

## AARHUS 1964

+ Over 3 days, 15 theologians from both families met in Aarhus in Denmark for informal conversations. They recognized in each other the one orthodox faith.

+ The well known phrase used by our common father, St. Cyril of Alexandria "the one nature of God's Word Incarnate" was at the centre of the conversations. Through the different terminologies used by each side, they saw the same truth expressed. On the essence of the Christological dogma they found themselves in full agreement.

+ As for the Council of Chalcedon (451) both families agreed without reservation on rejecting the teaching of Eutyches as well as Nestorius, and thus the acceptance or non-acceptance of the Council of Chalcedon does not entail the acceptance of either heresy.

+ It was agreed that the significant role of political, sociological and cultural factors in creating tension between factions in the last fifteen centuries should be recognized and studied together. They should not, however, continue to divide us.

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## BRISTOL 1967

The Agreed Statement from the second informal conversations in Bristol, England, firstly affirmed new areas of agreement and then discussed the questions that still remained to be studied and settled.

### -- ONE --

+ Based on the teachings of common fathers of the universal Church they approached the Christological question from the perspective of salvation.

+ "Thus He who is consubstantial with the Father became by the Incarnation consubstantial also with us". God became by nature man that man may attain to His uncreated glory.

+ Ever since the fifth century, we have used different formulae to confess our common faith in the One Lord Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect Man. Some of us affirm two natures, wills and energies hypostatically united in the One Lord Jesus Christ. Some of us affirm one united divine-human nature, will and energy in the same Christ. But both sides speak of a union without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. The four adverbs belong to our common tradition. Both affirm the dynamic permanence of the God-head and the Manhood, with all their natural properties and faculties, in the one Christ. Those who speak in terms of "two" do not thereby divide or separate. Those who speak in terms of "one" do not thereby commingle or confuse.

+ They discussed also the continuity of doctrine in the Councils of the Church, and especially the mono-energetic and monothelete controversies of the seventh century. They agreed that the

human will is neither absorbed nor suppressed by the divine will in the Incarnate Logos, nor are they contrary one to the other.

-- TWO --

+ Secondly they began to explore adequate steps to restore the full communion between our Churches.

+ They recommended a joint declaration be drafted with a formula of agreement on the basic Christological faith in relation to the nature, will and energy of our one Lord Jesus Christ, for formal and authoritative approval by the Churches.

+ They saw a need to further examine the canonical, liturgical and jurisdictional problems involved (e.g. anathemas, acceptance and non acceptance of some Councils, and agreements necessary before formal restoration of communion.

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## **CENACLE, GENEVA 16-21 Aug 1970**

The third unofficial conversations yielded a four part Summary of Conclusions:

### **I. REAFFIRMATION OF CHRISTOLOGICAL AGREEMENT**

+ The theologians found that they were still in full and deep agreement with the universal tradition of the one undivided Church.

+ Through visits to each other, and through study of each other's liturgical traditions and theological and spiritual writings, they rediscovered other mutual agreements in all important matters: liturgy and spirituality, doctrine and canonical practice.

+ They concluded by saying ``Our mutual agreement is not merely verbal or conceptual it is a deep agreement that impels us to beg our Churches to consummate our union by bringing together again the two lines of tradition which have been separated from each other for historical reasons for such a long time. We work in the hope that our Lord will grant us full unity so that we can celebrate together that unity in the Common Eucharist. That is our strong desire and final goal".

### **II. SOME DIFFERENCES**

+ Despite their agreement on the substance of the tradition, the long period of separation has brought about certain differences in the formal expression of that tradition. These differences have to do with three basic ecclesiological issues:

(a) The meaning and place of certain Councils -

The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches that there were seven ecumenical Councils which have an inner coherence and continuity that make them a single indivisible complex.

The Oriental Orthodox Church feels, however, that the authentic Christological tradition has so far been held by them on the basis of the three ecumenical Councils.

(b) The anathematization or acclamation as Saints of certain controversial teachers -

It may not be necessary formally to lift these anathemas, nor for these teachers to be recognised as Saints by the condemning side. But the restoration of Communion obviously implies, among other things, that formal anathemas and condemnation of revered teachers of the other side should be discontinued as in the case of Leo, Dioscorus, Severus, and others.

(c) The jurisdictional questions related to uniting the Churches at local, regional and world levels -

This is not only an administrative matter, but it also touches the question of ecclesiology in some aspects. Most cities will need to have more than one bishop and more than one Eucharist, but it is important that the unity is expressed in Eucharistic Communion.

+ The universal tradition of the Church does not demand uniformity in all details of doctrinal formulation, forms of worship and canonical practice. But the limits of variability need to be more clearly worked out.

### **III. TOWARDS A STATEMENT OF RECONCILIATION**

+ They reaffirmed the need for an official joint commission to draft an explanatory statement of reconciliation which could then be the basis for unity.

+ They suggested that this statement of common Christological agreement could make use of the theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria and John of Antioch, and that it be worded in unambiguous terminology that would make it clear that this explanation has been held by both sides for centuries, as is attested by the liturgical and patristic documents.

### **IV. SOME PRACTICAL STEPS**

+ There had already been visits between the two families on the levels of heads of churches, bishops and theologians.

+ Some Oriental Orthodox students have been studying in Eastern Orthodox Theological Institutions and it was hoped that there would be more exchange both ways at the level of theological professors, church dignitaries and students.

- + Although it was realised that some work could be initiated at an informal level, it was hoped that official actions would make further unofficial conversations unnecessary.
- + A special Executive Committee was formed to have the following functions:
  - (a) Publish in the Greek Orthodox Theological Review a report on this meeting in Geneva.
  - (b) Produce a resume of the three unofficial conversations, which may be studied by the different churches
  - (c) Publish a handbook of statistical, historical, and theological information regarding the various Churches
  - (d) Explore the possibility of an association of all the Theological Schools
  - (e) Publish a periodical which will continue to provide information about the Churches and to pursue further discussions
  - (f) Make available to the Churches the original sources for an informed and accurate study of developments
  - (g) Encourage theological consultations on contemporary problems
  - (h) Explore the possibilities of establishing a common research centre for Orthodox theological and historical studies
  - (i) Explore the possibility of common teaching material for children and youth.

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## **ADDIS ABABA 1971**

- + The informal discussions at Addis Ababa centered around the lifting of anathemas and the recognition of Saints.
- + This was termed "an indispensable step on the way to unity". The delegates felt that such a step presupposes essential unity in the faith and thus as previously discussed there is a need for an official announcement of unity in faith first.
- + They agreed that once the anathemas against certain persons cease to be effective, there is no need to require their recognition as saints by those who previously anathematized them.
- + They felt that the lifting of anathemas should be prepared for by careful study of the teaching of these men, the accusations levelled against them, the circumstances under which they were anathematized, and the true intention of their teaching. Such study should be sympathetic and motivated by the desire to understand and therefore to overlook minor errors.

+ There was also a request for a study of how anathemas have been lifted in the past. It was suggested that there may be no need for a formal ceremony but that it is much simpler gradually to drop these anathemas in a quiet way. The fact that these anathemas have been lifted can then be formally announced at the time of union.

+ Another study suggested was "Who is a Saint?"; a study of the criteria for sainthood and distinctions between universal, national and local saints.

+ An educational programme for churches was suggested, for both before and after the lifting of the anathemas, especially where anathemas and condemnations are written into the liturgical texts and hymns. Also the rewriting of Church history, text-books and theological manuals will be necessary. As this is a time consuming project, we need not await its completion for the lifting of anathemas or even for the restoration of Communion.

+ The Summary of Conclusions of this fourth unofficial meeting was submitted to the churches with the following closing note: "It is our hope that the work done at an informal level can soon be taken up officially by the churches, so that the work of the Spirit in bringing us together can now find full ecclesiastical response."

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## **CHAMBESY, GENEVA 10-15 Dec 1985**

+ After two decades of unofficial theological consultations the first official dialogue between the two families of orthodoxy finally occurred with a delegation that was called the "Joint-Commission of the Theological Dialogue Between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Non-Chalcedonian Churches".

+ They set up a Joint Sub-Committee of six theologians to prepare common texts for future work. The aim of the next meetings would be to re-discover common grounds in Christology and Ecclesiology. The following main theme and subsequent sub-themes were agreed upon:

"Towards a common Christology"

- a) Problems of terminology
- b) Conciliar formulations
- c) Historical factors
- d) Interpretation of Christological dogmas today.

## **CORINTH, GREECE 23-26 Sep 1987**

+ This was a meeting of the Joint Sub-Committee to discuss the problems of terminology. They were convinced that though using some terms in a different sense, both sides express the same Orthodox theology.

+ The dialogue focused on the terms: Physis, Ousia, Hypostasis, Prosopon.

Although these terms have not been used with conformity in different traditions and by different theologians of the same tradition, all the delegates confirmed their agreement that the unique and wonderful union of the two natures of Christ is a hypostatic, natural and real unity.

+ In confessing Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God the Father, truly born of the Holy and Virgin Mary, our Churches have avoided and rejected the heretical teachings of both Nestorius and Eutyches.

+ The common denominator was the common doctrine of the two real births of the Logos. The Logos, the Only-begotten of the Father before the ages, became man through his second birth in time from the Virgin Mary.

+ The discussion concluded with the expression of the faith that the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ was necessary for the salvation of the human kind. Only the Incarnate Logos, as perfect God and at the same time perfect man, could redeem man.

+ As discussed in Bristol in 1967, the Joint Sub-Committee concluded that the four attributes of the wonderful union of the natures belong also to the common tradition since both sides speak of it as "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation". And thus those who speak in terms of "two" don't thereby divide or separate. Those who speak in terms of "one" don't thereby co-mingle or confuse.

+ They affirmed that the term "Theotokos" used for the Virgin Mary, is a basic element of faith in our common tradition.

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## **ANBA BISHOY MONASTERY, EGYPT 20-24 Jun 1989**

+ This was the second meeting of the Joint Commission, there were 23 participants representing 13 Churches.

+ The main item for consideration was the report of the Joint Sub-Committee from Corinth on common Christological convictions. An Agreed Statement was approved for transmission to our Churches which subsequently gained widespread acceptance by everybody.

- + It confessed the common apostolic faith and tradition of the undivided church of the first centuries. This was best expressed in the formula of our common father, St. Cyril of Alexandria' ``the one nature of God's Word Incarnate".
- + They confirmed that the Holy Virgin is Theotokos and the Holy Trinity is one True God, one ousia in three hypostases or three prosopa.
- + They acknowledged the mystery of the Incarnation when the Logos, eternally consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit in his Divinity, became incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin Mary Theotokos, and thus became consubstantial with us in His humanity but without sin; true God and true man at the same time.
- + It is not that in Him a divine hypostasis and a human hypostasis came together, but that the one eternal hypostasis of the Second Person of the Trinity has assumed our created human nature to form an inseparably and unconfusedly united real divine-human being, the natures being distinguished from each other in contemplation only.
- + The agreed condemnation of the Nestorian and Eutychian heresies means that we neither separate nor divide the human nature in Christ from His divine nature, nor do we think that the former was absorbed in the latter and thus ceased to exist.
- + Again the four adverbs were used to qualify the mystery of the hypostatic union: without co-mingling, without change, without separation and without division.
- + This mutual agreement was not limited to Christology, but encompassed the whole faith of the one undivided church of the early centuries.
- + They included a statement on the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father alone.
- + They then appointed a 10 person Joint Sub-Committee for Pastoral Problems to report at the next meeting of the newly named Joint Commission of the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

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## **ANBA BISHOY MONASTERY, EGYPT 31 Jan-4 Feb 1990**

- + This was a meeting of the Joint Sub-Committee for Pastoral Problems. They found that while the faith unifies us, history keeps us distant because it creates ecclesiastical practical problems, which often are more difficult to rectify than the historical differences of theological expressions.
- + They recognised that although these problems do not have a deep theological cause, they renew the feelings of suspicion and pain among us, and will diminish the value of the theological fruits of our official dialogues unless ties of love and common sincere desire for unity complement our relations.

They made proposals in two areas:

## **1 - The relation between the two Orthodox families:-**

+ The first step must be official ecclesiastical acceptance of the agreed statement on Christology. From there an education programme should begin with publications to acquaint congregations with the joint agreements, with the churches taking part in the dialogues, a summary of the most important Christological terms together with a brief explanation based on the fathers' writings, and updates on the relations existing between us.

+ There should be an objective to create ecclesiastical relations through exchanging the theological writings, professors and students of the Theological Institutes.

+ They recommended the clear official acceptance and recognition of the Baptism performed by the two families and a joint confrontation of the practical problems in the two families such as the problems of marriage - divorce (consideration of the marriage as having taken place) etc.

## **2 - Our common relations with the rest of the Christian world:-**

+ There were several recommendations for a joint front:

- To adopt the same attitude in theological dialogues with the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical movements.

- To issue a joint communique against the modern conceptions which are completely in contradiction with our Apostolic tradition, whether related to faith or ecclesiastical issues, such as the ordination of women, and the moral issues.

- Common work in neutralising the trends of proselytism and the confrontation of religious groups who mislead believers from the faith, such as Jehovah's witnesses, Adventists, etc .....

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## **CHAMBESY, GENEVA 23-28 Sep 1990**

+ Over six days the third meeting of the Joint Commission was held at the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. They produced a "Second Agreed Statement and Recommendations to the Churches", and a four part appendix related to the report of the Joint Sub-Committee on Pastoral Problems from their meeting at Anba Bishoy Monastery.

### **I. Second Agreed Statement and Recommendations to the Churches**

+ They reaffirmed our common faith based on the first Agreed Statement on Christology. Points reiterated were the condemnation of the heresies of Eutyches and Nestorius; the Incarnation of the Logos from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary Theotokos, to become fully consubstantial with us; the hypostatic union of His divine and human natures with their proper energies and wills naturally without confusion, without change, without division and without separation, being

distinguished in thought alone; the acceptance of the first three ecumenical councils as common heritage and a mutual understanding of respective views on the four later councils; the veneration of icons.

+ They stated a clear understanding that both families have always loyally maintained the same authentic Orthodox Christological faith, and the unbroken continuity of the apostolic tradition, though they may have used Christological terms in different ways. It is this common faith and continuous loyalty to the apostolic tradition that should be the basis of our unity and communion.

+ They recommended that all the anathemas and condemnations of the past which now divide us should be lifted by the Churches in order that the last obstacle to the full unity and communion of our two families can be removed by the grace and power of God. The manner in which the anathemas are to be lifted should be decided by the Churches individually.

## **II. Recommendations on Pastoral Issues**

(A) Relations among our two families of Churches:

+ They felt that a period of intense preparation of our people to participate in the restoration of communion of our Churches is needed. This should include an exchange of visits by our heads of Churches and prelates, priests and lay people of each one of our two families of Churches to the other; and further encouragement to the exchange of theological professors and students among theological institutions of the two families for periods varying from one week to several years.

+ In localities where Churches of the two families co-exist, they suggested that the congregations should organize participation in one Eucharistic worship on a sunday or feast day.

+ Again the need for various publications to reach the people was stated; these would include the key documents of the Joint Commission, a summary of Christological terminology as it was used in history and in the light of our agreed statement on Christology, a descriptive book about all the Churches of our two families, brief books of Church History giving a more positive understanding of the divergencies of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries.

+ They recognised each others baptism's and suggested that where conflicts arise between Churches of our two families over marriages, annulments etc., the Churches involved should come to bilateral agreements on the procedure to be adopted until such problems are finally solved by our union.

(B) Relations of our Churches with other Christian Churches:

+ They agreed with the Joint Sub-Committee that our common participation in the ecumenical movement needs better co-ordination to make it more effective and fruitful.

+ There was a suggestion for small joint consultations on issues like :

- (a) The position and role of the woman in the life of the Church / the ordination of women to the priesthood,
- (b) Pastoral care for mixed marriages between Orthodox and heterodox Christians,
- (c) Marriages between Orthodox Christians and members of other religions,
- (d) The Orthodox position on annulment of marriage, divorce and separation of married couples,
- (e) Abortion,
- (f) Proselytism,
- (g) The theology and practice of Uniatism in the Roman Catholic Church (as a prelude to a discussion with the Roman Catholic Church on this subject).

+ There was found to be a need for another joint consultation to co-ordinate the results of the several bilateral conversations now going on or held in the past by the Churches of our two families with other Catholic and Protestant Churches.

(C) Our common service to the world of suffering, need, injustice and conflicts:

+ They called for the co-ordination of our existing schemes for promoting our humanitarian and philanthropic projects in the socio-ethnic context of our peoples and of the world at large. This would entail our common approach to such problems as: hunger and poverty, sickness and suffering, political, religious and social discriminations, refugees and victims of war, youth, drugs and unemployment, the mentally and physically handicapped, the aged.

(D) Our co-operation in the propagation of the Christian Faith:

+ This includes mutual co-operation in the work of our inner mission to our people, and also collaborating with each other and with the other Christians in the Christian mission to the world.