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Letter to Fr. George Dimas 5-3-04 from His Eminence Metropolitan Philip Saliba

This letter is in response to correspondence from Fr. George Dimas dated April 26th, 2004. [Click here to read this letter.](#)

May 3, 2004

Fr. George Dimas

Secretary to the Holy Synod Of Antioch

c/o The Archdiocese of Beirut

Dear Fr. George:

Christ is Risen!

I have before me your correspondence dated April 26th, 2004. I believe that this correspondence raises the same points as your original letter to the WORD magazine dated February 16, 2004, and to Again Magazine dated February 12, 2004. I also have a copy of Mr. Albert Laham's letter to His Beatitude Patriarch IGNATIUS IV dated February 7, 2004. Your letter, Fr. George, seems as if it is a translation of Mr. Laham's letter. Now we know who is muddying the water and fanning the fire for reasons that I will not mention in this letter.

First, I would like to clarify my relationship with the WORD and Again magazines.

A. Please be advised that the WORD magazine is edited and published in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The editor of the WORD magazine is the Very Rev. Fr. John Abdalah, in whom I have full confidence. Pittsburgh is quite a distance from the Archdiocese Headquarters in New Jersey (approximately 500 Km). The issue of the WORD magazine that contained the word "autonomy" in the Editor's Comment was prepared and printed while I was still in the Old Country. When I returned to the United States, I directed the editor of the WORD not to use the word autonomy, but rather to substitute the expression self-rule. This was done in accordance with the decision of the Holy Synod of Antioch.

B. Again Magazine is edited and published in California which is approximately 4,800 Km from New Jersey. The editor of Again Magazine is the Rev. Fr. Thomas Zell who is rendering a tremendous witness to Holy Orthodoxy in this land.

It is important for you and for all concerned to know that I do not censor these publications. What is published in these magazines does not necessarily express the official position of this Archdiocese, nor its policies. We are responsible only for what we send from our office under the title "Archdiocese Office." The authors of various articles are responsible for what they write. It is also important to know that here in America we live in a country that does not censor articles and opinions. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees *freedom of speech*. Both magazines (i.e. The WORD, and Again) have been informed of our policy concerning self-rule. It is interesting to note the following dialog that is recorded on page 38 of the official minutes of the meeting of the Holy Synod of Antioch that was held in October, 2003. I asked the question "How do you translate the word *autonomy* into English or Arabic?" Albert Laham answered "There is no strict legal (canonical) translation for this word. There is no objection to calling it "self-administered church" or "self-governing church." This is the translation of the word *autonomy* according to Mr. Laham.

Dear Fr. George, I will now proceed to answer your points categorically:

1. **"Eparchial Synod" and "Local Synod"**

After two years of tension and intense debate, the Holy Synod of Antioch unanimously adopted the document titled "Resolution of the Holy Synod of Antioch." I am most grateful to all of those who have contributed to this result. Our father in Christ, His Beatitude patriarch IGNATIUS IV deserves the

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credit for this wonderful achievement. After the unanimous adoption of this resolution, I said to His Beatitude, and may God be my witness, "Sayidna, there are some rough spots in the English translation of the resolution, and I am going to make corrections, not in substance, but in a few expressions." His Beatitude said to me "This is simple (baseeta)." Fr. George, Metropolitan PHILIP did not invent the expression **Local Synod**. I refer you to the Resolution of the Holy Synod of Antioch, where you will find the following:

- a. Paragraph 3 reads in Arabic "Recognition of Auxiliary bishops as diocesan bishops and the **Local Synod**."
- b. Paragraph 4 states that "the consecration and enthronement of the bishops shall be accomplished in North America by the Metropolitan, the Patriarchal Delegate and members of the **Local Synod**."
- c. Paragraph 5 mentions the **Local Synod** twice in the procedure for election of the Metropolitan Primate.

Now, Let us both examine the official minutes of the meeting of the Holy Synod of Antioch that was held in October, 2003. Please check the statement made by Metropolitan GEORGES Khodr on page 27. On page 33 even Mr. Laham used the expression **Local Synod**. On page 36, please check the second paragraph of Metropolitan GEORGES' statement. On page 43, please read what Metropolitan ELIAS of Beirut said about the **Local Synod**. On page 44, our beloved Patriarch says "I suggest that there must be some order for the **Local Synod**." On the same page, the Most Reverend YOHANNA, Metropolitan of Latakia also mentioned the words **Local Synod**. On page 45 His Grace Bishop YOHANNA Yazigi mentioned the **Local Synod**. Again on page 46, Metropolitan ELIAS of Beirut mentions the **Local Synod**. If the usage of the expression **Local Synod** is anathema, why did not someone raise a "point of order" in the meeting?

Since the expressions **Local Synod** and **Eparchial Synod** were used interchangeably in the official document "Resolution of the Holy Synod of Antioch" written in October, 2003, and since the expression **Local Synod** appeared in the official minutes of the meeting of October, 2003, I opted to use the expression **Local Synod** instead of **Eparchial Synod**. Why? Because the word Eparchy is not a widely understood term in this country. Only those who are familiar with ecclesial terminology are likely to be familiar with this word. For this reason, we chose to use **Local Synod**, so that the majority of people would understand.

2. Election of Bishops

I do not understand the logic of anyone who would say that we are trying to "minimize the weight of the Patriarchal presence in the election process." God forbid!! We have the utmost respect for the Patriarch, and we have proven that in words and deeds. We stated in our document "two or three" Metropolitans for purely practical reasons. We wished to give His Beatitude the choice of delegating two or three Metropolitans. Thus, if the Patriarch wishes to send three Metropolitans, who would object to that? They would be most welcome. This is a non-issue. We did not want to require His Beatitude, who is an excellent steward of the Church, to spend between \$20,000 and \$25,000 for travel and living expenses. This money could be better spent on needy students at the University of Balamand.

3. Right of Appeal

We indeed added the clause "in all matters of hierarchical discipline" to the language that specifies the right of appeal of diocesan bishops to the Patriarch and the Holy Synod. This addition to the document makes sense. For example, if a member of the Local Synod disagrees on how many students we should send to seminary, should this be a matter of appeal to the Patriarch and the Holy Synod? If a member of the Local Synod disagrees with the assignment of a newly graduated seminarian to a specific parish, should this be a matter of appeal to the Patriarch and the Holy Synod? If a member of the Local Synod disagrees with any financial matter related to the life of this Archdiocese, should this be a matter of appeal to the Patriarch and the Holy Synod? This would be beyond reason. I am sure that our good Patriarch has many things to attend to in lieu of these mundane issues. Moreover, if the Holy Synod wished to intervene in every minor disagreement of our bishops, than what remains of our self-rule? This is our rationale for the addition to article 6. This was not discussed by the Holy Synod because the obvious does not require a discussion.

4. Synaxis Attendance

Let us assume that we receive an invitation and agenda to such a synaxis, and the Metropolitan's health does not permit him to attend this synaxis. Do you not think that it is imperative that the Metropolitan should consult with the diocesan bishops before they attend the synaxis? Someone is again making an issue of a non-issue. It is extremely important that the Metropolitan should consult with any diocesan bishop within this Archdiocese before he travels abroad.

Dear Fr. George and venerable members of the Holy Synod of Antioch, St. Paul teaches us that our Lord gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this "present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). Thus, we find the Church at the beginning of the 21st century besieged by serious problems from all sides, both here in America, and in the Middle East. Do we not have anything better to do than to nitpick at such simple matters? There is an old proverb that says "While the ship is sinking, the crew is busy painting the chimney." Let us stop "painting the chimney" but instead let us, during this joyous Paschal season, renew our love for one another, and rededicate ourselves to the unity that exists between the Mother Church of Antioch and this Archdiocese. Finally, may the Light which cannot be overtaken by night always shine in your hearts.

Yours in the Risen Lord,

Metropolitan PHILIP

Primate

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America



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