

# Relations between Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox Churches\*

THE REV. FR. PAUL VARGHESE

*Principal, Orthodox Syrian Theological Seminary, Kottayam*

The conference of the Heads of Oriental Orthodox Churches held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in January 1965, gave high priority to conversations with our sister Orthodox Churches of the Greek tradition. The exact words are important: "Though in our concern for the reunion of Christendom we have in our minds the reunion of all churches, from the point of view of closer affinity in faith and spiritual kinship with us we need to develop different approaches in our relationship with them. This consideration leads us to take up the question of our relation with the Eastern Orthodox Churches as a first step. We shared the same faith and communion till the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and then the division took place.

Concerning the Christological controversy which caused the division, we hope the common studies in a spirit of mutual understanding can shed light on our understanding of each other's positions. So we decide that we should institute formally a fresh study of the Christological doctrine in its historical setting to be undertaken by our scholars, taking into account the earlier studies on this subject as well as the informal consultations held in connection with the meetings of the world Council of Churches. Meanwhile, we express our agreement that our churches could seek closer relationship and co-operate with the Eastern Orthodox Churches in practical affairs".

It is thus clear that for us, our relations with tradition represented by Your Beatitude, is a first priority in our ecumenical relations. Most though all, of our Churches in the Oriental Orthodox family, give this high priority to the need for restoring communion between our two families of Churches. There are churches in our family who are not quite ready for the restoration of communion. They are afraid either of compromising the faith of our fathers or of being swallowed up by a larger neighbour.

It may also be the case that not all the churches of the Constantinople family give the same high priority to the relations with our family of Churches. We have reason to believe that some of those who have often expressed great warmth of friendship towards us, have sometimes by their actions shown that they do not want the

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\* A summary of the statement presented to H. H. Justinian Patriarch of Romania, at Kottayam.

relations to progress except at their pace and under their own leadership which leadership itself has not always been very forthcoming or effective.

There are difficulties on both sides. But the possibilities are full of promise. For the decisions of Addis Ababa have been prepared through a long series of previous meetings. This is not the place to give a complete list of such meetings. There have been significant contacts, mainly under the initiative of the Russian Orthodox Church, in the 19th century both with the Armenian Orthodox and also with other Churches in the Middle East. Again during the period after the second world war we here in India had conversations with our Russian Orthodox brethren.

In several of the world ecumenical meetings, held under the auspices of the Faith and Order Movement or later the World Council of Churches, the bishops on both sides met each other and discovered that they had been misinformed about the theological positions of the other side.

Especially since the New Delhi (1961) Assembly of the W.C.C. there have been several informal meetings held in connection with World Council Conferences.

The first substantial piece of work was done at Aarhus, Denmark in August 1964. Before this, the Pan-Orthodox meeting at Rhodes in 1961 had already accorded high priority to relations between our two families of churches. The informal meetings organized by Dr. Nissiotis and myself, in our personal capacity at Montreal, Canada 1963 was a significant step forward, for we had already secured the approval of the Heads of all Oriental Orthodox Churches to go ahead with informal conversations. Bishop Emilianos and Bishop Vladimir, representatives in Geneva of the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Moscow respectively gave us their full co-operation, and the Faith and Order Commission of the W. C. C. helped us with office help and financial assistance.

There and only less than 20 theologians at Aarhus. We were genuinely surprised at the measure and pace of our mutual agreement. "On the essence of the Christological dogma we found ourselves in full agreement. Through the different terminologies used by each side, we saw the same truth expressed."

In Aarhus we were filled with hope. A few negative criticisms in Athens and New York failed to encourage us. The patriarchs of the Oriental Orthodox Churches spoke up so bravely because Aarhus had happened just a few months before.

The reactions to Aarhus on the part of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople were exceptionally good, at least on paper. It was my privilege to go to Constantinople on behalf of the Emperor

of Ethiopia to explain to him the decisions taken in Addis and to give copy of the decisions to Patriarch Athenagoras. As a result of our discussions, the Synod of Constantinople formally declared, on June 9, 1965, quoting the decisions of Addis Ababa, certain "progressive steps for the further development of the relations of our Holy Eastern Orthodox Churches with these venerable Churches of the Orient."

It was Patriarch Athenagoras, personal view in January 1965 that all this could be done before the end of 1965. Some of us thought that we needed at least ten years to complete the process.

The Standing Committee of the Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches took action in view of the proposals of the Ecumenical Patriarch. It had been possible for us in the meanwhile to make sure that the other Orthodox Churches in communion with Constantinople supported the Patriarch's proposals in general. The Cairo meeting of the Oriental Orthodox Churches Standing Committee in January 1966 stated informally that when the Orthodox Churches in communion with Constantinople were able to appoint a committee on their side, the Standing Committee would function as the Theological Commission of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and could coopt other theologians as found necessary.

This view was informally communicated to Patriarch Athenagoras. The Holy Synod of Constantinople reiterated their decisions of 9th June 1965 in another decision of 8th June 1966.

It was in this positive atmosphere that we met again informally at Bristol, England in July 1967, though no visible progress had been achieved in the matter of appointing a theological commission on the Constantinople side.

This paper is only an attempt to sketch the pattern of recent developments in the relations between our churches. A theological memorandum will have to be prepared separately. Here it remains only to point out a few of the problems that remain and to indicate the steps that need to be taken.

1. It is now sufficiently well-documented that in the substance of christological dogma, our two families of Orthodox churches hold to the same tradition. We both believe that the Son of God became by incarnation the Son of Man, and that Jesus Christ is perfect God and perfect Man, one undivided person, consubstantial with God the Father according to His Godhead and consubstantial with us according to His manhood, like us in all things, sin excepted, we both agree that the Godhead and the Manhood are united in the one hypostasis of the word incarnate, without change, without conversion, without division, without separation.

2. Our disagreement with the substance of the Chalcedonian formula is limited to the phrases to be acknowledged "in two natures" and "the distinction of natures being in no wise done away because of the union."

Even this disagreement is primarily terminological. It is possible for us to acknowledge that the person (prosopon or Hypostasis) of the incarnate Logos can be thought (in theory only) in terms of the full human nature and the full divine nature, and thus "in two natures", but in the same breath has to be acknowledged the complimentary fact that the different actions of Christ cannot be attributed to two distinct natures as Pope Leo was tempted to do. The hypokeimenon or the hypostasis to which all the actions including death and resurrection, suffering and miracle-working are to be assigned is one. It is one Christ with a united divine-human nature who hungers and thirsts and who works miracles.

Our own position is best expressed by the Syrian Patriarch Dionysius Bar Salibhi (+1171 A. D.) in the prayer of fraction used in our Holy Eucharist.

"Thus truly did suffer the Logos God in the flesh and was sacrificed and broken on the Cross. Separated was his soul from his body while nevertheless his divinity was not separated either from his soul or from his body; he was pierced on his side with a lance, and there flowed from him blood and water absolution for the whole world and his body was commingled with them (the blood and water). The Son died on the cross for the sin of the entire world, and his soul came and was reunited to his body. He turned us from the works of the left to those of the right. He reconciled by the blood of his person and united and combined the heavenly with earthly, the people (Israel) with the people (gentiles) and the soul with the body, and on the third day he rose from the grave. And one is Ammanuel and cannot be separated into two natures after the inseparable union. Thus we believe and thus we confess and thus we affirm, that this body belongs to this blood and this blood belongs to this body."

This is our faith—our confession, that Ammanuel is one, inseparable in to two natures. This is not in contradiction to the decisions of Chalcedon which also affirms that the two natures are indivisible and inseparable.

We would also agree that the distinction between the two natures is not done away on account of the union; provided such distinction is not ontological but theoretical. Ontologically they have become one nature—the miaphysis tou theo logos sesarkomene (the one nature of God's word incarnate).

It is not likely that we would be willing to change this basic Cyrillian position. These two points in the Chalcedonian formula the one about "acknowledged in two natures" and the other about "distinction of two natures after the union" are both thus problematic for us.

3. As for the will (*thelema*) and energy (*Energeia*) of Christ, the positions on both sides are not substantially different. We hold to one united divine human will and energy in Christ, while the Chalcedonians are required to believe in two wills and energies inseparably united. The difference is primarily a matter of formulation. We emphasize the unity, while the Chalcedonians emphasize the distinction. In fact we need each other to balance each other.

4. The main difficulties are of a more practical nature. The first and foremost is the acceptance and non-acceptance of Chalcedon as a universal or Ecumenical Council of the Church. Here our Churches do not now seem to be in a position to change our tradition of rejecting the council as an attempt to impose an imperial theology on the Church. It may be possible for us to consider formulating a new declaration of our common Christology to which both sides could subscribe (not as part of creed this the tradition and the Chalcedonian decree expressly forbids). This formulation could include the substance of the Chalcedonian definition, but not its exact words.

5. The second difficulty relates to the number of ecumenical councils to be recognized as such. For the moment we are not in a position to accept any councils after those of Nicea (325) Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431). The number is not sacrosanct for us. But we cannot accept any of the later councils as ecumenical. The Council of Chalcedon we regard as basically uncanonical in its procedure. At the later councils we were not present. We feel that the basic elements of the faith are adequately comprehended in the three councils and nothing of great significance is added by any of the later Councils. We may find the formulations of the third Council of Constantinople ("Sixth ecumenical" —A. D. 680–681) somewhat unacceptable in respect of the two wills and two operations. We feel this council made a mistake in reaffirming the wrong teaching of Pope Leo: "Each from morphe" does in communion with the other what pertains properly to it, the Word namely, doing that which pertains to the Word, and the flesh that the which pertains to the flesh" we are not sure that, the two natures have two separate operations in Christ. We ascribe the will and the operations to the person and nature, while the Chalcedonian side seems to ascribe the will and energy to nature and to person only through nature, We cannot think of Christ as one Person

operating through two separate natures or two separate wills. Therefore in Christ there is one divine-human person, one divine-human nature, will and energy.

The second Council of Nicea "Seventh ecumenical (787 A. D.) is also objectionable to us, for its decree contains words like the following:

"With the Fathers of this Synod we confess that he who was incarnate of the immaculate Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary has two natures, recognizing him as perfect God and perfect man, as also the Council of Chalcedon hath promulgated, expelling from the divine aula as blasphemers Eutyches and Dioscurus; and placing in the same category Severus Peter and a number of others, blaspheming in diverse fashions" (FPNF. Series II. Vol. XIV, p. 549).

The second Council of Constantinople (Fifth ecumenical 553 A. D.) is the least objectionable to us, since it corrects some of the onesidedness of Chalcedon. It affirms clearly the hypostatic-synthetic union of the two natures. Even this council reaffirms the formula "in two natures" (capitulum VII) as well as "of two natures" (Cap. VIII). The latter is generally acceptable to us with all the qualifications given in Capitulum VIII.

It should be clear from the fore-going that unconditional acceptance of the seven councils is not a practical or theoretical possibility for us, who wish to remain fully faithful to the one tradition of the undivided Church.

6. A third difficulty refers to the Saints and fathers of one side now being anathematized by the other. We now anathematize Arius and Leo, Nestorius and Eutyches. The Chalcedonians anathematize Dioscurus and perhaps Severus too. We would like to be told what is the heresy in these fathers for which they are condemned. In the case of Leo, we hold that he was a heretic in dividing the two natures and ascribing the different actions of Christ to two different natures. If it can now be demonstrated that Leo was not heretical in this respect, it may be possible to refrain from anathematizing him as a gesture of courtesy. We would then expect a reciprocal action from the Chalcedonian side in relation to Dioscurus. Timothy Aelurus and Severus of Antioch. This mutual lifting of anathemas seems to be one of the steps that need to be explored rather soon by theologians and bishops competent to deal with the question.

7. Yet another problem that may remain is related to the question of jurisdiction. It is understandable that the situation between the Melchites and the Syrian Orthodox in Syria, between the Greeks and the Copts in Alexandria and the Armenians and the Russians in the U. S. S. R. does give room for anxiety of one or

the other partner. It may be necessary to insist on the continuance of the jurisdictions as they are, on the basis of different liturgical rites even after communion has been restored.

8. None of the Churches in our family is in favour of bilateral actions to restore communion between one Oriental Orthodox and one Eastern Orthodox Church. The principal needs to be respected that I am in communion with all the members of all the Churches with which my church is in communion as well as with all churches in communion with any one church with whom we have communion. That is to say if the Syrian Orthodox Church restores communion with the Romanian Orthodox Church, then all the Churches in communion with us are automatically in communion with the Romanian Orthodox Church, and all of us are in communion with all the Churches with which the Romanian Church is in communion. This principle rules out the possibility of bilateral action. The matter has to be settled in the main between our two families, and not simply between two Churches.

9. The most urgent need to make such a conversation possible at a sufficiently structured level, makes it imperative that the Churches in communion with Constantinople establish a permanent commission, with an address and an office.

10. While this is being done direct contacts between individual Churches should go on developing at all possible levels. It may be possible for us here to establish a bilateral commission between our two Churches to discuss these theological and practical issues and to come to some form of mutual understanding. It may also be useful for us to practice exchange of theological students and teachers.

11. To me, yet another matter seems of fundamental importance. We of the whole Orthodox tradition, have a responsibility to make a more significant and effective contribution to the ecumenical movement in its world-wide dimension. This can be effectively done only if we do more consultation among ourselves on ecumenical issues, particularly those of crucial importance in the World Council of Churches and in the Roman Catholic Church. Would it be possible for such a process being initiated through a theological conference of some two weeks organized in Europe, perhaps in Romania, for theologians from our two families of Churches? If this proposal meets with approval it may be possible to appoint a small sub-committee to prepare a list of participants and to fix the agenda and programme.

12. It is also my personal hope that such a conference would lead to the establishment of a permanent association of the two families of Orthodox Churches. with its own office and fulltime

staff. Unless something of this is attempted, the conversations among ourselves as well as between us and our western brethren cannot make the speedy progress which it should.

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## The Orthodox Church in Greece To-day

A new charter granted to the Orthodox Church by the Athen's regime provides for a new foreign affairs dept., and continued State supervision, for example: if no representative of the State is present at a Holy Synod meeting, the decisions of the Synod are invalid. The State retains the right to choose the archbishop from a list of three names proposed by the Church. Previously the State was obliged to ratify the elections. Educational minister has certain decisive powers concerning diocese, including abolition of some. The Church received, after two previous meetings were postponed, the new charter of the Prime Minister with no opportunity to amend any of the provisions. For the next three years all power is to be exercised by a permanent Synod of 10 bishops which, will be appointed by the one instituted by emergency law in 1967.

*Mount Athos Monks Protest:* Mean-while on Mount Athos the chief abbot of the Orthodox Monastic Republic has appealed to Christians to protest against a government decree giving the civil government authority over the Republic of Mount Athos. In future, even decisions of the monastic administration must be submitted to the government in writing for his approval. He will have control over property, relics, treasures and libraries of the monastery, and will be entitled to investigate the monastery on grounds of suspicion, without legal authorization.

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## On the Path of the Ecumenical Movement.

### Successor to Bishop Willebrands.

Fr. Jerome Hamer, a 52 year old Belgian born Dominican will succeed Cardinal Willebrands as the secretary of the secretariat for Christian unity in Rome. Mgr. Willebrands succeeds Cardinal Bea as the secretariat's president.

### Cardinal Preaches in York Minster.

Cardinal Suenens of Malines, Belgium preached in York Minster—the first Cardinal to do so in 450 years. The Cardinal