

## Between Orthodoxy and Catholicism

I feel sad to tell you that the relations between our Church and the Catholic Church are now in a dilemma and that they are paused on the level of the international mixed committee for the dialogue between the two Churches. This committee met between 9 and 19 July in a region next to Baltimore in the United States and 46 delegates attended from around the world (Father Michel Najm from the Archdiocese of New York represented the Antiochian Church). The topic of the meeting was to examine the unity movement (with Rome) from the aspect of ecclesiastic theology and canon law. However, this meeting failed and the participants didn't reach an agreement because the Orthodox still refused the existence of a theological basis for the existence of Catholics that have Byzantine rituals.

They discussed deep topics with theological and canonic forms that are related to Catholic Christians who come from Orthodox origins. Therefore, no mutual statement resulted from the meeting as before and the members will only send reports to their Churches about the possibility of overcoming the difficulties that block the dialogue. Nevertheless, the mutual committee expressed its hope to continue this quest and dialogue hoping that it would help to bring back the communion between the two Churches. In addition to the discussions, the delegates participated in prayers that were held in the Latin Church and in the Greek Orthodox Church in Baltimore.

The dialogue on this high level became complicated since 1990 when new Eastern Catholics appeared in Western Ukraine and Romania (After the Communist Regime closed their Churches). Also, Russian Orthodox Christians felt that Catholicism is being practiced in Russia – via Latin missionaries – and that it was snatching their people. The latest document on this issue appeared in a meeting of the international committee that was held at Balamand in July 1993. In Balamand, the process of joining Rome as a way for unity was refused. There is another path for the unity of the West and the East. The document spoke about the notion of “Sister Churches”. However, some Churches, especially the Greek Church and the Greek Catholic Church in Romania, refused this notion. Finally, the “Faith teaching” council in Vatican issued in 30 June a decision that refused this notion and this decision was signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and was approved by the Pope.

Regardless of this dilemma, the Orthodox representatives expressed their will to continue the dialogue. I have a feeling that the Balamand document was enough and there was no need to add to it another document. It was obvious for us that each addition or adjustment made to the Balamand text would make the issue of Eastern Catholics more complicated. Rome gave us in Balamand more than we

expected by confessing that establishing Eastern Catholic Churches was a doctrinal and historical mistake. We didn't accept the legitimacy of these Churches but we respected their existence and freedom. Canonically, they are a part of the Church of Rome. From this aspect, we deal with the Sacraments of these Churches.

It is normal, while looking at the dialogues of Churches, for every side of us to see that these Churches are raising only one problematic. They are considered as one block although, administratively, they are not. They are considered as one phenomenon in Eastern Europe or in the diaspora. However, some of these Churches have stopped their snatching of believers in a notable and direct way. Also some of them have a brotherly feeling towards us.

It is obvious that an obstacle was created, which isn't only a psychological one, because of the appearance of these Churches. I feel that our awareness and the ecumenical spirit that have penetrated several places are able to stop the process of "snatching". Our spiritual renaissance and theirs have proved in some countries – such as ours – that we can cooperate in theological scientific production and in other ways without having a sacramental participation with each other.

Other issues, some that are old and others that are new, have expanded the hole between us. The next official meeting won't be sooner than two years. How can we continue this mutual strive after the appearance of this obstacle in Baltimore? Only God knows. We pray for Him to let us overcome the barriers.

Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon