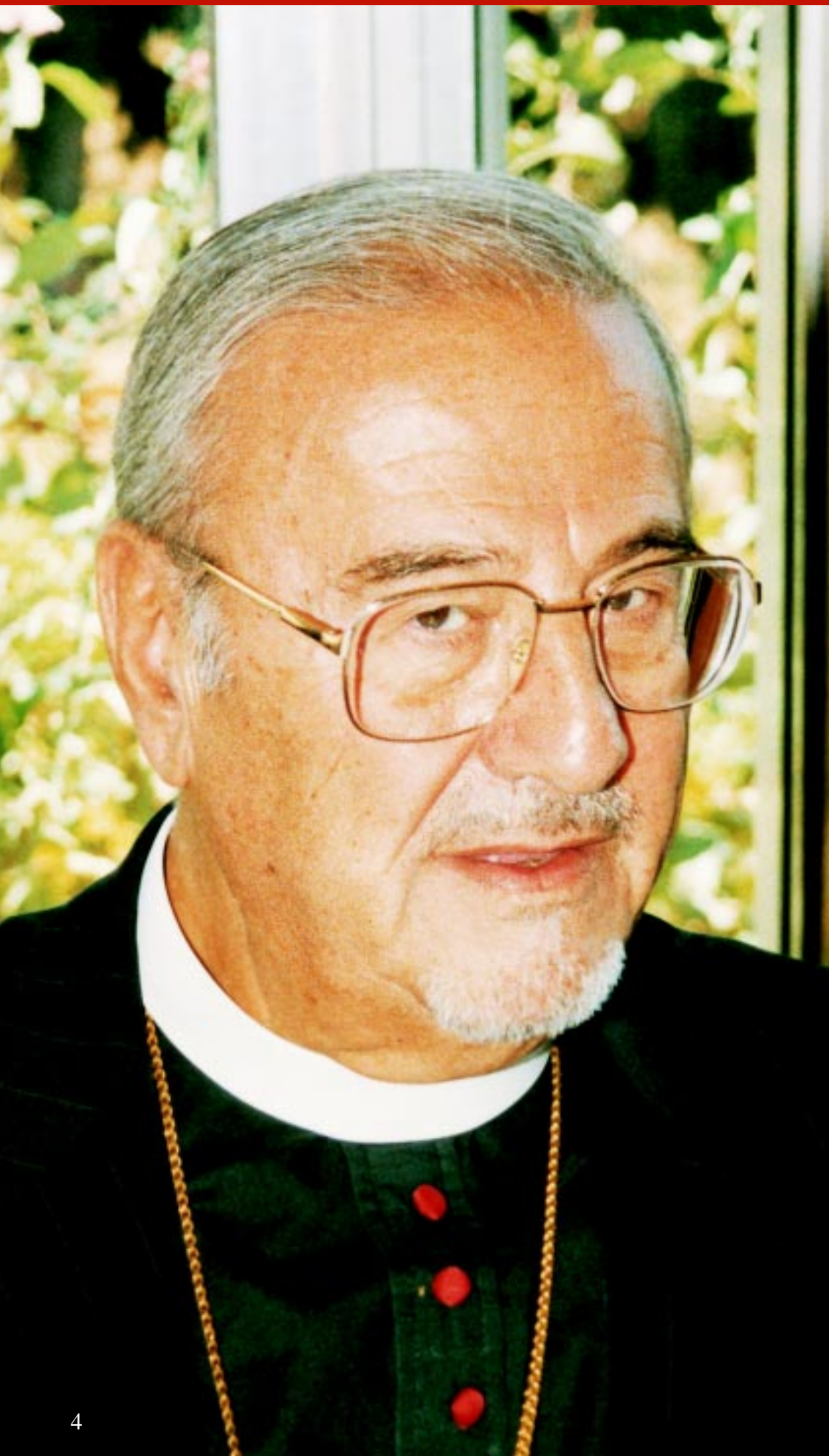


**AN EXCLUSIVE AGAIN INTERVIEW with Metropolitan PHILIP  
of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**



On October 9, 2003, the Synod of the Patriarchate of Antioch granted autonomy to its daughter Church, the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America. The following interview was conducted in November, 2003, shortly after Metropolitan PHILIP's return from Damascus.

*Please see the sidebar on page 7 for the full text of the resolution granting autonomy or self-rule.*

**AGAIN: The decision of the Patriarch and the Holy Synod of Antioch to grant self-rule to the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America is deeply significant. It also has obvious and seemingly immediate implications regarding our relations with other Orthodox jurisdictions here in North America. What do you see on the horizon in this regard?**

Metropolitan PHILIP: This decision regarding self-rule is very historic. It was not compelled by any political ideology, such as communism. After two years of intense negotiations, His Beatitude, Patriarch Ignatius IV, along with the members of the Holy Synod of Antioch, realized we do have a clear vision for the future of Orthodoxy on this continent. His Beatitude and the Synod became convinced that our self-rule is not a separation from Antioch.

In my address to the Synod, I said, “Antioch is far more than geography or nationality; it is a distinct school of incarnational theology, a theology rooted in Christ Himself, in Peter and Paul, in Ignatius of Antioch, in John of Damascus, and finally in the articulator of this theology, our father among the saints, John Chrysostom. Antioch is more than geography. Geography may change. Antioch is history and history does not change. Where are the Christians of North Africa? Where are the Christians of Yemen and Saudi Arabia? Where are the Christians of Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Alexandria?”

We hope and pray that our self-rule will embolden other Orthodox hierarchs, clergy, and faithful to emulate our example and move toward the future with courage and unshakable faith in God’s plan for Orthodoxy in North America. The unity of Orthodoxy in our country is inevitable because it is the will of God. This is what we see despite all obstacles.

**AGAIN: Not everyone will be enthusiastic about the granting of autonomy to the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America. What criticisms do you see coming from the outside? Will these present a difficulty in terms of unifying Orthodox groups here?**

We hope that everyone will be enthusiastic about our self-rule, because it is the will of God and the will of our God-loving people. At the 2001 Archdiocese Convention in Los Angeles, California, 97.7% of our people voted for self-rule. I am most thankful to our Antiochian people. In all of our deliberations, they were of one heart and one mind; this is precisely why we got this self-rule without any division in our Archdiocese. This is very rare in modern Orthodox history. Yes, there may be some criticism from the outside, from selfish patriarchs who do not understand the movements of history, from persons who enjoy life in the grave of history. We say to such people, “The Holy Spirit is not dead. The Holy Spirit is a lifegiving Spirit and is always working in the Church despite our sinfulness. What He requires from us is a positive response to His divine challenge.” This criticism, however, will not present an insurmountable difficulty. Orthodoxy unity in North America is inevitable, despite some frozen-minded bishops.

**AGAIN: Do you see other North American jurisdictions, such as the Greek Archdiocese, following suit and achieving a similar degree of autonomy from the Mother Churches?**

Unfortunately, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is experiencing its long, dark night. It has problems in Estonia, Australia, and North America, and some problems with the Church of Greece, just to mention a few. Thus, despite the fact that many Greek-Americans would like to emulate our example, it is not going to be easy for them to escape from the grip of the Ecumenical Patriarch.

We thank God that Patriarch Ignatius and the Holy Synod of Antioch have a sense of history and were able to put the interest of the Church above their own. If the Greek-Americans succeed in their quest for autonomy, this will be a tremendous step forward toward Orthodox unity, and other jurisdictions will follow.

**AGAIN: How is this likely to affect your relationship with the Orthodox Church in America?**

We have always had good relations with the Orthodox Church in America, and we will continue to do so. How far can we go in our relationship? This depends on the leadership of the Orthodox Church in America. I do not know if the Orthodox Church in America has a clear vision for the future.

**AGAIN: Is this the beginning of a process which will one day give birth to a unified, united Orthodox Church here in North America?**

I have no doubt that this process will continue. I pray, however, that it will continue peacefully without causing any schism in the Church. Our Orthodox people on this continent have matured and are ready to put their house in North America in order. We need some courageous religious leaders to lead with clear visions for the future. The scripture says: “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). Despite our various national backgrounds, I believe Orthodox unity, with diversity, is very possible.

**AGAIN: You have spoken frequently over the years about our need as Orthodox in North America to come out of the ethnic ghettos. You have said this will allow us to reach out to the vast multitudes on this continent, speaking to them with a unified voice in a language they can understand, and with a faith that is alive and full of the Holy Spirit. Do you feel that this move towards autonomy will help in this regard? If so, how?**

I thank God that the Antiochian Archdiocese is no longer an ethnic ghetto, liturgically or otherwise. If you examine the tremendous number of convert clergy and laity in our Archdiocese, you will know what I mean. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). In the Archdiocese, we are all one in the body of Christ.

When students apply to us to attend the seminary, our Review Board does not examine their applications based on national background, but rather on their qualifications. In the Antiochian House of Studies, we have students from all jurisdictions and many national backgrounds, especially from overseas. I hope our blessed move toward self-rule will reinforce what I have been teaching and preaching for the past thirty-eight years of my episcopacy.



*Top: Metropolitan PHILIP with Patriarch IGNATIUS IV.*

*Bottom (left to right): Dr. George Farha, Metropolitan PHILIP, Patriarch IGNATIUS IV, Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, and Father Joseph Antipas, during the Metropolitan's recent trip to Damascus.*

Moreover, I hope that our self-rule will encourage clergy and laity of other jurisdictions to be bold enough to think of our children and future generations. America is thirsty for the holy Orthodox faith. What is happening in the Episcopal and Roman churches is very indicative of this reality. According to statistics, there are about sixty-six million unchurched Americans. Don't you think it is our responsibility to bring them to the true Orthodox faith, the "faith which once and for all was delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3)?

Our Department of Missions and Evangelism, under the leadership of the Very Reverend Peter Gillquist, has brought many thousands of people to the true faith. Can you imagine how many people we can bring to this true faith if we have a united Orthodox Department of Missions and Evangelism? I beseech my brothers, the Orthodox hierarchs, and the clergy and laity of other jurisdictions, to seek self-rule for the sake of Orthodoxy in this hemisphere.

**AGAIN: Here is a question which is hard to ask, but which I'm sure many readers will want to hear you address. As you look ahead to the future of Orthodoxy in North America and generations yet to be born, a future which you have worked so hard to help shape and define, and which you have sacrificed so much to help establish, what do you envision? When some day in the years to come, you must say, as St. Simeon, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," for what do you hope? What are your dreams regarding Orthodoxy here after you are gone?**

This question is not hard to ask at all. It has been present in my mind since 1968, when I had my heart attack in Washington, D.C., and since 1972 at the Miami Heart Institute, when I had open heart surgery.

When I was consecrated Metropolitan of this God-protected Archdiocese in 1966, I was young, full of energy, and full of pride. I had my own agenda. I wanted to reorganize the Archdiocese, and to unite Orthodoxy in America in the twinkling of an eye. I wanted to feed the poor everywhere, to end the war in Viet Nam, to bring a just peace to the Middle East, and so on. Little did I know that God does not work according to my agenda, but to His. This compassionate God "has chastened me and I was chastened. . ." (Jeremiah 31:18).

Before my heart surgery, I surrendered completely to God. By so doing, I felt at peace. It is ironic that in order to be liberated, we must surrender. I said to God, "My life belongs to You. If You want me to depart, I will do Your will, and if You want me to sail to Your shores, I am ready."

We have done much during the past thirty-eight years. Yet there is still much to be done. Our Lord said, "My Father is still working and I am working" (John 5:17).

Future Orthodox generations expect much from us. First and foremost, they expect Orthodox unity. We are not going to push a button and eliminate ethnicity. What we are seeking is unity with diversity. We can organize a synod in North America to address all uncanonical issues which we are facing, such as the interference of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the internal affairs of the Antiochian Archdiocese. We have a complete break of canonical order in this country. This must be addressed.

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## **HOLY SYNOD OF ANTIOCH GRANTS SELF-RULE TO THE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA**

*On Thursday, October 9th, 2003, the Holy Synod of Antioch voted unanimously to grant self-rule to the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. The full text of the authorized English translation of the Synodal Resolution is included below.*

### **Resolution of the Holy Synod Regarding the Status of the Antiochian Archdiocese in North America**

#### **1. Self rule and Jurisdiction**

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America is and shall remain self-ruled within its present jurisdiction (The United States of America and Canada) and shall constitute one unified ecclesiastical Antiochian entity.

#### **2. Governance**

The Archdiocese is governed by the Holy Scripture, the Sacred Tradition, the Holy Canons, the Constitution of the Church of Antioch and this Synodical resolution and by its Constitution and Bylaws.

#### **3. Recognition of Auxiliary Bishops as Diocesan Bishops and Local Synod**

Upon adoption of this resolution, the Auxiliary Bishops of the Archdiocese shall become Diocesan Bishops and bear their given titles. The Diocesan Bishops will constitute under the Metropolitan the Local Synod of the Archdiocese which will be its governing authority. The Local Synod shall determine the number of dioceses and their boundaries.

#### **4. Procedure of election of Diocesan Bishops**

- A. The General Assembly of the Archdiocese will nominate three candidates for a Diocesan Bishop. When Diocesan Assemblies shall be constituted the nominations shall then be made, by the said assemblies.
- B. The Patriarch of Antioch shall delegate two or three Metropolitans to participate on behalf of the Holy Synod together with the Local Synod in the election of the Diocesan Bishops. The Metropolitan shall preside over the electoral assembly.
- C. The consecration and enthronement of the Bishops shall be accomplished in North America by the Metropolitan, the Patriarchal Delegate and the members of the Local Synod.
- D. In case of insufficient number of qualified nominees from the Archdiocesan clergy, the Archdiocese shall nominate from the list of nominations kept in the Patriarchal records.

#### **5. Procedure of election of the Metropolitan Primate**

The Metropolitan Primate shall be nominated according to the Constitution of the Church of Antioch and the Constitution and Bylaws of the Archdiocese. The three nominees for the office of Metropolitan Primate shall be submitted to the Holy Synod of Antioch to elect one of them. The Metropolitan shall be a member of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate as well as of the Local Synod of the Archdiocese.

#### **6. Right of appeal and Synaxis**

In all matters of hierarchical discipline, Bishops of the Local Synod have the right to appeal to the Patriarch of Antioch and the Holy Synod. The Archdiocesan Bishops, after consultation with the Metropolitan, shall attend the gatherings or synaxis of the Antiochian Bishops which may be called from time to time by the Patriarch of Antioch.

#### **7. Decisions of the Holy Synod of Antioch**

The decisions of the Holy Synod of Antioch shall be binding on the Archdiocese on matters of doctrine, liturgy, sacraments, relations with autocephalous Orthodox Churches and ecumenical policy with regard to other Christian and non-Christian bodies.

#### **8. Amendment and translation**

The Patriarchate of Antioch and the Archdiocese shall each amend its constitution in accordance with the above. The Archdiocese shall submit its amended constitution to the Holy Synod of Antioch for approval. The Arabic text of this resolution and its English translation shall have equal force and validity. ❖

## DID YOU KNOW. . .

### ❖ That the Orthodox Church is composed at present of the following **“autocephalous”** Churches:

The four ancient Patriarchates:

- Constantinople (the Ecumenical Patriarchate)
- Alexandria
- Antioch
- Jerusalem

several other Patriarchates (autocephalous churches headed by a Patriarch):

- Russia (the Moscow Patriarchate)
- Serbia
- Romania
- Bulgaria
- Georgia

and several other autocephalous churches headed by an Archbishop or Metropolitan:

- Cyprus
- Greece
- Poland
- Albania
- Czech & Slovak Republics
- The Orthodox Church in America

**An autocephalous church is self-governing.** It possesses the right to resolve all internal problems on its own authority and has the ability to choose its own bishops (including the Patriarch, Archbishop, or Metropolitan who heads the church).

### ❖ That there are, in addition, several Churches which are **“autonomous”**:

- Finland, dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate
- Estonia, dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate
- Sinai, dependent on the Patriarchate of Jerusalem
- Japan, dependent on the Moscow Patriarchate
- China, dependent on the Moscow Patriarchate
- Ukraine, dependent on the Moscow Patriarchate
- and now, the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America, dependent on the Patriarchate of Antioch

**While self-ruling in most respects, an autonomous church has not yet attained full independence from its mother church.** The head of the church must be confirmed in office by the Holy Synod of its mother church.

### ❖ Although each church acts independently, they all remain in sacramental and canonical communion with one another.

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Note: there is not complete consensus on the specific self-governing status of all of the churches.

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I envision an autocephalous Orthodox Church which would put an end to all this uncanonical chaos in North America. I do not think I will see that in my lifetime. However, no one can turn back the wheels of history. Christ did not establish His Church to leave it to the wolves. The future generations will enjoy all the fruits of a united Orthodoxy in our country. I envision tens of thousands of Americans joining the Orthodox Church, if we are united. As far as St. Simon's prayer is concerned, I do not know when God is going to take me home, but I am ready. And when I go, I will go happily, because at least I have tried.

### **AGAIN: Let s look back the other direction for a moment. As you look back over the many years of your episcopal leadership over the archdiocese, what are your fondest memories? What successes do you prize most highly? What do you hope your legacy will be?**

While I am always looking towards the future, I don't mind looking towards the past because I am a student of history. Despite the obstacles of the past, the past remains rich and sweet. The most productive years of my episcopacy were the years after my heart surgery. Every moment of my life became an urgent moment, and every day seemed like the last day.

Some of my fondest memories from the past are my encounters with little children. When our Lord said, "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3), He was, as always, teaching us the truth. Some of the children's questions were serious. Some were funny, such as "Do you live behind the altar?"; "Are you the Margarine King?"; "Were you born a bishop?"; "Your M & M (Eminence), when are you going home?"

Much of my success happened in the Seventies. I think of the founding of the Antiochian Women and of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch; the purchase of the Antiochian Village, the beginning of our camping program and the reorganization of our youth. Then there is the first visit of our Antiochian Patriarch to America; the consecration of territorial bishops, soon to be diocesan bishops; and the visits of Patriarch Ignatius in 1985 and 1999. Then there is a very important event in the life of Orthodoxy in North America, the reception of the former Evangelical Orthodox Church into canonical Orthodoxy in 1987.

These are but some of the prized moments in the history of my episcopacy. Last but not least is the obtaining of self-rule for our Archdiocese. This was one of my most difficult and yet joyful experiences. I am eternally indebted to the hierarchs, the clergy, and the laity of this Archdiocese. Without them self-rule would never have been achieved.

### **AGAIN: Do you have anything to add, have we missed anything? Please give your blessing.**

May God bless you, your co-workers, and finally may He bless AGAIN Magazine. ❖