

# **Draft outline used during the conference on The Hope of Communion: From 1920 to 2020**

## **The contribution and ecumenical vision of Metropolitan Germanos Strenopoulos and Professor Hamilcar Alivisatos for a “Koinonia of Churches”**

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### ***I. “Founding Fathers” of the Ecumenical Movement***

As the famous 1920 Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople “Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere” marks its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this paper focuses on the contribution and ecumenical vision of Metropolitan Germanos Strenopoulos and Professor Hamilcar Alivisatos for a “Koinonia of Churches”. Both are among those who played a decisive role in the early stages of the Ecumenical Movement and accompanied with brilliant figures, pioneers and enthusiasts of the unitary effort of the Church. They are considered the “founding fathers” of the Ecumenical Movement.

Metropolitan Germanos’s role was undeniably fundamental, not only during the drafting of the encyclical, but also during the phase when it was received by the non-Orthodox churches and by the ecumenical movement. The metropolitan, an astute and cultured man, embodied the genuine and mature ecumenical awareness of the Church of Constantinople.

Likewise, since 1914 and on, Professor H. Alivisatos participated in all the meetings and in fact as an active and important member of the ecumenical movements, precursors of the WCC. In 1948, at the founding General Assembly of WCC, H. Alivisatos and the metropolitan of Thyateira Germanos (Strenopoulos) contributed to the voting of the first Constitution of the WCC. In that way they acted in general terms according to the spirit of the Patriarchal Encyclical and also, they founded the Council on a structure that was not substantially different from the one that was proposed and specified at the time of the circulation of the Encyclical.

Between 1919 and 1920, there were four proposals for a *koinonia* of the churches. The Patriarchal and Synodical Encyclical in January 1920, the Memorandum of Dr. J. H. Oldham to the International Missionary Congress in Crans, Switzerland in June of 1920, the publication, by the Lambeth Conference of 252 Anglican bishops assembled in July 1920, of an “Appeal to All Christian People” and the proposal of Lutheran Archbishop of Upsala N. Söderblom during a congress of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through Churches in 1919 for the foundation of an “Ecumenical Council”.

### ***II. An explicitly ecumenical vision: Metropolitan Germanos Strenopoulos and professor Hamilkas Alivisatos explain the Orthodox Program for a “League (Koinonia) of Churches”***

During this pre-ecumenical phase in 1920, as Willem Visser’t Hooft explained, «the orthodox delegates had a much clearer vision of the ecumenical calling of the Church

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than the delegates of other churches» and «sought to convince the other churches of the need of an ongoing ecumenical organization of the churches». At the time, the Ecumenical Movement was in the making and apart from individual or collective manifestations, it mainly assumed three forms: the World Conference on Faith and Order, the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through Churches and the World Conference of Life and Work. For a lot of historians of the Ecumenical Movement, that particular year can be considered its beginning.

During the summer of the year when the ecumenical movement was born, the Orthodox Church had the opportunity, at the two ecumenical conferences, to present its program based on the 1920 synodal encyclical.

a. From August 9 to August 12, the preliminary congress that laid the groundwork for the Movement Life and Work was held in Geneva. Metropolitan of Seleukia Germanos, corresponding to Söderblom's invitation, attended the congress. During this preliminary meeting, the Encyclical found the keen interest the Patriarchate expected. Metropolitan Germanos declared that the Orthodox leaders welcomed the convocation of this international conference and he added that its objectives were in harmony with the Encyclical of the Patriarchate that proposed the constitution of a Koinonia of Churches for the achievement of common goals.

b. The preliminary Conference on "Faith and Order" from August 12 to August 20 of 1920 was the one that truly gave the possibility to present thoroughly the project for the "League (Koinonia) of Churches". The important thing was that it was made clear that the proposals of the Patriarchal Encyclical were supported by all the Orthodox Churches represented in the conference. A total of eighteen hierarchs, clergymen and secular theologians, representing ten local Churches, took part in this preliminary Congress. Metropolitan of Seleukia Germanos, on behalf of the entire Orthodox delegation, addressed a greeting pointing out the convergence of objectives between the Churches and that the Ecumenical Patriarchate had called the Churches to collaborate within the "Koinonia of Churches".

Very important for the Preparatory Conference of Geneva was the contribution of professor Hamilkas Alivisatos, who based on the Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate presented on behalf of all Orthodox representatives the program of the Orthodox Church for the formation of a "League of Churches". His statement explained and supplemented the Patriarchal Encyclical in a very essential way. H. Alivisatos, after a short presentation of the Orthodox teaching concerning the Church where he stressed that all the Eastern Orthodox Churches make the «one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church», displayed the ecumenical program of the Orthodox:

"The program [...] its basic idea is the establishment of a truly friendly communication among the various Christian groups on the basis the superior law, given to us by our lord, the law of love. The submitted program aims to the formation of a League (Koinonia) of Churches in the way of the League of Nations, which will prepare its final objective that is the unity in faith and administration. For this, it is necessary to disappear above all the ignorance, the hostility and the selfishness..."

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In regard to the question «how do we believe it is possible to achieve all of the above?», he explained:

“This is precisely the goal of the League of Churches, which according to our opinion, should be structured as follow: a) to designate a permanent central committee of the League of the Churches, b) to designate various Committees in every Church represented in the League of Churches, which will communicate and collaborate with the central committee, c) to form a special media body of the League of Churches, d) to establish, in regard to the above goals, different congresses, the time and the place of which will be decided by the central committee of the League of Churches, and e) to decide from now the place and the time of the first Pan-Christian Congress.”

c. A month later, in September, Metropolitan Germanos paid a visit to Sweden, invited by Archbishop Söderblom. During two of his lectures on “The Ecumenical Patriarchate and Church Unity,” he had the opportunity to return to the proposals made in Geneva and to show, once again, how the Orthodox Church had a clear and precise idea of the form that the proposed inter-ecclesial permanent organization should take.

### ***III. The Encyclical's theological foundation and the creation of the World Council***

It is noteworthy that most of the ways of inter-church collaboration within the "Koinonia of Churches" proposed by the Encyclical have many basic similarities with the functions of the World Council of Churches established later.

Also it is equally important the fact that the proposal and the description of “koinonia” in the Encyclical of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1920 and the origin of the term in the New Testament helped in the description of the Council in its “Basis” as a “fellowship (koinonia) of Churches”. The truly notable aspect of the encyclical was the biblical and ecclesiological foundation to the proposed koinonia of churches, which was rooted particularly in Paul’s teachings on the Body of Christ in Eph 3:6, 4:15.

According to Metropolitan Germanos, the encyclical does not exclude the evangelical sense of the term, which is of fraternal communion.

It was no coincidence, therefore, that the very man who had played such an important role in drafting the encyclical and who had then promoted the activities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in collaborating with other churches, Metropolitan Germanos, would express great satisfaction on behalf of the Orthodox for the foundation of the WCC.

### ***IV. Conclusion: 100 Years Later***

The importance of the 1920 encyclical is even more evident today, one hundred years later. Since its promulgation, its basic principles as well as its corollaries have become the parameters within which the activities and functions of the major inter-ecclesial organizations are constituted and decided. In addition to providing the impetus for the entire Christian community to move toward establishing new ecumenical relations in a spirit of Christian love, the encyclical gave all the churches a clear vision and precise plan for their establishment.

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