

**THE VISION OF PATRIARCH IGNATIUS IV OF ANTIOCH
ABOUT THE DIASPORA
A THEMATIC SURVEY AND AN ANALYSIS OF HIS HOMILIES
AND PUBLICATIONS**

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1 Introduction

In the last two centuries, not only the Antiochian but also all other Orthodox diasporas have experienced a consistent growth worldwide, to the extent that Orthodoxy today is no longer the Christianity living in the East, but it has expanded all over the world, particularly after its active presence in the West for more than one hundred and fifty years. During his thirty-three years as the head of the Antiochian See (1979–2012), Patriarch Ignatius IV accompanied important and great challenges in the dioceses of the diaspora. He visited their parishes, encountered their people, and experienced how the Antiochian roots spread in new lands and yielded fruits.

The late patriarch wrote and spoke about his vision of the diaspora in various opportunities. In this article, we read and analyze a selection of his sayings in this regard, considering the key ideas he defended and sustained. Some of his messages were delivered on special occasions directly related to the Antiochian diaspora, such as his first official visit to Western Europe in May and June 1983; his first official visit to South America in September and October 1984; The First Open Synod of Balamand in 1993 and his last episcopal ordinations for the diaspora dioceses in 2011 and 2012.

His approach to the diaspora question is based on two principles. On the one hand, he sees that Christianity is called to spread throughout the world because Christians are missionaries by nature. On the other hand, he considers that the Antiochian See must keep its unity because Antioch is not linked to a national heritage, but it is above all a particular Christian way of life. When he talks to the parishes, he opts for a simplified Arabic language, close to the spoken dialect. However, his words do never lack depth in meaning nor power in conveying a message, just like the Gospels of John and Mark that were written in a popular language but had the force to engrave their message on the hearts of their listeners. As for his academic and official words in front of

the church and political authorities, we notice a more refined style in messages written with eloquence and persuasiveness.¹

After this brief introduction comes to a presentation of his theological fundamentals about the church in the diaspora. Then follows an analytical study of his sayings according to these three essential aspects: the unity of the Antiochian See, witness and education, and the future of the diaspora. There is a new demographic distribution of the Orthodox parishes in the world, and today the Orthodox people form part of different cultures, some of which are far away from the traditional milieu of the Mediterranean basin and the ancient world. Patriarch Ignatius noticed the depth of this radical change in the structure of the Church he had to serve and planned for the challenges to come not only for Antioch but also for the Pan-Orthodox world.

2 *His Theological Fundamentals*

In an interview given to George Nahas with the title *Al-ghurbah* (the absence) that was published in 1968, that is, six years after his ordination as a bishop, His Beatitude explains one of his favorite theological fundamentals, which turns out to be closely related to his vision of the diaspora. The Arabic term *ghurbah* has a varied and rich lexical field and, depending on the context, it may denote either absence or abandonment. The word is related to the basic idea of leaving home (the East) to go toward the West (*al-gharb*); some forms of the root may even denote banishment or exile. This interview contains an in-depth text about how Christians are called to abandon themselves to the will of God.

After a brief allusion to the Epistle to Diognetus, Patriarch Ignatius begins with a philosophical premise to define the concept of *ghurbah* and says: “the *ghurbah* can only happen in relation to the particular. A person cannot be absent except in relation to the ones close to them.” (Georges 2003, 63) He moves on and says that Christians should not feel ashamed of being strangers (*ghurabâ*) to this world and passing through this life without leaving a secular trace, but rather that they should care to leave the seed of striving to turn towards God, far from this world. Christians have the call to bear witness of God’s word away from any worldly concern to the point that lacking a home

1 For a brief analysis of his homiletic style and contents see Dimitra Koukoura, 1-10. A more detailed study is to be found in the doctoral dissertation by Archbishop Isaak Abdallah Barakat with the title Το ομιλητικό έργο του Πατριάρχη Αντιόχειας Ιγνάτιου Δ’.

is no longer understood as a weakness but as a virtue, in the sense that the Gospel of Luke shows when it says, “they left everything and followed him” and “foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 5:11; 9:58par; RSV). Therefore, “the only thing worth building in the world is the elevation of souls to the one who loves the repentance of every sinner.” (Georges 2003, 65) He concludes by emphasizing the importance of trusting in the divine providence and neighborly love, saying: “Your *ghurbah* in the world requires you to have courage and an adventurous soul. You need to be ready to give everything and to take nothing in return, accepting to be disturbed and worried for the others, teach them, and knock on every door knowing that the Lord will open one day.” (Georges 2003, 67)

On the one hand, his message in this interview relies on the major Christian virtues of love, chastity, and poverty for the sake of Christ. On the other hand, his words connect with those living in the *ghurbah* par excellence, i. e., the emigrants who are far from home and their beloved ones. They would have similar experiences, particularly those who thirst for spiritual life. Patriarch Ignatius IV realized that the Antiochian communities abroad were thirsty for a life according to the Holy Spirit and spoke about them in his writings. In the communities he met, there were emigrants from the first generation as well as their children who were well aware of their parents’ sufferings and sacrifices to take root in a new land and help their people in the motherland. He also met the third and fourth generations of grandchildren and great-grandchildren who were eagerly seeking to go back to the land of their ancestors for a visit and for creating new bonds.

His Beatitude expressed his conviction that nothing meaningful can happen in the church without the permanent work of the Holy Spirit. He said so for the first time in an ecumenical homily in Uppsala in 1968 and his saying was published again and again: “Without the Spirit, God is far away; Christ belongs to the past, and the Gospel is dead letter, the Church is merely an organization, authority is domination, mission is propaganda, worship is evocation, and Christian action is a slave morality.” (Ignatius IV 1990, 122–130)

Undoubtedly, the summoning of Orthodox to found local parishes in the diaspora thanks to the efforts of Antiochian emigrants was one of the noblest manifestations of these humble people throughout the world. Without any attempt to celebrate or exult any geopolitical situation that jeopardized the Christian presence in the Middle East, it is worth mentioning that those Christian emigrants caught the breath of the Holy Spirit amidst every storm

that forced them to displace and migrate but stayed firm in their faith. Patriarch Ignatius IV saw the presence of this divine breath in those emigrants and in everything they did for the Church in the diaspora. Based on his authentic theological convictions, he saw that these young dioceses were flourishing with the blessing of the Lord and that they will always be a blessing as long as they remain loyal to the Orthodox Christian faith.

3 The Diaspora and Patriarch Ignatius IV

3.1 The Unity of the Antiochian See

This is one of the main concerns Patriarch Ignatius IV had about the Antiochian diaspora, mainly because Antioch went through major internal crises due to several socio-political changes in the Middle East and the world during his ministry between 1979 and 2012. For his Beatitude, the Antiochian identity was a way of life, and Antiochians shaped one and the same church despite any geographical and cultural distances. The following lines analyze some of his sayings about this topic in chronological order.

The first text has a special context because it was part of His Beatitude's message to Pope John Paul II in Rome in May 1983, during his first official visit to the Vatican. In the opening lines of his discourse, the patriarch chose to refer to the parishes in the diaspora as an integral part of the Antiochian See. Notwithstanding the topic's relevance, he did not go deeper into this idea because he preferred to elaborate on three other current affairs: the practice of ecumenical dialogue, the situation of the Lebanese war, and the latest developments in the Palestinian cause (Voyage 1983, 215–218). However, in this official visit, he highlighted his approach to the Church of Antioch as a universal church. He said: « J'ai la joie de vous saluer au nom de cette Eglise d'Antioche rassemblée et dispersée jusqu'aux confins du monde » (Voyage 1983, 215).

The following year, in September 1984, His Beatitude visited Brazil and addressed the community in São Paulo and told them that in the Damascene Levant there is a living history that does not only belong to the archeological places like Ugarit or the Phoenician monuments, but rather to lively and thriving cities such as Damascus, Beirut, and Jerusalem. He said that he belonged to this region, “a cradle of religions that gave birth to civilizations ... We treasure the Islam from among us and the genuine Christianity and Judaism that came from among us.” (Bada'iyy 1987, 15) These sayings enhanced the awareness of the legacy inherited by the diaspora communities and the

assurance that the Church is alive in the Middle East and has an ancestral legacy to offer. His Beatitude cared to create bonds between the Antiochians worldwide. This is why, for instance, he invited the young people of Curitiba in 1984 to come and see the faith of the young people in the motherland (Badaûiyy 1987, 45)

In his inaugural address to the First Open Synod in Balamand in October 1993,² Ignatius IV said: “Our holy Antiochian See has expanded throughout the globe (Yûsuf 2004, 135)” He added that people need to know each other to love each other. It is difficult to love those who you do not know, and one of the Church fundamentals is love. Further, he came to mention some eminent leaders and teachers of the Antiochene See in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and evoked their achievements. He stressed the fact that those people watched over the unity of the church with the help of the Holy Spirit. He first mentioned Saint Raphael Hawaweeny, Bishop of Brooklyn, and Father Basil Kharbawy for their ministry in the United States and Canada. Then he mentioned Father Simon Issa El-Khoury, a disciple of Saint Raphael, who served in Mexico and Argentina. Then he remarked on the work of Archimandrite Ignatius Abu El-Rus in Argentina. He said that both the Antiochian and the Russian churches were eager in paying the highest respects to Bishop Raphael and canonized him as a saint. In the conclusion, he announced that the members of the First Open Synod would go home with the canonization of a new saint for Antioch, Saint Joseph the Damascene (Yûsuf 2004, 136–138) This last step was of great importance to the Church, as the biography of Saint Joseph was quickly distributed throughout Antioch in many languages and became the patron saint of a new generation of clergy. Today Saint Joseph is well known for his pastoral work in Damascus and for his endeavors to spread knowledge and education during the difficult days he had to live until his martyrdom.

2 I participated in the Open Synod as a theology student and a translator for the delegation of Argentina. It was a heartwarming event for the clergy and the lay leaders who were able to meet for the first time in one place with their brothers and sisters from other dioceses in the diaspora to debate the future of the Antiochian Church in different regions and continents. Side meetings were held for this purpose, and the attendees raised key issues, such as the establishment of a theological institute in Latin America and the teaching of Byzantine chanting in Spanish in an organized and unified manner. A similar event took place again on June 26–29, 2014, under the blessing of His Beatitude John X. This time the official name was not “the open synod” but “the general Antiochian conference” followed by a regular session of the Holy Synod. See the documents on <https://www.antiochpatriarchate.org>.

In his message stands out his position about unity in diversity: “I have had the opportunity to meet many brothers and sisters in all the archdioceses that have been entrusted to me and they all spoke with one voice: We do not need to settle for one to be identical to the other. The Christian life does not consist of uniformity. Each of us must be open to meeting the other. The Christian life is communion and spiritual exchange between one and the other. There is nothing more beautiful than meeting with the person that God has placed before you and saying with him/her: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your Name (Yûsuf 2004, 139)” In other words, Patriarch Ignatius IV was convinced that the Holy Spirit provides communion within the Church. This does not mean that everyone should be alike. He respected the freedom of the other and the neighbor, as the Christian faith teaches in the Bible and the writings of the holy fathers. Unity in diversity is one of the key principles for His Beatitude’s approach to the diaspora inasmuch as the acceptance of the other in their own reality and context.

In his later years, at the ordination of two auxiliary bishops for the Archdiocese of Brazil on November 6, 2011, in the Virgin Mary’s Cathedral of Damascus, Patriarch Ignatius delivered a homily published in *Al-nashrah* magazine (*ars antâkiyy* 3 2011, 33–48). His Beatitude referred in this homily to the multiplicity of languages used for worship in the Antiochian Patriarchate. Most probably because the faithful had heard parts of the Divine Liturgy in Portuguese besides Arabic. “We do not say that our only language is Arabic,” he said and added that Arabic is only the language of the region in which believers express their thoughts and feelings. (*ars antâkiyy* 3 2011, 34) “So, dear sisters and brothers, we see today that we have here two young men from South America. When they spoke in their own language, they prayed what you pray. I want you to know that there is a community in South America who carry the word of God and deliver it to the people in their language, to make them understand, not to be ignorant. (*ars antâkiyy* 3 2011, 34)” In the Antiochian tradition, there is no definition of a holy language, any language is apt for expressing the faith. There is no need to cling to national political identity to be a Christian from Antioch. Antioch works as a church that carries the word of God and communicates it to the people. What mattered to His Beatitude is that the church announces the word of God, which alone unites everyone no matter where they are and despite their cultural context.

On the occasion of the ordination of the auxiliary bishops for the Archdiocese of North America at the Monastery of Balamand on December 11, 2011, His Beatitude emphasized the importance of the episcopate service to

the church if they follow Jesus' example during his public life. (ars antâkiyy 3 2011, 39) In this homily, the late Patriarch emphasized the essential role that was completed by those who transmitted the faith to America and became a bond of union between the people in the New Continent and the people of the Middle East. They were faithful to their roots and were proud of their origin, so they founded the Archdiocese of America "years ago with their blood and with their deeds, without forgetting their roots they acted genuinely and came back here. They were proud of belonging to this place. Everyone should know that we have people who love the church, and feel part of the church, and know the value of their priests, their bishops, and their patriarch. (ars antâkiyy 3 2011, 39)" Thus, Ignatius IV expressed his concept of unity, he saw the church as one big family whose members live everywhere across the continents but return to meet in the old ancestral home and in the presence of their father.

Concerning the role of the patriarch to secure the unity of the church, he said: "Dear brothers and sisters, in the one church we have different sees: the see of Constantinople, the See of Alexandria ... and we have the See of Antioch, the least known of all, but one of the greatest. Our patriarchate can have only one patriarch, as is the case in all other Orthodox patriarchates, and as it has always been from old till this day. Why should we sustain that there are many (patriarchs) when there is only one patriarch (for each church)? (ars antâkiyy 3 2011, 41)" With these words, His Eminence expressed his keenness and attention to keeping the unity of the Antiochian See. Patriarch Ignatius IV believed that the Antiochian heritage is shaped by the contributions of the sanctifying experience of the people throughout history and in the present. This experience is granted by the power of the Holy Spirit, who blows with his divine grace wherever the believers gather in the name of the Lord. (Ignatius IV 2006, 51–53)

3.2 Witness and Education

3.2.1 Witness

In the Antiochian context, the witness to the Christian faith is understood as an essential mission of the Church that stems from its Levantine nature that took form over the centuries of ethnic pluralism and coexistence between different religions. This is why Patriarch Ignatius, a son of the Damascene Levant, devotes an essential place to witnessing in his discourse.

In his first visit as a patriarch to the World Council of Churches in Geneva on May 14, 1983, he said: “La recherche de notre propre identité antiochienne dans tous les domaines de la vie ecclésiale contribuera peut-être à sensibiliser notre Patriarcat à son rôle de témoin du Christ dans nos régions et à tous ce qu’il y a de créateur dans le monde chrétien. (Voyage 1983, 220)” In this statement, His Beatitude expresses his intellectual openness to a continuous striving for the fostering of service within the church and in the world. I think that this saying applies to the Antiochians living both in the Middle East and in the diaspora, because without intellectual openness the Antiochian communities cannot adapt to the new cultural contexts and give witness to their faith.

In the following year, on September 22, 1984, Ignatius IV visited one of the Antiochian charitable institutions in São Paulo and stated in his speech: “You are apostles and teachers, and you did not come only to receive, but also to give. We do not want anyone of us to reach a situation where he (or she) only takes and does not give. Your faith is the best that you can give. Your faith is the most genuine faith on the face of the earth. Lift up your heads and do not be ashamed. You have a richness like no other in the world. (Badaûiyy 1987, 15)” With this saying, His Beatitude sends his audience to the world as real missionaries of the Christian faith. These words remind the reader of what Saint Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:31: “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord (RSV).” In this verse Saint Paul was quoting Jeremiah 9:24, which in its full length says: “Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord (RSV).” In his address to an emerging church, the patriarch depicted the diaspora as an essential means not only for the spread of the faith but also for achieving justice and mercy among people.

Two days later, in the Brazilian city of Santos, Ignatius IV delivered a historical speech in which he exhorted the people to work hand in hand with the parish leaders for the sake of educating their children. Here, one of the pastoral targets of the diaspora communities is revealed: “(The presence of) your faith in Brazil does not consist of empty words ... We need people who can incarnate the faith. The world needs something more than words. Our people need something more than words. We need (active) people, silent soldiers, and they come from your homes and your consecrated parishes. (Badaûiyy 1987, 25)” And when he visited Goiania, he added: “All these people here (i. e., non-Orthodox citizens of Brazil) demand you to know more about your church and you have to tell them about your church. (Badaûiyy 1987, 76)”

Consequently, the parishes in the diaspora can provide people who can do charitable work for their local and global communities. His Beatitude considered that the freedom, tolerance, and the predominant Christian environment in the countries where the diaspora parishes lived granted an appropriate ground for the Antiochian church to grow and bear fruit. The Archimandrite Nicolas Badawi noted in his book that the Patriarch looked at the Antiochian people of Brazil with optimism and rejoiced in their many achievements for the sake of the church and society (Badaûiyy 1987, 24–26) We do not read that His Beatitude regretted that these people were a loss to the church in the Middle East, or that he was worried about their socio-political context. He rather focused on the future of the parishes and the raising of their children according to the Apostolic Antiochian faith. He saw the parishes as the expansion of the mother Antiochian church into new countries that accepted its ancient history, teaching, and principles. Undoubtedly, His Beatitude had a positive view of the Antiochian diaspora and looked forward to their witness in their local communities.

After more than twenty-five years, we read about his uninterrupted pastoral work, on the occasion of the ordination of the auxiliary bishops for the Archdiocese of North America. In this opportunity, His Beatitude tackled once again the concept of witnessing the faith in the diaspora archdioceses and invited the new bishops to fulfill the following mission: “I wish to see you as evangelists announcing to the world with engagement and depth what we have here. The Holy Spirit blows upon us now and always to bless us. The church here is the same church there. We must never forget to mention our grandfathers and fathers and mothers by whose efforts the church grew both here and in North America. God has given you the call to be faithful to Him and the canons of His church. These canons must be observed well and earnestly because they are inspired by the Lord. (ars antâkiyy 3 2011, 41)”

3.2.2 Education

Education was a major concern in the life of Patriarch Ignatius IV, as the institutions he directed and founded around the Balamand Monastery clearly show. Wherever he was assigned or appointed, His Beatitude took care of the educational institutions around him and worked for the education of parishes, monasteries, dioceses, and finally all of the Antiochian Patriarchate, including the diaspora.

In 1983 His Beatitude gave a speech at the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris in the presence of Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger. Here Ignatius IV referred to the history of the Antiochian Patriarchate and the dialogue between Christians in the East and West. In this context, he mentioned the presence of the Orthodox in Paris and said: “You too, in France, can offer much. Perhaps not everyone is aware, but Paris became in the twentieth century one of the centers of Orthodox thought. I myself studied theology in Paris at the St. Serge Institute. Moreover, some books published in Paris in French revealed the importance and beauty of the Orthodox Church to the young men and women living in Syria and Lebanon, including myself. At that time, we founded the Orthodox Youth Movement in the Patriarchate of Antioch, an institution that until this day is a great instrument of spiritual renewal. (Ignatius IV 2006, 45–55)”

In this statement, it is remarkable how the patriarch gives credit to the intellectual activity in the diaspora (in this example the Russians in France) for fostering religious education with the founding of institutions and the publication of books and other reading material. He sees that the Orthodox diaspora contributed to the advancement of studies in the Middle East, and the University of Balamand founded by His Beatitude is a clear example of his implementation of this vision. Both, the diaspora, and the mother church profit from this interaction and help each other in the fields of education and many other pastoral fields.

As for the speech of Patriarch Ignatius IV to the Antiochian Society in São Paulo on October 2, 1984, he brought up some points that, in his opinion, they needed to improve. He said that the genuine Antiochian tradition consists of knowing the Gospel and the Christian faith. He added that he saw many libraries during his visit, but he noticed the absence of the Bible in them. He saw that people were distracted by industrial progress and social appearances and embraced “imported moral standards.” His Beatitude asked them to focus on the authentic Antiochian heritage, which is the Gospel and the belief in the Gospel. He quoted the New Testament twice: One to remind them that it was in Antioch where the disciples were called Christians for the first time (Acts 11:19–26) and another to recall the meeting of the two chief apostles Peter and Paul in Antioch (Galatians 2:11–14). The patriarch affirmed that Christianity renews everything. Therefore, Christians should not get distracted by what is old and earthy. He invited the audience to gather to talk about their faith periodically. He echoed the voice of the mother church who cares for her children and teaches them to love. He told them: “We want books that talk about our heritage and our faith. We want books in our language and other

languages. We want words that we hear from time to time to broaden our horizons and open new doors for our minds, thoughts, and aspirations. (Badaûiyy 1987, 61)” He urged them to gather around prayer and to uncover the treasures of the Antiochian faith by organizing lectures on history, thought, and theology in Antioch.

Among the sermons of Patriarch Ignatius IV to the diaspora communities stands out the one he delivered in the St. Nicholas Cathedral of Rio de Janeiro on Sunday, October 14, 1984. There, His Beatitude outlined guidelines for successful pastoral work. His words revolved around Jesus’ key saying in the Sermon on the Mount: “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). From this call, he proceeded to stress the duty of every Christian to learn the word of God, live according to it, and teach it to their children in words and deeds. According to him, only education can provide a solid future to the Antiochian diaspora. For him, education is the key to any pastoral work. (Badaûiyy 1987, 98–99) This sermon reached the listeners’ hearts and they applauded with enthusiasm when he finished. On that day he gave communion personally to hundreds of attendants as an expression of his personal engagement with them to work for the church.

3.3 The Future of the Diaspora

According to His Beatitude, the future of the church in the diaspora is entirely dependent on our ability to raise the new generations in the faith. This work begins at home on the responsibility of the parents and is completed by the parishes through religious education programs, youth gatherings, and the summoning around the word of God to listen and pray.

This is why, he addressed the fathers at St. Nicholas Church in Goiania and said to them: “Fathers, organize religious education (programs) because without them we will disappear. If we do not educate our children, they will become the children of others. (Badaûiyy 1987, 76)”³ In Rio de Janeiro, the Patriarch spoke about the future with optimism and enthusiasm. He came to establish a new era in the history of Antioch in Latin America, he said. He asked for institutions to work for the education of the upcoming generations. He wanted to meet all existing institutions related to Antioch to exhort them to work for education and formation. Antiochian communities should be less

3 In a recent article, the Brazilian Orthodox writer Pedro Sergio Dos Santos speaks of a necessity to assume a more missionary attitude in Latin America by providing education and reading material in the local languages (174–175).

interested in social activities and the founding of leisure clubs. They were rather expected to engage more for the church. For Patriarch Ignatius, Christians are called so because Christ is the cornerstone of their lives and therefore the parishes in the diaspora must focus on spreading the Christian faith above all. (Badauiyy 1987, 93)

As for the future priests of the Diaspora, His Beatitude stressed that they should come from among the local parishes and dioceses because an active and praying community could not be barren of priestly vocations. (Badauiyy 1987, 16,76) A healthy parish bears fruits and secures its continuity, just as every community provides the professionals necessary for their progress and development. The Institute of Theology at the University of Balamand knows the practical dimension of Patriarch Ignatius' vision. During his days, the largest number of students of the Antiochian diaspora studied at the institute, and His Beatitude was very optimistic about using online education systems to provide religious education for the parishes overseas. During his visit to Brazil, he took the opportunity to meet with the archbishops of Latin America and planned with them for the future of their dioceses, so they decided to organize annual regional conventions⁴ and annual youth conferences in each diocese (Badauiyy 1987, 75). This kind of event has been taking place since then on a quite regular basis.

Furthermore, Patriarch Ignatius IV met the clergy, the youth movement members, and the administrative committees in Buenos Aires (Archdiocese of Argentina) in October 1984 and expressed his concerns for the future of the Church in Latin America. He presented his pastoral plan for the development of the church in the diaspora and insisted on the following points: First, priestly vocations and church leaders must come out from among the parishes themselves. Secondly, religious education is a must for the upbringing of future generations. He informed them about the results of the episcopal regional meeting in Brazil where they decided to launch a new phase in the regional pastoral work (Badauiyy 1987, 109–110)

More than twenty years later, Patriarch Ignatius ordained Archimandrite Silouan Moussi as the Archbishop of Argentina on Sunday, October 15, 2006, in the Damascene Cathedral. In the homily, he highlighted the two primary tasks of a bishop in their pastoral ministry: teaching the Word and performing

4 They appointed the Archdiocese of Mexico, Venezuela, and Central America as the host for the first event in 1985. The delegations met in Caracas as planned, and this conference created a positive spirit of unity and cooperation among the clergy and the youth movement in Latin America.

good actions. He reassured his opinion that the future needs men and women committed to teaching and working in the church (*Siyâmat al-arshimandrit silûân mûsiy miṭrânan 'ala abrashiyyat al-argantiyn 2006*).

4 Conclusions

“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word,” with these words St. Luke sums up his vision of the situation of the first Christians after they had to leave Jerusalem because of the persecutions and became carriers of the faith in Jesus Christ throughout the world (Acts 8:4). In human terms, those Christians were in a sad and painful situation, but they were encouraged by the power and assistance of the Holy Spirit to get out of their afflictions and preach the Gospel wherever they went. Patriarch Ignatius read the Bible as the divine living Word that works today among the believers. Therefore, he saw that God’s dispersion of the Antiochian people throughout the world was a precious opportunity to become missionaries of the authentic Eastern Christian faith, just as those early Christians did when they had to leave Jerusalem.

Patriarch Ignatius IV was properly presented as a spiritual leader of peace, dialogue, and reconciliation (Bishara 2020, 53). In his words, he cared to define the role of the church both in the Middle East and in the diaspora. While the mother church has centuries of tradition and a precious heritage to share, the dioceses overseas have the call to mission and bear witness to the one and only Antiochian Orthodox faith. The whole church is united by the Antiochian spirit, which is a way of living the faith taught in the Bible and the tradition of the holy fathers. This is how Patriarch Ignatius saw the relationship between the church in the East and the church in the West. His vision leaves an important legate for the Pan-Orthodox world; not only at the level of preaching and teaching but also in the canon laws that were approved by the Holy Synod of Antioch regarding the diaspora and the pastoral achievements of the Antiochian diaspora during his patriarchal ministry. These canon laws ought to be studied in detail.

The Balamand Monastery and all its institutions are a living example of an integrated work between the mother church and the communities abroad, just as the late patriarch envisioned. From the foundation of the high school, the theological seminary, and the university to the development of programs, publications, and common projects, all these activities show a balanced and fruitful collaboration of the Antiochian people from all continents.

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