

Chapter 1 – Preparation for the Council

A – At the Stage of the Ante-preparatory Commission

On January 25, 1959, Pope John XXIII announced the convocation of the Second Vatican Council. On May 17, the Feast of Pentecost, the pope appointed an ante-preparatory commission, with Domenico Cardinal Tardini as president. The latter hastened to ask, on the following June 18th, for “the advice, counsel, and wishes of the future Fathers of the Council... for the preparation of the problems to be examined... with full freedom and frankness... concerning the questions which are susceptible of being treated at the future council.”

Instead of replying individually, the members of the Melkite Greek Catholic hierarchy preferred to give a collective response. Thus the patriarch called them to a synod held at Ain-Traz on August 24 to 29, 1959. It was during this synod, almost exclusively devoted to the affairs of the Council, that the Melkite hierarchy set forth its suggestions for the Council in a collective letter to Cardinal Tardini, dated August 29, 1959, and signed by the patriarch, fifteen bishops, and four superiors general. The Melkite Greek hierarchy would continue to act in this manner: synodically and collegially. This letter accompanied the sending of two notes which we publish below in their entirety: one deals with “Reconciliation with the Orthodox,” the other contains the suggestions by the hierarchy on the “Questions to be Submitted to the Council.”

Note on Reconciliation with the Orthodox

This note of the Melkite Greek Catholic hierarchy was sent on August 29, 1959, to Cardinal Tardini in his capacity as president of the Ante-preparatory Commission of the Council. It already indicates the tremendous importance that the Melkite Greek Catholic hierarchy intends to give to the ecumenical problem, which, in its eyes, takes precedence over all the other problems of the Council.

Our Melkite Greek Catholic Church believes that its principal mission is to work for Christian unity, and more particularly, to reconcile our Orthodox brethren to the Holy See of Rome.

Therefore we believe that among the labors of the forthcoming Council those that should claim our greatest attention and that of the Council are precisely those which are meant to prepare for the restoration of Christian unity. It is, moreover, on this point that we believe that our contribution to the Council will be most appreciable, for, in spite of our small numbers, we represent, within the Catholicism of our time, the great Eastern apostolic Christianity in its origins. Unfortunately, the greater part of this Eastern Christianity is today still outside the Roman communion.

It is an undeniable fact, evidenced by long experience, that since the separation between the East and the West, and especially during the past two centuries, the attitude of the authorities of the Western Catholic Church, in spite of the purity of their intentions and their personal sanctity, has only exacerbated the estrangement of the Orthodox, deepened the gulf of the schism, and hardened positions. This is seldom realized in the West, where there is a tendency to accuse the Easterners of being at fault. But we Greek Catholics, who feel and endure all the repercussions of the conflict between the Latins and the Orthodox, owe it to ourselves to bring the matter to the attention of the Council, frankly indicating the principal cause of the trouble and proposing the appropriate remedies for it.

1. The principal cause of the trouble, it seems to us, is the tendency of the majority of the Latin theologians and canonists to concentrate all the authority conferred by Christ to his Church in the sole person of the supreme pontiff, making him the source of all power, and as a consequence giving excessively centralized and practically sovereign powers to the Roman Curia which acts in his name. With this perspective, it is difficult for them to see in the apostolic power of patriarchs and bishops anything other than a pure and simple delegation of the supreme authority of the pope, limitable and revocable at will. Thus the pope, the father of Christians, has become, for that part of Christianity presently dissenting from his communion, a disfigured personage, accused by the non-Catholics of insatiable pride and human ambition, often repugnant, whatever may be his personal charm, his human qualities, and his eminent sanctity.

Canon law and ecclesiology influence each other in this sphere, and give birth to theses and governmental measures that are increasingly centralized, and which, in the light of the power of the pope – that is to say, in fact, of the Roman Curia – cause the disappearance of all other authority in the Church.

Therefore the first thing we must do is to resume and complete the work on this matter done by the First Vatican Council which was suspended in 1870. It had defined the powers of the supreme pontiff, but did not have the time to define the nature and the powers of the bishops. Now, the hierarchy instituted by our Lord rests on the Twelve, with the primacy of Peter. It is indispensable from the point of view of union with the Orthodox, and of the internal peace of Catholics as well, that the power of Peter be balanced by that of the Twelve.

From the dogmatic viewpoint, that, it seems to us, is the principal task to be accomplished by the Council.

Moreover, the coming Council must, we believe, henceforth put a rein on the excessive zeal which drives certain groups or certain individuals to campaign in the Church to have the pope pronounce more and more dogmatic definitions in matters that until now have been optional. The effect of this tendency has been to stir up in reaction a contrary doctrinal tendency among other Christians, alienating them still further from the possibility of union around the Holy See of Rome.

2. Creation of a Special Commission to Work for Church Unity – The task of preparation for this part of the Council certainly should be consigned to a special commission. At this stage it is essential to consider two points:

a) Composition - This commission must not be recruited, it seems to us, solely from among the theologians and canonists with the “centralizing tendency,” who dominate the bureaus of the Roman Curia and the pontifical universities, where, theoretically and practically, each one thinks that he is doing the right thing by outdoing the others with regard to the concentration of powers in the curia. This commission must also include persons of the other side, that is to say, persons who know the apostolic Christian mentality of the East, who understand its intuitions and recognize the extent to which they are good and just, persons who realize the impression that words and gestures of the Roman See can produce on the Christians of the East. Theologians of this latter category are not numerous, but, thank God, their numbers are increasing. If we were asked to name a few of them and to suggest that they be designated as members of the said commission, we would be happy to do so.

b) Orthodox Contacts – This commission must not restrict its labors to the speculative study of the powers of the bishops and their canonical formation. As a body or through some of its members, it must not fear to get in touch with representatives of Orthodoxy, prelates and knowledgeable theologians, who may even be officially designated by their hierarchy, to study these questions in truth and charity, to compare viewpoints which are often not opposed but rather complementary. Such contacts with the Orthodox are indispensable. By “Orthodox” we naturally mean the Orthodox of the patriarchates or of other autocephalous Churches, but nothing prevents conferring with the other Churches that call themselves Orthodox: the Armenians, the Copts, and the Syrians. Moreover, we know that their “Monophysitism,” or, in the case of the Assyrians, their “Nestorianism,” is increasingly considered to be merely verbal.

We insist on the necessity of quickly setting up the said commission for two reasons: Granted that meeting with the Orthodox is indispensable from the viewpoint of restoration of unity, the formation of this commission and its implementation to contact them seems to be the best method of entering into agreement with them, for it is evident from the first reactions that, under the present conditions of Christianity, there will be neither an invitation from the pope to the Orthodox to participate in the Council, nor any possible Orthodox response to such an invitation. There remains only the proposed recourse: a commission which will officially assure the necessary contacts.

Besides, we can hope that the services of this “commission” will be such that the Holy Father will decide to keep it in existence, even after the end of the Council, as a permanent institution for contact with the Separated Churches. It could even become one of the Roman Sacred Congregations, to which would be imparted the handling of everything relating to ecumenism and to the constant effort to reform, without prejudice to Catholic dogma, morality, or discipline, everything that is open to criticism in Catholic relations with other Christians, whether in words or in actions. Thus the Catholic Church will become, as is universally wished, the head of a true catholic ecumenism.

The primacy of Peter, the infallible primacy, is a great grace, a charism granted by God to His Church, not for the advantage of a few, nor of Catholics alone, but of all Christians, including Orthodox and Protestants. All these Christians have the right to profit from this charism. At the present time there are obstacles that prevent them from seeing and attaining to this charism, obstacles placed either by them or by us Catholics. For our part, we must begin by removing the obstacles that stem from us, without waiting for the others to get started. This work will be part of the functions of the proposed commission.

Questions to be Submitted to the Council

The following note, also sent to Cardinal Tardini by the Melkite Greek hierarchy on August 29, 1959, is titled: "Questions proposed by the patriarch, the bishops, and the superiors general of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church for possible submission to the council."

I. Dogmatic Questions

- 1) In view of progressively preparing for Christian unity, and in order to avoid depriving certain souls of the advantages of ecclesiastical communion, we propose that the Catholic Church relax its present legislation on the matter of "communicatio in sacris" in all cases where doing so would not necessarily involve the denial of Catholic truth or a scandal for Christians. On this subject we note that at the present time, and especially in our countries, what scandalizes the faithful is not so much the participation of Catholics in Orthodox ceremonies as their refusal to participate in them. We believe that it is not permissible to treat Christian "non-Catholics," above all if they are Orthodox, in the same fashion as we treat unbelieving "non-Catholics."
- 2) Certain movements, parties, or sections, concerning which the Church has formerly made pronouncements, have taken on new forms of a nature to deceive souls. Thus we consider it useful that the Church once more determine its position in their regard, so that the pastors of souls may be provided with the necessary official documents, brought suitably up-to-date. We are thinking in particular of the following doctrines and organizations: Communism, Freemasonry, racism, Nazism, Fascism, extremist capitalism, etc.
- 3) The teaching of philosophy and theology in our major seminaries and our ecclesiastical faculties must assign a more important place to the doctrines of the Fathers of the Church and to modern philosophical theories.

II. Pastoral questions

- 4) Our century is the victim of atheistic materialism, of an unbridled pursuit of pleasure, and of religious indifference. Children and young persons are nurtured in this spirit in irreligious secular or atheistic educational institutions; the working class is losing the spirit of faith and increasingly breaking away from the Church. Thus we should review the methods of our apostolate, to re-establish contact with young people and manual workers through religious education, or by Catholic Action, to which the Church should grant an official and canonical form, as well as by encouraging priestly vocations, or through the use of the press, motion pictures, radio, television, etc.
- 5) Our century suffers from a crisis of priestly vocations and the lack of missionaries, in particular in certain parts of the world, as in South America, Africa, and Asia. To remedy this state of things, would it not be opportune to restudy, in the light of the true interests of the Church and its expansion, especially in mission countries, the question of married

priests? The shock that this idea at first causes will perhaps be followed by a state of greater understanding. It would be also necessary to take effective measures to encourage priestly vocations and to guard against the moral isolation and material distress suffered by rural priests in particular.

III. Liturgical Questions

6) It is our hope that liturgical prayers and ceremonies while remaining as faithful as possible to the tradition of the Fathers, may evolve normally, like every expression of life, so as to be understood by all the faithful and lived by them. Certain rites need to be shortened and varied; others could usefully be reviewed with a view to the more exact expression of the truths that they contain. All should be celebrated in the language of the people. As for the Eastern Churches, however, this evolution should take place in a manner that will not accentuate the differences which separate us from our Orthodox brethren, and, if possible, be accomplished in concert with them.

IV. Questions of Discipline

7) Unification of the date of Pascha. The reform of the calendar ordered by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, which has not yet been adopted by the Eastern Churches not in union with Rome with respect to the date for Pascha, has had as a result that Christians in the East seldom celebrate together that "Great Feast," that memorial of the "Resurrection of Christ, foundation of our faith," that symbol of our unity. Thus, according to the ecclesiastical calendar for the next sixteen years, from 1960 to 1975, we shall have the joy of celebrating together only four times (1960, 1963, 1966, 1974); four times there will be a difference of 35 days (1964, 1967, 1970, 1975); the eight other times, the difference will be seven days.

In the West (Europe, America) and in the countries where Christians are primarily Catholic or Protestant (Africa, Asia, Oceania), there is little awareness of the importance of this problem. Throughout the East, however, and wherever there are Orthodox minorities, Christians suffer painfully from this situation, as much from the religious viewpoint as from the social viewpoint.

In fact, in all those countries, there is no strict compartmentalization between the various Christian communities; many families are mixed: numerous families have a Catholic branch and an Orthodox branch. All families maintain among themselves social relations of friendship, neighborliness, and business. In the East the feast of Pascha assumes a very particular importance, not only to the Christians but also to their Muslim neighbors, who, on this occasion come to visit them and to offer their felicitations. Think of how much pain the Christians feel on this occasion which should be in principle only a time of internal and external joy! Think of the sarcastic remarks of which the Christians are the object on the part of others: "While some raise Him," they say, "others bury Him"! Not all the people are scholars or cultivated persons to see in this calendar difference only a question of astronomical calculations. The Muslims see in it one of the irremediable defects of Christianity, dedicated to division. The majority of ordinary Christians see in it

an effect of the stubbornness and ill will of the ecclesiastical leaders. Each year the same catch phrases and the same complaints are stridently repeated.

More than ever, in the Arab East, Christians feel the need for unity, at least in externals, while waiting for a more complete and more permanent unity. This need for unification of the date of Pascha is so great that, when His Holiness Pope John XXIII announced his intention of convoking an ecumenical council, good Christian people of all confessions universally thought that this council would have as its principal aim the setting of a common date for the "Great Feast" of all Christians!

In the days of the League of Nations at Geneva, there were studies of various projects for calendar reform. What interests us is the date of Easter or Pascha. Among those projects there was one which proposed setting the date of Pascha as the second Sunday of April. This project received the adherence in principle of the Catholic Church, of Protestants, and of the Orthodox Churches. However, the political events of that epoch, notably the war of 1939-1945 and the disturbances that it brought to the world and which caused the League of Nations to disappear, have made the reform of the Paschal calendar disappear from view.

That is why we suggest the establishment at Rome of a small commission of a few specialists to study the question technically and to immediately make contacts with the Orthodox Churches on this matter. These contacts are absolutely necessary; they should be pursued with perseverance and charity until a conclusion is reached. They may well result in an agreement which could be put into force even before the meeting of the council.

8) We propose a revision of the Code of Eastern Canon Law, both those parts already published and those to be published in the future, before its definitive promulgation. This revision, in which the Eastern Churches themselves should be better represented and, above all, heard, would be carried on in the spirit of a greater fidelity to the authentic traditions of the Christian East, without excluding the advisability of making minor changes tending to simplify and mitigate the ancient law. We are thinking in particular of matrimonial law and of the need for our countries in the East to recognize the validity of mixed marriages contracted before Orthodox authority. This is a very important point on which our patriarchate and the bishops united in synod have frequently approached the Holy See of Rome, strengthening their propositions with factual arguments, which seem to them to be decisive.

9) The election of the sovereign pontiff should, it seems to us, have a broader base. To confirm the authentic catholicity of the Church, and given the centralizing powers that the pope ordinarily assumes in the Church as a whole, we propose that henceforth the Eastern patriarchs participate in his election. We would be pleased also to have this election carried out by a still larger number of electors, better representing all the Churches of the Catholic world.

10) Pontifical representation in the world, whether its character be diplomatic or simply religious, should be subjected to a serious revision, so as to avoid having the papal representatives transformed in fact into “superbishops” governing, in the name of the pope, the dioceses of the entire world. In selecting them, the choice should not be more or less reserved to those in a Christian nation to the detriment of the others. We would wish also that Easterners might be called to render such services to the Church.

11) We propose that the Holy See bring about a reform of the Roman Curia, leading to a clear-cut decentralization of powers and to a real catholicity (viz., international character) of those who compose it. Excessive and continuously growing centralization is one of the principal grievances of non-Catholics and of Catholics themselves against papal authority.

12) The General Council should, we believe, solemnly reaffirm the declarations of earlier councils and the formal promises of the popes relative to the rights and privileges of the Eastern Churches. Earlier councils and popes assured the Eastern Churches which would unite with the Roman Church that the rank that they occupy in the Church, the rights and privileges of their patriarchs and bishops, and the rite and discipline that belong to them would be respected and protected. It must not happen that these hierarchs should be rendered in fact illogical in their declarations and unfaithful to their promises. With such precedents, which cast doubt on the good faith of the Catholic party, it is not possible to hope to deal fruitfully on the subject of a return to catholic unity with our separated brethren. We think in particular of the following three points:

- a) The ranking of Eastern patriarchs in the Catholic hierarchy – This rank, as it was established in ecumenical councils and which the popes have promised to respect, places the Eastern patriarchs immediately after the Roman pontiff. Thus it is not permissible, out of respect for the authority of the ecumenical councils and for the formal promises of the popes, as well as for the very interests of the Catholic Church and for the efforts for the restoration of Christian unity, that all the cardinals and all the representatives of the Holy See of Rome, even if they are not legates *a latere*, and even if they are simple priests, should precede the Eastern patriarchs. The order of precedence in the Catholic Church should remain what it has always been: the Pope of Rome in first place, then in order the actual Eastern patriarchs, not the titular patriarchs of Constantinople, of Alexandria, of Antioch, and of Jerusalem.
- b) The powers of the Eastern patriarchs – The new Eastern canon law, promulgated by the Holy See of Rome, does not respect the prerogatives of the patriarchal institution, and submits the exercise of the majority of patriarchal powers to the humiliating and unnecessary prior or subsequent authorizations of the Roman Curia.
- c) The safeguarding of the Churches – The Holy See of Rome should take effective measures to prevent the latinization of the East by poorly-informed Western missionaries. Eastern Catholics should remain Eastern. Eastern Catholics are no less Catholic than their Latin brothers. It is not necessary to be Latin in order to be fully Catholic. The establishment of Latin ordinary jurisdictions whose goal is to sustain the latinization of the East must be forbidden. Such, for instance, is the

“Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem,” which is a real threat to the Christian East, and which should be suppressed. The Eastern Catholic Churches have as many, if not more, rights over the Holy Places as the Latin Church, rights which today are absolutely unrecognized by Latin authority. Moreover, Eastern Catholics dispersed over the world should be provided with pastors of their own rite, at all levels of the hierarchy, and in collaboration with local authority.

On these three points the bishops of our patriarchate have set forth their thoughts in detail in a synodal letter to Pope Pius XII, dated February 10, 1958, and in a synodal letter to Pope John XXIII, dated May 1, 1959.

13) Restoration of the institution of metropolitan. The role that the institution of patriarch plays in the East, should be played by the institution of metropolitan or primate in the West, in relation to the suffragan bishops of one province or of one country. This presupposes the restoration in the West of the institution of metropolitan, which for centuries has been reduced to the rank of an almost entirely honorary position. Thus at the head of a region or of a country there would be a centralizing function, intermediate between the authority of the pope and that of the bishops, a role which until now has in practice been carried out by the representatives of the pope, thereby contributing still more to the centralization of the Church.

14) Episcopal powers should be recognized and strengthened. In what concerns us, we are thinking of the power of bishops, which has always been recognized, to elect their patriarch, to elect their colleagues in the episcopacy, and to ordain the clerics of their dioceses, and to do these things without any hindrance from the Roman Curia.

15) The position of the priest in the Church should be re-evaluated, both spiritually and practically.

16) Clerical attire. It is time, we think, for clerical attire to conform better to the needs of life and of contemporary duties.

17) The discipline of fasting and abstinence, as well as the number of holy days of obligation and the way to observe them, should be revised. On these subjects there are too many divergences from one place to another. Fasting and abstinence are rarely observed. The abstention from work on Sunday and holy days of obligation can no longer be based on the outdated and sometimes inequitable distinction between servile works and those which are not.

18) The Western Church is inclined to legalism and to the organization of the Church as a human society. This mentality presents the difficulty of viewing the Church from an angle that is too exclusively human, as being like every other society of the world, whereas the Church is above all a spiritual and supernatural society, whose primary goal is not of this world. This mentality should be re-examined, as well as the legislation and the canonical institutions that it animates.

19) The need is felt to set forth solemnly the position of the laity in the Church: their role, their mission, their rights and duties, their participation in the apostolate, and, in particular, their collaboration in the material tasks of the Church. In other words, the Church should establish a theology of the laity, which can be drawn up from the papal documents published especially since Pope Pius XI.

Calling Upon Non-Roman Collaborators

Patriarch Maximos noticed that the members of the Ante-preparatory Commission were all chosen from among the officials of the Roman Curia. He saw in this a possible danger for the direction that the future Council might take. The East, in particular, was not at all represented. On August 11, 1959, the patriarch expressed his thoughts to John XXIII, with his customary frankness and courage.

Most Holy Father:

The consolation that I felt at the time of the long audience that I had the honor and the joy to have with Your Holiness on last May 23rd and also the spirit of supernatural comprehension of the problems of the Eastern Church which Your Holiness demonstrated, induce me to address to you with confidence and frankness these few lines that I believe necessary for the good of the Church in view of the forthcoming Council.

Your Holiness has deigned to name an Ante-preparatory Commission for the ecumenical council, composed of prominent ecclesiastics, whose eminence nobody can dispute from any point of view.

This commission has stated that it “will receive with a respect and veneration the opinions, advice, desires, and requests of the bishops and of all those who by right will be Fathers of the council...” We are all profoundly grateful to it for this, and the episcopal body of our Church will soon submit its ideas to the commission.

However, all the persons who compose this commission – permit me, Holiness, to say this humbly and simply – belong to the Roman Curia. The ideas that guide them follow a predetermined direction, toward an ever more closed centralization from which the Latin world itself is suffering, without anyone daring to talk about it for fear of being considered anti-Roman. As for the Eastern Church, it absolutely cannot live in this atmosphere. Thus the wall that separates the Eastern Church from the Western one is becoming thicker and thicker. The council will without doubt have great repercussions on the Western Catholic Church, but it runs the risk of not having any effect on the Eastern Church, which will not have been touched at all.

Would it not be appropriate and even necessary to have among the members of this Ante-preparatory Commission – and, for greater reason, of the Preparatory Commission that will succeed it – ecclesiastical persons who are profoundly Catholic and Roman, but at the same time open to the problems of the Eastern Church? Must the Eastern Church always remain a closed book for the Western Church? No successor to Saint Peter is better able to grasp these ideas than Your Holiness. Therefore I implore Your Holiness to break this ice that is over one thousand years old and to hear other voices than those of the Roman Curia, for which we otherwise have the greatest respect and consideration.

I entrust these humble lines to your heart as successor of Saint Peter, for whom the unity of the Church of Christ is the highest ideal.

B – At the Stage of the Preparatory Commissions

During the stage of those commissions which are properly called preparatory, it was at the Central Commission, above all, that the Melkite Greek Church had its greatest influence. Patriarch Maximos was named a member, as were all the other Eastern patriarchs. He made a great contribution. In spite of his age and the occupations of his high pastoral duties, at a profoundly troubled epoch in the history of the Arab Middle East, the patriarch took part personally at one of the meetings of this commission (January, 1962). He had to excuse himself from the other meetings, but he had obtained from the pope the favor of being represented by his secretary, so that his thought and that of his Church were always heard.

Further efforts were expended in the Eastern Commission, in which the Melkite Greek Catholic Church had three representatives: Archimandrite Neophytos Edelby, then secretary to the patriarch, Archimandrite Athanasius Hage, Superior General of the Basilian Chouerite Order, and Archimandrite Maurice Blondeel, Rector of the Melkite Greek Seminary of Saint Anne (White Fathers). A third field of action was provided by the Commission “on Bishops,” to which Kyr Philip Nabaa, Metropolitan of Beirut, made an important contribution.

All told, five Melkite Catholic Greek prelates participated directly in the preparatory commissions of the Council. However, these contributions, even when presented with the signature of one or the other, were in reality the fruit of multiple consultations and of close collaboration among the members of the hierarchy.

It is necessary to add here the name of a sixth Melkite Greek Catholic among the most eminent: the late Cardinal Gabriel Acacius Coussa, who died unexpectedly in July, 1962, on the eve of the opening of the Council. As Assessor of the Eastern Congregation, then as Cardinal, he collaborated with the works of the Eastern Commission and of the Central Commission. He would have been able to play a very important role at the Council. Providence decided otherwise.

In general, the interventions of the Melkite Greek Catholic prelates created a sensation. But, with speaking time strictly limited to ten minutes, they sought to present the essentials of their thought, sacrificing proofs and nuances. The notes they entrusted to the different preparatory commissions of the Council are more numerous and more fully developed. It is especially in them that one finds the underlying thought of the Melkite Greek Catholic hierarchy. Since they deal with quite varied questions, we have not chosen to group them all in this chapter devoted to the preparation for the Council. They will be found distributed, according to the order of the subjects, among all the chapters of this collection, interspersed with the interventions that are conciliar in the strict sense.

For a Permanent Roman Organization on Ecumenical Matters

What first drew the attention of Patriarch Maximos in this second stage of the preparation for the council was the absence, around the pope, of a permanent organization for ecumenical matters. For a council that had for one of its principal goals to prepare the path for union between the Churches, this lacuna was serious. Profiting from his first visit with John XXIII, on May 23, 1959, the patriarch sent him the following note, which already demonstrated the constant concern for ecumenism that the patriarch would bring to the council. This note doubtless played a part in the setting up of the "Secretariat for Christian Unity."

Here is a humble suggestion that I entrust to the great heart of His Holiness Pope John XXIII, supreme head of the universal Church. At the present time, when there is so much talk about ecumenism, would it not be advisable to have in the Catholic Church, which represents Christ on earth, a permanent institution to promote the union of the separated Churches, in accordance with the desires of our Lord? The reiterated appeals from time to time by the sovereign pontiffs seem to have had almost no effect. Even more, they seem at times to have produced a more pronounced stiffening against Rome.

Would it not be advisable, for example, to create a new congregation or a special Roman commission to deal with everything that concerns the relations with the Christian Churches that are not in union with the Holy See, and with everything that can promote progress towards union? That is a very serious question that seems to deserve the greatest attention.

In this congregation or commission there would be a high-ranking member of the Holy Office, of the Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Church, and a member of the Secretariat of State. Everything relating to ecumenism would be in the jurisdiction of this new institution. Within this institution the member representing the Holy Office would be free to make necessary dogmatic remarks, without his being able to take any measures against the persons subject to this institution, which for its part would have the right to act severely, if need be, whether *ex officio* or at the request of the Holy Office itself. Through this new creation hearts and horizons would be widened, and thus, it would seem, the first steps would be taken for effectively approaching our brothers separated from the center of Christian unity.

The Language of the Council

In collaborating in the preparations for the council, the patriarch was intrigued by the excessive importance that certain Roman groups gave to Latin. The patriarch saw in this notable drawbacks, relating to the very character of the council: was this a plenary Council of the Latin Church or something more? He first raised the subject with Archbishop Pericle Felici, then Secretary General of the Central Preparatory Commission. The letter is dated February 4, 1961.

Concerning the language to be employed in the forthcoming council, a number of high prelates have already declared to the press that only Latin would be authorized. It has even been specified that although the Fathers of the Council could use modern Latin for the deliberations, it was understood that for the publication of the Acts of the Council only classical Latin would be used.

On this subject, we wish to make a proposition. We agree that, for us also, classical Latin must be the language of the Acts of the Council. However, we suggest that for the speeches and the deliberations, in full session or in commissions, the Fathers should be able to freely use a living language of their own choice from among the four or five living languages most frequently employed today in international meetings. To this end, the organizers of the council will do well, it seems to us, to profit from the progress of modern technology: the speeches, submitted in advance, will be simultaneously heard in all the admitted languages, and the deliberations will likewise be translated and retransmitted by qualified interpreters.

The exclusive use of Latin presents, in fact, notable drawbacks: the great majority of the Fathers of the Council are not able to express easily, rapidly, and correctly in Latin the nuances of their thoughts, above all on matters of the modern apostolate, where the classical formulas render the thought only in an imperfect manner. It would not be proper, we think, that because of insufficient practice in Latin the majority of the Fathers should be reduced to remaining silent or to expressing themselves incorrectly and without nuances...

On May 17, 1961, the patriarch, moved by the evasive responses made to him, decided to write directly to Pope John XXIII on this question of the language of the council. Although these observations unfortunately were not accepted, they certainly had the merit of preparing for the future.

Holiness:

The simplicity and the freedom with which Your Holiness wishes that we express ourselves in addressing you on matters concerning the Second Vatican Council encourage me to submit to Your Holiness the following question regarding the language of the council.

On February 4, 1961, under No. 121313, I had the honor to address to His Excellency the Secretary General of the Central Preparatory Commission a letter containing a concrete proposition for the authorization of the Fathers of the Council to use, in addition to Latin, a few living languages, taking advantage of the progress of modern technology which facilitates the deliberations at international gatherings. In his response of February 13, 1961, Prot. N. 694 COM/1961, His Excellency Pericle Felici gave me the assurance that the question would be carefully studied and that the decisions adopted would be communicated to me.

Now I have just read in the press a note that has all the appearance of being at least a semi-official communiqué. It announces that, “an installation of simultaneous translation will be set up for the use of the official observers of the various non-Catholic Christian confessions who will attend the council, so that they may be able to follow the deliberations that take place in Latin.”

I am very happy with this initiative, for which the Technico-Organizational Commission should be congratulated. Nevertheless, I wonder why is it necessary that the said official observers and/or delegates should be favored more than the Fathers of the Council themselves? Is it that there can be a suspicion that the majority of these Fathers even those who use Latin in the performance of their liturgical ministry are not in a position to follow with ease discussions in the Latin language, and above all to participate appropriately in them? Will it thus be necessary that all the substantive activities of the council that are so far-reaching and so diverse be concentrated in the hands of a small number of specialists?

The council must without doubt have an official language and it is natural that this official language be Latin. Still, in addition to this official language, the bishops incapable of expressing themselves sufficiently well in that language should be able to express themselves in one of the languages recognized today as universal. Why is it necessary to exclude from the dialogue successors of the Apostles who have, by divine right, the qualifications to teach and govern and to reserve this right to the latinists, some of whom could not be successors of the Apostles?

The common sense that, in addition to so many other qualities, is a remarkable ornament of the spirit of Your Holiness will not allow that so serious and so just a criticism be made, now or in the future, of so important a council convoked by Your Holiness.

That is why, convinced as I am of being on this subject the spokesman for the great majority of the Fathers of the Council, I come to beg humbly and urgently Your Holiness to kindly give instructions to those in charge to put into practice the suggestions contained in my aforesaid letter of February 4, 1961, namely: 1) to authorize, in addition to Latin, the use in the council of a few other modern languages; 2) to install a system of simultaneous translation, not only for the use of the official non-Catholic observers, but also for the benefit of the Fathers of the Council...

Finally, on October 23, 1962, the patriarch, speaking to the council concerning the use of living languages in the liturgy, took advantage of the occasion to entreat for the use of living languages at the council, by means of simultaneous translations.

Concerning vernacular languages, may we be permitted to say a few more words.

How happy we would have been if we had been permitted to understand all that is being said in the council, by means of simultaneous translations, as is done in all the great international assemblies. We are not maligning anybody when we say that the exclusive use of Latin prevents us, and also prevents many others, from understanding questions that are often serious, on which we are required to render decisions. We of the East are not obliged to know Latin, but we have the right to pronounce judgment only when we understand what we are doing. The words of St. Paul, "How can anyone ...say 'Amen'... when he does not know what you are saying," applies to us. Moreover, we are required to place our signatures at the bottom of the acts of the council, and this can be done only with full knowledge and understanding of what we are doing. For us of the East, translation in one, or, even better, in two languages will be enough, and that is not so difficult.

We urgently beg the venerable president of the council to do what is necessary to accede to our legitimate request and thus permit us to perform human acts and not mechanical ones.

We address to him in advance our most sincere thanks.

Organization and Internal Regulation of the Council

From June 12 to June 22, 1961, the Central Commission held its first working session. The state of the health of the patriarch did not allow him to make the trip to Rome. He sent his opinion in writing, dated May 19, 1961. He replied to the questions, point by point. Here we publish the most noteworthy passages of his answer in regard to the agenda item, "Questions on the Manner of Holding the Council."

I. "In addition to the persons who must of right be summoned to the council, who should be admitted and by what right?"

The council is a general assembly of all the bishops of the Catholic Church, in communion with one another and with the Roman See, under the presidency of the Bishop of Rome. It is, in other words, the solemn assembly of the successors of the Apostles, under the presidency of the successor of Peter.

This concept, traditional in the East and in conformity with the practice of the first ecumenical councils, entails the following practical consequences:

- 1) All Catholic bishops, whether residential or titular, are members by right of the council. Episcopal consecration, in fact, and it alone, establishes them as successors of the Apostles. All who hold this title have deliberative votes.
- 2) It follows, therefore, that no priest or other cleric can by right be a member of the council, whatever his personal qualifications or the high position that he may occupy in the Church. In fact, from one viewpoint it is not ecclesiastical rank, knowledge, or ecclesiastical power which confers the status of successor of the Apostles, but episcopal ordination. From another viewpoint, it is not proper for the Church to change in this regard the constant and universal tradition of at least the first eight centuries its history on a point intimately linked to the foundations of the constitution of the Church.

There have in fact always been in the Church, in the first centuries as well as today, monks and priests who, because of their eminent theological doctrine or their exceptional apostolic activity have exercised in a practical way a greater influence on the destinies of the Church than a sizable number of bishops. Nevertheless, that has not appeared to the Fathers of the Church to be a sufficient reason to have these monks or priests sit in councils as *de iure* members.

As a result of this principle, no priest not invested with the episcopal dignity—even if he is a cardinal, or nuncio, or apostolic delegate—can be admitted as a member of the council. It is clear, however, that these high dignitaries should be able to be called to the council and to enjoy a deliberative voice in it. Thus we suggest that henceforth these dignitaries be invested with the episcopal character. It is the episcopal character, and it alone, and not the importance of the position that one occupies, that confers in the Church the standing as a successor of the Apostles and consequently constitutes the foundation of

all precedence. It seems to us that the Church must hold firmly to this criterion of the apostolic tradition.

3) It is nevertheless desirable and even necessary that there should be monks and priests not only in the preparatory commissions of the council but also as counselors in the course of its business. They constitute vital forces which the Church should utilize, but they can have only consultative voices.

4) On the other hand, the ancient tradition of the Church has admitted to councils clerics who were not bishops, but only as representatives of the Roman pontiff (*legates a latere*), the patriarchs, and of other bishops who were legitimately absent. As for these representatives, the ancient tradition granted them a deliberative voice, because they were seen as expressing opinions of their mandatories. Today, because of the volume of the matters to be treated and of the ease of communication, it may appear expedient or desirable not to admit these representatives (except those of the Roman pontiff), or to accord them only the right of being present and of signing the Acts in the names of their mandatories.

II. The Language of the Council

1) It is true that today Latin is the ecclesiastical and especially the liturgical language of the Latin Church, but it is false to say that Latin is the language of the Church, meaning by that the Church that is catholic and universal. This confusion between the Church and the Latin Church is very regrettable.

2) Since the council represents not only the Latin Church but the whole Church, it is not proper to consider the language of only one of the Churches that constitute it, albeit the principal one, as the only language of the council.

3) Moreover, from the historical aspect, Latin has not always been the language of councils, at least not the only language. Hence, we should not make the exclusive use of Latin at the council a question of a sacred principle, which would imply, if pushed to the extreme, the denial of the authentic catholicity of the Church. The question is purely practical. In other words, it concerns knowing what language it is proper to use so that the Fathers can speak and make themselves understood. This is not a question of an intangible principle or of prestige. It is a question of convenience. Even to express revealed truths, languages other than Latin have formerly served and can still serve. The Roman Church used Greek during the first three centuries. It is necessary above all to avoid making Latin a sort of untouchable dogma.

4) In all the questions that we have to consider, or the decisions that we have to make, we must always take into account the impression which we will make on those Christians who are not yet in union with the Holy See of Rome. We are not directly a “council of union,” but we are a “council preparing for union.” Let us then not assume attitudes or make decisions of principle which will rebuff them, drive them further away. They are perfectly capable of understanding the practical convenience and necessities in the use of

languages, but they would have every right to complain if we wished to impose on them, as an ecclesiastical principle, the use of the Latin language.

5) Having said this, we readily agree that today the most practical language for the council, when everything is considered, is Latin. The Acts of the council and all other official documents will be drawn up in Latin.

6) As far as the interventions of the Fathers, either in commission or in full session, are concerned, Latin will ordinarily be the language most frequently indicated. But we must provide equipment, like that in use today in international congresses, permitting the Fathers to express themselves in one of five or six of the most widely known languages of the world, with simultaneous translation into Latin and the other languages. We might propose the following languages: French, English, Italian, German, Spanish, and Portuguese. It is rare that any cultivated person, as the Fathers of the Council are, is unable to understand and speak fluently one or another of these languages. Thus the Fathers will not be reduced to the role of spectators or of listeners to speeches that have been more or less prepared in advance, giving a disproportionate advantage for the latinists over the pastors of souls and over other theologians who are not always accustomed to using Latin.

Invitation of Non-Catholics to the Council

A second meeting of the Central Commission was held from November 7 to 18, 1961. The patriarch was not able to take part personally. The agenda included, among other items, a series of questions concerning "the invitation of non-Catholics to the Council." It was only this last point that the patriarch developed in his reply of October 4, 1961.

1. Should observers from the Orthodox and Protestant Churches be invited to the council?

Yes, without any doubt. If the coming council were a council of union, in the fashion of that of Lyons in 1273 or of Florence in 1439, we would have wished that all the Orthodox bishops of the East would be convoked to the council, even before the proclamation of union. Since the forthcoming council will be above all "an internal act of the Catholic Church," the least that we can do is to invite the Orthodox Churches of the East and the Protestant Churches to be represented there by official observers, who must not be treated as journalists or simple spectators.

2. What qualifications should these observers have?

It is preferable, on the part of the Catholic Church, not to establish any qualification or requisite condition for these observers. The non-Catholic Churches themselves will decide which observers designated by them will represent them worthily. Their names will be provided to the authorities of the council, who should naturally agree in advance, as is the case for diplomatic representatives. As for the number of the observers, it seems preferable to leave this determination to the invited Churches themselves.

3. To what sessions should the observers be admitted?

It is difficult to reply to this question without knowing in advance how the council will be concretely organized.

At least it is possible to say that these observers should be admitted to as many sessions as possible, and not only to the general sessions, for then their role would consist of a merely ceremonial presence. They should also see the Fathers of the Council at work, whether in commissions or in private sessions, with or without theologians. The observers should not have the impression that they are being invited merely to cleverly-staged ceremonies. Besides, the Catholic Church has nothing to hide, and one can justifiably suppose that the possible discussions among the Fathers of the council will contain nothing that is not edifying. Even differences of opinion or of pastoral attitude will be very well understood by the observers.

We exclude from this general rule only the organizational meetings of subcommissions for drafting or for administration, which have no general interest for the observers.

Before and during the council, the Secretariat for Christian Unity should be the agent for liaison between the council and the observers. It can organize meetings, exchanges of

views, etc. It is in this sphere that the non-Catholics could express their viewpoints and obtain replies from qualified Catholic theologians.

4. What non-Catholic Churches should be invited?

Limiting ourselves to the Eastern Orthodox Churches, we say:

- a) The invitation must come from the Holy Father himself, and it must not be communicated to the press before it arrives in the hands of the recipients. It is fitting that the personal invitation of the Holy Father be delivered by hand by the representative of the Holy See in each area.
- b) The invitation must not be addressed to the Orthodox bishops individually, but to the head of the Church to which they belong. The Orthodox do not like to have the pope go over the heads of the highest authorities of their Church to address each bishop directly. Besides, the invitation is to be addressed to the particular Church as such, requesting that it send observers.
- c) The invitation should be addressed to all the Orthodox Churches, autocephalous or autonomous, in the persons of their respective heads: patriarchs, archbishops, or metropolitans. The guidelines on this matter could be what was done recently at the Pan-Orthodox Conference at Rhodes, or else an official request can be made to the Ecumenical Patriarch for the list of Orthodox Churches considered autocephalous or autonomous.

Remarks Concerning a New Formula for the Profession of Faith

The same session of November, 1961, was to study a new form for the Profession of Faith. The patriarch attended, and on November 28th made some remarks reflecting the Eastern viewpoint.

- 1) Concerning the addition of the “*Filioque*” – While professing the doctrine expressed by this word, this addition as such remains optional in the Eastern Catholic Churches, according to the declaration of the Council of Florence. A remark, appearing as a note, at the bottom of the text, could explain this. This could have an excellent effect on the attitudes of our Orthodox brethren.
- 2) Concerning bishops – I believe that it would be good to make more explicit the collegiate responsibility of the episcopate, in communion with the Roman pontiff and under his authority, in the general administration of the Church, according to whatever the forthcoming council may declare to complement the definition of the primacy and the infallibility of the Roman pontiff made at the First Vatican Council. For a complete view of things, that previous definition needs to be balanced by a more precise declaration of the nature and the powers of the episcopal body.
- 3) Concerning the “words of consecration” – The text of the profession of faith on this point should not be understood as excluding, in transubstantiation, the fulfilling action of the Holy Spirit, such as is traditionally expressed in Eastern liturgies by the prayer of epiclesis.
- 4) As to form – It would be better to state which are the points of the encyclicals *Pascendi* and *Humani generis* that are to be included in the profession of faith, rather than referring to these two encyclicals in a general way.

Patriarchal Letter on the Eve of the Council

When the patriarch was about to leave for the first session of the Council, he addressed to his Church a pastoral letter, dated September 30, 1962. In it he explained the mission of his Church at the Council and called upon the faithful to collaborate with it.

Glory always to God!

Maximos IV

by the grace of God Patriarch of Antioch and of all the East, of Alexandria and of Jerusalem,

to our dear Children, the Priests, the Religious, and all the Faithful of our Melkite Greek Catholic Church both in the East and in the Emigration.

Peace, Salvation, and Apostolic Benediction!

At the point of my departure for Rome, with most of our venerable brothers the bishops of our eparchies, to take part in the work of the Second Vatican Council, we wish, dear children, to address this letter to you to inform you about the mission to which we intend to consecrate our efforts.

A Church council is not an international congress in which states, nations, or other peoples are represented by delegates, with the view of participating in works or projects relating to scientific, literary, or political interests, or other lofty purposes, for the good of the members of the congress or that of human civilization in general. However noble the aims of these congresses may be, they are very different from those of councils convoked by the Holy Church, in which only the bishops of the Catholic world solemnly take part to testify concerning the truth of the revelation recorded in Holy Scripture and in the deposit of faith conserved in Christian Tradition, as well as to lay down the disciplinary regulations that the Church needs according to the varying requirements of the times to help Christians reach their eternal destiny in the most efficacious way.

The bishops united in the Council are thus not deputies charged with representing their eparchies, their patriarchates, their communities, their nations, or their own people. Neither are they counselors qualified to express their own private opinions before the council. They are the successors of the holy Apostles, to whom Christ entrusted the mission of preaching to the world and of baptizing the nations in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, promising to be with them always until the end of the world.

In this capacity, the bishop has a teaching, jurisdictional, and sanctifying power for the universal Church. A bishop, who in ordinary times is the head of a particular eparchy and whose power is restricted by the boundaries of this same eparchy, sits in the council as one of the successors of the Apostles, with universal jurisdiction over all Christians of the

entire world, bearing collective solicitude for all the Churches, in union with the successor of the leader of the Apostles, Peter, whom Christ established as the visible head to shepherd his flock.

The bishops of the council come from all the countries of the world. Each one thus represents the experience of the Christians of his region with respect to the understanding of Holy Scripture, fidelity to the apostolic tradition, practice of the spiritual life, the ordering of public prayer, the observance of fasts and holy days, and also the administration of the sacraments. In addition to that experience, each bishop knows the particular needs of his Church, in regard to a better knowledge of religion and a more faithful practice of the Christian virtues, as well as its needs for assuring the propagation of the word, and for overcoming the spiritual and moral dangers to which his faithful are exposed. Putting together this aggregate of diverse experiences and reactions, the bishops of the council define, in the light of Christ's teaching, what conforms to the true faith and what does not. They reaffirm sound morals, both public and private, and they disseminate evangelical principles throughout society. In all of this, they have at heart safeguarding the unity of spirit, and fulfilling the wish expressed by our Lord that all who believe in Him may be one, as He and the Father are one.

Such is the mission that is confided to us, as well as to your venerable bishops, at the council. Such are also the intentions of the souls of each one of us.

The Second Vatican Council presents some particular circumstances in comparison with councils that have preceded it. Among others, we must point out the fact that previous councils were most often assembled to clarify an obscure point of dogma or to reject a particular heresy or to condemn a sect. The council to which His Holiness Pope John XXIII has summoned us aims, in the first place, at pastoral action that proposes to eliminate everything that mars the Church and makes it appear outmoded in the light of the rapid evolution of humanity in various spheres of life. The Church will thus appear before the world as "glorious, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." In appearing thus to the world, the Church will have taken a great stride along the road toward the regrouping of Christians and will have drawn them closer to the unity that Christ desires.

The matters that will be treated at the council are extremely varied. We cannot give you even an elementary idea of these matters here. We only wish to inform you of the spirit with which we, patriarch and bishops, shall deal with these questions.

Each question in fact, can be treated under different aspects. Preparatory commissions, composed of eminent ecclesiastics, have considered all these aspects. At the council itself, other commissions will be designated to review them. What will be our attitude on all these questions?

The particular viewpoint that we shall use as a basis for our actions will be what bearing each of the proposed solutions might have on the problem of the union of the Churches.

This union is not the direct goal of the Second Vatican Council, but it is the ultimate and long-term goal.

The union of the Churches undoubtedly represents for a considerable number of bishops a serious and fundamental problem, but they perceive it only theoretically. For us, the schism is a wound that is always bleeding, that we feel at the greatest depth of our souls. The problem of the union of Churches is our greatest care, our primary concern, and the deepest desire of our hearts. It is the goal to which we stretch all our energies, and for which we wish to be the redemptive victim, so that it may be attained. It seems to us that working for the union of Churches is our reason for being and the fundamental mission which Providence has entrusted to us, individually and collectively. The Orthodox of the East and we constitute only one people, one family, one blood, one language, one mentality, one rite, and one history. Our religious and social problems are the same. We need to unite with them as much as they need to unite with us. Each of us nurtures a sincere love and a deep affection for the other, but each refrains from manifesting what we feel. The time has come for the two brothers to embrace one another at last after their long separation. The time has come for Christians to work to fulfill Christ's wish: "that they may be one."

For all these reasons, you understand, dear children, why we intend to consider all questions at the council in the light of their effectiveness in facilitating union. We have taken on ourselves the responsibility of representing at the council the true Eastern spirit, this spirit of apostolic tradition, which in itself brings forth sanctity that is just as eminent as that attained by the Catholic West, for in both cases holiness proceeds from the same wellspring, which is the Holy Gospel and the Savior's cross.

On this occasion, We wish to reaffirm here what we have expressed many times before, in various circumstances, officially and privately, orally and in writing, which is to say that we are Catholics adhering to the extreme limit to the Roman Church and the primacy of His Holiness the sovereign pontiff, as we are at that same time Easterners, attached to the extreme limit to the traditions of the Christian East and of the holy Fathers, and also to the rights, privileges, discipline, customs, and rites of the Eastern Church.

We ask you, dear children, to support us in this attitude by your prayers and fervent supplications to the Father of Lights so that He may help us accomplish this duty that is incumbent on us. Pray, pray without ceasing, in spite of the news that perhaps might deceive you. Our sins are great and numerous; the favor for which we implore is very great; thus We must never cease asking insistently and humbly, with absolute trust in God's mercies and the intercession of the "never-failing Protectress of Christians," the All-Holy Mother of God.

During our absence, which may be prolonged and repeated, we have appointed Archbishop Pierre-Kamel Medawar, our auxiliary, to replace us in all spiritual and temporal matters. Archbishop Medawar, as you all know, is worthy of this trust.

Finally, we expect of your piety, dear children, that you will take it to heart to preserve the spirit of charity and harmony among yourselves and in your relations with your fellow citizens, and obey dutifully the vicars who have been set up in each eparchy of our community to administer its spiritual and temporal affairs. By doing so, you will help us to devote ourselves entirely to the work of the council, and you will prove by deeds that you are a “chosen people,” worthy of praise.

In conclusion, we renew our paternal greetings and our Apostolic Blessing.

Given at our patriarchal residence at Ain-Traz,

September 30, 1962.

MAXIMOS IV

Patriarch of Antioch and of All-the-East,
of Alexandria and of Jerusalem