UNIATISM, METHOD OF UNION OF THE PAST, AND THE PRESENT SEARCH FOR FULL COMMUNION*

Balamand (Lebanon), June 23rd, 1993

Introduction

1. At the request of the Orthodox Churches, the normal progression of the theological dialogue with the Catholic Church has been set aside so that immediate attention might be given to the question which is called "uniatism".
2. With regard to the method which has been called "uniatism", it was stated at Freising (June 1990) that "we reject it as method for the search for unity because it is opposed to the common tradition of our Churches".
3. Concerning the Oriental Catholic Churches, it is clear that they, as part of the Catholic Communion, have the right to exist and to act in answer to the spiritual needs of their faithful.
4. The document prepared at Ariccia by the joint coordinating committee (June 1991) and finished at Balamand (June 1993) states what is our method in the present search for full communion, thus giving the reason for excluding "uniatism" as a method.
5. This document is composed of two parts:
Ecclesiological principles andPractical rules.

Ecclesiological principles

6. The division between the Churches of the East and of the West has never quelled the desire for unity wished by Christ. Rather this situation, which is contrary to the nature of the Church, has often been for many the occasion to become more deeply conscious of the need to achieve this unity, so as to be faithful to the Lord's commandment.
7. In the course of the centuries various attempts were made to re-establish unity. They sought to achieve this end through different ways, at times conciliar, according to the political, historical, theological and spiritual situation of each period. Unfortunately, none of these efforts succeeded in re-establishing full communion between the Church of the West and the Church of the East, and at times even made oppositions more acute.
8. In the course of the last four centuries, in various parts of the East, initiatives were taken within certain Churches and impelled by outside elements, to restore communion between the Church of the East and the Church of the West. These initiatives led to the union of certain communities with the See of Rome and brought with them, as a consequence, the breaking of communion with their Mother Churches of the East. This took place not without the interference of extraecclesial interests. In this way Oriental Catholic Churches came into being. And so a situation was created which has become a source of conflicts and of suffering in the first instance for the Orthodox but also for Catholics.
9. Whatever may have been the intention and the authenticity of the desire to be faithful to the commandment of Christ: "that all may be one" expressed in these partial unions with the See of Rome, it must be recognized that the reestablishment of unity between the Church of the East and the Church of the West was not achieved and that the division remains, embittered by these attempts.
10. The situation thus created resulted in fact in tensions and oppositions.
Progressively, in the decades which followed these unions, missionary activity tended to include among its priorities the effort to convert other Christians, individually or in groups, so as "to bring them back" to one's own Church. In order to legitimize this tendency, a source of proselytism, the Catholic Church developed the theological vision according to which she presented herself as the only one to whom salvation was entrusted. As a reaction, the Orthodox Church, in turn, came to accept the same vision according to which only in her could salvation be found. To assure the salvation of "the separated brethren" it even happened that Christians were rebaptized and that certain requirements of the religious freedom of persons and of their act of faith were forgotten. This perspective was one to which that period showed little sensitivity.
11. On the other hand certain civil authorities made attempts to bring back Oriental Catholics to the Church of their Fathers. To achieve this end they did not hesitate, when the occasion was given, to use unacceptable means.
12. Because of the way in which Catholics and Orthodox once again consider each other in their relationship to the mystery of the Church and discover each other once again as Sister Churches, this form of "missionary apostolate" described above, and which has been called "uniatism", can no longer be accepted either as a method to be followed nor as a model of the unity our Churches are seeking.

13. In fact, especially since the panorthodox Conferences and the Second Vatican Council, the re- discovery and the giving again of proper value to the Church as communion, both on the part of Orthodox and of Catholics, has radically altered perspectives and thus attitudes. On each side it is recognized that what Christ has entrusted to his Church - profession of apostolic faith, participation in the same sacraments, above all the one priesthood celebrating the one sacrifice of Christ, the apostolic succession of bishops - cannot be considered the exclusive property of one of our Churches. In this context, it is clear that any rebaptism must be avoided.
14. It is in this perspective that the Catholic Churches and the Orthodox Churches recognize each other as Sister Churches, responsible together for maintaining the Church of God in fidelity to the divine purpose, most especially in what concerns unity. According to the words of Pope John Paul II, the ecumenical endeavour of the Sister Churches of East and West, grounded in dialogue and prayer, is the search for perfect and total communion which is neither absorption nor fusion but a meeting in truth and love (cf. Slavorum Apostoli, n. 27).
15. While the inviolable freedom of persons and their obligation to follow the requirements of their conscience remain secure, in the search for re-establishing unity there is no question of conversion of people from one Church to the other in order to ensure their salvation. There is a question of achieving together the will of Christ for his own and the design of God for his Church by means of a common quest by the Churches for a full accord on the content of the faith and its implications. This effort is being carried on in the current theological dialogue. The present document is a necessary stage in this dialogue.
16. The Oriental Catholic Churches who have desired to re-establish full communion with the See of Rome and have remained faithful to it, have the rights and obligations which are connected with this communion. The principles determining their attitude towards Orthodox Churches are those which have been stated by the Second Vatican Council and have been put into practice by the Popes who have clarified the practical consequences flowing from these principles in various documents published since then. These Churches, then, should be inserted, on both local and universal levels, into the dialogue of love, in mutual respect and reciprocal trust found once again, and enter into the theological dialogue, with all its practical implications.
17. In this atmosphere, the considerations already presented and the practical guidelines which follow, insofar as they will be effectively received and faithfully observed, are such as to lead to a just and definitive solution to the difficulties which these Oriental Catholic Churches present to the Orthodox Church.
18. Towards this end, Pope Paul VI affirmed in his address at the Phanar in July 1967: "It is on the heads of the Churches, of their hierarchy, that the obligation rests to guide the Churches along the way that leads to finding full communion again. They ought to do this by recognizing and respecting each other as pastors of that part of the flock of Christ entrusted to them, by taking care for the cohesion and growth of the people of God, and avoiding everything that could scatter it or cause confusion in its ranks" (Tomos Agapis, n. 172). In this spirit Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I together stated clearly: "We reject every form of proselytism, every attitude which would be or could be perceived to be a lack of respect" (December 7th, 1987).

Practical rules
19. Mutual respect between the Churches which find themselves in difficult situations will increase appreciably in the measure that they will observe the following practical rules.
20. These rules will not resolve the problems which are worrying us unless each of the parties concerned has a will to pardon, based on the Gospel and, within the context of a constant effort for renewal, accompanied by the unceasing desire to seek the full communion which existed for more than a thousand years between our Churches. It is here that the dialogue of love must be present with a continually renewed intensity and perseverance which alone can overcome reciprocal lack of understanding and which is the necessary climate for deepening the theological dialogue that will permit arriving at full communion.
21. The first step to take is to put an end to everything that can foment division, contempt and hatred between the Churches. For this the authorities of the Catholic Church will assist the Oriental Catholic Churches and their communities so that they themselves may prepare full communion between Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The authorities of the Orthodox Church will act in a similar manner towards their faithful. In this way it will be possible to take care of the extremely complex situation that has been created in Eastern Europe, at the same time in charity and in justice, both as regards Catholics and Orthodox.
22. Pastoral activity in the Catholic Church, Latin as well as Oriental, no longer aims at having the faithful of one Church pass over to the other; that is to say, it no longer aims at proselytizing among the Orthodox. It aims at answering the spiritual needs of its own faithful and it has no desire for expansion at the expense of the Orthodox Church. Within these perspectives, so that there will be no longer place for mistrust and suspicion, it is necessary that there be reciprocal exchanges of information about various pastoral projects and that thus cooperation between bishops and all those with responsibilities in our Churches, can be set in motion and develop.
23. The history of the relations between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Catholic Churches has been marked by persecutions and sufferings. Whatever may have been these sufferings and their causes, they do

not justify any triumphalism; no one can glorify in them or draw an argument from them to accuse or disparage the other Church. God alone knows his own witnesses. Whatever may have been the past, it must be left to the mercy of God, and all the energies of the Churches should be directed towards obtaining that the present and the future conform better to the will of Christ for his own.

24. It will also be necessary - and this on the part of both Churches - that the bishops and all those with pastoral responsibilities in them scrupulously respect the religious liberty of the faithful. These, in turn, must be able to express freely their opinion by being consulted and by organizing themselves to this end. In fact, religious liberty requires that, particularly in situations of conflict, the faithful are able to express their opinion and to decide without pressure from outside if they wish to be in communion either with the Orthodox Church or with the Catholic Church. Religious freedom would be violated when, under the cover of financial assistance, the faithful of one Church would be attracted to the other, by promises, for example, of education and material benefits that may be lacking in their own Church. In this context, it will be necessary that social assistance, as well as every form of philanthropic activity be organized with common agreement so as to avoid creating new suspicions.

25. Furthermore, the necessary respect for christian freedom - one of the most precious gifts received from Christ - should not become an occasion for undertaking a pastoral project which may also involve the faithful of other Churches, without previous consultation with the pastors of these Churches. Not only should every form of pressure, of any kind whatsoever, be excluded, but respect for consciences, motivated by an authentic exigency of faith, is one of the principles guiding the pastoral concern of those responsible in the two Churches and should be the object of their common reflection (cf. Gal 5, 13).

26. That is why it is necessary to seek and to engage in an open dialogue, which in the first place should be between those who have responsibilities for the Churches at the local level. Those in charge of the communities concerned should create joint local commissions or make effective those which already exist, for finding solutions to concrete problems and seeing that these solutions are applied in truth and love, in justice and peace. If agreement cannot be reached on the local level, the question should be brought to mixed commissions established by higher authorities.

27. Suspicion would disappear more easily if the two parties were to condemn violence wherever communities of one Church use it against communities of a Sister Church. As requested by His Holiness Pope John Paul II in his letter of May 31st, 1991, it is necessary that all violence and every kind of pressure be absolutely avoided in order that freedom of conscience be respected. It is the task of those in charge of communities to assist their faithful to deepen their loyalty towards their own Church and towards its traditions and to teach them to avoid not only violence, be that physical, verbal or moral, but also all that could lead to contempt for other Christians and to a counter-witness, completely ignoring the work of salvation which is reconciliation in Christ.

28. Faith in sacramental reality implies a respect for the liturgical celebrations of the other Church. The use of violence to occupy a place of worship contradicts this conviction. On the contrary, this conviction sometimes requires that the celebration of other Churches should be made easier by putting at their disposal, by common agreement, one's own church for alternate celebration at different times in the same building. Still more, the evangelical ethos requires that statements or manifestations which are likely to perpetuate a state of conflict and hinder the dialogue be avoided. Does not St. Paul exhort us to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us, for the glory of God (Rom 15:7)?

29. Bishops and priests have the duty before God to respect the authority which the Holy Spirit has given to the bishops and priests of the other Church and for that reason to avoid interfering in the spiritual life of the faithful of that Church. When cooperation becomes necessary for the good of the faithful, it is then required that those responsible to an agreement among themselves, establish for this mutual assistance clear principles which are known to all, and act subsequently with frankness, clarity, and with respect for the sacramental discipline of the other Church.

In this context, to avoid all misunderstanding and to develop confidence between the two Churches, it is necessary that Catholic and Orthodox bishops of the same territory consult with each other before establishing Catholic pastoral projects which imply the creation of new structures in regions which traditionally form part of the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church, in view to avoid parallel pastoral activities which would risk rapidly degenerating into rivalry or even conflicts.

30. To pave the way for future relations between the two Churches, passing beyond the outdated ecclesiology of return to the Catholic Church connected with the problem which is the object of this document, special attention will be given to the preparation of future priests and of all those who, in any way, are involved in an apostolic activity carried on in a place where the other Church traditionally has its roots. Their education should be objectively positive with respect of the other Church. First of all, everyone should be informed of the apostolic succession of the other Church and the authenticity of its sacramental life. One should also offer all a correct and comprehensive knowledge of history aiming at a historiography of the two Churches which is in agreement and even may be common. In this way, the dissipation of prejudices will be helped, and the use of

history in a polemical manner will be avoided. This presentation will lead to an awareness that faults leading to separation belong to both sides, leaving deep wounds on each side.

31. The admonition of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor 6:1-7) will be recalled. It recommends that Christians resolve their differences through fraternal dialogue, thus avoiding recourse to the intervention of the civil authorities for a practical solution to the problems which arise between Churches or local communities. This applies particularly to the possession or return of ecclesiastical property. These solutions should not be based only on past situations or rely solely on general juridical principles, but they must also take into account the complexity of present realities and local circumstances.

32. It is in this spirit that it will be possible to meet in common the task of re-evangelization of our secularized world. Efforts will also be made to give objective news to the mass-media especially to the religious press in order to avoid tendentious and misleading information.

33. It is necessary that the Churches come together in order to express gratitude and respect towards all, known and unknown - bishops, priests or faithful, Orthodox, Catholic whether Oriental or Latin - who suffered, confessed their faith, witnessed their fidelity to the Church, and, in general, towards all Christians, without discrimination, who underwent persecutions. Their sufferings call us to unity and, on our part, to give common witness in response to the prayer of Christ "that all may be one, so that the world may believe" (John 17,21).

34. The International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, at its plenary meeting in Balamand, strongly recommends that these practical rules be put into practice by our Churches, including the Oriental Catholic Churches who are called to take part in this dialogue which should be carried on in the serene atmosphere necessary for its progress, towards the re-establishment of full communion.

35. By excluding for the future all proselytism and all desire for expansion by Catholics at the expense of the Orthodox Church, the commission hopes that it has overcome the obstacles which impelled certain autocephalous Churches to suspend their participation in the theological dialogue and that the Orthodox Church will be able to find itself altogether again for continuing the theological work already so happily begun.

(*) The text was originally drafted in French and translated into English during the meeting.