

**Memorandum of Understanding and
Collaboration between
The Eastern Orthodox Church, The Oriental Orthodox
Churches and
The United Bible Societies**

***"May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace
by means of your faith in him, so that your hope will
continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit"***

(Rom 15:13)

Preamble

This Memorandum represents the result of the process of consultation between the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the United Bible Societies (UBS) in view of a mutual commitment to continuing relations and collaboration in all aspects of activity related to the Holy Scripture.

This commitment respects the canonical status of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. It also acknowledges that the UBS is a World Fellowship of autonomous member Bible Societies.

1. The history of collaboration of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches with the UBS

1.1 The history of contacts between the national Bible Societies and the Eastern Orthodox Church and Oriental Orthodox Churches goes back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when cooperation began between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Bible Society. Later, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Armenian Patriarchate in Turkey worked together with the American Bible Society on various publication and translation projects. Relations began to develop on a more formal basis at the end of the 1960s when some representatives of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches started to attend UBS Europe regional meetings.

1.2 These relations expanded significantly at the end of the 1980s as the newly constituted or reconstituted national Bible Societies in countries where either or both Orthodox Churches are the majority developed and expanded official contacts and cooperation with the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

1.3 From 1999 onwards a new phase of relations was inaugurated between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the UBS after the initiative of His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Afterwards, Committees were set up to oversee the process: on the part of the UBS, a *Committee for Relations with the Orthodox Churches*, and on the part of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, a *Permanent Committee for Relations with the UBS*. The first official meetings between these Committees were held in Larnaca, Cyprus (2003) and in Volos, Greece (2005). Afterwards, the two Committees met in Athens, Greece (2006) Moscow, Russia (2007), and Agia Napa - Paralimni, Cyprus (2010). In 2011 the UBS Church Relations Committee took over the responsibility of the previous Committee for Relations with the Orthodox Churches, and subsequently set up a UBS Dialogue Group in 2014. A first meeting between this UBS Dialogue Group and the Permanent Committee was held in Constantinople/Istanbul in April 2015, another took place in Paralimni, Cyprus, in October

2016, and a further meeting was held in Ierapetra, Crete, in September 2017. The present Memorandum represents the outcome of this process.

2. The place and role of the Holy Scripture

- 2.1** For the Eastern Orthodox Church and Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Holy Scripture is inseparable from their Holy Church Tradition and the mission of their Churches in the world, and is addressed primarily to their faithful (*laos tou Theou*). Therefore, the reading, interpretation and proclamation of the Holy Scripture take place primarily in the sacramental life and the living experience of their Churches.
- 2.2** According to the UBS document *Fellowship Mission, Vision and Values*, “*The Bible Society movement has as its motivation the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)*” (UBS Foundational Beliefs 1). In addition, the Bible Societies “*affirm that the Holy Scriptures belong to all churches, recognizing that doctrinal interpretation of the Scriptures belongs to them*” (UBS Foundational Beliefs 4).
- 2.3** The Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the UBS jointly regard the Holy Scripture as “*inspired by God*” (2 Tim 3,16), affirm the universal character of the Divine Revelation and the need of the entire world for the life-giving message of the Holy Bible.

3. Statements of Intent

- 3.1** The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches acknowledge the importance for their church life of collaboration with the UBS, a World Fellowship of 150 national Bible Societies working in 200 countries worldwide, in translating, publishing and distributing the Holy Scripture. This collaboration also includes Bible projects and efforts directed towards inculturation of the Holy Scripture.
- 3.2** The Bible Societies “*serve all Christian Churches and remain fully committed to the principle of interconfessionality*” (UBS World Assembly, Philadelphia, U.S.A., 2016; Philadelphia Promise). As part of this commitment the UBS is determined to collaborate with the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, which together comprise more than 400 million Christians, in order to fulfill the UBS mission of “*the widest possible distribution of Holy Scripture*” (UBS Fellowship Mission, Vision and Values, paragraph 2).
- 3.3** The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches continue to hope and expect to be involved in the life, work and decision-making bodies of the national Bible Societies, and to have an adequate representation on their staff. Any nomination to the national Bible Societies should be in consultation with the respective member Churches.
- 3.4** The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches welcome the affirmation made by the UBS World Assembly in Newport, Wales (2004): “*Membership of our boards needs to reflect both the church and the population it serves. This implies a requirement for an appropriate range of skills, qualities and experience. As the nature of the mission and business changes and develops so will the need for leadership abilities and expertise.*”
- 3.5** The UBS, as a World Fellowship of national Bible Societies, is committed to ensuring that the understanding of the Holy Scripture according to the Eastern Orthodox and the

Oriental Orthodox Churches and its place and role in the life of their Church Traditions has to be respected in the work of the national Bible Societies.

- 3.6 The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches welcome the resolution made by the UBS Global Board in 2005 in Reading, U.K., that *"the UBS affirms its commitment to serving all Christian Churches"* and *"cannot knowingly associate itself with coercive activities aimed at inducing people to change their Church affiliation"*, but they expect a clearer statement condemning proselytism.
- 3.7 The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches acknowledge with much sympathy the UBS statement that *"We renew our commitment to the support of Bible Societies working in contexts where the Christians are under pressure"* (UBS World Assembly, Philadelphia, U.S.A., 2016; Philadelphia Promise, 4), and are committed to support and work in areas where Christian Churches and Christians are suffering under any violence, pressure, social injustice and poverty.

4. Objectives of Collaboration

The Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the UBS are committed through **mutual support** and close **collaboration** to achieve with the agreement of the local Churches, the following objectives:

- 4.1 To develop Scripture **translations** and **editions** in various languages which are appropriate for Eastern and Oriental Orthodox audiences, as detailed in the *UBS Guidelines for Scripture Translation* (2004);
- 4.2 To encourage and promote local collaborative strategies for Holy Scripture **distribution**, especially in countries where either or both of the two Church Traditions constitute the majority of the faithful.

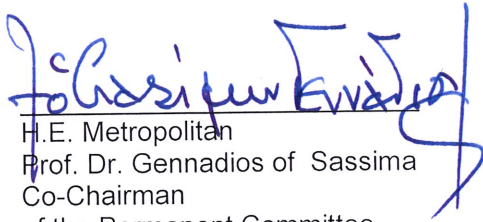
5. Implementation

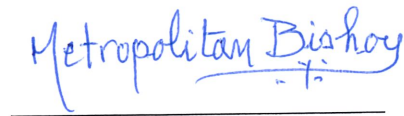
- 5.1 This Memorandum constitutes the working guidelines for collaboration and relations between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches Permanent Committee, and the UBS Church Relations Committee and its respective Dialogue Group. Both parties have agreed to meet at least once every two years. Local hospitality will be provided in rotation.
- 5.2 The Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the UBS will keep in contact as required to maintain and develop more effective working relations at the national, regional and global level.
- 5.3 The Churches' Permanent Committee for Relations with the UBS will liaise regularly with the UBS Church Relations Committee, and will nominate, after consultation, its potential candidate(s) to the UBS Global Council for the seat reflecting the Orthodox Tradition.

"Let us pray that our Lord Jesus Christ make this collaboration lead our steps, so that by the guidance of the Holy Spirit we might better serve "the Gospel of God entrusted to us" (1 Thess 2, 4)

Ierapetra/Crete, Greece, 20 September 2017.

This Memorandum of Understanding will be presented by members of this Conference of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches to their respective Churches, and by United Bible Societies to member Bible Societies, for their consideration and action.


H.E. Metropolitan
Prof. Dr. Gennadios of Sassima
Co-Chairman
of the Permanent Committee


H.E. Metropolitan
Prof. Dr. Bishoy of Damietta
Co-Chairman
of the Permanent Committee


Mr. Michael Perreau
Director General
UBS (United Bible
Societies)

Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia,
29th of September 2018