



# **Maronite Identity in a Multicultural Society**

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It is quite crucial to mention at the beginning of my word that changes perceived in our societies due to media and technological progress, are not tangential. The miniaturization and condensation of our world are interactively involving all human phenomena, whether religious, cultural or civilizational.

Old insularities are collapsing before the irreversible flow of globalization and the most crucial issue that humanity will inevitably face is coexistence rather than existence.

As an eloquent illustration of this terrible coexistence crisis that we face today, I found it appropriate to cite the thundering declaration of the

German Chancellor Angela Merkel about the ordeal of immigrants integration in Germany:

Kate Connolly, Guardian and Observer's Berlin correspondent, writes on Monday October 18, 2010: "Chancellor Angela Merkel has declared the death of multiculturalism in Germany, saying that it had "failed utterly" , in what has been interpreted as a startling

shift from her previous views. The German leader said it had been an illusion to think that Germans and foreign workers could “live happily side by side”.

“We kidded ourselves for a while that they wouldn’t stay, but that’s not the reality”, she said at a conference of the youth wing of her Christian Democratic Union party at the weekend,



referring to the *Gastarbeiters*, or guest workers, who arrived in Germany to fill a labour shortage during the economic boom of the 1960s.

Horst Lorenz Seehofer (born 4 July 1949) is a German right-Wing politician, and Minister-President of Bavaria, says: “Integration is the achievement of one who has integrated ... I don’t have to recognise anyone who

lives from the state, rejects that state, refuses to ensure his children receive an education and continues to produce little headscarfed girls.” A large number of the Arabs and Turks living in this city (Berlin) has no productive function other than selling fruit and vegetables”. “Turks are conquering Germany in the same way as Kosovars conquered Kosovo – with a high birth rate.”

In this « **global village** », the exacerbation of murderous identities will be inescapable. **How to exist and coexist? How to manage human resources in their discordant diversity** and get them accept one another in a unique and indispensable human experience for the sake of a multifaceted approach of the multidimensional Reality?



Without the *other*, in his/her differences and way of existence, would I exist? Without the other, without the *alter ego*, would I be aware of my own identity? And what about this *alter ego*? Isn't this difference that constitutes the foundation of my otherness in the indivisible body of humanity?



When I try to standardize, marginalize or eliminate the *other*, wouldn't it be a misdirection in the quest for the ego - the other being the only path towards it? When I seek to eliminate this dissimilar other, the one who constantly calls me and positively shakes me in what I consider eternal evidence, wouldn't it be a fatal slide into a lethal lethargy of mind and a sterile quietism?

And wouldn't it be a neutralization of the cognitive and exploratory faculties of human intelligence, the other being an indispensable partner in any successful search for truth?



It is evident that the *other* that is a compulsory crossing point, derives all his or her importance from the uniqueness of the *ego*, which is the result of its *cultural matrix*. As you all know, man, in his pure state, does not exist without culture, as there is no water in the nature, with only its two constituent atoms  $H_2O$ .

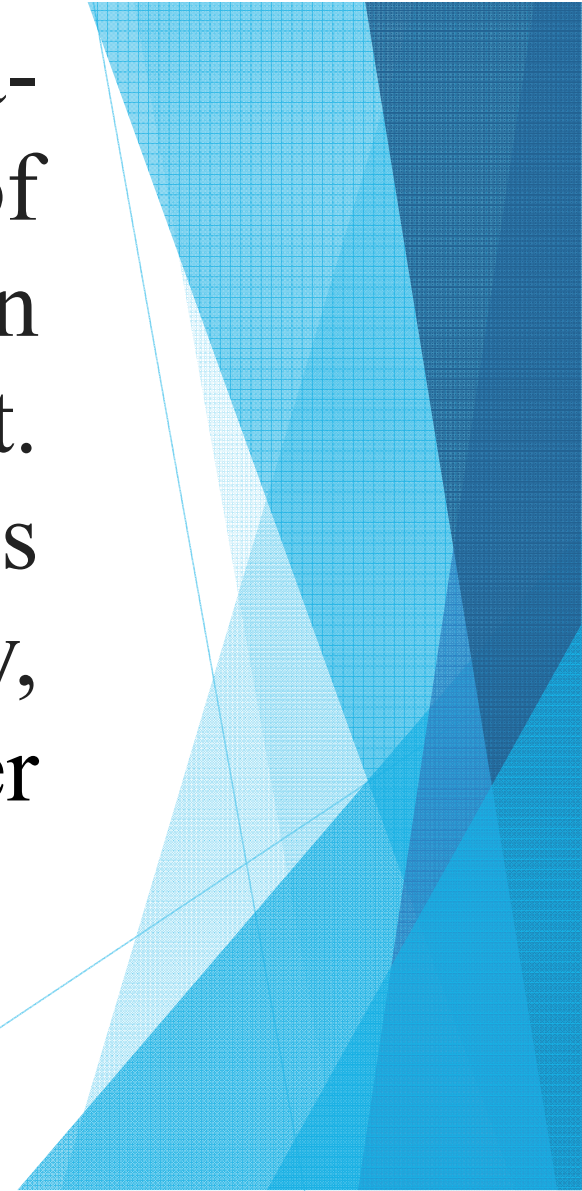
Culture in humans is equivalent to water ingredients. Without these, H<sub>2</sub>O are only existent in laboratories, but undrinkable; the same applies for human beings. The human person without his or her own culture is nowhere to be found; he or she remains a hollow concept housed in an abstraction that is disconnected from any living reality.




Similarly, faith, which is directly linked to the metaphysical dimension of human being, which is the founder of the being and giver of meaning is naturally inherent in human consciousness, as demonstrated by the famous researcher Mircea Eliade and many other well-known philosophers, psychiatrists and anthropologists.



Without these basic cultural, civilizational, national and religious sense of belonging, human being wouldn't even have the opportunity to exist. Therefore, a human being, this creature, this *Dasein*, as Germans say, chooses nothing to begin his or her earthly existence with.



Hence, there is a vital necessity in any project of peaceful and enriching coexistence to be open to others and to accept their basic sense of belonging that they haven't chosen. Outside this ontological openness to others, freely assumed by the basic imposed sense of belonging, humanity cannot move towards a lasting peace, a *sine qua non* for a flourishing conviviality.





After this concise and condensed introduction, I hope I have paved the way for our main topic: « Maronite Identity in a multicultural Society ». It goes without saying that answering the question: *Who Are We?* is the most difficult, most complicated and most hazardous thing. Whatever may be said thereupon, our attempted answer will always remain in the orbit of



asymptotic approaches, in the sphere of reductionist exploration. How to give utterance to our identity? Whatever we try to say about our identity, there will never be a possible appropriateness between being and saying. Well aware, thus, of the limits of our approach, we can now embark on the adventure of trying to determine some elements constituting our identity.



Identity construction is a dynamic process, starting from a constant founding kernel. The Maroniteness is born in a circumscribed historical and geographical context.

As highlighted by the Maronite Synod, the constant kernel of the Maronite Church's identity is:



1

- An Antiochene Syriac Church, with a special liturgical heritage

2

- A Chalcedonian Church

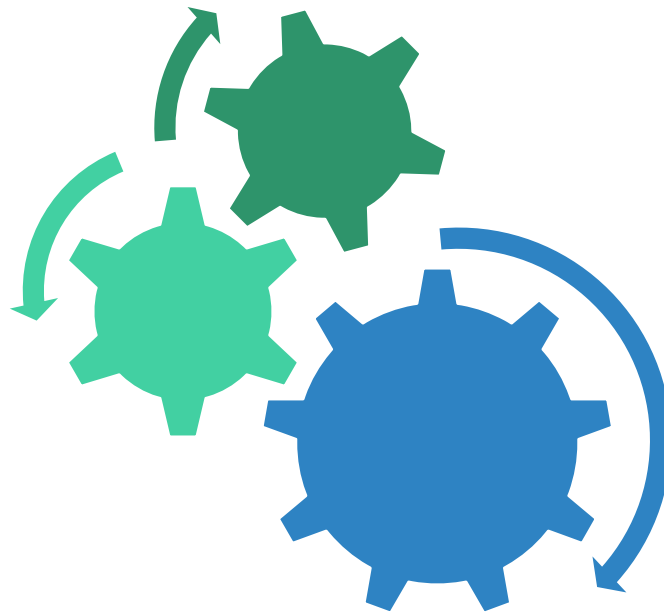
3

- A Patriarchal Church with an ascetic and a monastic aspect

4

- A Church in full union with the Apostolic Roman See

And the mobile identity components are dependent on the place of insertion of the Maronite Church in the world:





Maroniteness  
incarnated in its  
Lebanese and  
Eastern  
environment,  
and the Countries  
of Expansion

First of all, as defined by Maronite Synod, we must remember that the name *Maronite* derives from Saint Maroun, who died around 410, and to the monastery built and named after him, soon after the Council of Chalcedon (451) in the region of *Apamea*, in *Syria Secunda*, according to the Roman organization of Syria at the time. The Monastery of Saint Maroun



is indeed considered to be the cradle of the *Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church* which emerged under its auspices and in its environ, as an independent patriarchate at an unspecified date, between the end of the seventh century and the first half of the eighth. Saint Maroun, the Patron of our Church, whose feast day is celebrated on the ninth of February,



introduced a unique kind of eremitical life in Mount Cyrrhus in *Syria Prima* based on living in the open air. Theodoret of Cyrrhus (459+), influential theologian of the School of Antioch, biblical commentator, and bishop of Cyrrhus, wrote his biography and that of his disciples in his famous book *A History of the Monks of Syria*, between the beginning

of the fourth century and the middle of the fifth century:

*“I shall recall Maron, for he too adorned the godly choir of the saints[...] He practiced not only the usual labors, but devised others as well, heaping up the wealth of philosophy[...] He cured not only infirmities of the body, but applied suitable treatment to souls as well, healing this man’s greed and that man’s anger, to this man supplying teaching in*

*self-control and to that providing lessons in justice, correcting this man's intemperance and shaking up another man's sloth. Applying this mode of cultivation, he produced many plants of philosophy, and it was he who planted for God the garden that now flourishes in the region of Cyrrhus (pp. 117-118) {Translated with an Introduction and Notes by R. M. Price Cistercian Publications, Minnesota, USA.}*

The constant element of the Maronite identity is the attachment to the Antiochian Syriac Church. What does this mean? It means that the Maroniteness is a fierce defender of social and cultural diversity as it was lived in the Church of Antioch: in the cities of interior and in the countryside was prevalent the Aramaic-Syriac culture and in the coastal cities was predominant the Hellenic one. As life can only be born and

thrive in diversity, so the Maroniteness could only breathe and flourish in pluralism. The diverse and fertile heritage of Antioch remains embedded in the collective unconscious of the Maronite identity. That's why the Maronite people still oppose against any project of religion, rite, culture standardization and social or political fusion.

Here we refer to the living body to corroborate our approach to diversity. In the living body, there is no cell that is similar to another, no member is the same as another. But they are all in a functional cohesion. Take now the opposite to the living body image, the corpse. In the latter, what could be the difference between ear and mouth, stomach and back, heart and lung.



The death melts all in the funeral inertia. Therefore, any plan to remove the natural differences will inevitably be a funeral procession of life and creativity.

Now we come to another essential and constant element in the Maronite identity: *A Chalcedonian Church.*

As meticulously defined by the Maronite Synod, « By declaring that our *Church is Chalcedonian*, we mean that she perseveres in being faithful to “*the mystery of the plan of salvation*,” as it was professed and witnessed to by the monks of Saint Maron’s monastery, the cradle of our Church, in accordance with the Creed defined by the Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in



Chalcedon in 451. This Creed teaches that Christ has two full distinct natures, divine and human, united in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the distinctiveness of these two natures is maintained after that unity. This is confirmation of the humanity of Christ our Lord and of the reality of the incarnation and salvation.»



This insistence on the humanity of Christ, the monks of Saint Maron's Monastery defended with courage and determination, with Pope Leo the Great and other Fathers of the Council, has become over the centuries a *basic element in the Maronite identity*. Being Maronite is being **Inflexible Defendant** of the **Human Person** that God made in his image and that Christ has become in

the incarnation. In other words,  
**Stubborn Defendant** of the Image of  
God revealed in the **Human Dignity**  
based on **Freedom, Will, Love** and  
**Creativity**.

This is what prompted the great  
theologian, philosopher and poet Father  
Michel Hayek to give this definition of  
the Maronite: **The Maronite is eternally**  
**rebellious**.

Right now I will move on to the changing and dynamic component of the Maronite identity. It depends on the cultural and civilizational milieu where the Maronite is working to achieve. As there are natural and sometimes significant differences between one region and another in Lebanon itself, so are the countries of the expansion. It is undeniable that all the harmonics of the Maronite identity are

deeply coloured by cultural grafting. This phenomenon could not be more natural. Thus, we have Lebanese Maroniteness, American Maroniteness, Canadian Maroniteness, Brazilian Maroniteness, etc. This acculturation gives the Maronites continual enrichment. It is indeed a constant renewing that prevents Maroniteness stagnate and lose its dynamic character.

It is also worth noting that the Maronite fits entirely within the host society. Historically, the Maronite, enjoying very flexible intellectual structure, is pushed all spontaneously to love the country where he or she emigrates and to contribute to its development. His or her innate gifts for learning foreign languages provide him or her a smooth integration in the



countries of expansion, where he or she often demonstrates a strong passion for advanced university studies, among other things. In the Middle Ages, it was said in Italy and in France, “*He is erudite as a Maronite.*”

As an eloquent illustration of what I just said, I find it appropriate to think of Prof. George Helou.



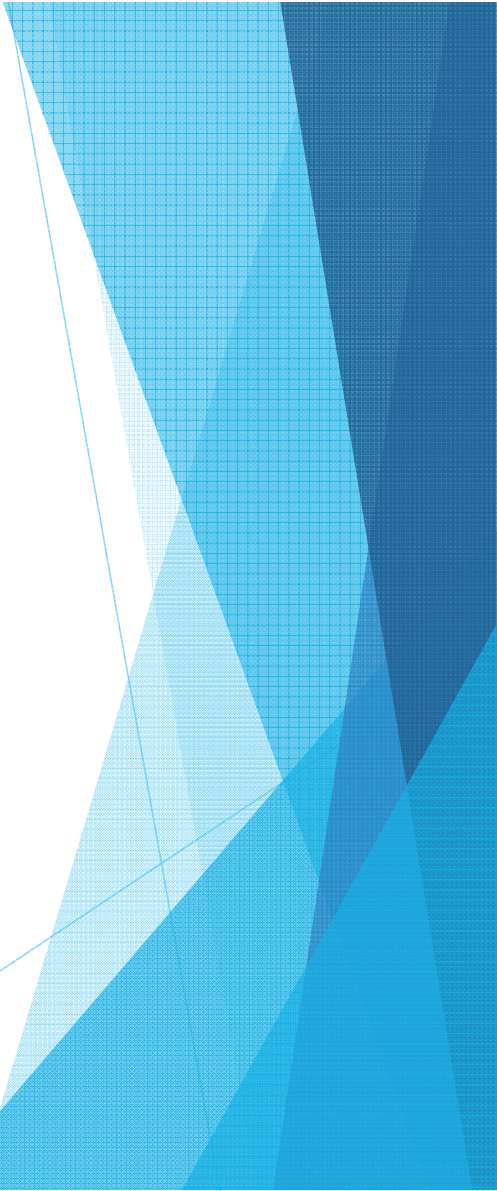


“Like many astronomers, I was captivated by the stars at a tender age. Over the mountains of Lebanon the skies were dark, the stars intense, and the Milky Way mesmerizing”.



He was born in Jezzin (South Lebanon) and pursued his studies in Beirut. He graduated in 1975 from the American University of Beirut with a B.S. in Physics with High Distinction and a Teaching Diploma in Science Education. He obtained a M.Sc. in 1977 and a Ph.D. in Astrophysics and Radio Science in

1980 from Cornell University. He is now the Executive Director of the Infrared Processing and Analysis Center, and a faculty member in the Physics, Math and Astronomy Division, at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) in Pasadena, CA. He is also Director of the NASA Herschel Science Center and Deputy Director of the Spitzer Science Center.



He splits his time between research in astrophysics and administration of science operations of NASA astronomy missions. His awards include the NASA Public Service Medal (2004), the NASA Exceptional Achievement Medal (2001), the NASA Exceptional Service Medal (1992). U.S. officials said: “*George Helou is the most precious gift that Lebanon has given to the USA.*”

Prof. Dr. Charles Elachi was born April 18, 1947 in Rayak in Lebanon. **Primary and secondary education in [Lebanon](#).** Elachi studied at Collège des Apôtres, [Jounieh](#) from 1958 to 1962, and then at the École Orientale, [Zahlé](#), where he graduated in 1964 first in [Lebanon](#) in the Lebanese Baccalaureate (Mathématiques Élémentaires).



Elachi began his career at Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in 1970. Over the span of 45 years, he has been an active researcher and science investigator on a number of space exploration missions and projects. He has authored more than 230 publications in the fields of active microwave remote sensing and electromagnetic theory, and he holds

several patents in these fields. He taught "The Physics of Remote Sensing" at Caltech from 1982 to 2001.

In 1988, the *Los Angeles Times* selected Elachi as one of "Southern California's rising stars who will make a difference in L.A." His accomplishments in the space program span the solar system and beyond.

In 2006, he was selected as one of America's Best Leaders by U.S. News & World Report and the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Charles Elachi, the Director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory since 2001, retired at the end of June 2016. He will become professor emeritus at the



California Institute of Technology, where he currently serves as a Vice President and Professor of Electrical Engineering and Planetary Science.

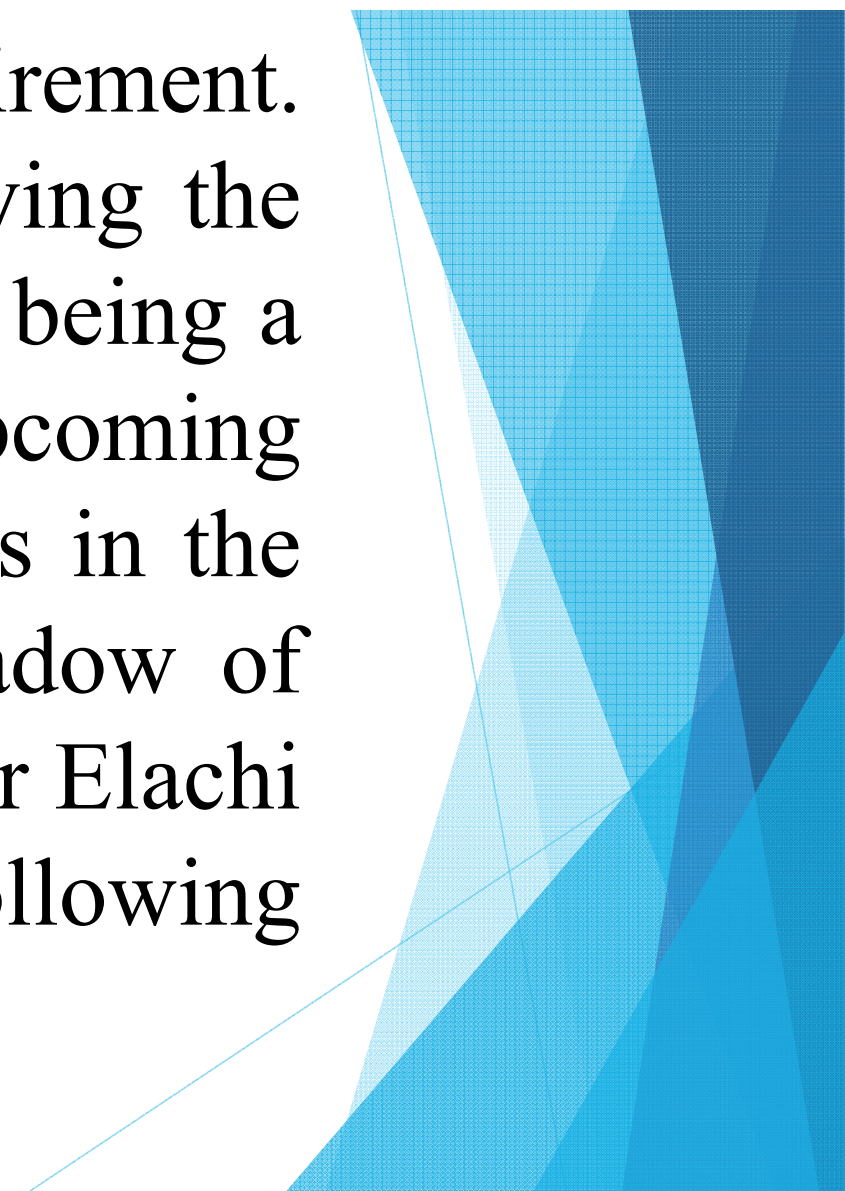
After the end of the Usek's Board of Trustees working sessions, Dr. Elias Ayoub, Chair of the Board, was extremely kind to give us a tour of the famous JPL in Cañada Flintridge on October 29, 2016 at 2 pm.

It goes without saying that it was a historic day for me. It is the most advanced space center in the world, where our planet is connected with the infinite spaces of the cosmos. And my surprise was so great to see that Lebanon, a tiny country and hardly visible on the geographical map of our globe, is a giant partner in the conquest of space, through the prominent figure

of Professor Charles Elachi. When I saw that the Mission Control Center of JPL is baptized in his name, “Charles Elachi Mission Control Center” I felt an overwhelming wave of joy and an indescribable sense of pride.

My joy doubled when my eyes fell on the Cedar of Lebanon that Professor Elachi had the ingenious idea of planting in the compound of the JPL

during the ceremony of his retirement. He entrusted its branches, defying the erosion of time, the mission of being a vigilant witness of the upcoming gigantic scientific achievements in the discovery of space. In the shadow of the Cedar of Lebanon, Professor Elachi writes on a plate the following prophetic sentence:






IN TWO THOUSAND YEARS, THIS CEDAR OF LEBANON  
WILL FILL THE EXPANSE OF THIS RING IN WITNESS OF  
MIGHTY THINGS STILL TO COME.

To conclude, we can say that Professor Charles Elachi eloquently illustrates, like every one of you here, how to be faithful to his roots that intensely color all the harmonics of his life and how to fit harmoniously and with a lot of love and recognition in the society that has welcomed him and to work for its development, in the field of science, knowledge, commerce, building, and so on.

I just told you about our extraordinary Maronite presence in the United States. But our remarkably effective and amazing presence in Australia is not less interesting. There are incredible and overflowing legends of moral and ethical lessons. For this purpose, I am glad to evoke a person you might know, Tom Hayson (Al-Hessen) in the famous book, written by



Kevin Perkins, one of Australia's best journalists, writers and biographers, with the inspiring title "Dare to Dream". As noted by the author, «Tom Hayson, born in a small bush town to a poor [Lebanese] migrant family [from a tiny village of Aitou high up in the mountains of North Lebanon], was driven all his life by one aching need – to be accepted as an Australian.

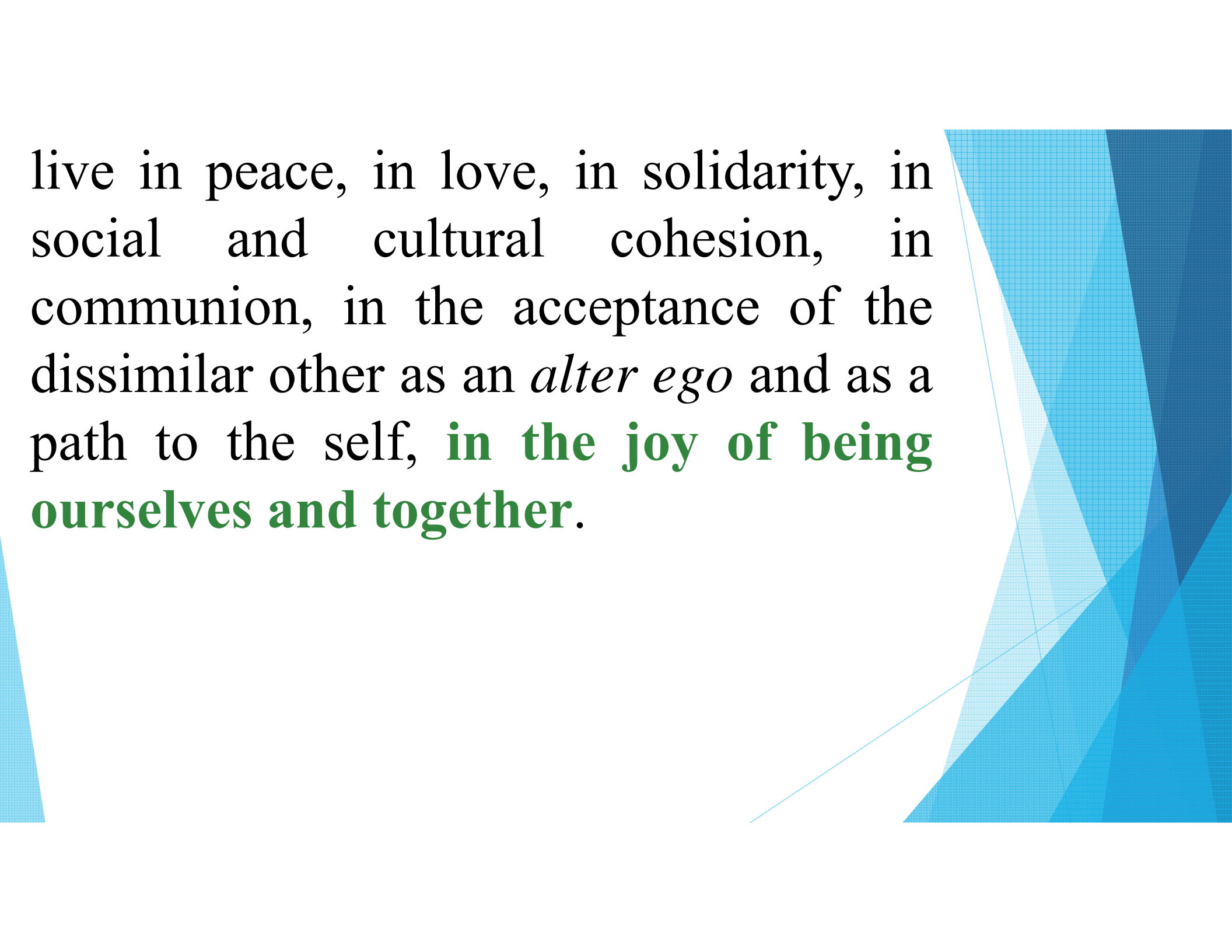




To succeed, he pioneered all he touched, from copy boy to top Sydney journalist and national radio personality to Australia's most innovative property developer. After numerous "firsts", he created world-renowned *Darling Harbour* which won Sydney the right to stage the 2000 "best ever" Olympics.»

Finally, I found it adequate to highlight the unavoidable philosophical principle for the encounter and communion between peoples and civilizations: *You must be yourself to be with others.* From there, dare to have the honor of being Maronites, to build together with other identities, no less important and rewarding for humanity in all its wonderful differences, the **New Jerusalem**, the city of God, where we shall

live in peace, in love, in solidarity, in social and cultural cohesion, in communion, in the acceptance of the dissimilar other as an *alter ego* and as a path to the self, **in the joy of being ourselves and together.**



Thanks a lot for your attention