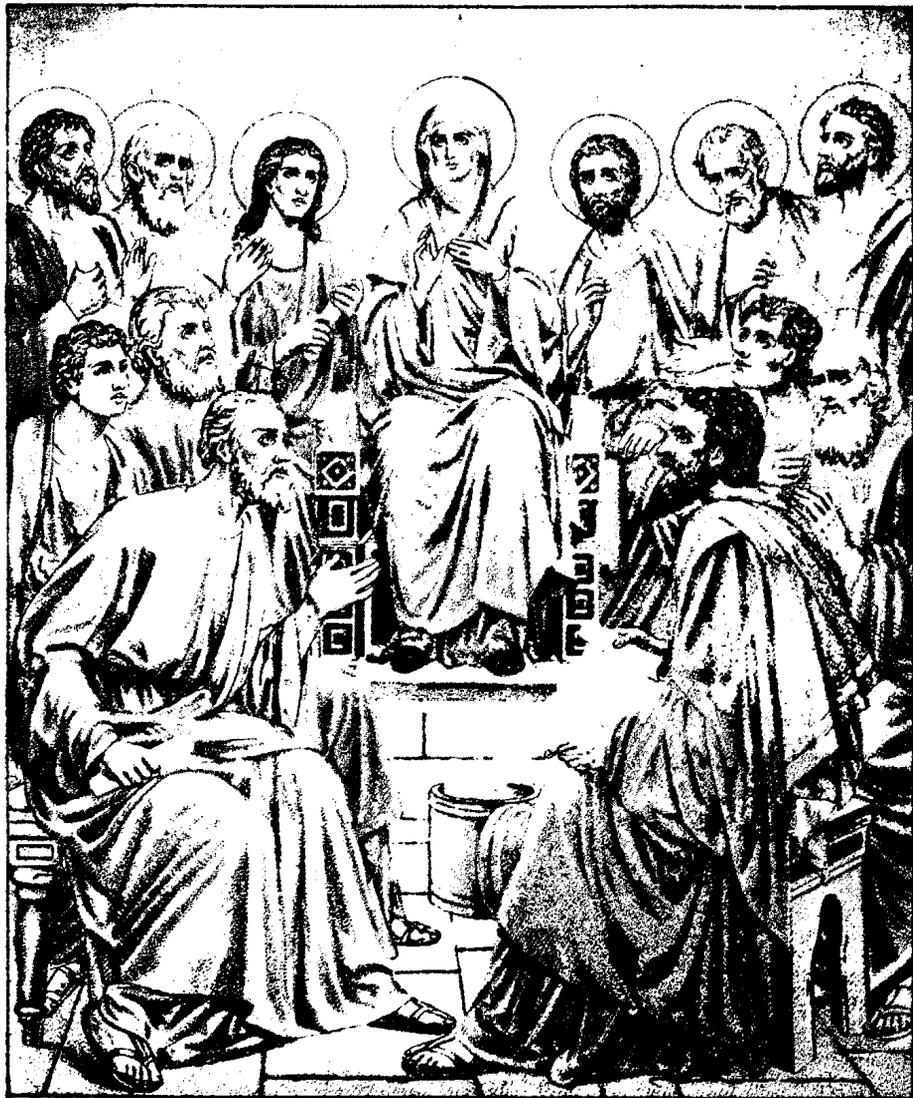


FATHER MATTA EL-MESKEEN

Spiritual Father of the Monastery of St. Macarius

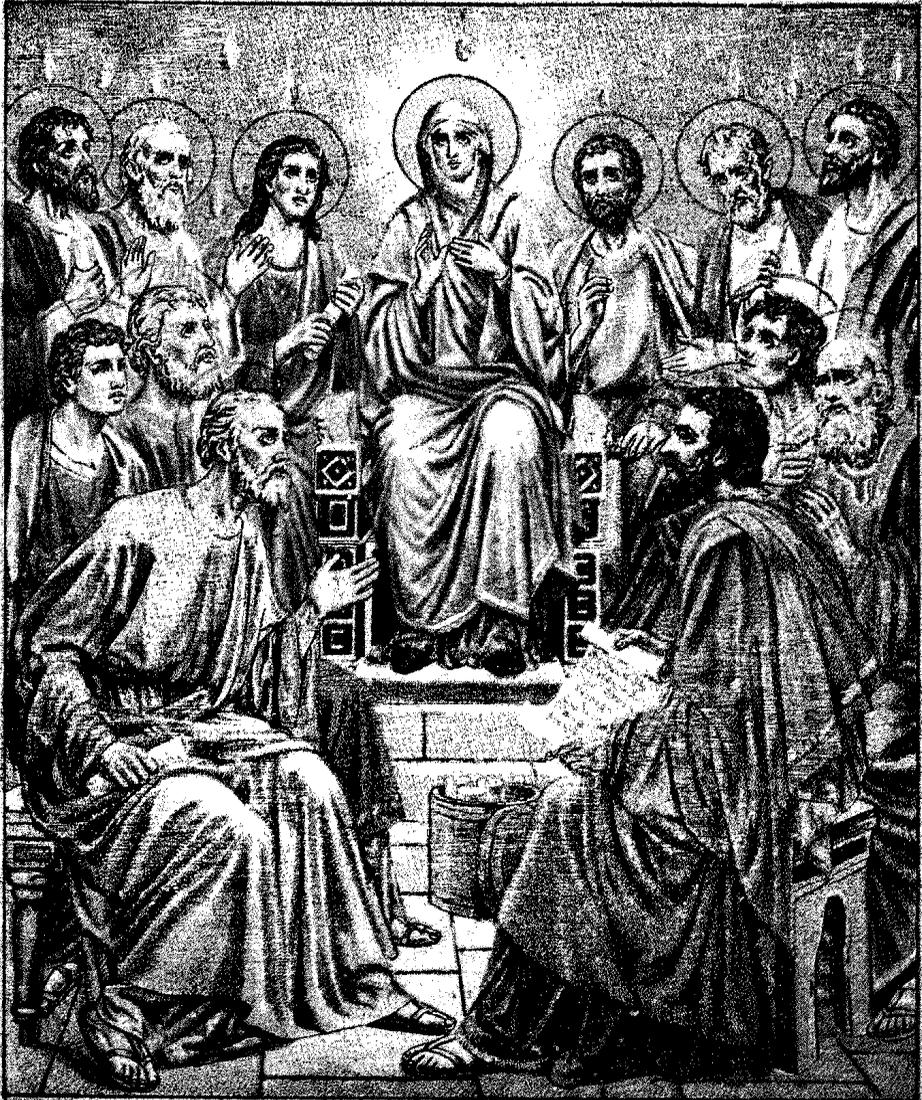
TRUE UNITY WILL INSPIRE THE WORLD



FATHER MATTA EL-MESKEEN

Spiritual Father of the Monastery of St. Macarius

TRUE UNITY WILL INSPIRE THE WORLD



Father Matta El-Meskeen

Spiritual Father of the Monastery of St. Macarius

TRUE UNITY
will be an Inspiration to the World

THE MONASTERY OF ST. MACARIUS

1988

True Unity will inspire the World

©Copyright, The Monastery of St Macarius, 1988.
2nd Edition 2002.

Printed in the Monastery of St Macarius. ©2002.
P.O.Box 2780, Cairo, Egypt.

True Unity will Inspire the World

الوحدة الحقيقية ستكون إلهاماً للعالم (إنجليزي)

رقم الإيداع بدار الكتب المصرية: ١٨٩٧٢ / ٢٠٠٢

رقم الإيداع الدولي: ٦ - ١٥٧ - ٢٤٠ - ٩٧٧

Contents

I. No Violation of Doctrine	5
II. Emergence from the Deadlock of Division	8
III. The Church Confronts the World	10
IV. A Freindly Look at the Schism between the Chalcedonians and the Non-Chalcedonians	16
V. What are the Significances and Potentialities that will Result from Unity?	18
VI. The Greatest Obstacle to Unity	27
VII. The role of the Holy Spirit in Unofficial Meetings	31

TRUE UNITY

WILL BE AN INSPIRATION TO THE WORLD

I. *No Violation of Doctrine*

Doctrine with regard to a church means the very existence of that church. For example since a Coptic Orthodox doctrine exists, the Coptic Orthodox Church also thus exists. Moreover, since this doctrine still exists unchanged, the Coptic Church exists unchanged as well. Doctrine is not simply lists of clauses, pronouncements, or church canons; rather it is above all spiritual worship and living faith, both of which are endowed with clear, distinctive features and characteristics. These distinctive features and characteristics are what give a doctrine its character. To the extent that the church adheres to this character, it will live and endure, otherwise its features will change, even its name may change, and perhaps it will pass out of existence.

The survival of these distinctive features through the ages has not been by means of rote memorization, faithful record keeping, apologetics, or even legal defence, so much as by means of love and ardor, living practice, exposition, clarification, contemplation, extensive description and definitions, as well as a profound exploration of the truth hidden within the doctrine itself. All of this together becomes a precious living heritage as it is handed down from generation to generation, first as an oral tradition and then recorded. Thus has the Church survived, and with it her doctrine. Throughout the generations doctrine has been compiled comprehensively in such a way that the most precise

explanations, definitions, and codifications are included in its contents so that the history of any church has become the history of its doctrine; also the history of a church's leaders and prominent teachers has in fact become the history of the extent of their adhering to or their forsaking of its doctrine. Thus, doctrine in the church has assumed a canonical framework which it cannot possibly neglect or budge from because such a framework constitutes the church's very being, as mentioned above, and expresses its existence, history, love and spirit.

And thus has Christianity, or rather Christ, settled among all peoples, assuming their appearances and distinctive features, and giving in return his life. For in Africa Christ appears as if he were black, in northern nations as if he were fair, in India he is brown-skinned, and among the Eskimo he is very short—but among all of them Christ is one and the same: Christ of Calvary, the grave, the resurrection, Christ of the whole world.

For this reason it is futile for churches, in their intense desire for Christian unity, to try and alter the expression of the doctrine of any church either by omission or addition, lest we be like one who wants to flay the African or dye the skin of the European, or like him who wants to obliterate the identity¹ of man in order to come up with a Christ without humanity.

But does this mean that we should abandon Christian unity? God forbid! For Christian unity is the greatest demand of faith; a demand which pours forth into our being and convulses our hearts and feelings. In tears we ask for unity, because we are asking for Christ. We want to live unity in spirit and truth because we want to taste Christ, to live his love, and to enjoy the

¹ The author finds it sufficient to mention only skin color and stature as representative of the profundity of thought, emotion, and philosophy that are manifest in the distinctive features of the natural, intellectual, and spiritual heritage of all the world's races and ethnic groups.

mystery of his oneness with the Father—this oneness which is the essence of divine love. Christ himself urges us to ask for this oneness and instructs us: “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their words, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us... I in them, and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one... that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn. 17:20,21,23,26).

With understanding we must direct our attention to the profundity of this supplication. For Christ is not asking for unity to the letter, but unity of the spirit; not unity of thought and opinion, but unity of love. The supplication does not limit itself to our unity in comprehending Christ alone, but concludes directly with the deep longing for unity of *all* believers *in* him. And this will not come about through our meeting in the form of a council of intellectual reconciliation in his presence. Neither will it be brought about except “that the *love... may be in them, and I in them.*”

But does this mean that we should give up on prayer conferences and study sessions, discussion and review of thought, and efforts to arrive at closer points of view? By no means! However, the serious question we are bringing up is, “Where do we begin?” With the letter, or with the Spirit? With law or with life? With the contents of faith and doctrine, or with their essence? Let us be well aware that if we begin with the letter, we shall kill the Spirit, our sessions resulting in nothing more than formulas and words. And if we begin with law, then in its light it will seem to us that we, without a doubt, are always in the right, while the others, without a doubt, are always in the wrong. Round and round we go until time—and with it life—slip away from us. And if we start with the contents of doctrine we will never manage to arrive at the essence. As for the Spirit, it is the one who establishes

the letter; it is the Spirit alone that can perfect it and give it life. Life in Christ is that which has been poured into the matrix of thought, thus allowing it to become a creed of faith. It is life in Christ alone which sunders the rigidity of law so that it is able to embrace life, diversity, and universality to the utmost. As to the essence of doctrine, it is Christ himself, and he will by no means be limited by the contents.

II. *Emergence from the Deadlock of Division*

It is therefore necessary to begin doctrinal dialogue with the Spirit and not with the letter, by receiving the one Christ first, before unifying the various diverse points of canon law and thought; it is also necessary that we live together in the one essence of doctrine before agreeing on its contents. Essence of doctrine, that is to say Christ himself, is based on love, sacrifice, redemption, and total relinquishment of self to the extent of assuming the role of a servant. In this way this heart-felt dialogue with the conscience arrives at a result which assuredly will be astounding to the intellect, but which speaks by the voice of Christ himself. It consists of three steps:

1. The churches should simultaneously reciprocate in lifting all excommunications from one another. Such excommunications are against the will of the Holy Spirit. This has happened through the ignorance that each church has had for the spirit and conscience of the other, and also because of their adherence to the letter and not to the spirit of the law. These mutual excommunications are the basic handicaps of all attempts at unity in the meetings and sessions that have been held up to the present date. For how can any agreement on the formula of peace and unity be concluded while each church is still excommunicated by the other?

2. There has to be a mutual and simultaneous recognition of doctrine between the Chalcedonian and Non-Chalcedonian churches on the basis of essence and not of contents; that is to say by reason of the tenets of salvation and eternal life which both of them propound as being through Jesus Christ who is the single active principle in both of them despite difference in doctrinal wording.

3. Discussion of doctrinal contents has to be entered into and vagueness removed by explanation, not by deletion or insertion, regarding doctrinal points that have been handed down to each church by means of tradition. Such a discussion would provide a formula of reconciliation which would be in harmony with the unity of fellowship and the Spirit without any violation whatsoever to the history of doctrine and the concomitant circumstances surrounding its writings, and councils. That is to say that, between the Orthodox who are now in conference with one another, there should take place a mutual and simultaneous recognition of the soundness of doctrine at each extreme, as well as an acceptance of the fellowship in Christ, or rather freely accepting Christ himself in our fellowship; it should also happen that we receive Holy Communion from one cup—not on the basis of the recorded letter of the law—but rather on the basis of the living Christ dwelling in the heart of each church, and on the basis of the Holy Spirit, the active principle and effective agent in each which leads to salvation. After that we can then begin discussion of formulas and articles without violating the legacy of any of the churches of their spiritual traditions, theological concepts, or anything derived from their writings and councils.

By Christ's presence we are united in the Spirit, in the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and thus we are compelled by the One Christ, or rather inspired by Christ, to be of

one mind, one voice, and one word without any church being deprived of its special characteristics or the distinctive features of its theology. It is in these very special characteristics that the One Christ lives. Or, in keeping with the example we presented earlier, there will be a single fellowship in the Spirit in the One Faith without requiring the black man to be flayed, or without forcing the white man to dye his face—for Christ being in the world, and having settled in the South and in the North, has taken on the features of all: “My beloved is radiant and ruddy,” and “I am dark but comely” (Song of Sol. 5:10, 1:5).

III. *The Church Confronts the World*

When the Church confronts the world, it does not stop at any border; for the whole world is a field open for her spiritual work where she faces all its ideologies, both positive and negative, its conditions, its policies and its governments at odds with one another: “Go into all the world” (Mk. 16:15) “to all nations” (Mk. 13:10; Mt. 28:19) in other words, to each and every man.

Man in and of himself, regardless of his thought and behavior, is the concern of the Church in the world; and the work of the Church in the world is her life in Christ, her joy in him, and her experience with him, as manifested in the first place through a holy way of life as a model rule of conduct, and then in offering through a word of inspiration, friendship, and sincerity; and also an action of good will and consolation so that the hearts of sons will be restored to their fathers, and the hearts of fathers to their sons in order to mould the mind and heart of man to the better life in Christ. Christ neither came to a particular church in its limited situation within a particular building, nor did he come under a particular name, nor in a particular environment, nor to a special people with a special thought and heritage as though he had been confined to the tent of meeting of old or to the temple—rather the

Father sent Christ to the world which he loved, to all of creation which has become his temple without boundaries “for God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are” (1 Cor. 3:17). It has never happened that the world, in its alienation from God, is as starved for truth, justice, peace, and love as it is today—so much so that it has become enslaved to every form of thought and every trend. Within the Church is the Bread of Life for the world, she is the Bethlehem for all nations. To her, Christ has entrusted the basket of the seven loaves from which has not disappeared the mystery of satisfying five-, or seven-thousand-million. The hunger is not for bread, but for the word of truth, love, and life. If only it were a sincere hunger for God that people felt as they did in olden times or as they did even fifty or a hundred years ago. But it is a rebellious hunger, and the soul is in the direst need for God; and yet it has been repulsed from him for many reasons. The most important reason was and still is the Church’s negligence, the sparseness of the pasture, and the ignorance of the shepherds. And thus in our day has been fulfilled Christ’s parable of the sheep fleeing from the hirling so that the wolf may seize custody of them. The bread of life, if it is not kneaded with the sweat of piety and baked with the fire of tribulations and perfect experience, is loathed by souls.

In the temple there was in ancient times a lampstand (the Menorah) which signified God’s presence in the midst of the people to enlighten their thought in the midst of the ignorance of the pagan world at that time. The Church in our time is that very light which is able to dispel the darkness of human ignorance throughout the world—the light which God has put in the world to light the way to life and immortality in front of every man. No darkness—regardless of its tyranny over an individual, a group, a people, or a state—can resist the light except to the extent that the Church grows weak or turns from her light to dwell in the shadows.

Darkness is now wrestling with the Light, and the Light is falling back defeated; the lamp of God is on the verge of going out in the hands of the preachers and the teachers. Now the light of the Church no longer draws its oil from the reservoir of piety and grace which pours out over the heart of a witness in words—words ringing out as from the mouth of God: “As commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak” (2 Cor. 12:19). Such a word disperses the notions of hearts corrupted and preoccupied by the surfeit of the intellectual and technical world which mars the simplicity of spiritual life in Christ. A skillful word alone can no longer move the hearts of men; they have become in urgent need of spiritual evidence and power; and so must the preacher be able to present the person of the living Christ to the people—Christ crucified and redeeming—so that it is possible to fill the emptiness of the heart, mind and soul with all the joys of the spirit, so that all souls may taste and be satisfied by a relationship with the Father in the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the holiness of Christ.

But according to the Book of Revelation, it is not for every man to say to another, “Come,” but rather, “Let him who hears say, ‘Come’ ” (Rev. 22:17); and neither should it be his own self that the preacher presents to the people, or else the word will die in his mouth. “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). When will the Church place herself as a slave in relation to the people? A slave, not a servant. For a servant has rights and wages, but a slave is under obligation to his master, but has no rights. He serves faithfully without expecting to receive wages for his service or his faithfulness. It is enough that he remains happy in his master’s house, ever prepared to lay down his life for his master and his master’s children. So it is that the Church has stood, and now stands on the threshold of readiness for martyrdom, and not

on limits of words: "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long" (Rom. 8:36).

In the Gospel and in the mind of Christ, the Church is a bride. Now if a bride disdains her purity and does not sanctify herself—she being represented in everyone who bears her name or wears her garments—then who could be expected to love purity or strive for holiness, or come to the bridegroom? Who could blame those who entered and then left in regret?

In the Book of Revelation, the Church, like her Teacher, is a spring of living water on account of the Spirit in her: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty, let him who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev. 22:17). If in the Church the spring of the spirit and love and piety runs dry, then what shall she proclaim? And if the Church does proclaim, who will hear? Who will come? Who will drink? And those who thirst after righteousness, where will they go? If they go astray and ask for comfort and happiness from the springs of the devil, who can then blame them? Who is to be blamed but the Church? The world is full of knowledge and science, as well as innumerable ideologies, but to the Church, God has entrusted a single spring, which wells up to eternal life. In the timeless parables of Christ regarding the Kingdom, the Church is the priceless pearl that the clever merchant found and bought by selling all he had. For him it became the source of riches which remains beyond the end of time, for in the Book of Revelation, the pearl is the door that leads to the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:21). In Christ's teaching it is clear that he is none other than this door leading to eternal life. But if, as Eve was beguiled by the serpent's craftiness, the Church's mind has strayed from its simplicity which is in Christ; if the Church has inclined toward the glory of this age; if it has inclined toward relying on the wealth, power and multifarious dealings of this age; if the heart of the Church has inclined toward

the corrupting lust for power—will the pearl endure? Will there remain the ability to know the way to the Door, or the ability to know the password for crossing the threshold? And if this failure is discovered, and everyone goes his own way while visions and opinions multiply and deceptions increase, then who can apportion blame or be blamed? Who can correct the ideas that have arisen? For one idea is not corrected by another, but only by an upright life led in upright thought. The Gospel, verses of Scripture, and sermons are expressions of piety, but without the mystery of the presence of Christ they become a trading in self-interest, and not in the interest of Christ.

Christ entrusted to the Church the mystery of his body. Thus the Church is either the Body of Christ “the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23), or else she is empty with nothing to fill her. The greatest distinguishing feature of the Body of Christ is that every day it is still liable to death and resurrection in the Church: “For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered” (Rom. 8:36). “But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom. 6:8). Generation after generation live in death and resurrection. But the Church that, for its own self or for the world, shrinks and flees from the death on the cross, that church is deprived of the gift and the power of the resurrection; that is to say victory over the world. In the end such a church conforms to the power of the world in spite of herself, and so loses her moral authority over it.

The greatest power concealed in the body of Christ, in the Church, and in us who are “flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone,” is the power of mysterious attraction supplied in him at all levels. “And I, when I am lifted up from earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn. 12:32). If the Church desires to be on this level, she must serve the divine mystery of attraction stored up in the

body of Christ that has been entrusted to her. That is to say she must gather all in Christ and for the sake of Christ she must converge in all at the level of the Gospel, the sacraments, traditions, and history so that she may serve all levels and conditions of mankind in the Church, and that she may serve all living souls existing in her embrace. Whenever the Church rises above the dust of the earth in spirit, mind, and aim, then the divine power of attraction is enlivened in her and in all mankind she rises up in the mystery of the cross to fulfill the mystery of the risen body according to the intention of Christ. Indeed Christ has actually risen above the earth through death, the death on the cross. Is it then possible that the Church can rise and exercise this attractive power *without* this very same death? Is it possible for her to do this by free, conscious and determined will? Or is it possible without the will, but through weakness in total surrender to him in whose hands are death and life? "For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4). St. Paul indeed discovered the mystery of attraction in this weakness and in this death itself: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain" (Phil. 1:23) "I will all the more boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9); for in his weakness Christ founded the Church, not in his strength.

If it is the mysteries of divine attraction latent in the body of Christ that form the basis of the Church's existence and life, then for the sake of completing the body of Christ, there is no way to go other than that of accepting weakness and accepting death as well; and in our minds, Christ's body must be without limits and without names. How can any church be accepting of, content with, or consenting to the fact that it exists separated from another church that bears the same body of Christ? Is Christ not one? Christ who bore all the wounds, suffering, and hardship, Christ who died on the cross in order that he might be raised up to

draw *all men* to himself, this Christ borne by all the churches, is he not one and the same? Who are *all men* I wonder? The Chalcedonians or the Non-Chalcedonians? Easterners or Westerners? The people of the North or of the South? The white or the black?

IV. *A Friendly Look at the Schism between the Chalcedonians and the Non-Chalcedonians*

Political analysts in the Christian world follow international events—events at the level of ideological development or events at the level of their inevitable consequences: bloody conflicts between countries and peoples, or even between citizens of the same land—yet many of these analysts fail to realize that the major part of these responsibilities falls upon the Church for failing to play her basic role of reconciling the world to God. The Church has grown weak and feeble with regards to spirituality and pure piety. In the past these were enough, in and of themselves, to invest the saints of the Church with enough authority to subdue the pride of men—even the kings among them—and make them obey the mind of God according to the Gospel in order for nations to live together in the fear of God, and together grow according to God's intentions for the good of man: "We take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). However, the Church's weakness has extended into the depths of theological thought. Veneration for the Bible has been shaken in modern theological schools; it has come to the point that the fear is no longer *of* God, but rather *for* God himself, lest he lose his honor or his very existence in the curriculae of these schools and in the hearts of many of these theologians. Thus the Church has lost the awesomeness with which she once imposed her word upon the earth—the awesomeness which she used to draw from the power of truth in the Holy Spirit, the strengthener of unity in thought, word, and deed. Thus have been shaken the Church's

very foundations which were in the eyes of the world "the pillar and bulwark of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

This collapse and division of ideas within the churches did not come about except as a result of a series of events traversing the history of the great schism from the 5th century onward which we have unjustly inherited from the disensions, divisions, and disputes of Chalcedon.

The tragic question for which there will never be an answer is this: Why did the great heroes, beloved in the Lord, fall into dispute? How were they driven to enmity? And even more so, on whom, then, did God set his hope of reconciling the world to himself?

Then comes another question even more tragic and painful: How did they all enter the Council of Chalcedon full of hope that they would arrive at unity in faith, thought and word—hope that each would rid his mind of any idea not pleasing to God's righteousness—how did they enter thus, and then leave excommunicated, humiliated, with beaten faces and broken teeth to begin the history of the greatest schism to take place in the whole of the Christian world? A schism which has weakened and undermined her strength. The East was left paralyzed—an easy prey for any marauder. The West was left to suffer its pain deprived of power to give aid or communion.

What makes the tragedy even more painful and senseless is what has come to light in our own time. Some of the finest and most brilliant Orthodox theologians have met together in conferences whose aims were reconciliation between the Chalcedonian and Non-Chalcedonian Churches (Aarhus, Denmark 1964; Bristol, England 1968; Geneva, Switzerland 1970; and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 1968). In these conferences, theologians have come to the conclusion and stated in recommendations for the proposed union, that this dreadful schism that has lasted 1,500

years, and which has left a legacy of weakness, helplessness, and disgrace on the whole Christian world—this schism had absolutely no justification whatsoever! But in any case these conferences have been the first steps to be taken by the churches since the time of the remote schism to move away from the despair of division and the tragedy of isolation toward a semblance of the idea of reconciliation. And so a streak of hope has begun to appear in the eastern sky announcing that Christian unity is regaining its spiritual power. Thus it will be possible to erase the wounds of history from the face of the Church and to soothe the hearts of the saints who departed this earth in hope of this day; it will also encourage and soothe the hearts of the present generations that have been weakened by the division and solitude, and that have been beleaguered by the pain of isolation—in the end the heart of God will rejoice.

V. What are the Significances and Potentialities that will Result from Unity?

1. The direct and actual significance of lifting excommunications within the realm of the spirit will be the removal of obstacles that impede the Holy Spirit from the work of renewal within the churches—the obstacles that prevent the Holy Spirit from showering new gifts for the benefit of this weary world and for the benefit of each church.

2. The acceptance of the sharing of one cup will make the two churches one through the cross in order to raise the mystery to the peak of its power: that is to say the acceptance of the power of Christ's blood, which alone has the potential to cast out enmity and to perfect reconciliation in one body.

3. Acceptance of reconciliation means the acceptance of a new power of forgiveness from God in return for the act of forgiveness

which is accomplished reciprocally between the churches. Within such action is an acquittal from liability toward a release from debt, which without our being aware has been a cause of weakness in every church: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Mt. 6:14).

4. The churches' returning together from the life of enmity which they have been living for the past 1,500 years would be tantamount to a sign of communal repentance. The repentance in and of itself is a colossal power that will make the heavens rejoice, and will be instrumental in bringing days of relief from suffering and days of peace for the good of the whole world: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets of old" (Acts 3:19).

Has the time then come for the restoration of all things according to the fulfillment of God's will? Let us hope that when the Son of God comes he will find the faith undivided amongst us, so that none of us will be deprived of seeing him as he is.

5. If the Orthodox Churches are able to go beyond the negative obstacles that have stood as an obstacle against the fulfillment of the unity of faith, love, and worship among us, then there will be released in the world a power of this very reconciliation sweeping away the remaining obstacles which burden mankind's heart and mind to the point of exhaustion, whether at the level of the church or the individual.

The first schism in Chalcedon in the 5th century happened without the Church's being aware of the consequences resulting from it which would pose such a danger for the Christian world.

This first schism led to the second one in the 11th century between the Catholics and the Orthodox for which the whole world is still paying an exorbitant price in terms of weakness, disintegration, and division in controversies both profound and superficial. The Church did not comprehend the fact that she was sowing the spirit of enmity and division in the world—the spirit which has spread among nations, peoples, and individuals, and which has become the standard of behavior for governments, states, and blocs of countries. Thus it is incumbent upon the Church, after reaping this bitter harvest, that she act in all devoutness and love in Christ, taking the burden of this divided and devastated world which is bent on self-destruction.

But the Church will neither be able, nor qualified, nor commissioned by God to pray for or bear the burden of the division that torments the world while she herself remains divided. As long as she is divided against herself, she is not strong enough to bear the world's current burdens—and yet it is she alone who bears their responsibility. The reconciliation between the churches is urgently needed by the world now. It is as though the world were waiting impatiently for a repair of the divisions between the churches, but without being conscious or aware of either the power or the scope of such a reconciliation.

6. At the core in the Eastern Orthodox Churches is the unity which is a true yield gleaned from the doctrine of sharing, not from individualism or division. And so unity is spreading—that is to say the fulfillment of communality—between the Orthodox Churches, but it is spreading with difficulty because of the length of separation and the influence of political factors which held sway over all else in the 5th century and laid the foundation for the spirit of enmity and allowed it to take control. Still, however, unity is at the very heart of our spiritual, psychological, environ-

mental, and even our theological nature. One of the basic constituents of our Orthodox faith is the belief in the communion of saints. The Church insists that she constitutes a spiritual family, or as St. Paul expressed it, "God's household," whether this be in the life of an individual, the congregation, the Church, or in areas of doctrine.

If we consider the divine and spiritual concept of unity, we find that it is one of the features that is lacking in the life in the western world at this time. That is to say that in the West individualism is tyrannizing society, family life, religion, worship, and work. If this situation worsens, it will be sufficient to undermine the solidarity of the Church, thus lessening the opportunities for salvation and for communicating the message of life to the individual lost amidst machines and the vastness of the cities. Such an individual is ensnared by mass media and recreational pastimes, both playing their part in destroying the remaining chances of his committing himself to church, community or even family. In him is killed the spirit of love, friendliness and longing for the heavenly homeland.

If we Orthodox fulfilled our unity, then first this divine doctrine (meaning the life in the communion of saints) would be animated within us in its practical form. Thus would be restored the Church's original spiritual form along with her spiritual being, which is an image of the Last Supper with Christ in the midst of his disciples. This spirit is in harmony with our own spirit and nature, and it is able to nourish the whole community with a new understanding of divine love in its broadest extent—even to the point that the love of Christ will not be the domain of ascetics and hermits only. The Orthodox Church will thus be capable of proclaiming her message throughout the world in divine love and passion for Christ as in the first days.

And with this we believe that the attainment of unity of the Orthodox Churches will create new forces for evangelizing in order to reconcile the world that is estranged from God—or rather the Holy Spirit will use this in order to pour out a spirit of vigilance on the earth so that all might return, and people will seek the face of God: “Thou hast said, ‘seek ye my face,’ thy face Lord do I seek” (Ps. 27:8).

A unity such as this could truly come about, to the benefit of the whole world, if we were truly able to surrender ourselves to the will of the Holy Spirit without putting obstacles in God’s way. The Spirit waits to see what we will sincerely do for the sake of unity, and then it will do a hundred times that much. For unity between the churches can neither exist nor be attained except through the power of the Holy Spirit and its will alone, albeit its initiative depends on our desire and on our free will.

7. There is a law in things spiritual which differs from the same law in things material. In the material world, if A is added to B , the result is the sum $A+B$; or in other words, effort plus ability equals output. However in the spiritual world, if a spiritual quantity A belonging to one church is added to a spiritual quantity B belonging to another, then there will be an amazing spiritual result. For the joining of things spiritual is accomplished on the basis of union and not on simple addition. In the end we find that the sum of spiritual gifts obtained through union of A and B is AB and BA . That is to say, the sum is increased in a mysteriously amazing way, for every individual will then possess the gifts of the other, united with his own gifts, as if they were truly his own. Thus from being united to another church, each church can gain potentialities for progress and spiritual heights that could never be attained by a church alone.

But even more astonishing is that churches that are unified

attain through their unity that which is impossible to attain for churches that are only grouped together but not united. In this mystery lies hidden a new power which springs from God's eternal nature—a power which the world is in need of now but which it will never find in any church no matter how strong that church may be. For the great power of Christ cannot be attained by the world except in the full stature of Christ, that is to say in the oneness of his body—his body which the church now presents divided and fragmented in her own division and fragmentation.

This latent unity in the mystery of sharing, which is presently obstructed by schisms, is in fact the power of the Transfiguration which the world has been laboring to bring forth in bitter pangs of death through the ages. The world awaits a total new birth: "The Kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and his Christ" (Rev. 11:15). Thus the mystery of this greater unity is in itself the mystery of the Transfiguration, or the mystery of that which has no end, which is contained in the One Body of Christ, and which can only be realized in the oneness of communal sharing. It is indeed clear that this is the only power upon which is founded both the transfiguration *of* the world and the presence of God *in* the world, both of which are for its salvation from the vortex of destruction. It has thus become imperative that the churches derive from this reality the power at some point to dispense with their rigidity, selfishness, individuality and cowardice in order to become able to embrace all the demands of unity.

8. It is clear that the world is ever moving toward liberation from the Church, for it is the Church that gives the opportunity for the world to move away from her in proportion to her own liberation from the complete submission and adherence to God. Thus the return of the world to the spirit of the Church depends

on the Church's return to the Spirit of God.

It is absolutely, undeniably and completely for sure and for certain that Christendom will never ever be united to God without the Church. For it is within the Church only that the righteousness of God is revealed through faith in Christ leading to repentance, salvation and adherence to God.

Everyone who has tasted true repentance and discovered the mystery of salvation, perceives that the world does not revolve around itself, but that it extends through time beyond itself. The form of the world changes at an astonishing rate, as if confirming to those living the mystery of salvation that the world is not moving beyond itself and passing into obscurity or oblivion, but rather the depths of the spiritual man impart power to the world to move toward God, albeit through a series of grievous failures. This is not to say that this journey of stumbling blocks has not been void of men and women inspired by greatness and holiness, but they have become an ineffective minority. The Church in her great weakness is incapable of showing the world the way to God—so then, who could be expected to grasp it?

The Church, every church, whether Chalcedonian or Non-Chalcedonian, fancies itself as alone able to act in the best interests of its own people.

Each church suffers from self-infatuation and does not want to understand that its own advantage is not to be compared to the fate of the world. Every church's concern with its own welfare while neglecting the fate of the rest of the world thus carries with it a commitment to the bitterness of schism. This means that the cup of communion in the church lacks the spirit of communal sharing, and also that the presence of Christ in the Church does not include the world saved and redeemed by God.

9. Christ's supplication was: "I do not pray for these only, but

also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn. 17:20-21). The unity which Christ asks for us all, for every man, for every church, for all who want to be included in the scope of his supplication, or who want to enter into obedience to his call, that is to say to respond to this, his greatest commandment—this is an extremely mysterious unity. The human mind can neither implement all its stipulations, nor bring forth all its terms, nor conceive of its range. We must exercise all caution in dealing with this unity, for an attempt to define it in this way could cause us to miss the mystery of Christ, or rather could cause the mystery of Christianity to escape us, since this unity is at the level of Christ's existing in the Father and the Father existing in Christ, not only in terms of Christ the eternal Word, but also in the sense of the Man Jesus Christ. This unity caused God the Father to sanction the paying of its price, the price that is paid through the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross.

In considering this we glimpse the mystery of eternal salvation coming from the mighty power of God. It is this power that brought about the resurrection of Christ which in turn became the source of power granted to man, to the Church, and to the whole world, given to us that we may trample down death, put an end to our destruction and enter into the fullness of life with God, a life beyond time, a life beyond all the implications and terrors with which time threatens the very being of man.

Christ places the dimensions of the power of his unity with the Father and the Father's unity with him to give a form and identity to the unity he asks for us in him and in each other: "That they also may be in us." Seeing that this unity is beyond our capabilities and outlook, he continues to plead for it beseeching the Father himself. And still, by means of his blood, he makes fervent

supplications.

The Church unity we seek is not, as it is said, a unity based on temporal or geographical dimensions, nor can it be built on any human or intellectual basis whatever they may be, for Jesus asked that it be first a unity in the Father through Christ himself, and then afterwards there will appear among us his works and his power in time and in the world. Christ had foreknowledge that such a unity, which will bring us together in him and in the Father, will be endowed with gifts and powers that will take effect among the whole human race.

He made known very clearly that this unity will have a direct effect upon the world's faith in Christ: "That they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

In short we may say with all clarity that the power that would result from unity of the churches is a power to evangelize the world without a word being spoken or a voice being raised: "There is no speech, nor are there words... yet their voice goes out to the end of the world" (Ps. 19:3-4). In this respect the churches have been very feeble even until now. In the past they have wanted to use Christ's words to reveal themselves to the world, but in the divine mystical union which Christ prayed for, the churches will reveal Christ himself to the world through their unity in divine love. Unity will be fulfilled and will take place through the death of the ego of each church, in order that Christ's self may live in them all. Thereafter a power as of the resurrection will go forth from the Church *to* the world and *for* the world, the same power that resurrected Christ, or to be more exact, the power in which he stands risen for all mankind to see. Christ awaits the coming of this unity that is both voluntary and obligatory so that by it he may be transfigured before the world. In our present schism, it is as if Christ were dead and hidden from the world, buried in the

frozen wastes of the divided churches. Christ waits, and the world waits with him, for the end of hostility and to be thus revived by the warmth of love through which he will rise and bestow life. All mankind will see him and the world will live and not die: "Because I live, you will live also" (Jn. 14:19); "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn. 14:20-21). We truly believe that if the Church truly lives in Christ and in the Father, and if the Church is purified through keeping the commandments of unity and love, then the world will see Christ as he is and will be thus purified. It will be drawn to him and will then follow him. Did not God so love the world that he gave his only Son that it might not perish? Did not Christ take from the world a body and unite himself to it thus guaranteeing its preservation in mystical relationship with God and gravitation towards him? And did not God then entrust to the Church the mystery of his body so that she should become responsible for this relationship and for the endurance of man's being drawn toward God?

VI. *The Greatest Obstacle to Unity*

In the unofficial consultations that have taken place up to now between the Chalcedonian and Non-Chalcedonian churches, it has become apparent to the participants that the dispute over Christ and the definition of his divine essence may be settled by the use of doctrinal formulae acceptable to both sides. They feel that this will suffice to begin the procedures that will tend toward unity. However, I believe that such an understanding is unlikely. The Gospel itself tells of a similar example of wrong thinking. One day, shortly before the Crucifixion, Christ asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" The disciples agreed on

the formula expressed by Peter. The contents were truly fine and in agreement with the right faith, and even directly inspired by God, according to Christ's own words: "Simon replied, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, saying, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 16:15-17).

Unfortunately this precise orthodox formula, truly inspired from heaven, did not help unite the disciples in anything, neither in thought nor in the practical expression of their faith in Christ. Even Peter, the one who had uttered the words, denied Christ saying he did not know him. Some of them even returned to their original occupations before the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We even read that they quarreled over which of them was the greatest (cf. Lk. 22:24). It is clear then, that a precise statement of faith in Christ, openly and unanimously confessed, even if it is inspired by the heavenly Father, is insufficient to unite disciples, or churches in the unity of communal sharing in Christ and in the work of love, sacrifice and death with him.

It is truly amazing that in the very chapter that contains Peter's correct confession of faith in Christ, we read that his behavior led Christ to say to him, "Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men" (Mt. 16:23). Is it not obvious that herein is concealed the reason that a correct faith failed completely to result in correct behavior? First we read, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And then, "You are not on the side of God but of men."

Christ perceived this split between faith and behavior, and so he gave his commandment of reconciliation: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself" (Mt. 16:24). But in spite of this, the disciples still came back and asked, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" (Mt. 18:1). And this caused Christ to

restate the wording of reconciliation in different and more positive terms: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt. 18:3).

It is therefore clear that a standardized statement of faith, unanimously agreed upon, will not be sufficient to constitute a means of true union among the churches even though it be a basic necessity. The schisms have acquired far reaching consequences with regards the Church's spiritual life, sense of identity, heritage, temporal existence, and even to the extent of her political orientation.

Christ is not like this, nor have we ever known him to be so. The state of our behavior with regards Christ is at odds with the true Christ. This is the poisonous root of division which will continue to nourish separation and schism no matter how many times we agree upon a beautiful and correct statement of faith like that of St. Peter's.

Indeed the position of the Church is more difficult now than that of the disciples before the descent of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were merely in doubt as to "who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" The churches today, on the other hand, are sure that they have the answer to the question. Each church sees itself as being indisputably the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, for it has the most correct and most precisely defined faith! As for the self-denial that should accompany faith, and the return to the mentality and consciousness of childhood in the power of simple faith in Christ, to our great shame we must say that these things are neither found in today's churches nor are any church delegates allowed to act upon these commandments.

Therefore we do not have a church that can act as Christ did—denying itself, bearing its cross and dying to the sin of division—and thus gaining life for itself and for others. The most dangerous of all the things lacking in the divided churches of

today is Christ himself, and him crucified. Or in the language of dialogue, one may say that what is lacking among the divided churches is a church that is able to bear responsibility for errors of the past in order to free itself and others from the sin of the present—that is to say schism and disintegration. If such a church could be found, then unity and reconciliation could take place and love would be victorious.

But talk about self-willed death and acceptance of the humiliation of the cross are hard words indeed. Is there anyone who can understand them? This is the same problem the disciples faced when Christ spoke to them of the necessity of accepting his humiliation, his death and his cross: “‘We are going to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of Man will be accomplished. For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon; they will scourge him and kill him, and on the third day he will rise.’ But they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said” (Lk. 18:31-34). The words of St. Paul the Apostle will therefore be of great help to us in our dialogue on unity: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). This is the sense of coming forward in the Spirit of the Lord Jesus wherein each church would simultaneously and reciprocally take the faults of the other upon itself. We could say, “each church will bear the sins of the other”—no more and no less.

With all due respect to their efforts and recommendations, the unofficial conferences and dialogue that has been going on for decades, they have not provided, nor can they provide the motivation that will cause every church to take up a Christ-like stance, bearing the faults of the other churches. This is a matter far beyond intellectual dialogue, long meetings and academic solutions. Since the churches are still facing age-old excommuni-

cations, any and all meetings are held in the official absence of the Holy spirit; such meetings can do no more than open up old wounds and increase the pain.

VII. *The role of the Holy Spirit in Unofficial Meetings*

The Churches meet and announce officially that the meetings are "unofficial." But why this insistence that they be unofficial? Is it so that the "official" churches need not be bound by the results? Or so that no delegation can change even minutely the canons or traditions of its church? Or is it so that there will be no advantage to any delegations giving way on any position, or admitting any fault committed by its own church in the past or in the present, or accepting the correctness of any position taken by the other side, or even excusing the mistakes of the others? Finally and most importantly, could it be so that no delegation will have the authority to lift the existing anathemas and grant absolution to the other churches?

Or put in another way, the churches insist that their delegations meet unofficially, so that the Holy Spirit will be officially absent, and the situation will remain unchanged! We are reminded of the disciples, afraid and distracted, meeting together behind locked doors in the upper room. The Holy Spirit was absent and Christ was dead in the tomb, for the resurrection had not yet been proclaimed. The disciples were afraid of the Jews and everything else, for their Master had left them.

Who are the churches afraid of now? Why do they still lock the doors of their minds? Christ has destroyed all the enmity that existed between the most arrogant of inherited systems, laws and traditions in the world—that is to say between the Jews and the Gentiles. The two of them he has made one in mind, heart, spirit, and worship. He has also destroyed the veil which had from eternity separated God from man, and reconciled that which is of

heaven with that which is of earth. He has destroyed the gates of hell and set free the spirits imprisoned there under the devil's authority. After all that, can the churches still erect barriers and shut up themselves and others behind locked doors?

Even after the resurrection was made known and Christ appeared in the flesh with the wounds in his hands and in his side, saying, "Peace be with you," even then the disciples turned back to their former ways, to their fear and hesitation. Some of them doubted and some even abandoned the group and returned to their old occupations as fishermen.

In the unofficial meetings we see delegations preoccupied with formulating a precise statement of reconciliation in preparation for unity. But in light of what has happened in the past, we believe that even if Christ himself appeared to them and stood among them, allowing them to feel him and touch him it is still highly possible that doubt would remain; it is still highly possible that some would leave the fellowship, for the unity that is granted by the Holy Spirit is still absent. It is the Holy Spirit alone, who has been commissioned from the beginning to destroy all that is old and decaying in the heart and mind of man, to destroy all that conflicts with the love of Christ and that delays the progress of the Church along the path to eternal life. The Holy Spirit alone can loose the bonds and fetters that have delayed the unity of the church and have so grievously obstructed her work in the world, thus providing the devil with every opportunity throughout the ages to plunder north, south, east, and west. One could just about say that the world stands in need of a completely new beginning and a new birth.

Submission to the Holy Spirit has therefore become a vital necessity if we are to arrive at better opportunities, not only for peace and reconciliation, but also for a new leaven to begin working in the world, a new leaven that will lead to a new life.

Division and fragmentation have penetrated to the depths of human thought and emotional life, as well as the human spirit and establishments. Thus the submission of the churches to the authority of the Holy Spirit today constitutes the most difficult and most consequential step that the churches have faced since their foundation. This step will be the decisive battle with the powers of the devil who is bent on the ultimate and irreversible disintegration and destruction of everything in the world. "Every Kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand" (Mt. 12:25).

From the very start the responsibility for kindling the Holy Spirit in the world has lain with the Church: "You are the light of the world" (Mt. 5:14). Those things which constitute the light are the spiritual values of oneness and immortality, as well as the spirit of works of love. If these spiritual values are absent and the unity of the Spirit is divided, and the power of love is dissipated through the schisms between the churches, who is to stand against the spirit of evil and deception? How will the voice of the world's groaning reach the ears of God?

By nature the world is ignorant of God; it cannot know him except through the works of the Church—it is the Church who presents God to the world, not through convincing words, but by the demonstration of the Spirit and power, by powerful and heroic acts of redemption, by manifestation of love, piety, and chastity which will inspire and overcome the world.

Love is the Church's hidden power which will never be exhausted, but still it cannot pour forth into the world without unity of the Spirit and oneness of heart.

The Church cannot offer these powers, potentialities and immortal values to the world through *outstanding* theologians only, but she must also offer them through the *saintly* among them, as well as through simple, saintly individuals, the exemp-

larities of the churches. For the Holy Spirit loves the saints wherever they are—it is from them that he forms the Church of Christ: “and the Spirit of Truth... he will be my witness, and you will be my witnesses” (Jn. 15:26).

Hence, regardless of how much we may try to lay the responsibility of unity and change upon the shoulders of the church, in the long run the burden will fall upon the saints of the church. If truly we demand that the process of unity begin immediately, then we must fix our eyes on the elect and the gifted who exist in every church, despite their efforts to escape being seen by men. When our confidence is placed with the poor, the meek, the humble, the pure in heart, and the lovers of the peace that only Christ can give, then and only then will we ever have hope of achieving the true Christian unity that will inspire the world.

MONASTERY OF ST. MACARIUS PUBLICATIONS
P.O. Box 31, SHOUBRA, CAIRO, EGYPT.

Books by Father Matta El-Meskeen

In English

December 2002

1. The Origin of the Coptic Calendar
2. Our Need for Christ
3. The Experience of God in a Monk's Life
4. Epiphany
5. The Mystery of the Cross
6. Resurrection & Redemption in the Orthodox Concept
7. Ascension and Pentecost
8. The Martyrdom of SS. Peter and Paul
9. Pentecost
10. Repentance
11. The Assumption of the body of the Virgin Mary
12. One Christ & One Catholic Church
13. The Discovery of the Relics of St John the Baptist and Elisha the Prophet
14. A Viewpoint on Birth Control
15. Rules for Ascetic Life
16. The Deep Meaning of Fasting
17. The Passion of Christ in our Life
18. Christian Unity
19. How to Read the Bible
20. The Christ of History, a Living Christ
21. An Optimistic Vision of Divine Justice
22. Women: Their rights and obligations in social and religious life in the early Church
23. Coptic Monasticism and the Monastery of St Macarius, a Short History
24. Welcome to the Monastery of St. Macarius
25. Spiritual Economy
26. True Unity will be an Inspiration to the World
27. The Birth of Christ & the Birth of Man

28. On the Mount of Temptation
29. Guidelines on Prayer
30. The Kingdom of God: Clear Vision vs Illusion
31. The Grain of Wheat
32. The True Art of Successful Living
33. How do we build ourselves up on the most Holy Faith

Order from:

THE MONASTERY OF ST. MACARIUS PUBLICATIONS

c/o PO Box 31, Shobra, Cairo, Egypt

or visit:

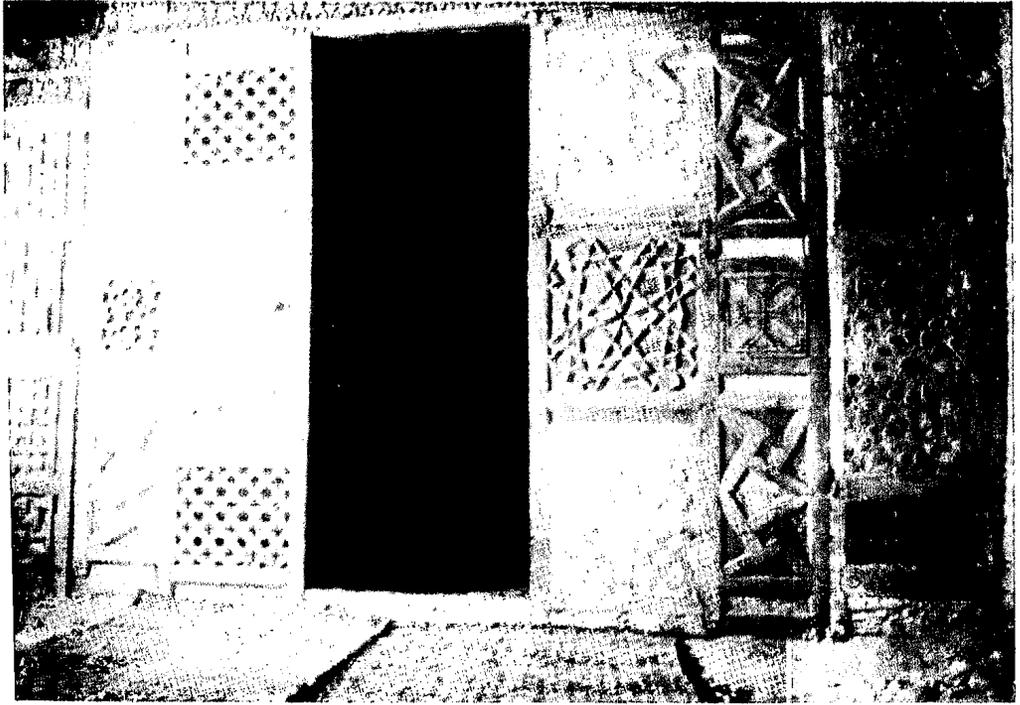
MARKOS MAGAZINE HOUSE

Cairo: 28, Shobra St. Tel: + 2(02)5770614

Alexandria: 8, Green St., Moharram Bey. Tel: + 2(03)4952740

Back cover:

The remains of very old screens, put together to form a screen that tells of former glories. It is to be found in the keep on the middle floor.



(228)

L.E. 3.00

الوحدة الحقيقية ستكون إلهاماً للعالم (إنجليزي)