

The dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the non-Chalcedonian Churches or Oriental Orthodox Churches¹

Christine CHAILLOT^{*}

Summary

This article contains a review of the modern dialogue between the Eastern and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, both official and unofficial. It starts with a brief encounter of the Christology of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and a review of the result of the modern dialogue. It analyses also other topics which have to be discussed for reaching full unity, like mutual recognition of the saints, the lifting of condemnations, the recognition of the seven ecumenical synods etc. It concludes with a short encounter on the reasons for continuing the dialogue and steps to be made for achieving full unity between the two Orthodox Church families.

Keywords

Oriental Orthodox Churches; Eastern Orthodox Churches; modern dialogue between Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches;

¹ The name of “Eastern” and “Oriental” Orthodox Churches is a convention recently established for distinguishing between the two Church traditions of Eastern Christianity. The name « Oriental Orthodox was given recently to the non-Chalcedonian Churches, since the Third Unofficial Consultation of the non-Official Dialogue in 1970. These churches insisted to be called « Orthodox » to differentiate themselves from the Catholic or Protestant Churches in their countries of origin in the Middle East and elsewhere. For instance, in Egypt you have the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Coptic Catholic Church and the Coptic Protestant Churches.

^{*} Mrs. Christine Chaillot (Ecumenical Patriarchate) is a Swiss Orthodox theologian. She is specialised in the actual situation of Orthodox Churches (both Eastern and Oriental). Email: acchailot@hotmail.com

Introduction

First let us explain who these two families of Churches are: The Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox. The Eastern Orthodox Churches include the four ancient patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople; that of Georgia; the patriarchates founded later of Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania; as well as the autocephalous Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Albania, the Czech Lands and Slovakia. Also included are some autonomous Churches such as those of Sinai and Finland.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches include four ancient Churches: Coptic Orthodox (Egypt), Armenian², Ethiopian and Syrian Orthodox³ as well as two other Churches: the autocephalous Malankara Orthodox Syrian Catholicosate (India) and the Eritrean Patriarchate.⁴ Nowadays, due to great movements of migration, these Christian communities of the two families of Churches (Eastern and Oriental Orthodox) are also found in all parts of the world.

The breach of ecclesial communion between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox occurred gradually during the fifth and sixth centuries as a result of a theological controversy concerning the relation between the human and divine natures in Christ. This controversy was centred on the expression “two natures in one Person”, a new Christological formula adopted at the Council of Chalcedon (451).⁵

The contemporary bilateral theological dialogue of these two families of Churches began in 1964 with an Unofficial Dialogue and several following meetings which produced texts about the Christology of the two families of Churches. This was followed since 1985 by an Official Dialogue with other meetings and production of texts, not only about Christology but also other questions at the canonical, liturgical,

² With two Catholicosates in Etchmiadzin and Antelias near Beirut in Lebanon as well as two patriarchates in Jerusalem and Istanbul.

³ With faithful mostly in Syria, south-east Turkey, Iraq as well as in India, where about half are in the Syrian Orthodox Catholicosate under the patriarchate of Antioch.

⁴ The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Catholicosate was founded in 1912 with the election of Mar Baselios I Paulos (1912-1914). The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was under the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria until it became autocephalous in 1959, with its seat in Addis Ababa. Under it was the Eritrean Orthodox Church until a patriarchate, with its seat in Asmara, was founded in 1998 following the creation of Eritrea in 1993. For their history see A.S. Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity*, New York, Millwood, 1980. For their life and spirituality see C. Chaillot, *Vie et spiritualité des Eglises orthodoxes orientales*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 2011.

⁵ Paulos Mar Gregorios, William H. Lazareth, Nikos A. Nissiotis (eds.), *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite? Towards convergence in Orthodox Christology*, Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1981, p. ix-xii.

The dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the non-Chalcedonian Churches or Oriental Orthodox Churches

pastoral and other levels.⁶ In fact, the texts of the Unofficial and Official Dialogues mostly speak of the agreements found at the Christological level.

The Christology of the Oriental Orthodox / non-Chalcedonian Churches

The Christology of the Oriental Orthodox Churches is based on St. Cyril of Alexandria's phrase *mia physis tou Theou logou sesarkomene* (literally, the one *physis* of God's Word incarnate). The Oriental Orthodox Churches have refused the new expression imposed at the Council of Chalcedon (451) while speaking of « two natures » in Christ, as they feared that in such an expression there was a risk to divide the divinity and the humanity of Christ.⁷

They were very traditionalist and were afraid of the new Chalcedonian formulation and refused to change the Christology of the great theologian of the time, St Cyril of Alexandria. Thus, they kept a Christology which is called today « miaphysite ». Miaphysite has to be understood properly. It has nothing to do with « monophysite », the Christology claimed by Eutyches († 454), a monk in Constantinople in the 5th Century, for whom the humanity of Christ was absorbed by his divinity, which is heretic. During the meetings/consultations of the Official Dialogue and in the texts published afterwards, the Oriental Orthodox clearly expressed that they are not monophysite and that they reject Eutyches.⁸

The Oriental Orthodox do object to being called “monophysites”. The term “monophysites” is now regarded as pejorative and should not be used as it is seen by the Oriental Orthodox Churches as improper and even as an insult. These Churches accept being named “miaphysite” (*mia* standing for a composite unity whereas *mono* means an elemental unity), a modern designation.⁹ To understand better « miaphysite » in the expression of St Cyril, one must understand his expression in detail: « of God the Logos » (*To Theou Logou*) expresses the divinity of Christ; and « incarnate »

⁶ In 1989 the two elected co-presidents of the Official Dialogue were Metropolitan Bishop of Damietta (Coptic Orthodox Church) to represent the Oriental Orthodox Churches and Metropolitan Damaskinos Papandreou (d. 2011) from Chambésy, Geneva (Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople) who was replaced in 2001 by Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis (Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, with his see in Paris).

⁷ Let us remember that this new formulation was NOT taken from the Byzantine tradition but it was brought from Rome and was imposed at the council of Chalcedon by the envoys of Pope Leo, following the *Tome of Leo*.

⁸ “Both families agree in condemning the Eutychian heresy”, in: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, Volos, 2016, p. 440.

⁹ The term “miaphysite” (referring to the “one (composite) nature”), on analogy with ‘dyophysite’ (referring to the formula ‘in two natures’, used in Chalcedon), has in recent years been introduced. Cf. Sebastian P. Brock, “Miaphysite, not monophysite!”, in: *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 1 (2016), p. 45-54.

(*sesarkomene*) expresses the humanity of Christ. It is clear that both the divinity AND humanity of Christ are expressed in the expression « *mia physis* ». It is not a simple/single « *physis* », but a composite « *physis* » which is the equivalent of « *person* » (*hypostasis*) at Chalcedon. This was also expressed during the official dialogue.¹⁰ Since the beginning of the contemporary dialogue it has been argued that, for Cyril of Alexandria, and for the Oriental Orthodox, this composite nature is equivalent to Chalcedon's "person" (*hypostasis*).¹¹ When one makes the effort to understand this formula in depth, one understands the Christological misunderstanding about the Christological formula of St. Cyril.

On the Chalcedonian side, theologians, clergy and faithful/people also have to make the effort to understand WHY the non-Chalcedonians refused the new formula of Chalcedon. In fact, if one speaks only of "two natures" (*physeis*) without adding that they are together in ONE PERSON, one would be heretic.

With regard to the expressions "one nature" and "two natures", both are used by several fathers of the Oriental Orthodox Churches as for instance Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria, Patriarch Severus of Antioch, or later by the Armenian Catholicos Nerses as well as by contemporary Oriental Orthodox authors.¹² Thus, we have to underline that the only theological point to be studied in the dialogue between the Oriental Orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox is about the interpretation of the Greek word *physis* in the Christological formulation of St. Cyril and the misunderstanding it has created. This must be repeated again and again: for the Oriental Orthodox this *physis* (translated as "nature") in Christ is composite (*synthetos*).

¹⁰ For example in the Agreed Statement of 1989, see In *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, Volos, 2016, p. 437: "*mia physis (hypostasis) tou Theou Logou sesarkomene*".

¹¹ See the Agreed Statement of June 1989: "There is one composite (*synthetos*) *hypostasis* of Jesus Christ ... who has assumed our created human nature in the act uniting it with his own uncreated divine nature, to form an inseparably and unconfused united real divine-human being, the natures being distinguished from each other in contemplation (*theoria*) only... The unique theandric person (*prosopon*) of Jesus Christ is one eternal *hypostasis* who has assumed human nature by the Incarnation. So we call that *hypostasis* composite, on account of the natures which are united to form one composite unity".

¹² For example, in his *Epistle to John of Antioch* (433), St. Cyril speaks of the two natures as he writes: For "there is One Lord Jesus Christ" although the difference of the natures is not ignored, from both of which we say that the ineffable Union has been wrought". Cyril admitted the diophysite point, as for example in the Succensus letters, or his letters to Eulogius and Valerian of Ikonium: see: J. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, the Christological Controversy*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004, p. 228. See also Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*, Brill, Leiden / Boston, 2009.

The dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the non-Chalcedonian Churches or Oriental Orthodox Churches

Thus, we can understand that both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Christians have kept the same Christological faith, despite the difference in emphasis arising from the use of one formulation or the other (St. Cyril or Chalcedon):

“This is the mystery of the *hypostatic union* we confess in humble adoration - the real union of the divine with the human... The four adverbs used to qualify the mystery of the hypostatic union belong to our common tradition... - without commingling (or confusion) (*asyngchyotos*), without change (*atreptos*), without separation (*achoristos*) and without division (*adiairetos*). Those among us who speak of two natures in Christ, do not thereby deny their inseparable, indivisible union; those among us who speak of one united divine-human nature in Christ, do not thereby deny the continuing dynamic presence in Christ of the divine and the human, without change, without confusion.”¹³

In 1993, the representatives of the two families of Churches reaffirmed that:

“In the light of our four unofficial consultations (1964, 1967, 1970, 1971) and our three official meetings which followed on (1985, 1989, 1990), we have understood that both families have loyally maintained the authentic Orthodox Christological doctrine, and the unbroken continuity of the apostolic tradition, though they may have used Christological terms in different ways.”

Another Christological question discussed is that of Christ’s two *energies* and two *wills* (divine and human) as defined at the Third Council of Constantinople (or Sixth Ecumenical Council) in order to condemn monoenergism and monothelitism¹⁴ as heretical. This question has to be studied with the same logics/understanding of the difference between the two words *monophysite* and *miaphysite*.

In the Second Statement (Chambésy, September 1990) it was agreed that “the natures with their proper energies and wills are united hypostatically and naturally without confusion, without change, without division and without separation, and that they are distinguished in thought alone (*te theoria mone*)(4).¹⁵ Both families agree that He who wills and acts is always the one hypostasis of the Logos incarnate (5).”¹⁶

In conclusion, as written at Chambésy in September 1990:

“The Orthodox agree that the Oriental Orthodox will continue to maintain their traditional Cyrillian terminology of ‘one nature of the Logos incarnate’ (*mia physis tou Theou Logou sesarkomene*), since they acknowledge the double consubstantiality of the Logos which Eutyches denied. The Orthodox also use this terminology. The Oriental Orthodox agree that the Orthodox are justified in their

¹³ Agreed Statement of the Joint Commission, St Bishoy Monastery, Egypt, 20-24 June 1989.

¹⁴ The monothelite heresy denied that Christ possessed both a divine will and a human will, FitzGerald, *Restoring the Unity in Faith*, 24.

¹⁵ Cf. “In two natures” can be accepted “mentally” (*en theoria*), but not “in reality”.

¹⁶ See: also the Statement of June 1989.

use of the two-natures formula, since they acknowledge that the distinction is ‘in thought alone’ (*te theoria mone*).”¹⁷

This joint text of 1990 also emphasized that their mutual understanding is not restricted to Christology but rather includes the entire faith of the one undivided Church of the first centuries: “It is this common faith and continuous loyalty to the Apostolic tradition that should be the basis of our unity and communion (9).”

St. Cyril of Alexandria remains the Church father *par excellence* for all the Oriental Orthodox Churches. The Eastern Orthodox can also use this terminology¹⁸ as St Cyril is also their Church father. As for the great specialist in St. Cyril, Fr. John McGuckin, he underlines that Chalcedon corresponds faithfully with Cyril.¹⁹ The most important point is that St. Cyril is a Church father and a great theologian for both the Chalcedonians and Non-Chalcedonians, which should be enough as an argument to solve the whole Christological problem between Chalcedonians and Non-Chalcedonians. In fact, this was underlined already in 1964 in Aarhus: “In St. Cyril of Alexandria’s phrase (*mia physis tou Theou logou sesarkomene* (the one incarnate *physis* of God’s Word), the theologians of the Joint Commission have found their common Christological ground, that of their common father, St Cyril of Alexandria.”²⁰

The theologians of the Joint Commission also realized that the Council of Chalcedon must be understood as reaffirming the decisions of the Council of Ephesus (431), and best understood in the light of the later Council of Constantinople (553). They have recognized that all councils have to be seen as stages in an integral development and that no council or document should be studied in isolation (Aarhus 1964).

¹⁷ Regarding “in thought alone” (*te theoria mone*), the natures are distinguished from each other in contemplation (*theoria*) only. The Official Statement of 1990 says that Cyril correctly interpreted this use in his letter to John of Antioch and his letters to Acacius of Melitene (*PG 77*, 184-201) Eulogius (*PG 77*, 224-228) and Succensus (*PG 77*, 228-245). Severus states that “in two natures” can be accepted “mentally” (*en theoria*), but not “in reality”.

¹⁸ Cf. Consultation of the official Dialogue at Chambésy 1990, see: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, p. 440.

¹⁹ John McGuckin, “St. Cyril of Alexandria’s miaphysite Christology and Chalcedonian Dyophysitism”, in: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, p. 39-54.

²⁰ In the Eastern Orthodox New Calendar, St. Cyril is commemorated on June 9th as his own day; and on January 18th, in the company of Saint Athanasius the great. The festal *Troparion* says: “Rejoice most blessed Cyril, spring of theology and river of the knowledge of God.”

The dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the non-Chalcedonian Churches or Oriental Orthodox Churches

Other topics to be discussed before reaching unity

As I tried to explain above, the only theological question about dogma, that is faith, is the Christological point of the expression “*mia physis*”. If this strategic and main dogmatic point is clarified/settled, it means that the other points to be discussed (and which are not related to faith) must also find some answers/solutions.

These topics must be tackled and certain areas clarified for future steps of the dialogue in order to facilitate the restoration of full ecclesial communion – that is to arrive at complete unity.

Concerning the *mutual recognition of saints*, two in particular are not recognized by the Chalcedonians: Patriarchs Dioscorus of Alexandria († 454) and Severus of Antioch († 538). In connection with Dioscorus, the hypothesis of some historians, according to which the Council of Chalcedon condemned him for theological reasons, is not only erroneous but unfounded. The Council undertook proceedings of condemnation only because he had refused to respond to a summons explicitly extended to him three times (in keeping with the Holy Canons) to present an apologia for the events of the Council of Ephesus (449).²¹ Severus of Antioch, for his part, firmly followed the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria. His doctrine was totally distinct from that of the heretic Eutyches, whom he condemned explicitly.²²

The reading of the texts by Severus of Antioch and Dioscorus of Alexandria have to be read in the light of St Cyril’s Christology. As the great patrologist Fr. Andrew Louth underlines, in his writings Severus of Antioch follows the Christology of St Cyril who is himself a follower of St. Athanasius.²³ As for Dioscorus, Ilias Kesmiris wrote a thesis in Thessaloniki University to show that his Christology is Orthodox.²⁴

About the lifting of all condemnations (anathemas), on the basis of their common acknowledgement (made by the representatives of both Church families) of the fact that the Councils and Fathers previously anathematized or condemned are not heretical, both families can agree that the lifting of anathemas can be consummated by the

²¹ See articles in: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, by Ilias Kesmiris,–Martzelos, Erickson and Metropolitan Damaskinos: the Council undertook proceedings of condemnation only because Dioscorus had refused to respond to a summons explicitly extended to him three times (in keeping with the Holy Canons) to present an apology for the events of the Council of Ephesus (449).

²² As the articles in: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, make clear, it is very important to read and study Severus’ own writings and not just quote Church fathers who opposed him, such as Maximus the Confessor.

²³ Andrew Louth, “Severus of Antioch: an Orthodox View”, in: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, p. 55-63.

²⁴ See Ilias Kesmiris, “Controversial Aspects in Christology of Dioscorus of Alexandria”, in: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, p. 113-133.

competent synodical authorities of both sides (Statements in 1990 and 1993).²⁵ The mutual lifting of anathemas should be made unanimously and simultaneously by the Heads of all the Churches, through the signing of an appropriate Ecclesiastical Act.²⁶

With regard to the theology and practice of the veneration of icons taught by the Council of Nicaea II, or Seventh Ecumenical Council (787), this is common to both families of Churches.²⁷

With regard to the *liturgical questions*, a Subcommittee was appointed by both sides to examine the liturgical implications arising from the restoration of communion and to propose appropriate forms of concelebration (Chambésy, 1993, c).

With regard to matters relating to *ecclesiastical jurisdiction*, they should be left to be arranged by the respective authorities of the local Churches according to common canonical and synodical principles (Chambésy, 1993, d).

With regard to the *ecclesiology* of both families of Churches, this is quite similar.

One specific point remains pending: *the co-enumeration or recognition of the Seven Ecumenical Councils*, including the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Ecumenical Councils all recognised by the Eastern Orthodox. Let us underline this fact: in the Joint Commission Agreements the representatives of the Oriental Orthodox have implicitly accepted the main dogmatic decisions adopted during the seven Ecumenical Synods (Chambésy 1990, points 1-8). The Oriental Orthodox hold the same faith as is

²⁵ T. FitzGerald: During the decades following the Council of Chalcedon, some churches in both families imposed anathemas (excommunications) upon teachers from the other tradition. These anathemas also reflected the inability of each tradition to recognize the fullness of the faith expressed in teachings of the leaders of the other. In recommending the lifting of anathemas, the Joint Commission recognizes that such actions would not be unprecedented.

²⁶ The content of which will include acknowledgement from each side that the other one is Orthodox in all respects. The lifting of anathemas should imply: **a.** that restoration of full communion for both sides is to be immediately implemented; **b.** that no past condemnation, synodical or personal, against each other is any longer applicable; **c.** that a catalogue of Diptychs of the Heads of the Churches should be agreed upon to be used liturgically. See the 1993 Communiqué of Chambésy and the article by Prof. V. Phidas, "The presuppositions for restoring ecclesiastical communion between the Orthodox Church and the Ancient Oriental Churches: lifting of anathemas and competent ecclesiastical authority", in: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, p. 204-221.

²⁷ "They are in basic agreement with the teaching and practice of the Oriental Orthodox from ancient times, long before the convening of the Council of Chalcedon" (Chambésy 1990, 8). See my book: *Rolul imaginilor sfinte si cinstirea icoanelor in Bisericile Ortodoxe Orientale*, Cluj, 2018.

<http://www.editura.ubbcluj.ro/bd/ebooks/pdf/2309.pdf>

The dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the non-Chalcedonian Churches or Oriental Orthodox Churches

professed by the Eastern Orthodox Church. Some Orthodox think that, if there is no difference in doctrine, this question of the Councils is not so essential.²⁸

Pastoral problems can also be solved²⁹. As for matters such as *early patristic tradition, liturgical texts, liturgical life, canon law, spirituality and asceticism*, the two Church traditions show very great similarities.³⁰

According to me, one issue of the utmost importance is that of *practical dialogue*. In the ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church it is important and necessary to implement the theological dialogue together with a practical dialogue. In the Orthodox tradition, dogma and praxis must be worked together. It is also very important to inform the people properly, with references of the Official Dialogue.³¹

In fact, since 1964, in the texts of the Unofficial and Official Theological Dialogues between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, some were dedicated to 'Practical Dialogue'. These texts called 'Recommendations' invite the two Families of Churches to be active in the Dialogue in different ways. For example, in the Recommendations on Pastoral Issues of the Joint Commission (held in Chambésy, Geneva, on 23-28 September 1990), one can read: "About the relations among our two families of Churches: There is a need 'for a period of intense

²⁸ These four Councils are not formally recognized by the Oriental Orthodox Churches. The Joint Commission has wisely sought to deal with the doctrinal affirmations expressed at these Councils rather than the more formal issue of the acceptance or rejection of particular councils. The statements affirm that the two families of Churches are in full agreement in their understanding of the historic Orthodox faith. This means that the Oriental Orthodox Churches recognize the faith of the Orthodox Church as expressed in the doctrinal decisions of the councils of 451, 553, 680, and 787, although they may not formally recognize these councils as being ecumenical, T. FitzGerald, *Restoring the Unity in Faith*, 26.

²⁹ For example, the two families of Churches already act as a single Orthodox family representation at the World Council of Churches (WCC). During the Official Dialogue in Chambésy 1990, four main types of *pastoral issues* were mentioned: Relations with other Christian Churches and common participation in the Ecumenical Movement as well as cooperation in the propagation of our common faith and tradition; and also our *social help* made in common service to the world of suffering, need, injustice and conflicts, to help in case of discriminations of all kinds, and a very present necessity, that to help refugees and victims of war.

³⁰ In the Athens Meeting of 2014, Metropolitan Emmanuel spoke of the common patristic and ecclesiological traditions.

³¹ This is what I explained during my talk at the IOTA Conference in Iasi (Romania) on 12 January 2019, where I gave a paper on "Practical Dialogue Between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox".

preparation of our people to participate in the implementation of our recommendations and in the restoration of our Churches', also through exchanges of visits.³²

As the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches can be found all around the world today, thus the practical dialogue and direct encounters can take place between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox in many countries, even in Romania. In Romania, the Armenian Church has been present for many centuries, with a bishop in Bucharest and with churches and monasteries in different places. There is bibliography on this topic.

What is hardly known is the presence of a Coptic community in Romania whose presence is recent. It began with the arrival of a Copt who came from Egypt to Bucharest to study at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Talat Tekla Marcos from Cairo, in 1999. A small group of Copts then began to gather and pray together. In 2002 Metropolitan Bishoy, the copresident of the Official Dialogue, visited Bucharest and asked the Patriarch Teoctist of the Romanian Orthodox Church for a place of prayer, which was allowed for two hours a week in the church of St. Catherine, close to the Theological Faculty. Talat began to give social assistance to needy Romanians and then set up a benevolent organisation for this purpose in 2004. In 2010, Talat became priest with the name of Fr. Mina. In 2019 he and his parishioners have the project to build a church in Bucharest. He celebrates the liturgy in Arabic and Coptic.³³

As Fr. Mina, told me : « The Copts have understood that the Byzantine Orthodox are not heretic when they speak of « two natures » in Christology. The Copts (and the other Oriental Orthodox) have kept the ancient formula of St Cyril of Alexandria ». Fr. Mina also explained that, at the pastoral level, in 2001 an agreement was signed between the Greek Orthodox and the Coptic Orthodox patriarchs of Alexandria in Egypt to mutually accept the Baptism as well as the Marriage.³⁴

Let us name another pastoral Statement, written in November 1991 in Damascus (Syria) by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch « On the Relations between the Eastern and Syrian Orthodox Churches ». In it, pastoral attitudes are explained with recommendations for bishops and priests of the two families of Churches participating together at baptisms/funeral services/ marriages, without the concelebration in the Liturgy (points 6-8). Point 9 explains that « In localities where there is only one priest,

³² The text also says that it is important “to plan 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. In localities where Churches of the two families co-exist, the congregations should organize participation of one group of people – men, women, youth and children, including priests –, where possible from one congregation of one family to a congregation of the other, to attend in the latter’s Eucharistic worship on Sundays and feast days”.

³³ Interview with Father Mina in Bucharest on 19 January 2019.

³⁴ See full text in: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C.Chaillot, p. 459.

The dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the non-Chalcedonian Churches or Oriental Orthodox Churches

from either Church, he will celebrate services for the faithful of both Churches, including the Divine Liturgy, pastoral duties and holy matrimony. »³⁵

The reasons for continuing the dialogue and steps to be made or How to know each other better?

The last texts of the Official Dialogue were elaborated in 1993; two texts of the meetings in Chambésy (2005) and Athens (2014), where just few participants attended, were also published. They are the fruit of the reflexions of the theologians of the two families of Churches who represented their patriarchates. The texts of this dialogue were then presented to the Holy Synods of each patriarchate for approval or comments. Some patriarchates have approved the texts. Other patriarchates are asking to elaborate the texts already discussed and published.

The meeting in Chambésy, 1990, recommended not only exchanges 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 but also exchanges of theological professors and students among theological institutions; and exchanges of youth. Also, regular meetings of the primates of our Churches, well-prepared meetings of monks from both families and all possible cooperation of our Churches at the regional level and in the Diaspora (Athens 2014) were recommended.³⁶

In the future, to be sure, more work has to be done. The first step of dialogue is to meet and discuss face to face, without prejudice, to listen to one another and to respect each other. Two excellent examples of such dialogue in the past are those of the Armenian Catholicos Nerses in the 12th century and the Russian Metropolitan Porphyrius Uspensky in the 19th Century.³⁷

All these should be done in order to offer more complete information on the outcome of the dialogue, to inform believers more carefully and to prepare the ecclesial conscience in a responsible way for the reception of the ecclesiastical decision on the question of the restoration of ecclesial unity. This is the main task and duty not only for the heads of Churches and the Joint Commission (appointed by the Mother Churches) as well as the Joint Subcommittees, but also for the clergy, theologians and all well informed people.

³⁵ See the full text in: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, p. 454.

³⁶ Agreed Statement of the Joint Commission, see: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, p. 437.

³⁷ See: http://orthodoxwiki.org/Porphyrius_%28Uspensky%29_of_Chigirin (last accessed, March 2019). Uspensky's writings should be republished and translated. For Catholicos Nerses, see Catholicos Aram of Cilicia, *St. Nerses the Gracious (1102-1173). St. Nerses the Gracious and Church Unity: Armeno-Greek Church Relations (1165-1173)*, Antelias (Lebanon), 2010.

In order to be well informed, there should also be production of appropriate literature explaining our common understanding of the Orthodox faith that has led us to overcome the divisions of the past, by making available publications about the dialogue and our mutual knowledge, in the various languages of our Churches (Chambésy, 1993, e).³⁸ For the education of all (clergy and faithful), more writings for promoting a positive dialogue need to be published, including through the internet.

For the sake of such dialogue, in order to show that the Oriental Orthodox are not monophysites but have an Orthodox faith, Christology and life, comparative studies should be developed in the future, not only in theology but also in other fields (for example in those of language, liturgy and iconography).³⁹

By studying carefully, the texts about the history of Chalcedon and of the theology/liturgy, one will understand that the Christology of the Oriental Orthodox is orthodox/correct. I tried to begin to make such a short demonstration by asking Oriental Orthodox theologians to write articles on this topic in my book published in Volos in 2016, *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, with articles on Christology and articles on Christology as found in their liturgical texts. The texts of the prayers used by all the Oriental Orthodox (at all levels, from their patriarchs to the clergy and faithful) since the time/separation of Chalcedon, are the best prove to show their Orthodox faith as these texts continually speak of Christ as being fully God AND fully Man, without separation or mixture (two of the adverbs also mentioned in the texts of Chalcedon). They also mention the Virgin Mary as « Mother of God » (*Theotokos*).

³⁸ Such books with information on the dialogue have been published for example by Fr. T. FitzGerald, *Restoring the Unity in Faith. The Orthodox-Oriental Orthodox Theological Dialogue*, Boston, 2007 ; and by C. Chaillot, *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, Volos, 2016. For the sake of the dialogue and in order to know each other better, my books have been translated into eleven languages, also in Romanian: Christine Chaillot - *Biserica Ortodoxă din Europa de Est în Secolul XX*, Humanitas, Bucarest, 2013 ; *O Scurta istorie a Bisericii Ortodoxe din Europa Occidentala în Secolul XX*, Cluj, 2017 ; *Rolul imaginilor sfinte si cinstirea icoanelor in Bisericii Ortodoxe Orientale*, Cluj, 2018. <http://www.editura.ubbcluj.ro/bd/ebooks/pdf/2309.pdf> My book *Towards Unity* with the texts of the Unofficial and Official Theological Dialogue has been published in Romanian in Sibiu in 2014 *Pentru Unitate. Dialogul teologic dintre Biserica Ortodoxă și Bisericile Vechi Orientale* (translated and edited by Prof. Aurel Pavel and A. M. Cojocarescu).

³⁹ At the linguistic level, for example, the Syriac language is found in liturgical books of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch until at least the 17th Century. Inscriptions in Syriac have been found in mural paintings in Greek Orthodox monasteries in Lebanon. Common prayers are found in the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches and traditions. In iconography, a strong argument is the representation by the Oriental Orthodox of Christ in illuminations, paintings and icons as a human being, which monophysites would not have accepted.

The dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the non-Chalcedonian Churches or Oriental Orthodox Churches

A similar demonstration about the Orthodox Christology of the Oriental Orthodox can be made about the veneration of icons as they represent Christ as Man on their icons and also on their wall paintings and illuminations in the manuscripts. If they were truly monophysite, that is if they believed that the humanity of Christ had been absorbed in his divinity as the heretic Eutyches did, would they have been concerned to represent His humanity in icons/paintings/illuminations ?

Recent International Conferences include panels/papers about this bilateral Dialogue. For example, in January 2019, in Iasi (Romania), for the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA) Conference,⁴⁰ I was responsible to moderate a panel about this dialogue entitled « The Dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches ». During the panel, two Romanian theologians presented the following topics : Fr. Dr. Ioan Ovidiu, *Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Dialogue- A Historical and Theological Survey* ; and Prof. Dr. Rev. Vasile Raduca about *The Romanian Theologians and The Dialogue with the Old Oriental Churches (or Oriental Orthodox Churches)*. A Greek theologian, Dr. Nikos Kouremenos, presented the situation of the dialogue in Greece.

On 3-7 March 2019, hundreds of researchers gathered in Bologna at European Academy of Religion⁴¹ for a Conference on the study of religion. Many of the 320 sessions dealt with various aspects of the ecumenical movement and the future of ecumenism in Europe. One panel, on « Orthodox Unity » spoke of « What are the real obstacles for unity between non-Chalcedonian and Chalcedonian Churches? ». Scholars presented the following papers: Michael Hjälm (Stockholm School of Theology / Sankt Ignatios Academy) on *Ecclesiology from Below. A Critical Theological Assessment of the Reception by the Byzantine Churches of the Conflict of Chalcedon 451* ; Cyril Hovorun (Loyola Marymount University / Huffington Ecumenical Institute) on *Unity after Chalcedon: Possible or Impossible?*; Metropolitan Polycarpus Augin Aydin (Stockholm School of Theology) on *Encounters on the Road: Towards Reconciling the Estranged Members of the Eastern/Oriental Orthodox Family* ; and Davor Dzalto (American University of Rome) on *Unity: Between Orthodoxy and (Political) Orthopraxy*.

In Bologna Conference, in another panel about the future of ecumenism, Professor Stavros Yangazoglou (Athens) also mentioned the dialogue between Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox in his paper.⁴² In his fourth section (« Commentaires

⁴⁰ <https://iota-web.org/>

⁴¹ <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/hundreds-of-researchers-gather-in-bologna-at-european-academy-of-religion>

⁴² It was entitled “Vivre et travailler pour l’unité des chrétiens dans l’Église orthodoxe : pratiquer un œcuménisme réceptif avec des ressources propres à la tradition orthodoxe”. This

et pratiques de développement d'exemples ciblés de « travail théologique et pastoral à domicile »), he puts these two important questions :

Que faudrait-il faire encore pour que cet accord christologique, positif sur le plan théologique, permette que l'Église orthodoxe soit en communion avec les Églises préchalcédoniennes ? This is the question which everyone should ask oneself. To answer this first question, I proposed some summarized answers above.

His second question was : *L'accord christologique de l'Église orthodoxe avec les Églises d'Orient préchalcédoniennes sur un plan théologique est-il suffisamment présent dans les programmes d'études des écoles théologiques et des séminaires ecclésiastiques ?* To answer the second question about teaching more about this bilateral dialogue in the theological schools and seminaries, this is the responsibility and duty of all the professors in each faculty of theology, in a team work with their bishop and clergy.

Professor Yangazoglou suggests « la nécessité d'une préparation ecclésiale adéquate ». According to him, « L'unité ne concerne pas simplement un consensus minimum des parties en dialogue et n'est pas non plus liée à une question de bureaucratie ecclésiastique; l'unité est une question d'apprentissage mutuel sur le plan théologique et ecclésiologique. »

Conclusion

Since Chalcedon, there have been attempts down the centuries at reconciliation⁴³, for example, in the fifth century by the emperor Zeno with the *Henotikon* (482), in the sixth century (532 and 553) by the Emperor Justinian and in the seventh century (630 and 633) by the Emperor Heraclius. But these proved unsuccessful and the situation stagnated after the Arab conquests of the 630s. Dialogue also took place between the Armenian and the Byzantine Churches from the 9th to the 12th centuries. Several times the two sides came close to a reconciliation, but until these days, the breach continues.⁴⁴

“This division is an anomaly, a bleeding wound in the Body of Christ, a wound which according to His will that we humbly serve, must be healed.”⁴⁵ In reality,

paper together with the other papers of this panel should be published in the future by Prof. P. Grisel (Lausanne), head of the panel.

⁴³ See in: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, the chronology (p. 511-514) and the important article by N. Russell “Cyril of Alexandria’s *Mia-physis* Formula in the Christological Debates of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries” (p. 94-112).

⁴⁴ Paulos Mar Gregorios and N.Nissiotis, *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite?*, WCC Geneva, 1981, p. IX-XII.

⁴⁵ Joint Commission 1989, see: *The Dialogue between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, ed. C. Chaillot, p. 436.

The dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the non-Chalcedonian Churches or Oriental Orthodox Churches

however, daily contact between the Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox communities were never completely broken as they lived (and still live) side by side in many places of the Middle East, in some Eastern European countries and around the world.

In 2019, one may describe the situation as followings: some groups are ready and open for dialogue and for finalizing unity.⁴⁶ Others are open for the dialogue but require that the Joint Commission (and Subcommittees) continue their work of research. Some groups, who are known to be opposed to ecumenical dialogue and contact, attack the dialogue for fear that communion may be reestablished without keeping the Orthodox faith, canons and Orthodox Church fully intact. To answer them, I would say that of course no theological compromises can be made. At the same time, we must find ways to remain flexible and open-minded for the dialogue. My wish is that such people who are negative for the dialogue should also make positive proposals for the dialogue orally and in writing, and not merely carp at it.⁴⁷ Some may believe that schism is only the mistake or responsibility of others. In order to counter this attitude, it is very important to pursue a new boardly-based study of history, Church history and patristics.

We must learn more about one another and also study together. In other words, in the context of dialogue, we must start from the sources and analyze the texts in order to remain as objective as possible. We should even make a list of all the impediments to union.

In the context of dialogue, we also have to take into consideration the sociological and even psychological approaches, for example, how to be self-critical. We must try not to accuse or moralize. It is not easy to change misperceptions and overcome prejudices. It requires from us a concerted and renewed effort for metanoia or “change

⁴⁶ Three local Churches from the Eastern Orthodox family (Alexandria, Antioch and Romania) and three Churches from the Oriental Orthodox family (Alexandria, Antioch and Malankara-India) have already declared their acceptance of the Agreed Statements and Proposals from the Joint Commission (Athens, 2014). The other Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches continue to study the Statements of the Commission.

⁴⁷ For example, *Lettre de la communauté monastique du Mont Athos* and “Les antichalcédoniens sont-ils orthodoxes?” Cf. J.C. Larchet, *Personne et nature*, Paris, 2011, p. 68. The Letter by Mont Athos was answered by Metropolitan Damaskinos in: *Episkepsis* 521 (1995), p. 9-19 with answer by Mont Athos in: *La Lumière du Thabor* 47-48 (1996), p. 113-122. See also writings by J.C. Larchet, for example in his book *Personne et Nature*, 69, translated in several languages who deplores “l’affaiblissement dogmatique qui caractérise notre époque” et la foi de plus en plus minimaliste de certains croyants”. In English see: A Memorandum of the Sacred Community of Mount Athos (not dated), http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/mono_athos.aspx (last accessed, June 2016); and Suggestions of a Committee from the Sacred Community of the Holy Mountain Athos. Concerning the Dialogue of the Orthodox with the Non-Chalcedonians (dated 1st of February 1994) http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/mono_athos2.aspx (last accessed, June 2016).

of heart” both individually and collectively. Hence, we must look forward with a renewed vision. Differences in customs and liturgical practices, for example, need not be a barrier to unity, and existing diversities should be maintained as they enrich all the other Churches’ traditions.⁴⁸

In order to see the consummation of this bilateral dialogue, much work and many prayers are still needed. But, with time, and by living and exercising together, the Lord, who always comes and helps those who love Him, will provide us with the necessary strength.⁴⁹ In the Joint Commission in Chambésy in September 1990, His Eminence Metropolitan Damaskinos exhorted the participants in his inaugural address to “work in a spirit of humility, brotherly love and mutual recognition so that ‘the Lord of the Faith and Head of His Church’ will guide us by the Holy Spirit on the speedier way towards unity and communion”.⁵⁰ The most important motivation for the continuation of the dialogue is the common desire to restore this ecclesial communion. Everyone in his or her own active way can contribute, also through practical dialogue.

Finally, as Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland wrote:

“Any quarrelsome theological disposition or diminished sensitivity at the prospect of restoration of ecclesial unity, when there is an official declaration of full agreement on the right faith, should be regarded as unthinkable and certainly as reflecting a false understanding of the operation of the mystery of the Church in the history of Salvation.”⁵¹

St. Cyril of Alexandria himself wrote (in his *Epistle to John of Antioch* in 433) that “the dissension which then arose between the Churches was quite needless and inexcusable.”

⁴⁸ Whereby the Eastern Orthodox Churches benefit from their sister Oriental Orthodox Churches and are enriched by their traditions, literature and holy rituals, liturgy and spirituality, and vice-versa. The process of restoring unity must be done in such a way that recognizes the distinctive liturgical customs, linguistic preferences, iconographic tradition, and legitimate historical character of the various ecclesial traditions, FitzGerald, *Restoring the Unity in Faith*.

⁴⁹ “Car je suis convaincu qu’avec le temps et en vivant et en nous exerçant ensemble, le Seigneur, qui toujours vient en aide pour le bien à ceux qui l’aiment, pourvoira pour nous affermir”, quotation by V. Phidas, “Orthodoxie et Eglises préchalcédoniennes”, in : *Episkepsis* 479 (1992), p. 20, 21.

⁵⁰ *Towards Unity*, ed, C. Chaillot, Geneva, 1998, p. 62.

⁵¹ “The Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches”, *Towards Unity*, 34. In Athens, 24-25 November 2014, Metropolitan Emmanuel of France called not only for a systematic evaluation of all the theological critiques on the proposals of the Joint Commission but also for a theological defense against all prejudices and polemical arguments.