

ACT OF UNION OF 1911

Arnold H. Mathew unwisely and unfortunately severed relations with the Utrecht Union. This action on his part has resulted in a multiplicity of church organizations. Desperate for recognition from a major catholic-orthodox body, he petitioned and was received into the Syrian Orthodox Communion under Patriarch Meletios of Antioch in 1911. Item #1 is the statement submitted by Bishop Mathew. Item #2 is the official response from the Patriarch of Antioch (Syrian).

#1 Statement of Faith submitted by Bishop Mathew.

1. The Way of Salvation. Eternal Salvation is promised to mankind only through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and upon condition of obedience to the teaching of the Gospel, which requires Faith, Hope, and Charity, and the due observance of the ordinances of the Orthodox and Catholic religion.

2. Faith, Hope and Charity. Faith is a virtue infused by God, whereby man accepts, and believes without doubting, whatever God has revealed in the Church concerning true religion.

Hope is a virtue infused by God, and following upon Faith; by it man puts his entire trust and confidence in the goodness and mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, and looks for the fulfillment of the Divine promises made to those who obey the Gospel.

Charity is a virtue infused by God, and likewise consequent upon Faith, whereby man, loving God above all things for His own sake, and his neighbor as himself for God's sake, yields up his will to a joyful obedience to the revealed will of God in the Church.

3. The Creed. The Catholic Church has set forth the principle doctrines of the Christian Faith in 12 articles of the Creed, as follows:

I believe in One God, the Father, The Almighty, maker of the heaven and earth, and all that is seen and unseen.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered died and was buried. On the third day he rose again in the fulfillment of scriptures, he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his Kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son the Spirit is worshipped and glorified, and has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one Holy Catholic and Apostolic church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life H of the world to come. Amen.

This sacred Creed is sufficient for the establishment of the Truth, inasmuch as it explicitly teaches the perfect doctrine of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

4. The Sacraments. The fundamental ordinances of the Gospel, instituted by Jesus Christ as a special means of conveying Divine grace and influence to the souls of men, which are commonly called Mysteries or Sacraments, are seven in number, namely, Baptism, Confirmation (Chrismation), the Holy Eucharist, Holy Orders, Matrimony, Penance, and Unction.

Baptism is the first Sacrament of the Gospel, administered by three-fold immersion in or affusion with water, with the words, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." It admits the recipient into the Church, bestows upon him the forgiveness of sins, original and actual, through the Blood of Christ, and causes in him a spiritual change called Regeneration. Without valid Baptism no other Sacrament can be validly received.

Confirmation, or Chrismation, is a Sacrament in which the baptized person, on being anointed with Sacred Chrism consecrated by the Bishops of the Church, with the imposition of hands, receives the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Ghost to strengthen him in the grace which he received at Baptism, making him a strong and perfect Christian and a good soldier of Christ.

The Holy Eucharist is a Sacrament in which, under the appearances of bread and wine, the real and actual Body and Blood of Christ are given and received for the remission of sins, the increase of Divine grace, and the reward of everlasting life. After the prayer of Invocation of the Holy Ghost in the Liturgy, the bread and wine are entirely converted into the living Body and Blood of Christ by an actual change of being, to which the philosophical terms of Transubstantiation and Transmutation are rightly applied. The celebration of this Mystery or Sacrament, commonly called the Mass, constitutes the chief act of Christian worship, being a sacrificial Memorial or re-Presentation of our Lord's death. It is not a repetition of the Sacrifice offered once for all upon Calvary, but is a perpetuation of that Sacrifice by the Church on earth, as our Lord also perpetually offers it in heaven. It is a true and propitiatory Sacrifice, which is offered alike for the living and for the dead.

Holy Order is a Sacrament in which the Holy Ghost, through the laying-on of hands of the Bishops, consecrates and ordains the pastors and ministers of the Church, and imparts to them special grace to administer the Sacraments, to forgive sins, and to feed the flock of Christ.

Matrimony is a Sacrament in which the voluntary union of husband and wife is sanctified to become an image of the union of Christ and His Church; and grace is imparted to them to fulfill the duties of their estate and its great responsibilities, both to each other and to their children.

Penance is a Sacrament in which the Holy Ghost bestows the forgiveness of sins, by the ministry of the Priest, upon those who, having sinned after Baptism, confess their sins with true repentance; and grace is given to amend their lives thereafter.

Unction is a Sacrament in which the Priests of the Church anoint the sick with oil, for the healing of the infirmities of their souls, and if it should please God those of their bodies also.

The efficacy of the Sacraments depends upon the promise and appointment of God; howbeit they benefit only those who receive them worthily with faith, and with due preparation and disposition of mind.

5. Holy Scripture. The Scriptures are writings inspired by God, and given to the Church for her instruction and edification. The Church is therefore the custodian and the only Divinely appointed interpreter of Holy Scripture.

6. Tradition. The Apostolic and Ecclesiastical Traditions received from the seven General Councils and the early Fathers of the Church may not be rejected, but are to be received and obeyed as being both agreeable to Holy Scripture and to that Authority with which Christ endowed His Church. Matters of discipline and ceremonial do not rank on the same level with matters of Faith or Morals, but may be altered from time to time and from place to place by the Authority of the Church, according as the welfare and greater devotion of the faithful may be furthered thereby.

7. The Communion of Saints. There is a Communion of Saints in the Providence of God, wherein the souls of the righteous of all ages are united with Christ in the bond of faith and love. Wherefore it is pleasing to God, and profitable to humanity, to honour the Saints and to invoke them in prayer; and also to pray for the faithful departed.

8. Religious Symbols. The Relics and representations of Saints are worthy of honour, as are also all other religious emblems; that our minds may be encouraged to devotion and to imitation of the deeds of the just. Honour shown to such objects is purely relative, and in no way implies a confusion of the symbol with the thing signified.

9. Rites and Ceremonies. It is the duty of all Christians to join in the worship of the Church, especially in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in accordance with our Lord's express command; and to conform to the ceremonies prescribed by Holy Tradition for the greater dignity of that Sacrifice and for the edification of the faithful.

10. The Moral Law. All Christians are bound to observe the Moral Law contained in the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, developed with greater strictness in the New, founded upon the law of nature and charity, and defining our duty to God and to man. The laws of the Church are also to be obeyed, as proceeding from that Authority which Christ has committed to her for the instruction and salvation of His people.

11. The Monastic Estate. The monastic life, duly regulated according to the laws of the Church, is a salutary institution in strict accord with the Holy Scriptures; and is fully of profit to them who, after being carefully tried and examined, make full proof of their calling thereto.

ORGANIC ARTICLES

1. Head of the Church. The Foundation, Head and Supreme Pastor and Bishop of the Church is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, from whom all Bishops and Pastors derive their spiritual powers and jurisdiction.

2. Obedience. By the law and institution of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel, all Christians owe obedience and submission in spiritual things to them who have rule and authority within the Church.

3. Apostolic Succession. The only lawful successors of the Apostles are the Orthodox and Catholic Bishops, united by profession of the self-same belief, participation in the same Sacraments, and mutual recognition and intercommunion. The Bishops of the Church, being true successors of the Apostles, are by Divine right and appointment the rulers of the Church.

In virtue of this appointment, each individual Bishop is supreme and independent in that part of the Church which has been committed to his care, so long as he remains in Faith and Communion with the united company of Catholic Bishops, who cannot exclude any from the Church save only them who stray from the path of virtue or err in Faith.

By virtue of this same Divine appointment, the supreme Authority over the whole Church on earth belongs to the collective Orthodox and Catholic Episcopate. They alone form the highest tribunal in spiritual matters, from whose united judgment there can be no appeal; so that it is unlawful for any single Bishop, or any smaller group of Bishops apart from them, or for any secular power or state, to usurp this Authority, or for any individual Christian to substitute his own private judgment for that interpretation of Scripture or Authority which is approved by the Church.

4. Church Authority. The collective body of the Orthodox Catholic Episcopate, united by profession of the Faith, by the Sacraments, and by mutual recognition and actual intercommunion, is the source and depository of all order, authority and jurisdiction in the Church, and is the center of visible Catholic unity; so that no Pope, Patriarch or Bishop, or any number of Bishops separated from this united body can possess any authority or jurisdiction whatsoever. The authority of this collective body is equally binding, however it may be expressed: whether by a General Council or by the regular and ordinary consultation and agreement of the Bishops them-selves. It is an act of schism to appeal from the known judgment of the Orthodox and Catholic Episcopate, however it may have been ascertained; or to appeal from any dogmatic decree of any General Council even though such appeal be to a future Council. For the Episcopate, being a continuation of the Apostolate, is clearly a Divine institution, and its authority is founded in Divine right. But General councils are not of themselves of direct Divine appointment; and so the Episcopate having clearly the Scriptural promise of Divine guidance into all Truth, cannot be hampered in the exercise of its authority by the necessity of assembling a General Council, which may obviously be rendered impossible through natural circumstances.

There have been seven General Councils only, which are recognized by the whole of Catholic Christendom, held respectively in Nic³a (A.D. 325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople (553), Constantinople (680), and Nicea (787).

At no other Councils was the entire body of the Orthodox and Catholic Episcopate representatively assembled; and the decrees and pronouncements of no others must of themselves be accepted as binding upon the consciences of the faithful.

The Authority of the Church can never be in abeyance, even though a General Council cannot be assembled. It is equally to be submitted to and obeyed in whatever way it may be exercised, and although it may be exercised only through the ordinary administration of their respective jurisdictions by individual Bishops.

5. Hierarchy. All Patriarchs, Archbishops and Metropolitans (that is to say, all Bishops exercising authority over other Bishops) owe that authority solely to the appointment or general consent of the Orthodox and Catholic Episcopate; nor can they ever cease from owing obedience to the collective body of the Episcopate in all matters concerning Faith and Morals.

6. The Five Patriarchates. There are five Patriarchates, which ought to be united and form the supreme authority in the administration of the Holy Catholic Church. These are Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople. Unfortunately, owing to disputes and differences on the one hand and to the lust for power on the other, the Patriarchs are not at present in Communion; and the welfare of Christendom is jeopardized by their disedifying quarrels, which we pray may soon have an end.

(NB - Other Patriarchates have been legally erected in addition to these.)

#2 Text of the official letter of reception.

Colleague and brother in Jesus Christ, with open arms in the love of the Saviour, I receive you among us, and I accept your oath of fidelity to His Beatitude the Orthodox Patriarch and his Holy Synod of Antioch, since those who hold our Faith and wish to be united with us have never been prevented from joining us. Praying God to bless you, and not only you but all those who come to us with you, we bless you in the name of His Beatitude the Patriarch and of the Holy Synod of Antioch.

Your Colleague and Brother in Jesus Christ,

ÉGERASSIMOS MESSARRA,
Metropolitan of Beirut (5 Aug. 1911)