



## The Holy See

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***COMMON DECLARATION OF POPE JOHN PAUL II  
AND THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH  
HIS HOLINESS MORAN MAR IGNATIUS ZAKKA I IWAS***

1. His Holiness John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, kneel down with full humility in front of the exalted and extolled Heavenly Throne of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks for this glorious opportunity which has been granted them to meet together in His love in order to strengthen further the relationship between their two sister Churches, the Church of Rome and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch - the relationship already excellent through the joint initiative of Their Holinesses of blessed memory Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mar Ignatius Jacob III.
2. Their Holinesses Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Zakka I wish solemnly to widen the horizon of their brotherhood and affirm herewith the terms of the deep spiritual communion which already unites them and the prelates, clergy and faithful of both their Churches, to consolidate these ties of Faith, Hope and Love, and to advance in finding a wholly common ecclesial life.
3. First of all, Their Holinesses confess the faith of their two Churches, formulated by the Nicene Council of 325 A. D. and generally known as "the Nicene Creed". The confusions and schisms that occurred between their Churches in the later centuries, they realize today, in no way affect or touch the substance of their faith, since these arose only because of differences in terminology and culture and in the various formulae adopted by different theological schools to express the same matter. Accordingly, we find today no real basis for the sad divisions and schisms that subsequently arose between us concerning the doctrine of Incarnation. In words and life we confess the true doctrine concerning Christ our Lord, notwithstanding the differences in interpretation of such a doctrine which arose at the time of the Council of Chalcedon.
4. Hence we wish to reaffirm solemnly our profession of common faith in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mar Ignatius Jacob III did in 1971. They

denied that there was any difference in the faith they confessed in the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become truly man. In our turn we confess that He became incarnate for us, taking to himself a real body with a rational soul. He shared our humanity in all things except sin. We confess that our Lord and our God, our Saviour and the King of all, Jesus Christ, is perfect God as to His divinity and perfect man as to His humanity. In Him His divinity is united to His humanity. This union is real, perfect, without blending or mingling, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without the least separation. He who is God eternal and indivisible, became visible in the flesh and took the form of servant. In him are united, in a real, perfect indivisible and inseparable way, divinity and humanity, and in Him all their properties are present and active.

5. Having the same conception of Christ, we confess also the same conception of His mystery. Incarnate, dead and risen again, our Lord, God and Saviour, has conquered sin and death. Through him during the time between Pentecost and the Second Coming, the period which is also the last phase of time, it is given to man to experience the new creation, the kingdom of God, the transforming ferment (*Matth. 13, 33*) already present in our midst. For this God has chosen a new people, His holy Church which is the body of Christ. Through the Word and through the Sacraments the Holy Spirit acts in the Church to call everybody and make them members of this Body of Christ. Those who believe are baptized in the Holy Spirit in the name of the Holy Trinity to form one body and through the Holy Sacrament of the anointing of Confirmation their faith is perfected and strengthened by the same Spirit.

6. Sacramental life finds in the Holy Eucharist its fulfilment and its summit, in such a way that it is through the Eucharist that the Church most profoundly realizes and reveals its nature. Through the Holy Eucharist the event of Christ's Pasch expands throughout the Church. Through Holy Baptism and Confirmation, indeed, the members of Christ are anointed by the Holy Spirit, grafted on to Christ; and through the Holy Eucharist the Church becomes what she is destined to be through Baptism and Confirmation. By communion with the body and blood of Christ the faithful grow in that mysterious divinization which by the Holy Spirit makes them dwell in the Son as children of the Father.

7. The other Sacraments, which the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch hold together in one and the same succession of Apostolic ministry, i. e. Holy Orders, Matrimony, Reconciliation of penitents and Anointing of the Sick, are ordered to that celebration of the Holy Eucharist which is the centre of sacramental life and the chief visible expression of ecclesial communion. This communion of Christians with each other and of local Churches united around their lawful Bishops is realized in the gathered community which confesses the same faith, which reaches forward in hope of the world to come and in expectation of the Saviour's return and is anointed by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in it with charity that never fails.

8. Since it is the chief expression of Christian unity between the faithful and between Bishops and priests, the Holy Eucharist cannot yet be concelebrated by us. Such celebration supposes a

complete identity of faith such as does not yet exist between us. Certain questions, in fact, still need to be resolved touching the Lord's will for His Church, as also the doctrinal implications and canonical details of the traditions proper to our communities which have been too long separated.

9. Our identity in faith, though not yet complete, entitles us to envisage collaboration between our Churches in pastoral care, in situations which nowadays are frequent both because of the dispersion of our faithful throughout the world and because of the precarious conditions of these difficult times. It is not rare, in fact, for our faithful to find access to a priest of their own Church materially or morally impossible. Anxious to meet their needs and with their spiritual benefit in mind, we authorize them in such cases to ask for the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick from lawful priests of either of our two sister Churches, when they need them. It would be a logical corollary of collaboration in pastoral care to cooperate in priestly formation and theological education. Bishops are encouraged to promote sharing of facilities for theological education where they judge it to be advisable. While doing this we do not forget that we must still do all in our power to achieve the full visible communion between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and ceaselessly implore our Lord to grant us that unity which alone will enable us to give to the world a fully unanimous Gospel witness.

10. Thanking the Lord who has allowed us to meet and enjoy the consolation of the faith we hold in common (*Rom. 1, 12*) and to proclaim before the world the mystery of the Person of the Word incarnate and of His saving work, the unshakeable foundation of that common faith, we pledge ourselves solemnly to do all that in us lies to remove the last obstacles still hindering full communion between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, so that with one heart and voice we may preach the word: "The True Light that enlightens every man" and "that all who believe in His name may become the children of God" (*Jo. 1, 9-12*).

*Rome, 23 June 1984.*

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