new Pentecost, if her sons and daughters can learn to listen, just like Mary and the Apostles, to the whispers of the Spirit who

24. Concerning the transfer of the Patriarchate to Lebanon, refer to Stephen Doueihy's, *Tareekh al-Azmina* (History of the Times), a study by Abbot Boutros Fahed, the series *Al-Khizana at-Tareekhia* (Historical Chest), 3, Lahad Khater Publications, Beirut, pp. 50-51 (no date). In saying that, we do not mean that the arrival of the Maronites in Lebanon goes back to this date. Coastal Lebanon, or what used to be known as Coastal Phoenicia, had known Christianity since the Apostolic Era, whereas the people of Mount Lebanon converted from paganism to Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries, as it seems, through preaching campaigns planned and guided by Ibrahim Al-Korashi (Abraham of Cyrrhus), (who was a disciple of Saint Maron), Saint John Chrysostom (+407) and Simon Stylite (+457). It is normal that the Christians of the Lebanese Coast and Mountain had divided, like all other Christians in the Antiochene context, between "Jacobites" (Syrian Orthodox), "Melkites" (Greek Orthodox) and Maronites because of the theological conflicts and ecclesiastical discords, between the fifth and eighth centuries.

brings them together and aids them in proclaiming the Good News anywhere they settle. Through the power and support of the Spirit they will find the appropriate means to fulfill their mission, inspired by their unique identity and by their faithfulness to its spirit within the new societies where they now reside. Maronites, clergy and laity, realize that the reality of the expansion detracts from their unity if they do not reinforce their ties to their mother Church in the Patriarchal Domain where the essential elements of their identity were crystallized. Their unity is also made manifest by the preservation of their ascetic character and their liturgy that sustains the faith and spirituality of their Church. The text of “the worldwide expansion of the Maronite Church” presented a number of practical suggestions meant to strengthen the unity of our Church in her diversity. We hope these suggestions may be favorably received in the course of our Synodal journey.

38. Regarding the link between the majority of the Maronites of the Patriarchal Domain and Lebanon, the land and the heritage is considered, the distinctive mission and call of our Mother Church throughout her long history becomes clear. In this land characterized by its remarkable pluralism, whether on the Christian level or the Muslim level, our Maronite Church along with others in agreement, strove to be the bearer of a mission centered on the human being, thus that human being may be this mission which was inspired from her apostolic faith. In most cases, that mission was an uprising for the sake of building a society that believes in human dignity, safeguards its right to religious and cultural diversity as a testimony of freedom, and the upholding of its basic political rights. This historical endeavor was crowned by the proclamation of the state of Greater Lebanon in 1920, which soon after became an independent republic in 1943. Patriarch Elias Hoyek played a pioneering role in this respect. The Maronite Patriarchate has never wished for Lebanon to be a “Christian country,” rather, a homeland for all its people, where Christians and Muslims live together with equal rights and mutual respect. Perhaps the most sincere expression concerning the true Lebanese identity was that launched by Pope John Paul II when he said, “Lebanon is more than a country. It is a mission of freedom and a model of pluralism for the East as it is for the West.”²⁵ It is neither an exaggeration nor a boast to say that the Maronite Patriarchate has a pioneering role in this pluralistic nation to be a mission. As Lebanon-the Mission is being elevated to that universal human level, our Synod urges all Maronites to continue witnessing to this mission in all their countries, in a close union with their Patriarchal Church that has embraced this mission, as a mother enfolds her child, hoping he will grow “to the extent of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

39. To bolster the mission of our Maronite Church in the context of the Gospel, our Synod calls upon all Maronite believers to renew their faith through the apostolic dimension of the Church. This requires all of us to constantly return to the deposit of faith of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ, as we have received it from the Apostles and the early Church and that we witness to it trustworthily within the environment God has willed us to settle. The apostolic mission of the Church pours forth from the “mystery of the plan of salvation” that is the work of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for our sake and for our salvation. Christ who rose from the dead said to his disciples when he appeared to them, as stated in the Gospel of John: *“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven*

25. Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter to All Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Situation in Lebanon* (September 7, 1989), Para. 6.

them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (John 20:21- 23). So, the disciples set out on their apostolic mission after receiving through Christ the Holy Spirit, God’s gift to them. The Spirit is “The Consoler,” “the Spirit of truth” who will teach them everything and remind them of all that Jesus Christ told them (John 14:15- 16, 25; 16:7). Christians are aware that through their baptism “in water and Spirit” (John 3:5), they are like the disciples, sent into the world, equipped with the power of the Spirit, reviver of the Church and her living memory, to carry to the world the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

40. The sons and daughters of our Maronite Church realize that their Antiochene roots pull them in a special way to the Good News which the city of God, Antioch, embraced, ever since Peter, the Head of the Apostles, along with Paul, Barnabas and other preachers, announced it. They have made this city a living model of reconciliation between the Jews and the Gentiles who are united in their faith in Jesus Christ, their Lord and Savior (Acts 15:22-35; Galatians, 2:11-21). It pleases our Synod to remind Maronites that the conversion of many Syrian and Lebanese to Christianity during the Roman era occurred at the hands of preachers motivated by apostolic zeal, and foremost among them were monks, disciples of Saint Maron of Cyrrhus, Saint John Chrysostom, and Simon Stylites.²⁶ This indicates that the monastic life of following Christ and dedicating oneself to him is apostolic *par excellence*. In this context, our Synod urges monks, nuns and laity in the parishes and in the ecclesiastical institutions to persevere in their apostolic testimony, through complete dedication in the service of the Gospel, in the light of the founding charisma specific to their congregations, orders and associations.

41. It is the destiny of our Maronite Church, as for the other Eastern Churches, to witness to the Apostolic deposit of faith in the midst of a religiously diverse society since the emergence of Islam at the beginning of the 7th century, which developed such that it became the religion of the overwhelming majority of peoples in the Middle East. Even though the number of Christians in this part of the globe has decreased, the Maronites have not forgotten that the Church, being apostolic, is not self-centered. Then, our Maronite Church strove diligently to always stay present in her environment, despite her small size and all sorts of obstacles she faces. She cooperated with her partners-in-destiny in laying the foundation of a pluralistic society; hence, Lebanon—the Mission, as mentioned above (No. 38). It is imperative that our Church persists in this mission in accordance with the requirements of today’s world. Indeed if our Church endeavored, through the synod, to shed light upon the elements of her identity, mission and message (file one), and to search for means of pastoral renewal aimed at people, structures and pastoral domains (file two), it is necessary for her to be present and effective, in today’s world. The domains of this presence are diverse and complementary. All Maronites are duty-bound in the name of Christ, each according to his gift, to commit themselves to involvement in the educational, cultural, political, economic, social and media affairs (file three texts), witnessing, through prophetic boldness, to the apostolic dimension of the Church, contributing to the progress of the human beings in their various societies.

26. To accompany this preaching effort, refer to Youhanna Sader’s book, *Croix et Symbole dans l’Art Maronite Antique* (Cross and Symbol in Ancient Maronite Art), collection *Héritage et Patrimoine*, n. 1, Ed. Dar Sader, Beirut, Lebanon, 1989, pp. 235-253: Conversion of the Lebanese through the Intercession of Saint Simon Stylites; and, pp. 261- 265: John Chrysostom and the mission into Phoenicia.

42. For the Maronite Church to carry out her mission in the spirit of the Gospel, our Synod prompts the bishops and their assistants to be alert, in various ways, toward enhancing the sense of the mission in her sons and daughters. That can be achieved through integrated pastoral formation based on the Holy Bible, the teachings of the Church in these fields, the heritage of their Church, and a thorough knowledge of the human environment they are addressing. Our Church knows that to the degree this mission spirit is embedded among her sons and daughters, so that they accompany Christ into deep water, throwing their nets at his command, then the kingdom of God will grow abundantly (Luke 5:1-11). With this faith, our Synod calls upon us not to limit our apostolic testimony to our own environment, but to go beyond it and reach out for new human horizons that lack the vivifying word of the Gospel. No doubt that this testimony deepens in the local Church, in as much as her sons and daughters carry the concern of “all.” Thus, they implement in deed what they otherwise live in mystery in every Eucharistic celebration whereby they enter into an organic and undetached communion with Jesus Christ, and with those near and far alike.

43. Indeed, if the attention of our Church is centered on providing for the needs of her sons and daughters in the Antiochene Domain and in the Countries of Expansion, she also finds solace in the dedication of some of her children, outside these domains, to apostolic work through Western apostolic associations with an international character. Our Synod looks on with satisfaction at all the initiatives undertaken in past years by some eparchies, monastic orders and lay apostolic movements that send priests, monks, nuns and laity, for limited periods of time, to some African and Asian countries, the Arab region and elsewhere so as to foster apostolic cooperation with local particular Churches. Our Synod urges the continuation of the journey in this direction in collaboration with “the Episcopal Commission for Apostolic Coordination among Churches” appointed by the Council of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon. While our Church emphasizes the organic relationship between openness to the mission and ecclesiastical renewal, it pleases our Synod to quote what was written in this respect in the Apostolic Exhortation *New Hope for Lebanon*: “*Many of the Fathers of the Synod, in addition to priests and monks, nuns and lay believers have also declared that one way for the renewal of the Church in Lebanon is through the openness of her mission ‘among the nations’, that she may collaborate in this work with other particular Churches in various parts of the world. Thrusting overseas with the mission cannot but renew the youthfulness of the Church and her internal fortitude*” (No. 82).

44. This Blessed Synod asserts that the apostolic mission of the Church is inseparable from her ecumenical mission. On the eve of his Passion, Christ prayed to his Father for his disciples before sending them out into the world that they may all be one, as he and the Father are One, so that the world may believe that he is sent from the Father to all people (John 17:21), and that he is the “way” that leads to Him (John 14:6). The relationship between the apostolicity of the Church and her unity is fundamental and organic such that the Christian message is weakened and constricted if it is not embraced and committed to by the Churches of God. These churches have a communion with each other based on unity in the apostolic faith, in the love of God, and in the love of neighbor, and these are the greatest commandments (Matthew 22:34-40). To the degree that fraternal love is the statute of the children of the New Covenant in word and deed, to that degree the ecclesiastical partnership between them deepened and the unity thrives, and so, they come to know God who is Love (1 John 4:7-8). His love for us was made manifest through

the Incarnation of His Son as expiation for our sins (1 John 4:9-10). Now that God has upheld us as witnesses to the Incarnation of His Son in this Eastern spot and in the Countries of Expansion, we are confident that our testimony is alive and efficacious in its environment, provided we are true stewards of that love.

45. With such faith our Maronite Church looks ahead today at the series of divisions that have split the Church of Christ, one and diverse like the Holy Trinity, in the East and the West, especially in the Patriarchal Domain from the fifth century till this very day. This Synodal text alludes to some of them (Refer to paragraphs 14-17, and 29-30).²⁷ With that same faith she also asserts that these divisions, no matter how high their walls may rise, will never detract from the mystery of her unity and of her uniqueness, as we declare in the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed: “We believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” Our Church gives thanks for the emergence of what is known as “The Ecumenical Movement,” considered by the Fathers of Vatican II as “an action of the Holy Spirit.” [Refer to Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree On Ecumenism), No. 1].²⁸ In his encyclical *That They may be One* (1995), Pope John Paul II reasserts that the Catholic Church has committed herself, at the said Council, “irrevocably to following the path of the ecumenical venture” (No. 3). The fifth pastoral letter: the Ecumenical Movement, issued in 1999 by the Council of Eastern Catholic Patriarchs faithfully echoed this same commitment.

46. The Maronite faithful find the seeds of their ecumenical mission in the essential elements that constitute their ecclesiastical identity and this text has sought to manifest it in its broad outline. Our Synod hopes that amongst themselves they will continue to seriously research these elements seeking to uncover the practical requirements on the missionary and ecumenical levels, always taking into consideration Catholic principles for the ecumenical work as brought forth in the documents of Vatican II, specifically, the Dogmatic Constitution: *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic constitution on the Church), and Decree: *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree On Ecumenism - Chapter 1). Since anxiety to regain the visible unity of the Church is of concern to the whole Church, shepherds and faithful, each according to his means (Refer to Decree on Ecumenism, No. 5), our Synod presents some suggestions and recommendations in this matter, hoping they would contribute to organizing and energizing ecumenical work in our Church, in the Patriarchal Domain and in the Countries of Expansion.

47. Based on this hope, our Synod urges all those in charge of faculties and institutes of theology and religious studies to devote special attention to ecumenical formation such that courses in theology and in religious studies may be given to priests, monks, nuns, and laity in an “ecumenical spirit,” training them to seriously search for the truth with objectivity and love for the Church, taking into consideration the most important results attained by the various

27. For more information on the history of these divisions, see the Fifth Pastoral Letter of the Council of Catholic Patriarchs *That They may be One* (Easter 1999), Chapter one: “Wealth in the Diversity of our Heritage, and the Tragedy of our Divisions”, Nos. 7-22, particularly Nos. 9 -16.

28. The “Ecumenical Movement” in its present form emerged in the midst of some Protestant missions in Africa and Asia, between the end of the 19th century and the beginnings of the 20th century. In its early beginnings, this movement focused on resolving theological and other controversies outstanding among these missionary groups which were a stumbling block to many of the new converts in those regions, as though Christ were divided (1 Corinthians 1: 10-17). This serves as confirmation of the close link existing between the Christian message and ecclesiastical unity.

ecumenical dialogues, formal and informal, especially those related to our Eastern Churches. These faculties and institutions are the ones that train those who will one day assume pastoral duties and provide catechism in the Church and those who will be selected to participate in local, regional, and international theological dialogue committees, after completing their educational formation.²⁹ In this regard, the synod acknowledges the distinctive ecumenical role performed by the Association of Theology Institutes in the Middle East (ATIME), which operates in coordination with the Middle East Council of Churches toward activating academic cooperation among deans, faculty and students. Because of the merit of this association, these institutions are transformed into oases of research and dialogue to reinforce the common concerns between churches and to resolve the subjects of contention among them. This leads to the crystallizing of a local common ecumenical vision contributing to cementing the Christian presence in the Middle East where “we shall be Christians together or not be.”³⁰

48. Our Synod also charges the stewards on the institutes of theological formation in our Church to continue working on reclaiming the common Antiochene heritage that it may be the primary source for the theological, spiritual, and liturgical renewal of our sons and daughters in the Patriarchal Domain and in the Countries of Expansion (Refer to Nos. 12-13 above). The Maronite faithful must not forget the positive ecumenical dimension tied to this renewal, as is indicated more than once in the Apostolic Exhortation: *A New Hope for Lebanon* (Nos. 42, 77, 86). The heritage in question is the common root among the Antiochene; they return to it as they would to the springheads. There is no doubt that in going back to that heritage, they contribute to the enriching of theological thought and this enriches the ecumenical dialogue on the local, regional and international levels between the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches and the Eastern Orthodox considering the distinctiveness and authenticity of that heritage. In relation to our Maronite Church and to the other Antiochene sister Churches, which are directly concerned with this dialogue in which they are partners, this matter is a blessed step towards reclaiming full communion between all the churches.

29. Concerning ecumenical formation, refer to: Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993), Part III, Nos. 55-91.

30. The expression between quotation marks is taken from the Common Pastoral Letter issued by the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the East entitled: *The Christian Presence in the East, Testimony and Mission* (1992), No. 39. Refer also to Part V of that letter: *Ecumenical Presence*, Nos. 39-44.

Epilogue

49. With this faith and this hope, our Synod exhorts Maronites, clergy, monks, nuns and laity, to use all available resources in seriously pursuing the quest for their ecclesiastical identity and for its essential components as presented in its broad outline in this text. In fact, the more attention they give to this issue, the clearer becomes their calling and their mission in the Patriarchal Domain and in the Countries of Expansion. Thus, they would witness more faithfully to Christ according to the gifts of their own Church and contribute to the furtherance of his kingdom wherever they dwell. At the onset of this third millennium, our Synod asserts that the identity of our Church, its calling and its mission are, like the Church, the body of Christ, in a process of growth, interaction, and purification until she reaches her perfection in Christ at the end of time. Christ is the head of this body, and the foundation of our ecclesiastical identity. He is what the Book of Revelation states: “the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation: 1:8; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13). As we invoke the Holy Spirit to accompany us on our Synodal journey, we place our Maronite Church under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, temple of the Holy Spirit, and icon of the Church. Through her intercession, the intercession of the Maronite saints and martyrs and all the just and the righteous, we will grow in holiness, both as individuals and as communities. Only through holiness will our Church attain her maturity.

TEXT RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION MECHANISMS

SUBJECT	RECOMMENDATION	MECHANISM
<p>1. Revival of the Antiochene Syriac Heritage.</p>	<p>1. The Maronites belong to the Antiochene Syriac heritage in which the rest of the Antiochene churches and the Syriac family of churches participate in, a heritage for the Universal Church. Accordingly, the synod calls for continued attention to the revival of this heritage in its theological, spiritual and liturgical dimensions, presenting it in a new attire made available to Maronites wherever they may dwell.</p>	<p>1.a.: Maronite universities, and especially their faculties of theology, are to embrace this project in conformity to the recommendations of the Apostolic Exhortation <i>New Hope for Lebanon</i> (Nos. 42, 77, and 86), and in cooperation with other universities and the specialized individuals in the other Antiochene churches in Lebanon and the countries of the expansion. This is accomplished:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Firstly, through a scientific research of this heritage and its promulgation and translation;</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Secondly, through the incorporation of this heritage in the educational curricula of the faculties of theology.</p> <p>1b.: Maronite monastic orders and eparchies are to strive to dedicate whomever exhibits promising signs of educational competence to specialize in this field.</p>
<p>2. Producing a Book on the History of the Maronites.</p>	<p>2. Since knowledge of ecclesiastical history is one of the fundamentals of authentic pastoral renewal, and since our Maronite Church up till today is lacking its own history book in which to present events and essential constants in a form all Maronites agree on, the synod recommends that serious effort be expended to produce such a book in a scientific, simplified and attractive form to be within reach of Maronites in the Patriarchal Domain and the Countries of Expansion; thus, it would be a prelude to a common and “ecumenical” edition with the rest of the Antiochene relating the history of the Antiochene See.</p>	<p>2. The Patriarchate, in cooperation with Maronite universities in Lebanon and the Eparchies of the Expansion, moves to appoint a committee composed of specialists in ecclesiastical history in general and Maronite history in particular, whose mission is to author the history of the Maronites and to promulgate it in many languages.</p>

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3. Fostering Communion in the Patriarchal Church.	3. In the light of the concept of communion and the theology of the Patriarchal Church, the synod urges reinforcement of the Episcopate Synodal practice between the patriarch and the bishops, on the one hand, and activation of mutual relations between the Maronite monastic orders, and the Patriarchal See and the eparchies, on the other.	3. Organizing seminars to discuss the theology of the Patriarchal Church, with regard to the Episcopate Synodal System (Refer to Text 5). With regard to relations between the Maronite monastic orders, and the Patriarchal See and the eparchies, it is a must to support the function of the Patriarchal Curia to coordinate between the bishops and the monastic orders (Refer to Text 8).
4. Ecumenical Commitment.	4. In view of the importance of ecumenical commitment in strengthening Christian presence in Lebanon and the Middle East in the spirit of the Gospel and the service of man, and in view of the unique position of the Maronite Church in the Antiochene family and her full partnership with the Roman Apostolic See, the synod recommends fostering this commitment on all spiritual, theological, pastoral and social levels.	4. This commitment is manifested through: 4a.: Operating under the direction of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Rome), activating the role of the Episcopal committees for ecumenical relations. 4b.: Effective participation in the work of the Council of Middle Eastern churches and its activities, and the Association of Theological Colleges and Institutes in the Middle East. 4c.: Contributing along with the experts in the preparation of ecumenical catechetical books and promulgating them as the need dictates. 4d.: Working with other churches to crystallize a common pastoral policy especially in the domain of mixed marriages between Christians, in the light of the Ash-Shurfa Agreement (1966), such that this does not contradict with Catholic ecumenical principles. 4e.: Arranging common spiritual and biblical seminars in parishes and among the apostolic organizations. 4f.: Cooperation at the level of social witnessing.

SUBJECT	RECOMMENDATION	MECHANISM
5. Commitment to the Mission.	<p>5. Since the missionary dimension is a constituent of our Christian faith, and openness to the mission is an element of local ecclesiastical renewal, the synod recommends the fostering of initiatives already undertaken by eparchies, monastic orders and lay apostolic movements, through dispatching priests, monks, nuns and laity to some African and Asian countries and those in the Arab region and elsewhere, for the purpose of realizing missionary cooperation with the local particular churches.</p>	<p>5a.: Coordination in this domain with “the Episcopal Committee for Missionary Cooperation between Churches”, of the Council of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon.</p> <p>5b.: Incorporation of Missionary Theology as a subject in the curricula of faculties of theology.</p> <p>5c.: Formation of priests, monks, nuns and lay persons on the missionary dimension in the Church.</p>