

# THE VIENNA DIALOGUE

Five PRO ORIENTE Consultations  
with Oriental Orthodoxy

ON COUNCILS AND CONCILIARITY  
SECOND STUDY SEMINAR  
JUNE 1992

Booklet No. 5  
Vienna 1993

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ISBN: 3 - 901 188 - 05 - 3

Cover Picture Credits: Syrian Cross Plate, Paris, Louvre; Coptic Embroidery, Vienna, Museum für Angewandte  
Kunst; Romanesque Cross, Barcelona; Armenian Cross (Khatchkar), Sanahin; Indian Cross, Pro Oriente, Vienna

Cover Layout and Design by Hedwig Bledl  
Text Layout by Franz Gschwandtner

Printed by Ferdinand Berger & Söhne Ges.m.b.H., Horn, Austria 1993



## Preamble

The question of *Councils and Conciliarity* has several interesting aspects which are open to discussion in the ecumenical Dialogue of Churches of different traditions. The Roman Catholic Church traditionally recognizes 21 Ecumenical Councils, the Orthodox Church 7, the family of Oriental Orthodox Churches only 3, whereas the Churches of Reformation accept in general 4 Councils (at least on paper!). Already the Roman Catholic and Oriental Orthodox representatives of the Second Vienna Consultation agreed upon the following common statement:

"We agree that the first three Ecumenical Councils had, because of their more general acceptance in the Church, a greater degree of fullness, which the later Councils do not have." (*Second Consultation*, p.176)

During the unofficial Dialogue between members of the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, some Byzantine-minded theologians insisted on the acceptance of the first seven Ecumenical Councils as one of the pre-conditions for the restoration of unity and eucharistic communion. In September 1990 at Chambésy (Geneva) in an agreed Statement of their official Dialogue both sides declared:

"Both families accept the first three Ecumenical Councils which form our common heritage."

However the problem was fundamentally solved only at the beginning of November 1993 at Chambésy when the Joint Theological Commission for the Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches agreed to lift mutually the anathemas spoken against Councils and Fathers. Here I quote the main paragraph of this document:

"In the light of our Agreed Statement on Christology at St. Bishoy Monastery 1989, and of our Second Agreed Statement at Chambésy 1990, the representatives of both Church families agree that the lifting of anathemata and condemnations of the past can be consumed on the basis of their common acknowledgement of the fact that the Councils and Fathers previously anathematized or condemned are orthodox in their teachings."

By a similar approach to the problem of the Councils it is possible to attain to an agreement also with the Roman Catholic Church. Certainly, after the proclamation of an agreed Christological interpretation and formula by the Churches of the East and West, it should be the right and duty of particular churches to receive, in the course of time, the essential contents of Ecumenical or General Councils under discussion in their liturgy, canons and devotional life (*Second Consultation*, p. 72-73). In any case the dispute on the Councils convoked by Rome after the seventh Ecumenical Council,

can be easily solved, if both sides agree to consider these Synods (8th to 21st) as *General Councils* of the West or of the Roman Church!

The conciliarity itself is an important issue of the ecumenical dialogue between the Churches of the East and West. The result of various consultations of many years was that "the one Church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local Churches" as it was formulated in the Salamanca-definition (1973) of the World Council of Churches:

"The one Church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local Churches which are themselves truly united. In this conciliar fellowship each local Church possesses, in communion with others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same Apostolic faith and therefore recognizes the others as belonging to the same Church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit." (*Third Consultation*, p.101-102)

Such an understanding of conciliarity excludes the idea and structure of centralized authority in the Church. In this connection the ecumenical dialogue has to concentrate its efforts on the question of primacy which in various forms exists in different Churches. In fact "the office of Peter" is the main problem which hinders now the accomplishment of full communion between the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the East.

May this Booklet of PRO ORIENTE contribute substantially to a new and positive interpretation of the vital and complex issues of Councils and Conciliarity.

Archbp. Mesrob K. Krikorian

The Oriental Orthodox - Roman Catholic  
Ecumenical Dialogue

PRO ORIENTE Publications in English

- \* First Ecumenical Consultation between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, Papers and Minutes. Supplementary Issue Number 1 of the Periodical "Wort und Wahrheit" (Verlag Herder, Vienna 1972) 190 p.
- \* Second Ecumenical Consultation between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, Papers and Minutes. Supplementary Issue Number 2 of the Periodical "Wort und Wahrheit" (Verlag Herder, Vienna 1974) 208 p.
- \* Third Ecumenical Consultation between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, Papers and Minutes. Supplementary Issue Number 3 of the Periodical "Wort und Wahrheit" (Verlag Herder, Vienna 1976) 240 p.
- \* Fourth Ecumenical Consultation between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, Papers and Minutes. Supplementary Issue Number 4 of the Periodical "Wort und Wahrheit" (Verlag Herder, Vienna 1978) 256 p.
- \* Fifth Ecumenical Consultation between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, Papers and Minutes. Supplementary Issue Number 5 of the Periodical "Wort und Wahrheit" (Verlag Herder, Vienna 1989) 208 p.
- \* Selection of the Papers and Minutes of the Four Vienna Consultations between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Edited by Ökumenische Stiftung PRO ORIENTE in Vienna (1988) 286 p.
- \* Five Vienna Consultations between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church 1971 - 1988. Selected Papers in One Volume. Published and edited by the Ecumenical Foundation PRO ORIENTE - Vienna (1993) 370 p.

The Oriental Orthodox - Roman Catholic  
Ecumenical Dialogue

PRO ORIENTE Booklet Series

- \* Booklet Number 1, Communiqués and Joint Documents; PRO ORIENTE, Vienna 1990, 136 p. Available in English, Arabic and Malayalam, planned in Armenian, Amharic and German.
- \* Booklet Number 2, Summaries of the Papers; PRO ORIENTE, Vienna 1991, 74 p. Available in English and Arabic; planned in other languages.
- \* Booklet Number 3, Middle East Regional Symposium, Deir Amba Bishoy, October 1991; PRO ORIENTE, Vienna 1993, 168 p. Available in English, planned in other languages.
- \* Booklet Number 4, On Primacy, First Study Seminar, June 1991; PRO ORIENTE, Vienna 1993, 92 p. Planned in the above mentioned languages.
- \* Booklet Number 5, On Councils and Conciliarity, Second Study Seminar, June 1992; PRO ORIENTE, Vienna 1993, 72p. Planned in the above mentioned languages.
- \* Booklet Number 6, Kerala Regional Symposium, Kottayam, October 1993; PRO ORIENTE, Vienna 1994. Planned in the above mentioned languages.

## Foreword by the Editors

In this fifth booklet we present the texts of the Second Vienna Study Seminar of PRO ORIENTE held from June 26th - 30th 1992 "On Councils and Conciliarity". The previous four booklets contain the joint Communiqués of the five Vienna Consultations (1971 - 1988) between theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church with a survey of the participants, programmes and sermons (Booklet No. 1), the summaries of the five consultations (Booklet No. 2), the results of the First PRO ORIENTE Regional Symposium at Wadi Natroun in 1991 (Booklet No. 3)) and the texts of the First Vienna Study Seminar "On Primacy" (Booklet No. 4).

This series of documentations is published to spread the outcome of the Vienna Dialogue among interested Christians, be they theologians, members of the clergy or laymen. The Vienna Dialogue which started in 1971 developed a special dynamic by establishing in 1989 a Standing Committee to deepen the relations between theologians and bishops of the churches involved. Twice every year theologians from the Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Ethiopian Orthodox, Syro-Indian Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church come to Vienna or some other convenient places and stay for a week to discuss different topics, mainly those which had led to the split at the Council of Chalcedon. They consider and deliberate the ways of regaining the unity of these two Church families.

Major progress was achieved at the First Vienna Consultation in 1971 when the theologians discussed the christological problem and found the consensus of the so-called "Vienna Christological formula":

"We believe that our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is God the Son Incarnate; perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity. His divinity was not separated from his humanity for a single moment, not for the twinkling of an eye. His humanity is one with his divinity without commixtion, without confusion, without division, without separation. We in our common faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, regard his mystery inexhaustible and ineffable and for the human mind never fully comprehensible or expressible."

This formula later came to be officially accepted in the Common Declarations signed by Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II on the one hand and Pope Shenouda III, the Patriarchs Yacoub III and Zakka I Iwas and other Heads of the Oriental Churches on the other hand. Over and above these Common Declarations officially signed by the Heads of the Churches, two bilateral processes of dialogue have emerged from the Vienna Dialogue: the Official Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church since 1973 and the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church of India since 1989.

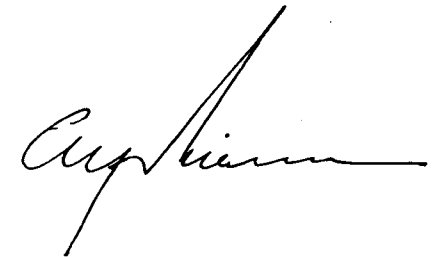
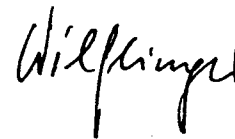
The complete English texts of the papers and discussions of the Vienna Dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox Churches are published in five volumes. The fifth volume also contains the communiqués of the Theological Dialogue between the Byzantine Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox churches (see Minutes of the Fifth Vienna Consultation, Wort und Wahrheit, Supplementary Issue No. 5 PRO ORIENTE, Vienna 1989, pp. 171-175).

In order to facilitate the reception of the results of these five rounds of consultations by a maximum of the theologians, clergymen and laypeople of the Churches concerned we felt it necessary to condense the more than 1500 pages of learned thought down to a more readily accessible form in one volume.

The publication of this new series of booklets is one of the proposals made on the initiative of the PRO ORIENTE Standing Committee which acts as a clearing house of ideas. In the PRO ORIENTE Standing Committee the five Oriental Churches are represented by Their Graces Metropolitan Amba Bishoy of Damiette and Kafr el Sheikh, Secretary General of the Holy Synod; Archbishop Mar Gregorios of Aleppo; Archbishop Mesrob K. Krikorian, Patriarchal Delegate for Central Europe and Sweden; Archbishop Aram Keshishian of Lebanon, Moderator of the Central Committee of the WCC; Archbishop Nicodimos, Head of Foreign Affairs, and The Rev. Dr. Kondothra K. M. George, Vice-Principal of the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey.

Booklet No. 5 shows the result of a Standing Committee proposal to conduct more profound studies of certain subjects which were treated during the five Vienna Consultations but need further research and analysis. Thus, the theoretical basis and practical exercise of councils and conciliarity in the different churches were examined at the Second PRO ORIENTE Study Seminar. After reviewing all the relevant statements made at the five Vienna Consultations, three theologians, Reverend Tadros Y. Malaty, Father Khalil Kochassary and Professor Wilhelm Schulz systematically treated the issues under discussion. Then the agreement reached and the open points were set out in a final statement. The booklet is completed by a selective list of literature.

By way of conclusion we would like to express our thanks to the Standing Committee of PRO ORIENTE for their untiring efforts and commitment. To His Grace Archbishop Mesrob K. Krikorian we are particularly grateful for having had the kindness to write the preamble.



## Prompting an Ecumenical Ecclesiology

### The Scholarly Achievement of this Volume

Ecumenical ecclesiology sees the increasingly clear emergence of a few key issues, whose solution could in fact point ways out of many a deadlock. Besides the decision as to what an extent the ordained ministry in the Churches is a question of faith or a matter of (local) church law, these key issues include the problems of council and conciliarity in the Church and forms of primacy within the Church.

Over the last few years - and partly in collaboration with the Austrian Fund for Promoting Academic and Scientific Research (FWF) - the Foundation PRO ORIENTE has given special attention to these two issues of ecumenical ecclesiology. The inclusion of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in these studies - both as a topic of discussion and by taking in theologians from these Churches - proved to be significant and fruitful, since there is more of a variety in the phenomena under discussion here than in the two similarly structured imperial churches of Rome and Byzantium. The Oriental Orthodox Churches have their distinct primacies - although they use different names for it - as well as conciliar or synodal structures. This is also clear evidence that it is incorrect to qualify the seven Ecumenical Councils of the first millenary indiscriminately as synods of the undivided Christianity, as it is often done nowadays.

The Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox non-Chalcedonian Churches only share the first three councils - Nicaea (324), Constantinople (380/81) and Ephesus (431) - and if one also takes into account the Assyrian Church, the so-called "Nestorians", who have been condemned by the Orthodox since the Council of Ephesus, only the first two councils can be called synods of the undivided Christianity.

When it comes to the qualification of councils and the phenomenon of primacy in independent local churches, the early church shows principles which are important criteria for the rediscovery of the unity of the divided churches.

This volume is primarily a collection of papers and research findings either related to the conciliarity of the local churches and thus to the one universal church or dealing with a differentiated appreciation of the so-called Ecumenical Councils.

Conciliarity is an important structural principle of every church and is rooted in their apostolicity. The twelve Apostles formed a collegial body and this collegial body lives on in the episcopate of every local church as well as in the one universal church. Just as the Apostle Peter, before any special service for the unity of all churches, first of all is a member of the college of the Apostles and the bishop of the local church of Rome, in the same way every major local church needs a primate who presides its synod of bishops but does not stand above it. Only the Lord stands above the college of the Apostles, as the invisible head of his body, which is the church.

As far as the so-called Ecumenical Synods are concerned it has become apparent for some time that it is essential to differentiate. Pope Paul VI. already broke the ban for the Catholic Church when he quite intentionally and almost as a matter of course called the co-called Ecumenical Councils of the second millenary General Councils of the Western Church. This enormously facilitates talks with the Orthodox Churches, who hitherto justifiably took offence at the Roman Church claiming the sole right of

taking conciliar decisions binding for the church as a whole. Hence it will not be possible to make the mandatory approval of all dogmatic definitions of these councils of the second millenary a precondition for overcoming the split between the churches who are still divided.

Apart from the graded participation of the entire episcopate in such Ecumenical Councils it is also necessary to differentiate more accurately when it comes to the appreciation of dogmatic decisions for the importance of church unity. The rank of a dogma in the "hierarchy of truths of faith", about which Vatican II speaks, must also be considered in terms of its validity for the church as a whole. Individual local churches may well have different emphases of theology and spirituality.

As a rule dogmas are necessary answers to concrete topical questions. If the questions lack topicality or are no longer asked by anybody, the reply in turn loses its significance, or can even no longer be properly understood.

Finally we must distinguish between dogmas of confession ("this is how the faith must be confessed") and dogmas of teaching ("thus it is to be taught"), or in other words prayable dogmas and reflecting dogmas. The binding manner in which Christians ought to confess their common faith does not allow the conclusion that all churches must accept the same theological interpretations.

This is why the synodally determined peculiarities of one local church must not necessarily be decreed or taken over in every church.

Many of the questions broached here have by no means found definitive answers and solutions, but the fact that a debate has been launched and the indication of the aspects to be taken into account in this debate provide valuable guidelines for future talks.

Moreover, this volume shows the importance of carrying on nonofficial consultations with theologians of different churches, even though the official dialogue in formally created commissions has already started. In this way human and technical relations between theologians and hierarchs of the different churches can be established in a very laid-back and relaxed atmosphere, which are apt to withstand more difficult circumstances ahead. Here personal views and convictions are the subject under discussion, not necessarily rigid standpoints of the different churches. Here problems can be voiced and broached in discussion which are not yet ripe for the official dialogue or still "too hot".

May this volume find a large audience, something which is to be ensured by translations into many languages, and may the considerations put forward largely find their way into the theological debate as well as into theological teaching. The latter is the reason for PRO ORIENTE promoting and organizing regional conferences in the theological centres of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

## List of the Papers on Councils and Conciliarity of the Five Vienna Consultations

Father Professor Paul Verghese, Kottayam, India: The Infallibility of the Church Significance of the Ecumenical Councils ("Wort und Wahrheit" Supplementary Issue = WW No. 2, p.45)

Professor J. G. Remmers, Münster: The Infallibility of the Church and the Ecumenical Councils (WW No. 2, p.54)

Vardapet Mesrob K. Krikorian, Vienna: The Attitude of the Oriental Orthodox Churches towards the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Ecumenical Councils (WW No. 2, p. 70)

Mar Severius Zakka Iwas, Damascus: The Reception of Councils (WW No. 2, p.85)

Professor Johannes B. Bauer, Graz: The Reception of Councils (WW No. 2, p.94)

Amba Gregorius, Cairo: The Ecumenical Council and the Ministry of Peter (WW No. 2, p.130)

Prof. Wilhelm de Vries, Münster: Ecumenical Councils and the Ministry of Peter (WW No. 2, p.146)

Vardapet Mesrob K. Krikorian, Vienna: The Origins of the Conciliar Idea (WW No. 3, p.91)

Bishop Youannis of Gharbia, Cairo: The Origins of the Conciliar Idea (WW No.3, p.103)

Professor Alois Grillmeier SJ, Frankfurt/Main: The Origins of the Conciliar Idea (WW No. 3, p.108)

Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios, Kottayam, India: The Importance of Councils for the Life of the Universal Church (WW No. 3, p. 138)

Professor Walter Brandmüller, Augsburg: The Importance of Councils for the Life of the Universal Church (WW No. 3, p. 141)

Mar Gregorius Saliba, Mosul: The Authority of Councils and the Unity of the Church (WW No. 3, p. 154)

Professor Georg Schwaiger, Munich: The Authority of Councils and the Unity of the Church (WW No. 3, p. 161)

## Councils and Conciliarity-related Extracts from the Five Communiqués

### *The First Vienna Consultation: 1)*

"We have also discussed generally the problem of the Ecumenical Councils, their authority and reception, and we urge that these problems be extensively studied on both sides. We commonly submit ourselves to the witness of the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament and thus to the Apostolic Kerygma and express our intention not to get tired in the search for a common language of the mystery of salvation in our Lord in a brotherly spirit ... 'until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God' (Eph. 4, 13). We wish to see the mystery of the compassion of God translated into a life of Christian compassion."

### *The Second Vienna Consultation: 2)*

"We also studied the question of Ecumenical Councils, especially the difference in number (three, seven or twenty one). Though no consensus is easily attainable in this issue, we agree that the first three Ecumenical Councils had, because of their more general acceptance in the Church, a greater degree of fullness, which the later Councils do not have. We look forward, however, to future regional and ecumenical Councils with larger representation as the reunion of Churches is hastened by the working of the Holy Spirit. As regards the relation between the ministry of St. Peter and the Ecumenical Councils, as the Roman Catholics understand it, we have not reached a consensus on it though the principle of collegiality emphasized by the Second Vatican Council is appreciated as a move in the right direction according to which the role of the bishop of Rome is seen within the Council and not above it."

### *The Third Vienna Consultation: 3)*

"We have studied together the notion of conciliarity, i. e. the understanding of the Church as a *koinonia*, so essential to the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ, and so clearly visible in the structure of its life and leadership from the very inception. It is the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth and all unity through councils and other means; it is to Him that we look in hope for a council in which the unity of the one Church in truth and love, in eucharistic communion and episcopal unity can be publicly affirmed and manifested.

In our discussions we distinguished between the council or synod as an event, and the synod as an aspect of the continuing structure of the Church's life. As for the council as an event, we could not agree on how and by whom such a world-wide council of our churches should be convoked and conducted, nor could we agree completely on the procedure for the reception of past or future councils. We also took note of the fact, that while the Roman Catholic Church regards many of the councils held after the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus 431 as - although in a differentiated sense - "ecumenical", the Oriental Orthodox Churches are unable to so regard them.

1) Booklet No. 1, p. 46 (First Vienna Consultation 1971)

2) Booklet No. 1, p. 59 (Second Vienna Consultation 1973)

3) Booklet No. 1, p. 71 (Third Vienna Consultation 1976)

We wished to affirm the right of the churches to convoke a council whenever found necessary and possible though there is no necessity to hold ecumenical councils at given intervals as a permanent structure of the Church. We recognize the need of structures of coordination between the autocephalous churches for the settlement of disputes and for facing together the problems and tasks confronting our churches in the modern world."

*The Fourth Vienna Consultation:*<sup>4)</sup>

"We were agreed that we should work towards a goal of full union of sister Churches - with communion in the faith, in the sacraments of the Church, in ministry and within a canonical structure. Each Church as well as all Churches together will have a primate and conciliar structure, providing for their communion in a given place as well as on a regional and world-wide scale.

The structure will be basically conciliar. No single Church in this communion will by itself be regarded as the source and origin of that communion; the source of the unity of the Church is the action of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the same Spirit who operates in all sister Churches the same faith, hope and love, as well as ministry and sacraments. About regarding one particular Church as the centre of the unity, there was no agreement, thought the need of a special ministry for unity was recognized by all.

This communion will find diverse means of expression - the exchange of letters of peace among the Churches, the public liturgical remembering of the Churches and their primates by each other, the placing of responsibility for convoking general synods in order to deal with common concerns of the Churches, and so on."

*The Fifth Vienna Consultation:*<sup>5)</sup>

"In relation to the question of 'reception' of councils, we saw that conciliar decision, confirmation of the decisions, and their reception by the churches were integral parts of a single process, not to be separated from each other. There are some decisions of councils regarded as ecumenical which have not been received by all churches. There are also canonical decrees of the council of Chalcedon and later councils which find their place in the canons of some Oriental Orthodox Churches, even when they refuse to receive the doctrinal formulations or horos of these councils. In general the Oriental Orthodox Churches did not see the necessity of a formal confirmation - procedure intervening between decision and reception, except as an action by local synods forming an integral part of the reception process. It was also recognized that the substance of a particular decision of a council can be integrated into the living tradition of a church without a formal reception of the conciliar decision as such."

## Council and Councilarity-related Extracts from the Summaries of the Five Consultations

*Mons. Otto Mauer, 1<sup>st</sup> Vienna Consultation:*<sup>6)</sup>

Under the heading "*The Council of Chalcedon - Analysis of a Conflict*", Alois Grillmeier gave a thorough description of the history leading up to the Council, from the viewpoint of dogmatic and theological developments. He referred to the de-hellenisation accomplished by Nicaea (325) against Arius and his middle-Platonic understanding of the Logos as an intermediate entity between divine Monas and Hyle, stressed the common ground in principle shared by all theological schools of thought, i. e. that Jesus Christ is one and the same. He also underlined the kerygmatic formulation of Athanasius: "And man is called Christ / and God is called Christ / and God and man is Christ / and one is Christ" (1<sup>st</sup> Cons., p. 29), and gave his interpretation of the pre-Chalcedonian Logos-sarx-scheme as well as the christological Logos-anthropos scheme both of which he declared to be only half-solutions. Giving an affirmative critical interpretation of the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria and of the letter Leo I sent to Patriarch Flavianus of Constantinople (Tomus Leonis) and pointing out that the setting of Chalcedon was overshadowed by emotions and political influence, he closed with the recommendation not to take the theological positions of around 451 as a basis for the discussions but to start from the great figure of Maximus Homolegetes.

V. C. Samuel, speaking from the standpoint of his Oriental Orthodox Church on "*The Council of Chalcedon - Analysis of a Conflict*" examined the theological situation prior to Chalcedon. He clearly differentiated between the Antiochian and the Alexandrian school in the christological question and described in detail the statements of Emperor Marcianus, the theological position of Theodoret of Cyrus, the message of the letter of Ibas to Maris as well as the Tomos Leonis. He made it clear that the Antiochians insisted on a union between the divine and human nature of Christ in the Prosopon, while the Alexandrians, by contrast, maintained the existence of a hypostatic union and the formula "the one incarnate nature of God the Word". V. C. Samuel then stated that there was no unequivocal use of the expressions 'hypostasis' and 'hypostatic union' at the Council of Chalcedon, at any rate not necessarily in the sense of Cyril of Alexandria. The statement of the Council - according to which both natures of Christ concurred "into one Prosopon and one Hypostasis", so that he is neither split nor divided into two Proposa, but one and the same Son and God incarnate, who is consubstantial with God the Father as well as with us - is interpreted by V. C. Samuel thus "that the one Hypostasis of Christ is not simply the Hypostasis of God the Word, but it is a composite Hypostasis formed by the concurrence of God the Word and the manhood which He united to Himself" (1<sup>st</sup> Cons., p. 50). On the other hand he points out, that the Antiochian element in the conciliar definition, that Christ is made known "in two natures" (en), whereas the formulation of the Alexandrians would have been "from two natures" (ek) (1<sup>st</sup> Cons., p. 51). Likewise, the formula "from two natures after the union" (1<sup>st</sup> Cons., p. 53) was not part of the Alexandrian formula. V. C. Samuel concluded by saying that the Council of Chalcedon "did serious violence to the faith which the Council of Ephesus in 431 had affirmed in condemning

4) Booklet No. 1, p. 87 (Fourth Vienna Consultation 1978)

5) Booklet No. 1, p. 102 (Fifth Vienna Consultation 1988)

6) Booklet No. 2, p. 10-12 and 14/15 (First Vienna Consultation 1971)



Nestorius" (1<sup>st</sup> Cons., p. 54). Moreover, he said that "sixth century Chalcedonian East realized this truth and sought to meet its challenge, not by admitting the flaw which was actually ascribable to the Council of Chalcedon, but by reading into the Council of 451 decisions which it never had made" (1<sup>st</sup> Cons., p. 54). The Council of Constantinople (553) had then gone on to defend the Council of Chalcedon.

*W. de Vries* then continued with a survey of "The Reasons for the Rejections of the Council of Chalcedon by the Oriental Orthodox Churches". One of them was the undemocratic behaviour at Chalcedon of Emperor Marcianus and Pope Leo, who practically defined the results of the Council beforehand and restricted the freedom of discussion of the council fathers by the authorization of their legates thus that the theological problems could not be discussed in an exhaustive way and the opposition felt suppressed. De Vries then described the positions taken by the individual churches against Chalcedon and summarized: "..... the Council of Chalcedon did not fulfil the expectations placed in it. Not only did it fail to restore peace in the universal Church, it even caused a schism which was unfortunately continued to our day. It is a tragic fact that the attempt to express the unfathomable mystery of Christ in human terms resulted in an implacable struggle of Christians against Christians. And yet they all really wanted the same thing..... The dispute arose from the basic inability of men at that time to believe that the same truth may be expressed in different words which may even be apparently contradictory" (1<sup>st</sup> Cons., p. 60).

(.....)

In a second lecture, *A. Grillmeier* gave a far-reaching survey of "*The Reception of the Council of Chalcedon in the Roman Catholic Church*", considering reception not as a mere juridical process, but one within the scope of the history of thought. He examined the reception of Chalcedon in forms of kerygmatics, spirituality and liturgy and finally theology. The result: the Roman Catholic Church and Latin theology were faithful advocates of the Chalcedonian heritage, even if the transmission of formulae by far outreaches the originality of a further theological development of these formulae. The modern theologian is faced with four schemata:

1. extreme emphasis on union (real Monophysitism),
2. moderate emphasis on union (the Alexandrians, Cyril),
3. moderate emphasis on duality (Antiochians, Theodoret),
4. extreme emphasis on duality (Nestorianism).

Even today there still exists an interpretation of Christ with a predominantly Logos-hypostasis approach as well as the Homo-assumptus doctrine of the church fathers ("relative autonomy of the humanity of Christ"). Both theological tendencies have to be seen in tension with each other and no one of them is satisfactory by itself.

*Alois Grillmeier SJ, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vienna Consultation: 7)*

Another topic for a whole meeting in its own right was that of "*The Ecumenical Council and the Ministry of Peter*". This subject was treated by *Amba Gregorios* (Cairo) and *W. de Vries* (Rome). These papers and the discussions which followed revealed the amount of patience that was still needed for this kind of intercommunication. The Alexandrian representatives vigorously denied any special role of Peter in the New Testament or of the Roman Bishop at a council. *Johannes B. Bauer*, however, pointed out in the discussion that it did make sense to show that those indications which we find in the New Testament were being carried on at the beginning of the second century. When dissident Judeo-Christians wanted to put the Lord's brother Jacob in Peter's place, they coined a saying of the Lord such as logion 12 of the Gospel according to Thomas: "The disciples said to Jesus: 'We know that you will go away from us; who will be the greatest over us?' Jesus told them: 'From the place to which you have come, you will go to Jacob the Just, for his sake Heaven and Earth have been created!'" (ed. J. Leipolt, TU 101, 28). The Hebrew Gospel, which originated in the same circles, proves Jacob's claim to primacy by characterizing him, contrary to the historical facts, as a participant in Jesus' Last Supper and as the first witness and thus as the most important witness of the resurrection. (Ph. Vilehauer in: Hennecke-Schneemelcher, Ntl. Apokr. I (1968) 105 text loc. cit. 108.) If the "first appearance" of the Resurrected, in 1, Cor 15,5 decidedly attributed to Peter, is being implicitly denied to him and explicitly attributed to Jacob instead, this can only be bound up with the fact that, at that time already, Petrine pre-eminence was being vindicated with this passage. Another proof of Peter's authority as early as at the end of the first century is the flood of pseudo-epigraphic writings in his name, starting with the so-called First Letter of Peter. This letter was apparently written under Domitian and addressed to a large number of communities in Asia Minor, which had largely been evangelized by Paul, whose name, however, is not mentioned. The real author of this letter obviously pretended to be Peter, because, by using his name, he could claim to have a right to write even to those communities which he had not founded himself. The same is true of the Second Letter of Peter. (I am grateful to Johannes B. Bauer for letting me have this summary of his contribution to the discussion.) Moreover, one might just refer to the relations of St Cyril of Alexandria to Rome and his collaboration with the Roman Bishop in the case of Nestorius. At this point the "larger problem" of ecumenical dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox Churches become evident which was also expressed in *Paul Verghese's* words: "The Oriental Orthodox Churches do not feel as split twigs, but as the original stem from which the Chalcedonian Church has departed."

Considering the differences which had surfaced at this point it was all the more astonishing when the Egyptian Bishop *Amba Samuel* proposed to move from unofficial talks to official negotiations on the reunification of the divided Churches. This was generally received with great approval; but one must not forget that this motion primarily sprang from the agreement on the Christological issue and includes ideas of a *koinonia* for which there is no straight correspondence in Roman canon law. Nevertheless, Rome should enter this dialogue with the greatest broadness and openness of mind possible. For the strength of faith and the sense of tradition which

these Churches bring in, can be an example to all of us - especially in the present crisis! On the other hand though, the Churches of the East will not be spared the task of tackling the problems of adapting what was handed down to the requirements of our time, as was recognized by the participants in this Consultation. After all they include in their ranks such ecumenists with an intimate knowledge of Western problems and Western literature, as the commonly revered Bishop *Amba Gregorius* from Cairo, or *Paul Verghese*. It is also the latter who can take the credit for the basic wording of the final Communiqué, which is an open statement of both our common ground and our points of divergence.

*Alois Grillmeier SJ, 3<sup>rd</sup> Consultation:8)*

This brought us on to the subject of "councils". The multitude of open questions in this respect is a natural consequence of the fact that the Oriental Orthodox Churches recognize only three councils as being ecumenical. Hence, it is clear that attitudes towards "councils" or treatment of the "conciliar idea" were not the same in all representatives of the different Churches. First of all "*The Origins of the Conciliar Idea*" was explored in three papers, i. e. from an Armenian (Vardapet Dr. *Mesrob K. Krikorian*), Coptic (Bishop *Amba Youannis*) and Roman Catholic perspective *Alois Grillmeier*.

Following that, the attention turned to the "*Importance of Councils for the Life of the Universal Church*", viewed in a Syro-Indian (Metropolitan *Paulos Mar Gregorios*) and Western perspective (Prof. Dr. *W. Brandmüller*). Brandmüller stressed that by virtue of the Codex Iuris Canonici (cc. 222-229) the General Council of the Church represents a highly important constitutional element within the Church, and this not least because the General Council represents the *Ecclesia universalis* (universal Church). Brandmüller, citing writers of the 15th century, traced the history of the importance and the development of the concept of *repraesentatio universalis ecclesiae* (representation of the Universal Church). However, these highly interesting explanations led the Oriental participants on to what was hitherto uncharted territory for them. Participants were taken on a tour of the whole of predominantly Western Church history by the topic of "*The Authority of Councils and the Unity of the Church*", and in particular by Prof. Dr. *G. Schwaiger's* paper (Munich); the Oriental speaker, Archbishop *Mar Gregorios Saliba* of Mosul treated the same subject in a more systematic perspective. Schwaiger ventured on the difficult question of the relationship between ecumenical councils and papal primacy, and showed the dramatic transformations of this relationship in the different stages of church history. The Oriental speaker, on the other hand, emphasized the ecumenical council as "highest authority of the Church". Its main task was to maintain the unity of the Church and to guard against anything that might upset the foundations of the Church; it had to decree all the necessary regulations and moral laws appropriate to create a bond between all those who are affiliated to the Church; dogmas had to be formulated, defined, unified and made public in canonic form to enable the faithful to understand and accept them.

8) Booklet No. 2, p. 28 (Third Vienna Consultation 1976)

*Hans-Joachim Schulz, 5<sup>th</sup> Vienna Consultation:9)*

Bishop *Krikorian* put forward future unity of the Churches as the main theme of the Fifth Consultation. He explained that this was not expected as a unity in uniformity, but as one in diversity: "Surely, it is not easy to determinate clearly the boundaries or limits of diversity, however, I myself plead and argue for the most possible far-reaching and wide plurality in various traditions of rites, customs, canons, spirituality and theology" (5<sup>th</sup> Cons., p.18).

Must future church unity be based on jurisdictional unity and the absolute necessity of mutual acceptance of dogmatic definitions considered to be essential? The latter vision of unity is maintained by the Eastern (Byzantine) Orthodox Church. The Oriental Orthodox Churches, for their part, consider only the first three Ecumenical Councils as fundamental and binding. If the role of the Bishop of Rome is defined, as Pope John Paul II did when receiving a delegation of the Coptic Orthodox Church in June 1979, as "ministry for the preservation of the community of faith and of the spiritual life", no objections can be raised against that. Classical Roman doctrine on primacy and infallibility, however, goes by far beyond such a function. The Orthodox Churches need not necessarily contrast this with a mere "primacy of honour" or the role of a "primus inter pares" (first among equals). The right to convoke Ecumenical Councils and to make doctrinal decisions within a concrete conciliar framework, would mean more and be at the same time more closely in line with the historical role of the Bishop of Rome which, according to what Patriarch Shenouda III said in Rome in 1973, cannot exclusively be grasped through the civic importance of ancient Rome but represents a "spiritual pre-eminence". Bishop Dr. *Krikorian* thinks that a reception of certain results of the Anglican-Catholic dialogue was worth considering: primacy as an expression of "episcopate" (episcopal authority) within a *koinonia* of local churches and as a subsidiary service to their bishops. As in previous Consultations, this assessment of the issue of primacy again showed the undoctinaire, future-oriented attitude of the Armenian Apostolic Church. In another Oriental Orthodox opinion, however, the transferability of results of the Anglican-Catholic dialogue was denied.

9) Booklet No. 2, p. 63 (Fifth Vienna Consultation 1988)

## List of Participants

**Oriental Orthodox:** Metropolitan Amba Bishoy, Damiette  
 Archbishop Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Aleppo  
 Bishop Ishak Bahnam Polos, Iraq  
 Archbishop Aram Keshishian, Antelias  
 Bishop Mesrob Krikorian, Vienna  
 Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios, India  
 Bishop Amba Gregorius, Cairo  
 Reverend Tadros Malaty, Alexandria  
 Vardapet Arshavir Kapoudjian, Antelias  
 Reverend Kondothra M. George, Geneva

**Roman Catholic:** Franciscus Cardinal König  
 Father Frans Bouwen PA, Jerusalem  
 Reverend Professor Philipp Harmoncourt, Graz  
 Professor Peter Hofrichter, Salzburg  
 Father Khalil Kochassarly OP, Brussels  
 Reverend Professor Hans-Joachim Schulz, Würzburg  
 Alfred Stirnemann, Vienna

**PRO ORIENTE**  
 On Councils and Conciliarity  
 Second Study Seminar  
 26th - 30th June 1992  
 Bildungshaus Lainz/Vienna

### Programme

Friday, 26th June	4.00 p.m.: Study Seminar 6.30 p.m.: Dinner
Saturday, 27th June	8.30 a.m.: Breakfast 9.00 a.m.: Study Seminar 12.30 p.m.: Lunch 4.00 p.m.: Study Seminar 6.30 p.m.: Dinner
Sunday, 28th June	Liturgies
Monday, 29th June	8.30 a.m.: Breakfast 9.00 a.m.: Study Seminar 12.30 p.m.: Lunch 4.00 p.m.: Study Seminar 6.30 p.m.: Dinner
Tuesday, 30th June	8.30 a.m.: Breakfast 9.00 a.m.: Study Seminar 12.30 p.m.: Lunch

## Papers and Discussions

Friday, June 26<sup>th</sup>: 4.00 p.m.

First working session. Chair: Bishop Mesrob K. Krikorian

Secretary General Stirnemann extended most heartfelt welcome greetings to all participants in the name of Cardinal Groër. The study seminars are held because many felt it was not yet time for a sixth consultation regarding the many open questions. His Holiness Zakka I Iwas has excused himself for not being able to come and is wishing a successful meeting.

Reverend Tadros Y. Malaty

### Ecumenical Councils and the Trinitarian Faith

#### 1. The Role of the Vienna Consultations

The Vienna Consultations have played an important role in the formal agreements that took place between some of the Oriental Orthodox Churches (Non-Chalcedonian) and the Catholic Church. This is especially true in what concerns the consensus reached upon the Christological understanding, i.e. the nature of Jesus Christ. Actually, the conflict arising from this topic had caused a schism between these churches, which lasted for fifteen centuries. Now, after attaining a unified concept concerning Christology, the study of other problems has been initiated. For example, the discussion of the topic "Councils and Conciliarity" was started during the Second Vienna Consultation. At that time, the importance of establishing a true and steadfast unity became evident. The focus was not only on the mere acknowledgement or rejection of certain Councils, but much more on our faith in relevance to the following points:

1. Our concept of the church unity: Should this unity rest upon the basis of one shared faith, or on the right of jurisdiction?

In other words, does the unity of the Church get achieved through the nomination of one Pope, Bishop, or Patriarch who has the sole power to issue decisive and final pronouncements in cases involving doctrinal and ecclesiastical ordinances throughout the world; or should unity rest upon one practical faith whose ultimate aim is the sanctity of the church wherever it is?!

What does unity of faith imply? How can all the churches, throughout the world, share one active and creative tradition in spite of local disparities in culture and customs?

2. If the church represents the icon of the Holy Trinity, then what is the relationship between ecumenical councils and the Trinitarian faith?

3. What's our concept of the nature of the "Catholic Orthodox" Church, especially that both terms are eastern; the second implies the "uprightness of the faith," while the first indicates the "church's universality and wholeness"?

4. How can we reinstate the Church to its early condition, before its division, a rather sound flexible framework that matches the present time? Furthermore it should rest upon church tradition inspired by the Bible and the Church Fathers, and reflects their living spirit.

5. To what extent is the church involved in the political contemporary life?

6. Our study of "Councils and Conciliarity" urges us to learn the correct implications of many issues such as heresy and the heretic; ecclesiastical anathemas; the infallibility of the bishop, the patriarch or the pope. Besides the attitude of the Oriental Orthodox Churches towards new doctrines that have been introduced to Councils, where they were not represented.

7. What is the role of a bishop in a Church? What is his authority, his obligations, and his position compared to other bishops in the same See which he follows. What about the role of the patriarchs or popes and apostolic sees; the interaction and combined relationships: what are the regulations that govern all these matters?

8. What can be done towards establishing an ecumenical council acknowledged by all? Such questions and the sort come up as we study the topic of "Councils and Conciliarity." We do not deny that in former councils significant progress was achieved. However, it is imperative to carry on further studies and discussions to resolve the obstacles still pending....

#### 2. Ecumenical Councils and Church Unity

The Council of Jerusalem took place in the first century. This could be truly considered a model of ecumenical councils. Other ecumenical councils followed, and were held in the fourth and fifth centuries, not in a way to fulfill church unity but rather it is a result of the intrinsic church unity that took place. However this happened to be through the one faith, not through organization of authority among the principal sees throughout the world. At that time the leaders of the church focussed first and foremost upon unity of the faith in the Christian world. This constituted the principal motive of the Church Fathers for holding such councils.

Today, the condition of the church is truly different, due to the presence of various sects represented in the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Churches. As Bishop Mesrob Krikorian says: "For many years the ecumenical movement has been seeking a model of universal Church in which all Churches and ecclesiastical communities could live and work together in full communion, at the same time retaining their identity and special traditions."<sup>10</sup>

Formerly, ecumenical councils were offsprings of church unity, and it was keen to preserve this unity. At present there is a strong desire to fulfill church unity... but what sort of unity?

In this context, Franciscus Cardinal König states that danger is always suspected due to the thought of mere visible unity whereas there is necessity of approaching unity in a spiritual manner. Unity cannot be taken to imply friendliness with another church, since it is a much longer and deeper process.<sup>11</sup>

Many demand a rapid unification on the expense of the one faith and the one spirit. They believe that holding ecumenical councils wherein all churches gather can achieve this unity. However our meetings on formal levels, as well as informal, either in the field of theological discourses or mutual social work, offer us true insight concerning our counterparts. This leads theological thought of the one faith to get closer.

Anba Bishoi felt that the meeting during the fifth Vienna Consultation had attempted to avoid theological discussions. He said: "Had this been the case in 1971, consensus

<sup>10</sup>) "Wort und Wahrheit" Supplementary Issue No. 5 (1989), p. 18

<sup>11</sup>) Ibidem. p. 124

concerning Christology would not have been achieved." He urged the meeting to face theological problems fearlessly and without asking for quick solutions. He also explained that there were many new schools of thought that deviated from the early apostolic faith and which could drive us to destruction.<sup>12)</sup>

The Rev. Fr. Edward Rene Hambye underlined the important developments that have taken place in the Catholic Church; and which specifically bear upon the variation of theological thought in the different continents. He said that today it is hard to speak about a monolithic theology recognized by the whole Catholic Church.<sup>13)</sup>

In other words, our study of ecumenical councils necessitates primarily an understanding of what the concept of "church unity" embraces. This cannot be understood as a mere human conglomeration or a numerical quantity; but rather as a deep study motivated by the desire to achieve a unity based on the apostolic faith and a unified creed characterized by one spirit and one thought, and behaving as members in the one Body of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:4,5).

### 3. Ecumenical Councils and Trinitarian Faith

Dr. Gad Hatem wrote an article about "Human Society as the Trinitarian Icon",<sup>14)</sup> in which he says that the Holy Bible speaks about the Holy Trinity as a model for human relationships. According to him, there is a correspondence between the Trinitarian fellowship (Koinonia) and human fellowship.<sup>15)</sup> That which governs divine life also governs Christian society but without measure. In other words, the Church is an icon of the Holy Trinity and seeks to identify herself with Them. Through this concept, how can ecumenical councils actually testify for the Trinitarian faith?

A. The Holy Trinity is essentially characterized by one essence yet with distinct Hypostaseis. This unity is unparalleled since the Trinity though being distinctly remarked from One Another still all have one essence. On the other hand, while They possess one essence, not any of the Persons of the Trinity loses His entity. Thus the perfection of the One implies the perfection of the Others.

We could say that we yearn to achieve an ecumenical council that simulates the Holy Trinity. Its fellowship arises due to the welding of all the parts in a spiritual manner, yet each preserving the character of its local See and its equal standing with respect to the others.

The competition to secure leadership or the desire for power breaks down the analogy between the Church and the Holy Trinity. Jürgen Moltmann<sup>16)</sup> has criticized the ecclesiastical framework of the church which could not abolish the doctrine of absolute monarchical divine rights, and supported his argument by setting the example of the pope's power.

The Brazilian thinker, Leonard Boff, calls for imitation of the Holy Trinity. He is one of the pillars of what is known as the "Theology of Liberation;" and he underlines that socialism, fellowship, and democracy are means that are not only identical with the Christian faith but that arise from the Trinitarian doctrine as well. He says, for instance, "The Trinity is our true social project."<sup>17)</sup> Thus, Trinitarianism is a

12) "Wort und Wahrheit" Supplementary Issue No. 5 (1989) (=WW 5), p. 123

13) Ibidem. p. 124

14) Dr. Gad Hatem. The Human Society as an Icon of the Trinity (1991), in Arabic

15) On the Holy Spirit 25, 59

16) Dr. Gad Hatem. Les Trinité et Le reign de Dieu (Paris 1984), p. 252

sociopolitical doctrine and it is appropriate that the Church adopts, comprehends, and practices it in its ecumenical councils.

To elaborate further, the attempt to centralize authority and entrust it to one specific bishop or see is a deviation from unification, based on Trinitarianism. As such, the church would reflect the claims of the Romans, Greeks, and Jews that there is one emperor on earth and one absolute God - thereby ignoring the three (Hypostaseis) Persons - in heaven. This ideological representation is clearly formed in Aristotle who called for political unity and said: "It is not good to have communal dominion, and humanity yearns to be governed by one person only." Moreover, Philo criticized the jurisdiction of the people and considered it unruly, as he believed that terrestrial monarchy reflected the heavenly Monarchy.

Briefly, Trinitarianism rejects absolute monarchy, respects fellowship and reciprocal human respect; and recognizes otherness.<sup>18)</sup> That is what must be taken into consideration if we want to establish true ecclesiastical and ecumenical councils.

B. The incarnation of the Word revealed to us the mystery of the Holy Trinity. It announced the divine fellowship and offered to us a new insight unto the nature of the Church and its oneness. It represents our union together in Him as members in His one Body. Consequently, that union does not hold a quantified human mass or organized conglomerations, but it constitutes a fellowship and union with the Father in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

According to John Meyendorff, the Catholicism of the church or its universality implies that there is no separate or independent existence outside Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, Who operates in and for the world. Its Catholicism is an integral part of its holiness, unity and apostolic nature which cannot be viewed as separate counterparts.<sup>19)</sup> In that context, J. Meyendorff says:

"His (Christ) presence constitutes the Mystery of Christ and of the Church...

Could that correspond to the view of St. Ignatius of Antioch for whom 'Where is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church'.<sup>20)</sup> - in other words, the whole body of Christ, represented by the local Eucharistic community, with the bishop as its head?"<sup>21)</sup>

The unity of the Church or her universality is strongly related to the Person of Jesus Christ and His revelation within her. Thus the Church partakes of His life, righteousness, and holiness through the one faith and the one spirit... That explains why Jesus, in His farewell prayer, asked for two things on behalf of the Church; or actually for one thing having two aspects: her unity in Him and her holiness through Him. Jesus said: "Holy Father keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are... and for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth" (John 17:11,19).

Therefore, since this is our belief concerning unity which is dictated by our Trinitarian faith, then the basis of the Church's unity should rest upon "holiness in Christ," rather than upon the power of one bishop or pope of one specific see. This is the only way to achieve ecclesiastical ecumenical councils.

Bishop Mesrob Krikorian says:

17) Dr. Gad Hatem/L. Boff. The Trinity, Society and Liberation (1986) p. 29

18) For more details see Dr. Gad Hatem. Human Society as an Icon of the Trinity (in Arabic); Erich Peterson. Monotheismus als politisches Problem (Leipzig 1935)

19) John Meyendorff. Orthodoxy and Catholicity (New York 1966), p. vi

20) Epistle to the Smyrnaeans, VIII/2

21) John Meyendorff. Orthodoxy and Catholicity. p. 4

"Since the Council of Vatican 1, the Roman Catholic Church tends to stress rather the importance of jurisdictional unity, whereas the Orthodox Churches regard the conformity of the essential dogmas more weighty than any other aspects."<sup>22)</sup>

#### *4. Ecumenical Councils and Living Church Tradition*

Father André de Halleux asks us to be faithful to our traditions as well as creative in our future prospects.<sup>23)</sup>

It is necessary to distinguish between the one living tradition of the one Church shared by the East and West before her break down into sects, and the variance arising from local customs or traditions. This would enable us to comprehend the implications of the unity and universality of the Church as well as the role of ecumenical councils... For the spirit is one in spite of the variation in cultures. On the other hand, the living tradition is not rigid. Conversely, it evolves to be in step with the changing times yet preserves its spirit, thought, and bases.

If we go back to the apostolic age when bishops were first appointed, we find that one bishop presided over one city which formed one local Eucharistic community. This local church did not need, however, to submit to the rule of an ecumenical bishop in order to achieve its unity and universality. There was no need for a bishop or pope to dispense all the executive, organizational, or spiritual matters. Indeed, every local church represented the universal church as it practiced church unity through its holy Eucharistic existence in God Almighty, i.e. with the presence of the Sacrificed and Risen Jesus Christ and His revelation within that church; in her worship, behaviour and her proclamation of the truth!

The Church is Catholic, yet worship and service are local! This is not an empire, or a state that seeks to dominate or prevail over the world! Rather, it seeks to serve with love every soul in its sphere as it is filled with an ecumenical or universal spirit... The congregation stands with the bishop to pray for the whole world, as well as for the city or village where the liturgy is held... That is why ecclesiastical liturgy, which seeks the salvation of the whole world, its sanctification and spiritual growth, is described as local as well as universal at the same time. By the same spirit, St. John Chrysostom used to say to priests: "The priest is the father of the whole world."<sup>24)</sup>

The unity of Christians in the universe is not fulfilled because the various churches do complement one another; but it is rather fulfilled above all, due to identical faith, manifested, in turn, in sacramental communion.<sup>25)</sup> Consequently, the one truth to which every local church testifies is pronounced by the bishop who represents the Lord Jesus Christ; and it is he who grants the community "universality." In this context, St. Irenaeus says: "All who wish to see the Truth can contemplate the tradition of the Apostles manifested throughout the world in every church."<sup>26)</sup>

Ever since the apostolic age, the number of Christians has been multiplied especially in the great countries. Consequently, four sees were, at first, established: in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. Every see had its local council... When necessary, all

the bishops throughout the world met specially to preserve the one faith rather than to achieve unity based on power.

It is obvious on studying ecclesiastical tradition, that there was no general ecumenical bishop in the world who dominated the universal church until the fifth century when the church suffered divisions. Moreover, there were no ecumenical councils seeking to achieve the universality of the church or her domination. We have elaborated earlier under the title "Councils and Counciliarity," about the futility of holding ecumenical or worldwide councils to proclaim the universal make up of the church.

#### *5. The Number of the Ecumenical Councils*

We have already spoken about the failure to reach an agreement concerning the number of ecumenical councils; and how no importance should be given to this numeral. What is more pressing concerns the "truth" which the church proclaims, and which it seeks to preserve - whatever it costs - by means of holding ecumenical councils. We have said that the church, with all the aspects of her existence - liturgy, apostolic traditions, ecclesiastical rules, and living demeanor - represents a kind of spiritual ecumenical council established to govern her life, incessantly.

Bearing this in mind, it is necessary to note that the Oriental Orthodox Churches cannot recognize the Council of Chalcedon, nor the other councils held later on, for the following reasons:

1. The anathemas and condemnations of their Fathers: The Sixth Council in Constantinople (680-681 A.D.), and the Seventh Council in Nicea (787 A.D.) consider the pope of Alexandria, Dioscorus (linking him with Eutyches), a hater of God; and the patriarch of Antioch, Severus, (linking him with Apollinarius and Themistius), as a heretic and scornful of God.<sup>27)</sup>

The topic of anathemas and condemnations was studied during the second Consultation. Positive solutions were proposed to reinstate unity between the Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches and the Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches. These were very much similar to those previously suggested and could be briefly stated as the lifting of the anathemas and condemnations without necessarily accepting those who had been condemned and deprived of being doctrinal Fathers. At the same time, they were not to be attacked any longer.

2. Before the Council of Chalcedon, the church enjoyed unity. Therefore, it was possible to hold ecumenical councils. However, the above mentioned council destroyed the unity of the church, and since then the Oriental Orthodox Churches no longer took part in any council neither by being present nor by sharing intellectually.

3. The decisions taken by the councils that followed the Chalcedonian Council need to be revised; especially that the Oriental Orthodox Churches reject any addition or change introduced into the Creed of Faith which was established and defined in the first three ecumenical councils. Moreover, they reject other doctrines that contradict the living tradition of the Church as well as the teachings of the early Fathers and which were declared before the division of the Church.

22) WW 5. p. 18

23) Ibidem. p. 125

24) De Sacerdotis 6/4

25) John Meyendorff. Orthodoxy and Catholicity. pp. 6 and 7

26) Irenaeus. Adversos Haereticos III, 3/1

27) WW 2 (1973). pp. 70-73

## 6. Ecumenical Councils and Authority

The problem of authority was raised during the Vienna Consultations:

- Does the council automatically possess absolute power?
- At this point, we may ask: what does power imply?
- Is it arbitration in matters concerning faith such as dogmas and ecclesiastical teachings?
- Or is it the setting of laws related to the churches on an ecumenical level, and enforcing them?
- Or, again, is it just an honorary degree and a temporary status?

The competition for power started among the disciples even before the crucifixion of the Lord. St. Mark says: "And He sat down and called the twelve and said to them. If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" Mark 9:35. The Lord, however, granted them His Holy Spirit at the Pentecost so that they might share the glory of His Crucifixion. Consequently, that competition was transformed into an act of self-sacrifice, service, and fellowship in times of pain; rather than a quest for authority or honour. The competition in love marked by humbleness does not imply that the church lives haphazardly. It is said: "Warn those who are unruly" 1 Thess. 5:14; and also: "For God is not the Author of confusion but of peace" 1 Cor. 14:33.

Then, under what form of organization has the Church lived since the apostolic age?

A. The epistles of St. Paul reveal the organization of the church in the dawn of Christianity. The Apostle felt that the invitation to serve was a personal one, which was proposed by God Himself. In this context, the Apostle says: "... when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood: nor did I go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me..." Gal.1:15,16. After three years of service, he went up to Jerusalem to meet, and be introduced to St. Peter, thus remained with him fifteen days. He also met with St. James, the brother of Jesus (Gal.1:18,19). This might probably be due to the fact that these two were particularly concerned with preaching to the "circumcised;" while St. Paul was concerned with the Gentiles. Consequently, St. Paul feared there would be a division in the church. This could occur as a result of the different needs of the Jews (circumcised) in contrast to those of the Gentiles. After fourteen years, St. Paul got a message from the Lord and went to Jerusalem as a preacher to the Gentiles, taking with him Barnabas and Titus. He discussed his mission with the important church leaders in private... Perhaps he feared to hold a communal discussion which would cause more trouble and lead Christians from Jewish origins to agitation.

The work of the Apostle had two aspects: the personal one that had to do with the direct relationship between him and God Who singled him out for service; and the communal ecclesiastical aspect whose aim was to establish harmony between doctrinal thought and the oneness of the spirit in all that concerns the dogmas and the faith.

In matters impinging upon organization and planning, St. Paul and Barnabas, as well as Titus, met with the apostles James, Peter, and John; and they planned their mission so that the first party would be concerned with preaching to the Gentiles; while the other would serve the circumcised (Gal. 2:9). It could be that St. Paul, the Apostle,

bestowed upon St. James a particular honour by mentioning him before St. Peter or St. John.

B. The matter of honour did not preoccupy the minds of the disciples or apostles. What really concerned them was the uprightness of the faith, as well as its sanctified life... St. Paul says: "But when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed" Gal. 2:11. It is clear that this behaviour, and other instances, reveal that St. Peter did not occupy any status of authority over the apostles. Furthermore, he was not infallible and accepted the public reproach that St. Paul addressed to him whereby he felt guilty!

C. A general (ecumenical) council was held in the apostolic era which is depicted in the book of the Acts, chapter fifteen. The following points can be noted from its contents:

\* It did not occur to the apostles to hold ecumenical councils. However, a council was held as a result of arguments raised and impinged upon converted Jews. The purpose was to uphold the unity of Christian thought.

\* The council did not meet on the request of St. Peter or St. James. In other words, the universal church was not headed by a specific person or by an appointed bishop of any see.

\* Among them, Paul and Barnabas as well as James, each played principal roles. Thus, St. Peter did not inaugurate or close the Council, but he rather spoke after lengthy discussions, (Acts 15:6). He had to come forward as many of the Jews considered him the protector of the Law, and as a representative of the circumcised. On the other hand, St. Paul was accused of teaching "all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses" Acts 21:21. Leadership could be attributed to James, the Apostle, who said a final settling word: "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turned to God" (Acts 15:19). Obviously, the decision was communally taken since it is said: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." Acts 15:28.

D. The letters of St. Ignatius reveal the Church's understanding of unity, as well as its organization during the age of the Apostolic Fathers:

\* It is clear from his letters that he has devoted all his life and ministry to achieve the unity of the church. He believed that this could be done by bringing the congregation and the visible bishop - who represents the Invisible Bishop<sup>28)</sup> - together in a close relationship. The authority of that bishop flows from that of the apostles, and he reflects the image of likeness of the Invisible God.<sup>29)</sup>

He writes to the people of Ephesus and says:

"For if I in a short time had such converse with your bishop, which was not after the manner of men but in the Spirit, how much more do I congratulate you who are closely joined with him as the Church is with Jesus Christ and as Jesus Christ is with the Father, that all things may be harmonious in unity." <sup>30)</sup>

It is clear that bishops are all drawn together spiritually through sharing one goal and one faith. The early church focussed on unity on a local level since it conveyed the universality of the church.

In the mind of St. Ignatius, unity was associated with closeness experienced by

28) Ad Magnes 3

29) Ad Magnes 6; Eph. 6; Tral. 3

30) Eph. 5

everyone - clergy and congregation - through the one Eucharistic offering which is an extension of the One sacrifice of the Cross. "Let there be one prayer in common, one supplication, one mind, one hope, in love and in joy unblamable, which is Jesus Christ. Hasten to come together all of you, as to one temple, even God; as to one altar, even to one Jesus Christ."<sup>31</sup>) That is why he has often defined the Church as "the place of sacrifice: *Thysiasterion*."<sup>32</sup>)

\* Concerning his relationship with Rome, the following may be noted:

- He did not address his message to the pope of Rome but rather to the church of Rome. It is clear that if the former had possessed the status of the head, it would have been more appropriate to address the message to him.

- He used a severe warning tone which a person would not use with his superior: (The prince of this world would fain tear me in pieces and corrupt my mind to Godward. Let not any of you therefore who are near abet him. Rather stand ye on my side, that is on God's side. Speak not of Jesus Christ and withal desire the world.)

\* The topic of Church unity was at the commence of all his other messages. Where then do we find the topic of submission to the Roman Pope?!

E. The main sees appeared in the world as a natural outcome of ecclesiastical work. Accordingly, Dr. Assad Roustum<sup>33</sup>) says that some churches were characterized, at that time, by certain qualities which invested them with some kind of influence that others did not possess. For example, the Lord Himself founded the church of Jerusalem and all the apostles served in it. James, the Lord's brother, dispensed its concerns, while the first council was held there. Similarly the Church of Antioch was in the capital of the Eastern world and it was the biggest and most important city in it. On the other hand, the Church of Alexandria surpassed all the churches in the world in knowledge, philosophy, and the study of the Holy Scriptures, as well as in its defense for the holy tradition. Consequently, it became the first teacher. As for Rome, it was the capital of a whole great empire. Consequently, its pope was in a very critical position, since anything he did was looked upon by other rulers as ensuing from all Christians in the Roman Empire. This does not mean that he was the head, but that he occupied an influential post where the emperor's men would deal with him... For the same reason, the Roman Empire became split into east and west and the patriarch of Constantinople gained powerful status.

F. What about the power of the Church in ecumenical councils?

Canon six of the council of Nicea states:

"The ancient customs of Egypt, Lybia, and Pentapolis (the Five Cities) shall be maintained: the bishop of Alexandria will exercise his power over all these provinces, since that is also the custom of the bishop who is in Rome; similarly in Antioch and in other provinces, the prerogatives of [some] Churches must be preserved. But, in general, it is evident that if someone has become bishop against the wish of the metropolitan, the great council rules that he is not a bishop. However, if two or three, in a spirit of contradiction, challenge the general suffrage after it has taken place correctly and according to ecclesiastical rule, the majority shall prevail."

It is clear that the council did not set up a new power or order, but rather stabilized the old established customs. Moreover, it ensured the power of the bishops in their

31) Ad Magnes 7

32) Eph. 5;2; Tral. 7,2; Philad. 4

33) See *Asaad Roustom*. We, Rome and Vatican. pp. 10-13 (in Arabic)

respective sees in Alexandria, Rome, Antioch and others. They had more power than the metropolitan and referred to their local councils which they headed... There is no indication in the law to submission to another see.

As for the designation of certain honours upon certain bishops in specific sees, this was governed by political factors which played a role rather than a need for investing greater power. Accordingly, Canon three of the Council of Constantinople states:

"The Bishop of Constantinople must have the privileges of honor (ta prebeia tes times) next to the bishop of Rome, because that city is a new Rome."

Meyendorff comments on this law and says: "The Canon's 'point' was obviously aimed against Alexandria whose prestige had been increased by the Arian controversy and whose authority was, until then, unique in the East."<sup>34</sup>)

It is clear that advancement in honorary titles was not based on principles of faith but rather on political ones. What ensued concerning canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon underlines the above statement:

"For the Fathers rightly granted privileges to the throne of Old Rome, because it was the royal city. And one hundred and fifty most religious bishops, actuated by the same considerations, gave equal privileges (isa presbeia) to the most holy throne of New Rome, justly judging that the city which is honored with the presence of the Emperor and the Senate, and enjoys equal privileges with the old imperial Rome, should, in ecclesiastical matters, also be magnified as she is and rank next after her."

Pope Leo opposed this canon in a series of letters addressed to the Easterners.

From the above, it is clear that the pope of Rome had no authority over the universal Church throughout history. However, he received honour due to his association with the Roman capital. Such honour was not vested upon him on the basis of faith or Biblical teachings. Such honour was condoned variously to different sees according to the political climate just as in the case of Constantinople.

## 7. Ecumenical Councils and the Roman Pope

According to the Catholics, the papacy is a declaration of Church unity all over the world. On the other hand, some Orthodox theologians erroneously assume that the universal or ecumenical council is the alternative option in that context... We have previously presented the elaborate writings of Mar Gregorios on this matter.<sup>35</sup>)

Father Professor André de Halleux<sup>36</sup>) mentions the controversy that took place in the Middle Ages arising out of the two opposing trends within the Roman Catholic Church: one claimed that the pope represented the key to the ecumenical council; while the other claimed that conciliarity is the bases and that the pope had no power whatsoever over the council. W. de Vries points out that, according to Roman Catholic theology, the Pope, in his capacity as St. Peter's successor, is the head of the council, and is an essential element of it.<sup>37</sup>)

The Catholic dictionary states the following: "Ecumenical councils are those to which the bishops and others entitled to vote are convoked from the whole world under the presidency of the Pope or his delegates, and the decrees of which, having received

34) *John Meyendorff*. Orthodoxy and Catholicity. p. 66

35) See our paper: Councils and Conciliarity, chapter 2

36) WW 5. p. 35

37) WW 2. p. 146



papal confirmation, bind Christians."<sup>38)</sup>

H. R. Percival says:

"In the history of the Christian Church, especially at a later period in connection with the Great Schism, much discussion has taken place among the learned as to the relative powers of a General Council and of the Pope...

And in the first place it is evident that no council has ever been received as ecumenical which has not been received and confirmed by the Roman Pontiff. But, after all, this is only saying that no council has been accepted as ecumenical which has not been ecumenically received, for it must be remembered that there was but one Patriarchate for the whole West, that of Rome; and this is true to all intents and purposes, whether or no certain sections had extrapatriarchal privileges, and were "autocephalous."

1. The First Council of Nicaea passed a canon in which some at least of the Roman rights are evidently looked upon as being exactly on the same plane as those of other metropolitans, declaring that they rest upon "custom."

It was the Emperor who originated this council and called it together, if we may believe his own words and those of the council...

2. The Second Ecumenical Council was called together by the Emperor without the knowledge of the Roman Pontiff. Nor was he invited to be present...

3. Before the third of the Ecumenical Synods was called to meet, Pope Celestine had already convicted Nestorius of heresy and deposed and excommunicated him. When subsequently the synod was assembled, and before the papal legates had arrived, the Council met, treated Nestorius as in good standing, entirely ignoring the sentence already given by Rome, and having examined the case (after summoning him three times to appear that he might be heard in his own defence), proceeded to sentence Nestorius, and immediately published the sentence. On the 10th of July (more than a fortnight later), the papal legates having arrived, a second session was held, at which they were told what had been done, all of which they were good enough to approve of."<sup>39)</sup>

Some contemporary Catholic theologians deal with the problem of the leadership of the pope and his power over holy councils by noting an overlapping of the papal interest and civil authority. This takes the form of interest in papal theology and in his singular power which arises from the nature of the mystical Church. Father Long says:

"There is special unique idea of authority in the church which has its foundation in the sacramental nature of the church. Sometimes there has been a confusion between papal and civil authority which entered into some formulations of the theology of the papacy. The explanation of papal authority must be based on the sacramental understanding of the church and not merely on sociological explanations or philosophies of a civil government."<sup>40)</sup>

At this point, the Orthodox mind is riddled by many questions concerning their liturgical status or the mysteries after the sad division of their Church: Does the local Orthodox Church lose its universal nature if it is not tied to Rome?

Mar Gregorios says:

"Papacy's concern for unity has been a major cause of division. Here the greatest violences have been done to the other Churches..."

38) *KW. Addis/ T. Arnold: A Catholic Dictionary* (London 1951) p. 225

39) N. & P. N. Frs., *Second Series*, vol. 14, pp. XII and XIII

40) WW 5. p. 110

We do not think the Eucharist requires the consent of the pope. We experience the fullness of the church without communion with Rome."<sup>41)</sup>

Bishop Krikorian demands Catholics to demonstrate how it is possible for the ministry of St. Peter to secure the Orthodoxy and community of the Eucharist?<sup>42)</sup>

We conclude our words concerning the relationship between ecumenical councils and the Roman Pope by quoting the ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius, who informs us that the idea of holding ecumenical council, through which the Arian controversy could be solved sprang from Emperor Constantine himself.<sup>43)</sup> This drove many theologians and historians to consider that ecumenical councils were actually imperial rather than ecclesiastical ones. This is true since the emperor issued invitation as he faced the danger of divisions within the church and which threatened the Empire itself. The ultimate aim was to preserve the peace of the Empire.

### 8. *The Infallibility of the Holy Councils*

The Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic churches both agree that the Holy Spirit leads and heads the Church of God; and preserves it from all evil, (Jn.16:13;14:26). They also believe that the Lord Jesus, according to this promise is present in the midst of it forever (Matt. 28:30). The gates of hell cannot overpower it, (Matt. 16:18). However, the Orthodox churches differ in opinion with the Roman Catholic Church concerning the latter's conclusions that all ecumenical councils are infallible... We have previously dealt with this topic under the title of "Councils and councilarity." We gave a number of examples that deny such councils the attribute of infallibility. For example:

a. Some of the Fathers who gathered in Ephesus in 449 A.D. attended the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. and contradicted themselves in both councils.

b. The Three Chapters "Tria Kephalia" written by Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa, were condemned by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D. They were, however, read at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. The Roman Pope, Vigilius defended these writings in May 553 A.D. acting with the power of his prestige as a pope. He then announced with the same papal authority his condemnation of them in February 554 A.D.

c. The West did not consider the Second Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.) to be an ecumenical, until 700 A.D. It also considered the Council held in 754 A.D. heretical, and canceled the council held in 869 A.D. after ten years.

When we say that the Holy Spirit preserves the Church, what does this imply?

A. Even though an ecumenical council represents the universal Church, yet not every meeting of the bishops from different countries is counted as an ecumenical council. However, from the Oriental Orthodox Church's point of view only three ecumenical councils have been held up till now. On the other hand, the Church which is preserved by the Holy Spirit is one that enjoys an evangelic concept and apostolic Fatherly thought as a whole... and is in itself an ecumenical council that extends throughout all ages.

B. If the Fathers of the Church, such as St. Athanasius and Ambrose, have declared that it is God who spoke in the Council of Nicaea, and His talk stays forever... This is

41) WW 5. p. 110

42) *Ibidem*.

43) *De Vita Constantini 3, 6; John Meyendorff: Orthodoxy and Catholicity. p. 23*

because they speak about what ensued from the council especially the Creed of faith... We underline that issue more than any other canon concerning ecclesiastical, organizational, managerial, or correctional matters.

C. Tradition insists that the Niceno - Constantinopolitan Creed of faith is an unique instrument that should not be altered or exchanged.<sup>44)</sup> This in itself negates the absolute power of councils since the Fathers at the Council of Ephesus feared that future might cancel or add anything to the Creed of faith.

### 9. Future Ecumenical Councils

As many years for the unity of the Church, perceived through an evangelic living traditional and fatherly thought, we are looking forward to holding ecumenical councils, on observing the following:

1. That holding these councils should not be mere apparent work, but rather a natural fruit of the unity of faith and spirit. For this reason, the consultations of Vienna were held and discussions took place between the Catholic Church and each separate Oriental Orthodox Church.

Mons. Professor Philipp Harnoncourt says about "Models of future unity" :

"- For a long time it was spoken about coming back to the unity, and especially Catholics meant coming back to Rome.

- Especially Orthodox Churches do not esteem the term reconciled diversity, because it could be misunderstood as an agreement with heretics."<sup>45)</sup>

3. Metropolitan Gregorios says that, to achieve future unity it is necessary to establish new frameworks that are commensurate with the new demands.<sup>46)</sup> We cannot go back and adopt the character of the Church as it was in the third century. There are other new conditions such as the various churches scattered throughout the world; and these need to be taken into consideration.

Then Bishop Krikorian opens the floor for discussion.

Professor Hofrichter: Other arguments than Mt. 16 are also being used regarding primacy. The primacy of the See of Rome was originally based on the apostles Peter and Paul. Irenaeus of Lyon said, that both apostles founded the See of Rome, not Peter alone.

The feast day date of St. Peter and Paul, June 29, has possibly been the pagan feast of the twins Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. There are indications that Paul as the organisator may have been more important in founding the See of Rome. The Papal encyclical letters could be regarded as a parallel to the letters of St. Paul in the New Testament. The plural maiestatis can also already be found in the letters of St. Paul.

Amba Bishoi: sees different levels between apostles and bishops as well as between the gospels and the writings of the fathers. When the church was founded by the Holy Spirit every word of the gospels came from the Holy Spirit. He suggested a study comparing the Ecumenical Council of the apostles with the ecumenical councils of

bishops. There the Holy Spirit was still working when they tried, in line with tradition, to preserve the faith and holiness of the church and the results were accepted by the church.

Bishop Krikorian: The reception of a council by the church is the sign that the Holy Spirit was working.

Amba Bishoi: The reception of a council by the church is one of the signs.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: When we talk about the first three or seven councils we do not include the Council of Jerusalem, because it was special. The sign of an Ecumenical Council is decision by the council and reception by the fathers of the council and reception by all the churches. Regarding infallibility I think it should not be applied to persons, not even to the apostles.

Archbishop Keshishian: Are there any former agreements between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church? On our common ecumenical pilgrimage we should first determine where we agree and where we disagree. To me the question is not a common creed but the common understanding of the apostolic faith as a basis not a fixed formula. Talking about terms I state that there is no universal but a Catholic Church with the local church being the full and authentic expression of the Catholic Church.

To me the first three Ecumenical Councils and their agreements manifest the most important and thus the basis of our faith. The following councils have only reinterpreted. The church is conciliar by her very nature because she is koinonia, even in the absence of conciliarity in expression. The term conciliarism points to special periods in the Catholic Church, conciliarity however belongs to the very being of the church which needs councils but can live without ecumenical councils. The authority of a council is related to reception which in turn depends on the *sensus fidelium*. Infallibility does not apply to a council but to the church. We do not need a council to achieve unity but the council should be the expression of unity.

Bishop Krikorian: Will the Roman Catholic side accept the opinion that the councils after Nicaea were only reinterpreting ?

Amba Bishoi: Infallibility of the apostles does not regard their persons but their writings which were exposed to the congregation of the apostles and accepted. Infallibility of the church is the promise of the Lord.

Father George: In a recent letter sent to the bishops by the Vatican, by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, the church was explained as communion. If now the communion with the Bishop of Rome is constitutive to all the particular churches, they are wounded and suffering if they cannot actually have this communion.

Professor Schulz: Cardinal Ratzinger says, the Roman Catholic Church is also wounded by not having this unity in communion.

Gregorios Mar Yohanna: I thought the study seminar should bring something new which I have missed in Father Tadros' paper.

Father Bouwen: I would have liked to hear more about what we have in common, Father Tadros however has mainly written about differences. Trinity is the model of the life of the church. Trinity should unite and not divide us.

Bishop Krikorian: It was the task of the papers to summarize the previous consultations. May I quote a word of the early church saying: "The local church can only be particular church, only the universal church can be the Body of Christ."

Reverend Tadros: There is a difference because they are what we have to talk about. After that we can proceed to new problems.

44) WW 5. p. 150

45) Ibidem. pp. 121/122

46) Ibidem. p. 124

Saturday, June 27<sup>th</sup>: 9.00 a.m.

Second working session. Chair: Father Frans Bouwen PA

Father Khalil Kochassarly OP

## On Councils and Conciliarity

### Introduction

On the occasion of the Middle East Symposium of Wadi Natrun at the end of October 1991, participants examined and discussed the results of the Five Vienna Consultations (1971, 1973, 1976, 1978 and 1988 presented and commented by different speakers.

The topics studied dealt with two major questions:

- 1 - Christology: the person of Jesus Christ
- 2 - Ecclesiology: the councils and conciliarity

Whereas the Christological question - through many efforts - has been settled in a welcome and admirable agreement between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches and after a division of 15 centuries, the ecclesiological question, despite some accords on general principles, has remained at the stage of discussion and research. There are still too many obstacles to reach at least relative unanimity. Participants expressed their will to attain the unity of all Christians one day and called for further study meetings and research in order to move forward along the path of a rapprochement, at least as far as the most essential questions are concerned. This is a long and arduous task requiring a step by step approach:

1. Sorting out the essential questions on which a consensus of all Churches much be achieved,
2. establishing the priorities in these questions in order to study them methodically one after the other,
3. sharing out work:
  - theologians for the fundamental and structural questions
  - pastors (bishops, priests, committed laymen...) for pastoral questions and issues of inter-church relations.

I hope that our study seminar on councils and conciliarity will allow to realize this project.

For this purpose it is useful

1. to recall in a brief summary the major lines of thought of the papers read at Wadi Natrun on this subject
2. to present the list of questions put forward for research and in-depth study by this last symposium in order to move on and make progress on the ecclesiological issues.

## A. Summary of the presentation of Wadi Natrun

### I. Councils and Conciliarity

#### a) The theological aspect

##### 1) The meaning of conciliarity

Conciliarity within the Church is expressed by its common practice of having recourse to a Council gathering as a means of settling conflicts concerning faith, morals and legislation. From the beginning, conciliarity has been regarded as more than an administrative method. According to the unanimous opinion of the participants to the Vienna consultations, it was part and parcel of the nature of the Church itself. Each Church must be based on conciliarity under the guidance of their bishops. So conciliarity provides the Church with the means of reaching its objectives in a collegial way as the Church is the Body of Christ composed of members having their own function in order to ensure the life of the whole body. Practising conciliarity has not always been satisfactory. It has undergone periods of crises and individual authoritarianism but the Church has always come back to an authority balanced by collegiality at the level of bishops as well as of lay members of the Church. Conciliarity has always been regarded as the driving force behind any progress and reforms. The Church is indeed only complete when there is participation from all its elements. Bishops exercise their authority not above the community or beside it but within the community and with it. By right, it is certainly up to the bishops to meet in local or general councils in order to take important decisions in accordance with the apostolical tradition but they are supposed to do it within the community.

The participants confirmed that the conciliarity of the Church is linked to the notion of "communion" which is an essential element of the Church as Body of Christ and of its visibility in the practice of its mission. They turned to the Holy Spirit, Source of Truth and Unity, in order that it gives rise to an ecumenical council in view of the setting up of One Church in Truth and Love, eucharistical participation and the communion of bishops.

Pope Gelasius I (492-496) indicated the essential conditions for an ideal council: correspondence with the Holy Scripture, with the traditio patrum, the celebration of the synod according the ecclesiastical rules in favour of the Catholic faith and the preservation of the community, reception by the entire Church, with the approval above all of the Apostolical Sees.

##### 2) Some open questions

However, this being their goal, unanimity could not be reached on the following points.

1. Who should summon the bishops of all the churches throughout the world.
2. Who should preside such a council ?
3. What are the best means of having past and future councils accepted by all churches?

#### b) The historical aspect

##### 1) The evolution of councils

It seems clear that the councils held before Constantine had independence and freedom as regards the choice of appropriate methods. At that time, bishops created the rank of

Metropolitan to whom was granted a greater responsibility as well as administrative priority. Bishops often held their gatherings under the direction of the Metropolitan. With the arrival of Constantine, the structure of councils underwent some changes. The coexistence between the State and the Church led to new requirements concerning the councils of bishops. They were strongly influenced by the interference of civil authorities in church matters, which gave rise to a new meaning to councils and conciliarity. For example, the first few councils were convened on the initiative and by order of the emperor, under the pretext that the emperor was regarded as a divine means of achieving God's projects. In fact, emperors hoped to ensure the unity of their empire and the security of all its regions by putting an end to religious divisions and ecclesiastical conflicts.

## 2) The reception of councils and their number

As regards the reception of ecumenical councils, the participants felt that three elements must be maintained: the conciliary decree, the confirmation of decrees and the reception by the fathers of the council. These elements are part of the same process. In fact, there were decrees from ecumenical councils which were not accepted by all churches. It must also be noted that a number of canonical decrees defined by the Council of Chalcedon or other later councils were accepted by Oriental Orthodox churches although they refused the dogmatic formulation of those councils. As a rule, Oriental Orthodox churches do not find it necessary to have decrees confirmed by any authority whatsoever as such decrees come from the collegiality of bishops, even though the confirmation of conciliary decrees is a legal process taking place between the decision taken by councils and their reception. These churches also felt that a conciliary decree may sometimes be already included in the living tradition of the Church and as such, it would not be necessary to have it officially and expressly accepted.

As for the number of accepted or refused councils, Oriental Orthodox churches think that the common ecumenical basis is faith in the doctrine of the first three ecumenical councils, the Councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431). These are truly ecumenical as all Christendom took part in them and they were approved by all the members of the Councils, with the consensus of the lay members of the churches. Besides, these councils dealt with essential, faith-related matters concerning all churches.

Regarding the Council of Chalcedon and the other councils, Oriental Orthodox churches stated that they were not ready to accept them for independent reasons from their participation or their absence to the councils in question. However, they are still willing to examine them in the light of socio-political circumstances in as much as they seem credible to them in view of their fidelity to the Holy Scripture and to the apostolical tradition of the Church.

## II. The universal Church and the Churches

The unity between Christians, gift of Christ to His Church, is an image of the unity between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The mission of the Church, and of any church, is to collaborate in the achievement of this unity. The unity of churches does not mean the absorption of one community by

another or the domination of one community over another. The unity to be strived for is unity in the multiplicity of traditions, languages, rites and various theological and spiritual expressions. Some participants drew the attention to the necessity of having one church responsible for promoting unity between Christians but this idea was not accepted by everyone. However, all participants agreed that each church should encourage an awareness of how unity could be promoted and safeguarded. Several means were proposed in this respect: exchange of peace messages between churches; mention of the other churches and of their hierarchy in the framework of the official liturgy of each church; formal or informal meetings between churches in order to solve joint problems affecting them.

What kind of coordination could be established between local churches and the Universal Church? This question was raised several times during the Vienna consultations. All the participants acknowledged that all Christian communities are faced with the same mystery: the mystery of One, Universal, Holy, Apostolical Church. This Church is the Body of Christ who died and rose again, eternally alive in the Heavens, permanently active in local churches and in the Universal Church.

The One Church - and it can only be One - is entirely present in local churches as well as in the Universal Church since communion in Truth and Love is lived by any church, with its source in the Eucharist and episcopal communion being a witness to it. But if Catholic theologians would rather regard the Church under its universal aspect, with a Universal Pastor, Oriental Orthodox churches favour the local aspect of the Church under the guidance of a local bishop. However, the Universal Church and local churches are connected in their very existence so that the notion of Church can be totally applied in both cases. At any rate, it is out of the question to view local churches as a part of the Universal Church. Despite the efforts made by the participants, all the questions related to this aspect could not be clarified as, although local churches express the notion of Church, they are not the Universal Church in the service of all men. Some participants proposed that the notion of communion - "Koinonia" - such as it was experienced in the Early Church may give rise to a solution as in this communion, Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, shapes His Church so that it communicates life to all its members. Because this concerns men all over the world, the communion is truly universal.

Some suggestions were put forward with a view to bringing together Christian communities and their unity:

1. The Second Vatican Council acknowledged that Oriental Orthodox churches are Church in the full sense of the word, which resulted in the creation of the phrase "sister churches".

2. The Second Vatican Council also gave the authorization, in some cases, to hold joint eucharistical celebrations between the various churches. This is a way of obtaining the grace of unity. At any rate, according to the tradition of the Early Church, this celebration is the de-facto-realization of the ecclesiastical community. By such a practice, all mutual anathemas are nullified as they are no longer in keeping with communion.

### III. Church authority

Among the participants to the consultations, some considered that each church must have its own authority according to its conceptions and its experience in this respect in relation to the community. Some others, who belonged to the Catholic Church, considered that the Bishop of Rome has a specific role to play because of his primacy in the communion of churches in order to promote and safeguard the unity of churches. These two ways of understanding the authority of the Church, although linked to conciliarity, are not fully in keeping with each other. It is thus necessary to go deeper into this subject, especially on the following points.

1. The authority of the Church finds its roots in the Sacraments ;
2. The conciliar authority of the Church must be studied in the light of the theological and liturgical tradition of each church;
3. Conciliarity as the expression of communion.

The participants found it necessary that the authority of the Church should be somewhat autonomous and decentralized in order that responsibilities be carried out in view of the specific situation of each church in each country. But while autonomy must be respected, it is also important that a coordination body should be established between churches so as to prevent anarchy, especially in matters of common interest. Such coordination should favour solidarity, mutual aid and sharing between churches.

### IV. Infallibility of the Church, the Councils, the Pope

The word "infallibility" cannot be found in the Bible or in Christian literature before the XVth century when some intellectual trends started doubting the truth of the Christian doctrine. But Christian tradition has always stated that the Church of God is infallible because of the Holy Spirit which guides it and protects it against error. Infallibility does not concern the protection of the Church against sin but against error. Christ, the founder of the Church, is Truth and He put Truth in the hands of the Church so that it can be a witness to it. Undoubtedly, the Church is not the exclusive holder of Truth. It is the new people of God, people of believers in the Truth announced by Jesus Christ, in the Word of God, its food and the light on its path, people of prophets working towards the setting up of the Kingdom of God. The Church is thus protected from error i.e. it cannot state that errors are Truth.

The Vatican Council II confirmed this doctrine :

"All the faithful who have received the anointing from the Holy One (cf. Jn 2.20.27) cannot err in the Faith. And this, their particular quality, they manifest by virtue of the supernatural sense of faith of the entire people when they voice their general agreement in matters of the faith and morality 'from the bishops to the last faithful layman ' " ( "Lumen Gentium", Chapter XI I ).

Any believer is a witness to Truth as he lives according to Faith and Love, not only at individual level but within a community of believers:

"The Church as a community communicates the truth of Revelation not merely through definitions of the faith but also through 'everything it is, everything it believes in ' " ("Dei Verbum", article 8).

### B. Issues proposed for research

The subjects proposed for more thorough theological research and reflection may be grouped around three topics:

#### 1. Councils:

- a) envisaging a universal council attended by representatives of all Churches, with equal rights and duties
- b) the election of bishops within the framework and in accordance with the spirit of conciliarity in the Church
- c) infallibility of the councils and the implications thereof

#### 2. Ecumenism:

- a) How far has ecumenism evolved to this day and what is its pace?
- b) How is ecumenism realized on the local level? What kind of resistance is being practised against ecumenism?
- c) Which are the major obstacles to ecumenism?

#### 3. Inter-Church Relations:

- a) proselytism exercised on the part of a given Church against the faithful belonging to another Church; this practise is rather worrying and may hamper the desired unity.
- b) the problem of rebaptism of Christians coming from another Church; this subject deserves a thorough study of the sacrament of baptism in the light of the Scriptures, the Fathers and of an open and up-to-date theology.
- c) mixed marriages and all related problems.
- d) Christian interconfessional eucharistic communion: significance and theological and pastoral consequences.

May the Holy Spirit who animates his Church guide us and give us the courage to serve in fraternal peace and the joy of love.

Father Khalil: For a real dialogue we need to find a new language which reflects without error the terms and contents. The reason for it is the ongoing theological evolution.

Professor Harnoncourt: A great part of the difficulty of the dialogue is due to language problems. To find a new language however would create more problems than to use the old one. We have common roots in the patristic language.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: The Oriental Orthodox Churches do not have councils as a common practice and a council is not necessarily a council of bishops. Even in Nicaea there were priests and laymen among the participants. It is just that the bishops signed in their name. Council means: everybody, the whole church is convening (synodos). Then he reminds that for the idea of unity faith is not the only necessity, we need unity also in love. Today we must often deplore the absence of love but that is where the Spirit wants to lead us to. Councils and the Creed are of one piece, cannot be separated.

Archbishop Keshishian: The question is not who summons a council but who presides and prevails in the council. The church needs primacy but there are different ways and concepts of primacy. What regards reception: The church is above the council. The

reception process is a broader indication, reflecting the church as a whole. The Second Vatican Council says clearly the universal church exists in the local church.

In the Roman Catholic Church relation, authority, unity, community etc. are manifested by a person, the Pope. This is a problem for us. We see this in the church, not in a person.

Bishop Krikorian: Conciliarity within the church is the common practice. In the Armenian Apostolic Church the laity has a large part also in theology, teaching, administration. Conciliarity however exists in different ways. Even after Council Vatican II in fact the bishop is above the council. We can see that presently in Austria. The same is true if we go to the center. The bishops are received very nicely but at the end the Pope or Primate has the last word and decides. In the Armenian Church it is different, neither the Catholicos nor archbishops are the highest authority.

Finally, if the decision of the fathers of a council is received, it is the duty to make use of it and let it bear fruit.

Father George: Orientals are more sensitive about the word "universal". It cannot mean the borders of the Roman empire! Within these borders councils were convened by the Roman rulers but later the Roman Church was going out of these borders. One example therefore is the arrival of the Portuguese in India almost 500 years ago. For the sake of concord and peace we have made many compromises, but there is a limit. Council Vatican II acknowledged the notion of "sister churches" which doubtlessly means evolution. Would a Council Vatican III today use the term sister churches?

Amba Bishoi: This paper can offer good help for our understanding. The universal pastor must be the guarantee of preserving the real faith. Was this the case in history? The Roman Catholic Church has been reforming many issues, purgatory for example. Without the Oriental Orthodox the Church of Rome was not and will not be able to guarantee the true faith. Take this into account when we talk about the universal church! We appreciate the Roman Catholic endeavors for unity but Council Vatican I created some dogmas which we cannot accept and which bring division.

Father Khalil: After Council Vatican II there was a change of ideas. Before there was the idea of a pyramidal structure of the church. Sister churches however means a togetherness of equals. This unity we aim at by getting to know each of us better and better. Let us see what this unity is after we treat each other well!

Archbishop Keshishian: Council Vatican II was a real turning point and aggiornamento. There primacy was understood in the collegiality but to my knowledge the primacy of the Pope was also emphasized. What we need is conciliar fellowship. This is the communion of the churches and the Pope. We say, we accept and need primacy, but the Roman Catholic say the head of the college can act without the college. It is rather the other way! The questions of authority and reception or infallibility are all connected with the Petrine office.

Father Bouwen: I think that this assessment of infallibility was too narrow. Actually in Roman Catholic teaching the locus of infallibility is the church! Regarding the Oriental Churches he thinks that they have not had councils but synods as expression of conciliarity. Is this not a part of the experience?

Paulos Mar Gregorios: I have referred to ecumenical councils.

Father Khalil: On the composition of ecumenical councils: The bishops are taking part

on behalf of their diocese. If in a council deacons or laypeople are present, there is a difference between what they say and what the bishops say.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: I simply cannot accept that. It is not just that the bishops decide, it was not the case in Nicaea.

Bishop Krikorian: Theoretically I accept what Father Kochassarily said. But in Council Vatican II there was a difference of opinions and convictions. Many bishops represent only the opinion of the smaller part of their diocese in faithfulness to the Pope. This brings forth the conflicts in the Churches of Germany and Austria for example.

Father George: The finding of the faith and opinions starts at parish level. That is how we function. Conciliarity is constitutive for the church. As we understand it comes from below.

Amba Bishoi: I continue: Conciliarity should start from the people. The bishop should be elected by the people, even the synod. The patriarch by people, priests and bishops. The bishops should really represent the people. It should even be possible to depose a bishop. At least priests and deacons should be elected but 50 % of the bishops can veto.

Archbishop Keshishian: Conciliarity avoids centralism or personalism. We must discuss the manner of representation. The Pope is not just the channel of infallibility, authority etc.

Gregorios Mar Yohanna: Regarding the election of bishops: In my church in the sixth century patriarch and synod received three names and one was chosen. Today the patriarch sends three names to the community (clergy, the nobles..) who elect one to be bishop.

Father Khalil: May I say a word about fallibility. Each council consists of debates and exchanges of ideas. These are not infallible. What can be infallible - if at all - is only the expression of the faith. It is the goal of the council to declare the faith and this result can be infallible.

Amba Bishoi: The first three ecumenical councils can fulfill the view of Father Khalil because they were accepted by all churches. Then it became different and therefore we needed 15 centuries to get unanimity in Christology. Actually a council has to defend the apostolic faith. Only a heretic would not accept it.

Archbishop Keshishian: Infallibility does not belong to the council per se but needs reception by the churches!

Having heard saying that at Chalcedon the Orientals accepted some canons of the councils he poses the question: Is it possible to separate the teachings of a council and to establish priorities? And secondly: is it possible to separate the teachings of a council from the council itself?

Paulos Mar Gregorios: In previous meetings we agreed to distinguish between dogmatic definitions and canons of a council.

Professor Schulz: Infallibility or fallibility of a council depend on the degree in which the faith of the church is expressed in such a council. He quotes Athanasius the Great who said about Nicaea: "We do not define the faith but we testify the faith which has already been before." There is no special conciliar method to guarantee that the faith of the church is well expressed.

There were political councils which were rejected by the church and there were the synods of the iconoclasts. For the Oriental Orthodox it is not necessary to accept the imperial councils between 451 and 787 with their setup of ideas. Though some parts

and texts would be acceptable to the Oriental Orthodox Churches they were mainly political.

Even as a Catholic I say: There is no need to count all the councils numerically and receive them all, including Council Vatican I. But the Oriental Orthodox have to sort out what is in consensus with the doctrine of the fathers of the church. To the Catholic Church as the Western Patriarchate these councils are binding, but not to the other churches. In the first ecumenic councils there was already a difference between the fathers from East and West regarding the role of the Pope. But this difference, though not settled, did not split the harmony of the church which kept diversity in unity.

Reverend Tadros: In the Church of Alexandria we never studied and we never accepted these councils. Still we know that there are some canons in harmony with our thinking but this does not mean that we have to accept or to refuse them.

Father George: About definition of infallibility: Oriental tradition says that the essence of God cannot be known by human beings. This consequently applies also to councils. Councils testify the true quality of the faith of the church, but God cannot be defined. The Holy Spirit will guide us and this is an ongoing process which is based on the infinite quality of God's being. Therefore we cannot say that certain councils have eternal value.

Bishop Krikorian: In our unofficial dialogue in the sixties the Orthodox theologians wished to distinguish between teaching considered to be eternal and canons which could be changed. Now at this stage of the dialogue polite solutions have been found without forcing the other side to accept. The problems regarding the Council of Chalcedon are different because our churches anathematized (he refers to his paper of Wadi Natrun 1991). Now this teaching was reinterpreted and can be acceptable. But even then this historically does not mean we do accept Chalcedon not even as a local council while the teaching may be accepted.

Gregorios Mar Yohanna: We do not have to agree with all the other churches in the dialogue. From the canons of Chalcedon we adopted five but this does not mean we are linked to all the canons or to the whole council.

Amba Bishoi: We did not say we accept the new interpretation of Chalcedon but we respond positively. The written agreement of Chambesy documents the lifting of the anathemas against all councils and fathers on both sides. No line can be taken away, otherwise it would be imbalanced.

Archbishop Keshishian: In the Orthodox unofficial dialogue we have given a new importance to reception which we distinguish from the teaching. We need to take reception as a process. The year of the Council of Chalcedon was 451. The Armenian Church took position in 504 to 506 which shows reception is not just an act of the church but the culmination of a process.

Magister Winkler: The question is not to accept all councils officially but how to find out that they do not separate us. If we look at the question of the veneration of icons we see that the teaching was accepted, not the council.

Professor Harnoncourt: Questions which are asked lead to the definition of a dogma. If you ask differently, you get another answer. Questions that are not asked now need not to be answered now.

Gregorios Mar Yohanna: It is a serious question whether or not a church can cancel anything from former councils, e.g. anathemas.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: A council can reinterpret but not formally cancel former decisions or declarations.

Bishop Krikorian: May I mention as an example the hymn condemning Pope Leo and express my belief that we can cancel theological writings but not those resulting from councils like canons or anathemas.

Amba Bishoi: They are lifting, which means canceling, the anathemas not only erasing them from liturgy. Canceling these anathemas was possible because there were misunderstandings regarding Eutychianism and Nestorianism. We should proceed now from unofficial to official agreements. Call Chalcedon unecumenical and open the door for unity, ecumenism and mutual understanding! The fathers would accept if they could hear what we say today.

Archbishop Keshishian: Lifting the anathemas does not imply accepting the councils or the person as a saint.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: What happened when the Roman Catholic and Byzantine Orthodox Churches lifted their mutual anathemas? Some say this was not theologically valid. Anyway must all this also be lifted from the teaching books in the seminaries. After Chalcedon the Orthodox changed their teaching which tended to be heretic and came back close to us.

Prof. Harnoncourt: An anathema is a fact much more severe than the excommunication of dead persons.

Saturday, June 27<sup>th</sup>: 4.00 p. m.

Third working session. Chair: Bishop Mesrob K. Krikorian

Hans-Joachim Schulz

## The Great Councils

### The Different Degree of Their Realisation of Ecclesial Conciliarity and Their Incorporation in the Respective Tradition

The three great churches, in which the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic church of the early undivided Christianity and of Christian antiquity is continuing - this is the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church of Byzantine tradition and the Orthodox Church of ancient Oriental traditions, have as a consequence of different historical developments and in different manner participated in the conciliar representation and realisation of the post-Theodosian imperial church and have had different views about the loss of the all-embracing koinonia about which ancient church councils are binding as a norm of the faith for the universal church and in which measure different church meetings can be further on celebrated as ecumenically binding also after the loss of the comprehensive koinonia as did the imperial church in the form of the councils of the years 451 to 787 and since the eleventh century the Catholic Church until the First and the Second Vatican Council.

1. This different activation of the Conciliarity of the church also after 451 in the councils which have been summoned on the occasion of an actual menace of the Christian faith and which considered themselves as "ecumenical" maybe interpreted in a way as if the Orthodox churches of ancient Oriental traditions at the council of Ephesus (431) respectively with the council of Chalcedon (451) which was not considered by them as universally binding would have left from the history of an articulation of faith which was decisive for themselves and for the universal church in general. Already the history of the Synod of the year 449 in Ephesus and the general strive in Chalcedon for the right future interpretation of the teaching of the Council of Ephesus of the year 431 is proving the contrary.

The consultations of the years 1964 to 1971 with the representatives of the Byzantine Orthodoxy as well as the Vienna Consultations and still more the joint christological declarations of Pope Paul VI with Patriarch Ignatius Yacoub III of Antioch and with Pope Shenouda 1973 in Rome and of Pope John Paul II again with Patriarch Ignatius Yacoub III and his successor Ignatius Zakka Iwas I 1980 respective 1984 as well as also the agreements of synodal character which achieved in the last years on the christological problem with Byzantine Orthodoxy as well as with the Roman Catholic Church are underlining the ecumenical relevance of the doctrinal development in the Orthodox Churches of ancient Oriental tradition also after the council of Chalcedon. Even the imperial ecumenical council of the year 553 was trying to go on from the side an "Ephesian" new interpretation of the doctrine of the council of Chalcedon which was much more consistently influencing the further dogmatically and spiritual development of Byzantine orthodoxy as for instance the regulation in terminology on

the problem of will efforts (*energeiai*) and of the capacity of will (*thelemata*) in Christ which was defined by the sixth council (680-681).

So it is not correct to define the Orthodox churches of ancient Oriental tradition as churches of three councils or still more as "prechalcedonian" churches. On the contrary those Councils formally recognized by them in the totality of the imperial church had been inbedded in the doctrinal development of ecumenical importance in which more testimony of this Conciliarity which is logically proper to church life and was not missing and whose most noble articulation came out of liturgical tradition.

2. Now the Byzantine Orthodoxy however sees in the formal recognition of the seven ecumenical councils of the first millenary as a normal faith decisive criterion of Orthodox church life. At the consultations in the years 1964 to 1971 the Greek theologians demanded from the Orthodox Churches of ancient Oriental tradition the subsequent recognition of the four councils of the years 451 to 787 with indication that this would be possible without denying the ancient Oriental Alexandrian traditions in the christological main problems.

In relation to the Catholic Church it was already at the Third Panorthodox Conference of Rhodos 1964 that means long before the definitive agreement on the theological dialogue of the year 1979 clear that this dialogue must take place on the bases of the faith of the seven ecumenical councils. By this implicitly the Catholic Church is put in front of the question whether she is considering in fact this councils to have a definitely unique ecumenical role. These councils would not only have to be seen as the numerically first ones and in so far the basical ones in the general line of council which are considered in the Catholic theology as "ecumenical". In fact the Catholic theology sees the necessity to work to come to a clear understanding how the different degrees of realisation of ecumenical importance and obligation for the faith of the universal church which might be existing between the seven ecumenical councils and all the councils celebrated later in the Occident and secondly again between councils like the Medieval Lateransynods on the one hand and the Tridentinum and the first Vaticanum on the other hand. But also the Orthodoxy of Byzantine tradition is met by the question whether the seven councils of the years 325 to 787 are realising in the same way the conception of an "ecumenical council" and the representative for the faith in the universal church in the same measure or whether there must be a differentiation and whether there are not criteria of differentiation be seen in the history of these councils themselves.

3. We ask thus in the first part of our conference for the different degree of realisation of the ecumenical character of the Western councils vis à vis the seven ecumenical councils of the ancient Church as also between themselves. According to this it's in the second part the question how the seven councils are to be differentiated according to the conceptional reality of the ecumenical council according to the ancient church criteria. In its third part we will finally set up criteria and principia which might be useful for the different formulation of conciliar developments in the three churches in order to come to an agreement in dialogue.

#### *1. "General Synods" and "Ecumenical Councils" of the Western type*

1. After the pause of koinonia between the church of Rome and the Eastern Patriarchates of Byzantine tradition which already had to be deplored from the



beginning of the eleventh century and not only since 1054 the Catholic Church in communion with the Pope of Rome was aware of the necessity that the universal character of the church of Christ needs the restoration of koinonia, but that the church remaining in communion with the first of Bishops has not lost its capacity to articulate in an obligatory way the faith of the church.

The synods of the Western churches have however for a long time not been defined as "ecumenical councils". The counting of such Western councils in one row with the seven ecumenical councils was imposed only since Robert Bellarmine who was speaking in his disputations of 1586 interestingly enough about 18 "concilia generalia" and he did so not on the basis of a denial of all ecclesiological important differences but only in the sense of equal canonical obligation in the framework of the exercise of papal jurisdiction. Only later on the whole was defined as "concilia ecumenica" according to a canonistic definition of councils which then became part of the Codex juris canonici of 1917 and which was counting Vaticanum I as the 20th ecumenical council. Such a counting was never theologically obligatory and could for instance be omitted in the literature about church history.

Pope Paul VI himself was giving in 1974 an important sign for a "relecture" of conciliar history in the sense of a more distinctive differentiation when he named at the occasion of the 700 years memory of the Second Council of Lyons (1274) this council as the 6th general Synod of the Western church in the Middle Ages.<sup>47)</sup> So because of the similarity of this type of synods also the four Lateran synods of 1123, 1139, 1179, 1215, the two councils of Lyons (1245, 1274), of Vienne (1311-12) and of Constance (1414-1418), as well as finally also the Fifth Lateran Council (1512) appeared as Western "general Synods".

By this the theological teaching of this ecclesial assemblies is naturally not defined as being not obligatory from the ecumenical and dogmatical aspect. But it is decisive in the individual theological assertions what ecumenical obligation (even in the space beyond the actual exercise of the papal jurisdictional and teaching power) they might possess by the fact that they come from the scriptures respectively from a tradition which continuously and commonly is existing and by this is taken from the very sources of the authentic church tradition.

2. Special standing in the history of tradition has the Council of Florence celebrated with the representatives of the Greek church in 1438-39. An analysis of the authentic ecumenical moments of these council as well as of the respective deficiencies was given by the same author (*Handbuch der Ostkirchenkunde I*, 1984, 129ff.). For the deficient negotiations with very small delegations of the Armenian and Coptic church we can state that here as a procedure there was not really a conciliar process which can be considered as such. The degrees accepted in 1439 respectively 1441 "pro Armenis" respectively "pro Jacobitis" show but little positive understanding of the respective tradition. "Decretum pro Armenis" has been considered according to its liturgical and juridical content as also from the concrete aim the Synod itself by historical research anymore as a dogmatical decree but as a disciplinary one. But also as a disciplinary one it must be considered as a notorious mistake.

3. At the council of Trent (1545-1563) and at the First Vatican Council they were clearly working on problems which at this time were the existential problems of the

47) AAS 1974, pp. 620-625

Catholic Church but also reaching the obligation of structures inherited from the ancient church; which is for the First Vatican Council still more true for its assertions on the structure of faith<sup>48)</sup> than in the assertions on the papal primacy of jurisdiction. Especially the standing of the council of Trent in the history of the tradition shows that - notwithstanding the ecumenical importance of the questions treated and the answers given by the council - were defined simply and with short breath by the actual Catholic-Protestant contradictions. So this council could not take up all the treasures of arguments which would have made it possible to take up by a more comprehensive historical knowledge of the ancient Church which have been to be found in order to overcome the errors of protestantism by typically Western late medieval thinking. So the Council fathers were doing a very good theological achievement considering the state of knowledge and the consciousness of faith of their time. A later reception of the conciliar decisions of Trent by the Eastern churches would not be a decent enough basis for them even in order to overcome the remaining actual Protestant temptations against the ancient structures of the faith and of the church in their peculiar situations. From the example of the Council of Trent it can be seen how a council which stood in the own legitimate tradition and which as a criterium of Orthodoxy for it, is very important and for this tradition even obligatory that such a council - put into the framework of another ancient church tradition with its own geographical and cultural characteristics - and would however not lose its content of truth but would be considered for the development and theological evidence and for its pastoral efficiency as an alien singularity.

The same is also true of the assertions of the First Vatican Council on the papal primacy of jurisdiction and the errorlessness of papal ex-cathedra-decisions for its formulations which are conditioned by the history of theology and whose ecumenical aspects are still to be tested.

But first we should turn to a differentiation of the ecumenical character of the imperial councils between 325 and 787.

## II. *The fundamental and the derived articulation of faith from Nicaea I to Nicaea II*

1. The concept "ecumenical council" has its full theological content as it is known, in the late phase of the conciliar era which completely is only to be seen in the language used in the 7th council.

The content is defined according the law of the empire. The fathers of Nicaea 325 do not use it for their council, however this is done by Eusebius in his "Vita Constantini" in explaining it in a constellation of imperial law and biography.

The councils fathers of Constantinople 381 are qualifying this one as an "ecumenical" one in a letter from 382 to Damasus, Ambrosius and the Western fathers where again the aspect of imperial law is to be understood against the background of the inter-church communication of this letter.

Only the assertions of Nicaea (787) are defining - in order to contradict the pseudo council of Hieria (754) - to find systematically the theological factors which make a council to an "ecumenical" one: representivity of the Roman See and of the Eastern Patriarchates and the notorious continuity of its doctrine with the doctrine of the (six) previous councils.

48) "De revelatione", "De fide et ratione"

2. De facto especially Nicaea I is very clearly to be considered an ecumenical council given the representativity of the churches of the East and the West and its foundation in the oldest traditions and this especially by its following back on the very old liturgical tradition of the local creed of Baptism. What concerns the aspect of the binding norm of faith, it is especially Athanasius who clarifies that this does not result from an act of will of the council of Nicaea. They moreover are giving a testimony to a long existing norm of faith within the Apostolic tradition and in the basis of the scriptures. Nicaea I is also today to be seen as the binding model par excellence of a council, in so far as the extremely necessary insight of the council fathers in the faith in its exemplary representativity of the Church of the East and the West were articulating the faith of the church according to the sources of the church tradition and precisating that the fundamental Arian falsification of the faith in Christ which was responding to the current popular philosophical secular tendencies was definitely overcome. After actualising the tradition of the faith in its contents and its definitive interpretation and realisation of the characteristics of conciliar church structures Nicaea I is in a unique way the "ecumenical council" of the ancient Church.

3. The first council of Constantinople (381) was first summoned as the Synod of the imperial diocese of Oriens but it was at its end also involving the Patriarchate of Alexandria and because of the bearing of the question of faith treated also ecumenically important. Its standing within the universal Church was resulting from the liturgical use of its symbolum in the East it was especially favoured by underlining its identity (το αυτο) with the Hosios of Nicaea at the council of Chalcedon. Chalcedon thus was leading - independently from the formal reception as the 4th council - to the reception of the symbolum made public in this council and that at the first council of Constantinople. From all imperial councils the one held at Ephesus (431) was coming next in importance to that of Nicaea, because its tendency nestorianically overstressed in dyophysitic theology was - however we want to judge the personal endeavors for orthodoxy in Nestorius himself - proper to go against the main stream of the understanding of salvation which is already given in the pre-Paulinian hymns of the letters of St. Paul and in the gospel according to St. John. At least since the reconciliation of 433 with the Antiochians accepted also by Cyril of Alexandria the main complex of the conciliar happening of Ephesus was showing the theological force of conviction and its solidity for future ecumenism.

4. The era of discussions on the council of Chalcedon which was of such providential importance for the Patriarchates of Alexandria and Antioch and even for the universal church has been exemplary clarified especially in the context of the goal of the Vienna Consultations on prior occasions by the important research works in the history of the dogma and on church history by A. Grillmeier and W. de Vries. The compatibility also of the later Alexandrian christology which was decided by the theology of Saint Cyril and representative for those churches who were against the reception of Chalcedon in its concrete conciliar and church political-form, with the proper christological interest of Chalcedon in so far as this council had the goal of overcoming the errors of Eutyches and which was in many ways underlined and often repeated by the previous theological assertions at the highest levels and also in the latest official agreements of the dialogue.

5. Let me make just one remark to the regrettable problem of the request of the Greek Orthodox theology of the subsequent reception of the councils of 451 to 787: if we

compare the way of the christology orientated on Cyril it is done especially in the representative text of the Syrian-Antiochian and the Alexandrian liturgy in the era after Chalcedon where it is impressively documented with the more complicated way characterized in many ways by dogmatic controversial discussions which the imperial conciliar development of Chalcedon until the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681) had to go, you get the following impression: This way is leading after different problems at first to an "Ephesian" interpretation of Chalcedon in the so-called "Neochalcedonism" then to its inevitable terminological consequence from Chalcedon which finds its expression in the doctrine on the two "thelemata" and "energeiai" of Christ and finally by its possible synthesis unification christology which leads by Maximus Homologites with all insistence on the dyophysitic terminology finally to the possibility of the syntheses which is very near in its intellectual mind to Cyril.

This conciliar way is certainly providential and was demanding not only a compromise of the old Antiochian and Alexandrian tendencies in christology but also in balancing of the theological interest of Rome and Constantinople. He was provoking astonishing theological efforts and was in general certainly running under the assistance of the Holy Spirit. But it proved to be so difficult and so conditioned by so different factors that even a Patriarch such as Sergius I of Constantinople and a Pope of Rome like Honorius were stumbling over it. A subsequential formal reception of the mentioned three councils from Chalcedon to Constantinople III who were themselves so to say steps of a zigzag strategy, by the Orthodox church of ancient Oriental tradition would have to be considered as rather against the spirit of history. What seems to be providential in the own council history the imperial churches in detours can be actually imitated under another horizon of tradition in all its individual phases. It is sufficient for a future koinonia that the compatibility of its starting point and its main direction in christology of the imperial council era should be stated such as it already has been done.

### *III. The continuity of tradition as a conciliar process of its own importance and as a universal criterium for the formal receptivity of conciliar assertions*

1. What can be said about the equivalency of the christology and of the trinitarian theology of the Orthodox Churches of ancient Oriental tradition with the teaching of the seven ecumenical councils of the first millennium and was leading to the statement that the subsequent formal reception of the councils since Chalcedon will not be necessary and will not correspond to the inner logics of the processes in the history of tradition. This is also to be considered for those problems of faith and church structure for which it has not been sufficiently explained in how far also here ancient Oriental traditions would correspond to special conciliar developments with the traditions of the Byzantine Orthodox and of the Catholic church has been going through and whether they are compatible with each other.

In so far as such questions of tradition and dissent even at the time of the still existing koinonia also between Byzantine Orthodoxy and the Western Church there were differences which however were not considered to be of schismatic nature able to split the church so this last one must be a criteria that such differences can also be reconciled today or even represent expressions of the ecclesial life which complement each other.

This is especially true of the theological interpretation of the pastoral ministry which is given to the bishop of Rome in so far that this is to be exerted in analogy to the role of Peter among the apostles. A tradition which is becoming even the more distinctive in articulation since the third century and the practice which was manifesting itself in this respect until the time of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) even against certain passing irritations not requested in its essence though the activity of such a pastoral ministry at the time of the iconoclasm was even demanded by the tradition-minded Byzantine monks.

For the earlier conciliar era and roughly speaking for the entire time of the existing koinonia between Rome and Constantinople it is even true that the Antiochian and Alexandrian tradition was much more open to the Petrine function of the bishop of Rome in comparison with Byzantium.

Also in this question it cannot be essential for the Orthodox churches of ancient Oriental tradition to take over conciliar decisions through subsequent formal acts of reception which are alien to the tradition. Neither canons nor traditions of canon law as they have come into existence at the councils from Chalcedon to Nicaea II (be it in the form of the definition or continuation of canon 28 of Chalcedon or in the sense of thinking in terms of the imperial Pentarchy) can use these models for the ancient Oriental tradition, nor can Catholics with sense call for the formal reception of the assertions on papacy in the First and in the Second Vatican Councils.

2. Only a personal thought should be here said as an echo to the previous phase of old Antiochian and old Alexandrian theology: the so called quotations on primacy in the gospels about the fundamental function and the pastoral ministry of Peter (Mt 16, 18f.; Joh 21; 15ff.) have been too rapidly interpreted by the traditional Catholic theology in terms of a juridical succession of the bishop of Rome and the primacy put on him, whereas Mt 16, 18f. has been evaluated by the Byzantine theology onesidedly as a promise on the faith of Peter with a more moral aim.

In the meantime also conservative representatives of the Catholic biblical theology accept a differentiated understanding from the standpoint of the history of tradition that the cited words of the gospel in committing the title of Kephias by Jesus is interpreted in so far as they follow the previous creed of Peter. The formulation of the word exclusively transmitted in Mt. 16 is today judged as a linguistically and in the history of tradition transparent expression for the early life of the Antiochian community of the time after the founding of the "Hellenists" of Jerusalem (Acts 6; 11, 19ff.) respectively the time of the acting of St. Peter in Antioch in the late 40s and 50s. The special evaluation of Peter and the reference to Peter as the first chief of the Antiochian community in order to favour the importance of the episcopal See of Antioch are characteristic of Antiochian tradition. Here is an obviously right conception of an analogous continuation of the function of Peter after the death of Peter at the place of his previous activity.

Evidently the quotation Jh. 21, 15ff. is correlated in the situation after the death of Peter, Jh. 21, 19, and in view of the future way of the church as well as in the light of the martyrdom of Peter as a testimony. So it is important to understand what is permanent in the pastoral ministry of Peter in the church in the light of Jh. 21 and of the post-apostolic episcopal structure of the church.

3. Again the church of Alexandria is according to old Alexandrian tradition a gift of certain dispositions of Peter. For when under the persecution by Herodes Agrippa

Petrus went for the first time for several years to Rome (Acts 12, 17) this was according to the testimony of Eusebius and Hieronymus not without any repercussion on missioning Alexandria. Markus as the specially connected catechetical helper of the first apostle had his special part in this.

The relation between Rome and Alexandria, which could be regarded as an axis of solid relationship at the beginning of the era of ecumenical councils is to be seen both in the oldest liturgical tradition of both episcopal sees as also in the oldest ecumenical conciliar canons (Nicaea I, canon 6).

Activating such tendencies of the old Antiochian and the old Alexandrian tradition of the importance of direction and testimony of the word of Jesus to Peter in its biblical-typological character for the post-apostolic church is still today actual and is corresponding to the new dimensions of understanding also of the Catholic theology. On the contrary a primatial claim which in a one-dimensional way is widened towards churches of ancient Oriental tradition according to the unmodified scheme of the assertions on primacy of the First Vatican and of the Western canon law is against the sense of history and of tradition. This sight also can reflect on a statement which was much quoted and has become almost proverbial by now, made by *Josef Ratzinger* at the first Ecclesiological Colloquium 1974 in Vienna.<sup>49)</sup> In this J. Ratzinger is referring on the words of the great Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, who in his term has very interestingly reflected a word of St. Ignatius of Antiochia to the church of Rome.

Bishop Krikorian: I saw very much sympathy and love for the Oriental Churches in Prof. Schulz's paper, e.g. regarding the acceptance of councils where he meets the Oriental position and conviction.

Reverend Tadros: In our church we have no tradition that St. Mark was a helper of St. Peter. For us all apostles are on the same level. Our church is not subject to Rome because of this claimed situation between St. Mark and St. Peter.

Professor Schulz: The word *hermeneutes* which means helper is quoted in the tradition.

Reverend Tadros: Did Mark give special importance to Rome? Jesus anyway was more important.

Bishop Krikorian: Let us look at this in a larger context!

Professor Schulz: St. Luke was the disciple of St. Paul.

Amba Bishoi: St. Mark is the disciple of Jesus Christ and was one of the 70 apostles that Jesus sent after the twelve.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: St. Luke and St. Mark are on the same level as evangelists. But there is a See of St. Mark, he is the founder of an apostolic Church in Alexandria and he probably was a witness of the resurrected Christ. These three distinctions can not be claimed for St. Luke.

Gregorios Mar Yohanna: May I ask about distinctions between councils. What is meant by the term "Great Councils"?

Archbishop Keshishian: If we mention priority regarding the ecumenicity of the councils we must put the first three on top, then come the following of the first

49) Auf dem Weg zur Einheit des Glaubens, Innsbruck - Wien 1976, p. 110 in German; in French: Koinonia. Premier Colloque ecclésiologique entre théologiens orthodoxes et catholiques, Istina, Paris 1975, p. 99

millenium and further the general Western synods. Without doubt all the councils comprise venerable ecumenical contents.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: I am very glad about Professor Schulz's statement in the first sentence of his paper: The ancient Church continues in the three churches: the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox. But has this also been stated by the Vatican? How does this include the reformation? He proposes a distinction between council 1-3 and the others which followed because they are of different standing. Later developments would have to be revised e.g. that the Pope presides.

Professor Schulz: The reformation brought forth Christian communities, not a church. The Canon law is a creation of the Roman Church.

Father Bouwen: The Canon law is a development of the Western church and has to be discussed and revised in a dialogue in harmony.

Amba Bishoi: Since we are not considered heretical Monophysites any more the Roman Catholic side has to adopt the same attitude towards us as towards the Orthodox. Full reception of a council by the entire church will have to include us. Therefore only council 1 - 3 can be Ecumenical Councils.

Bishop Krikorian: May I again explain my impression. This positive paper of Professor Schulz is of a very good spirit. I quote Patriarch Dimitrios I: "If the Pope (= Rome) gives up the demand for universal jurisdiction we immediately have unity." The rest of the primacy would be no problem. In the Roman Catholic Church participation of the laity has been introduced in the form of parish councils. Regarding the councils it has to be clear: participation is less important than reception.

Archbishop Keshishian: The focus is on conciliarity but we cannot divorce primacy from conciliarity. Primacy is a necessity in the church. The Roman interpretation and practice however is debatable.

Professor Schulz: Every primatial structure must be in concord with an apostolic church structure. The beginning of it all was the community of the twelve apostles. In his opinion it is wrong to say that Peter exercised power over the other apostles but he was the speaker of the apostles and Jesus addressed St. Peter when talking to all the apostles. St. Paul in 1 Kor.15 mentions St. Peter as the first witness of the resurrected Jesus Christ, then came the other apostles and others.

It would be interesting to discuss the structure of primacy nowadays. What was the position of Peter as a preacher, founder of churches? This was in the beginning not a juridical structure but must be seen in the light of the economy of salvation.

The primacy of St. Peter is not exclusively just for him. St. Cyprian says: Every bishop in his diocese is Peter. But the word principalis has a double meaning: Either "origin" or "the one to be referred to".

Paulos Mar Gregorios: The universal jurisdiction is based on some theological claims. Antioch could just as well claim the Petrine office. Most of the Oriental Churches would say: whatever was given to Peter was also given to the other apostles. As a consequence the succession is given to the whole apostolic college.

Professor Harnoncourt: In the sacramental order there is no difference between bishops at all.

Archbishop Keshishian: We Orientals have difficulties in individual succession. Primacy as it has been exercised is not how it is exercised now. Peter did not have any jurisdictional power over the other apostles.

Professor Schulz: Jurisdiction should be exercised as it was in the time of the apostles. The additional load must be done away with.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: The apostles were unique and differences must be accepted. Some principles of today's primacy are wrong.

Father Bouwen: What divides us is the present way of exercising primacy.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: We have to set limits within which primacy has exercised. Within our churches we have primacy problems too.

Professor Hofrichter: Primacy of jurisdiction is a matter of dogmatics, not only of Canon law or discipline. Let us look at the biblical fundament: The last chapter of the gospel of St. John belongs to the latest stratum. There it is written that the Church of Asia Minor opposes the claim of Rome. But it may also be a shadow of the Easter feast strive of the second century. We all know: The Gospel of St. John is the alternative to the Synoptics and St. Paul. According to John the first apostle to be called is Andrew. In the Church of Rome at the time of her foundation bishops have been ordained by Peter and Paul.

Then he put up the question of Nestorianism. These Christians admit only two ecumenical councils and we are missing to talk about them.

Amba Bishoi: We signed an agreement on Christology anathematizing Nestorianism. Why not search for the Arians also? If this point is taken up again, the Coptic Church will not continue any further dialogue. We shall preserve the Orthodox faith until the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The decision of the Third Ecumenical Council against Nestorius was correct. His teaching took place when he was a patriarch. He is not a person, he is a school.

We do not like to open a debate on Nestorius now, it will not help our dialogue altogether. But if the Roman Catholic side wants to enter a dialogue with the Nestorians this is another thing. And if the Nestorians of today are accepting the Third Ecumenical Council they are free to do so.

Then I have a remark about primacy: Inside the local church primacy is totally different from primacy of one apostolic church over another. I do not mean however to cancel the historical primacy of honour.

Professor Harnoncourt: Let us ask what the main reasons are for the importance of Rome. In our church the bishops go "ad sedes apostolorum" i. e. to the sees of the apostles. Important to us is also the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. Historically it is the See of St. Peter.

Secretary General Stirnemann: Dialogue with the Assyrians feasible or not, we agreed in the Wadi Natroun Symposium in October 1991 on openness. There was a work under way in the Middle East Council of Churches. Are there results?

Amba Bishoi: The Assyrians wanted to join but the Coptic Church refused their participation. Our church does not accept them as innocent unless they accept the horos of the Third Ecumenical Council. But studies are going on.

Father Bouwen: About the aforementioned differences of primacies: I question these differences because we have in all churches the same ordination, there are no sacraments involved.

Father George: Speaking of arguments for and against Roman primacy I am still taking into account the cultural and political factors. First there were Rome and Byzantium. Later, after Byzantium fell, Moscow claimed the title "the third Rome".

The existence of the Uniate Church is due to political factors. This all shows that the pre-eminence of Rome is not free of political and cultural factors.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: All the Oriental Orthodox Churches today have a universal jurisdiction all over the world because there is no more territorial limitation. What is the difference now of the universal primacy claims?

Bishop Krikorian: For the Armenian Church this has already been true since the 15th century. The Nestorian Church is a member of the World Council of Churches. By letter there is a dialogue between them and the Syrian Orthodox Church.

*Monday, June 29<sup>th</sup>: 9.00 a.m.*

*Fourth working session. Chair: Bishop Mesrob K. Krikorian*

The agenda is to study the text of the summary to finish the concluding statement.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: Do we need some other topic to be studied in the projected study seminars?

Archbishop Keshishian: A distinction has been made between symposium and seminar.

Bishop Krikorian: In the different regions we have symposions to popularize the aim and ways of Christian unity. Here in Vienna we are to study and digest the five consultations in a smaller meeting called study seminar to find out ways of rapprochement.

Archbishop Keshishian: In future meetings let us not repeat ourselves but find new ways and prospectives to say and find new things!

Professor Harnoncourt: I agree and to me it seems that a few new aspects have been brought in as a step forward like conciliarity and conciliarism.

Father Khalil: I have the impression that what we have heard here was put forward in a fraternal manner but we have made no progress, we move in a circle. I would like to see the way out.

What regards councils this is a matter of high importance but we have not been talking about the essence of the matter. We should let aside the secondary matters like who is presiding e.g. It is the message of Chalcedon e.g. what should be discussed.

I am convinced that the message of Council Vatican II could be accepted by most of us. Even in the Roman Catholic Church there are bishops who never have touched a book about Vatican II. But they have accepted the message of the council which is more important than to agree in a superficial way with the structure of the council. A council is a means not a goal.

Amba Bishoi: In the Fifth Consultation there were papers we could not follow. The study seminars help us in the process of digesting as was put forward previously. For us the purpose of the seminars is not to bring forth new papers but to give us the opportunity to agree.

Moreover there was always a fluctuation of members who later had to adapt in the following sessions. Regarding Council Vatican I in our church we find it difficult to accept new dogmas brought forward there. Also the Eastern Catholic members in Vatican I refused to accept some texts.

Gregorios Mar Yohanna: There is a practical question: What was the result of the first study seminar? Was it the same as this time? Where are we now? If we always only digest it will take us many years.

Secretary General Stirnemann: The results of the first study seminar will be printed in the course of this year. Primacy seems to be the most difficult topic which takes more time than conciliarity or any other.

Amba Bishoi: We had organograms at the first study seminar. These showed concepts of the churches, how people and bishops are sharing, how the church is organized. This should be completed.

Professor Harnoncourt: We cannot find solutions for primacy alone because conciliarity is connected. A balance in the exercise of conciliarity and primacy could be the topic of the third study seminar.

Bishop Krikorian: My impression is different. I find a rather quiet, slow, useful progress. There are differences, but there is progress, there are new steps and aspects, clarifications came.

All churches are following the discussion about primacy and nowhere an answer was found. To me the paper of the Standing Committee 1991 provides a list of future topics.

Archbishop Keshishian: What we are lacking and not yet able to see is the issue of interrelatedness. We are not yet able, but are afraid of moving forward in this field. And the basic crucial issue to me is ecclesiology, our understanding of the church. Here there are the most decisive differences.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: Comparing with the level where we have started from in 1971 remarkable progress has been achieved. We understand each other in a new way. I can compare with the talks between the Oriental Orthodox and the Byzantine Orthodox Churches. There all which could have been done unofficially has been done. Further steps will have to be on the official level. Here however we are not yet ready for this stage. But we have found out the one major obstacle and it should be treated in connection under the title: jurisdiction, episcopate, primacy and councils in the light of the church.

In Wadi Natrun 12 more or less important topics have been named. Proselytism e.g. has not been discussed.

Archbishop Keshishian: When Cardinal Willebrands paid visits he officially proposed to the Armenian Church to open bilateral talks but we decided to talk with the Roman Catholic Church as a family not as an individual church.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: Bilateral talks would involve more people and the transfer of the results would be difficult.

Amba Bishoi: The Standing Committee could help to exchange results of bilateral dialogues. We know that we would not take important steps without consulting the other Oriental Orthodox Churches. Such a bilateral dialogue could touch also special arguments of the Coptic Church. Christology was clear for all members. Primacy has to be discussed as a family, but purgatory, filioque, the procession of the Holy Spirit e.g. are not of the same importance.

Gregorios Mar Yohanna: The ultimate aim one day is official consultation. I too see the difficulty of transferring the results of bilateral talks to the Oriental Orthodox sister churches.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: When we receive documents we give them to the synods.

Father Bouwen: Could that not be a text which should not be published yet?

Secretary General Stirnemann: There are statements like the list of obstacles which are not for publication.

Amba Bishoi: I can explain why the Coptic Orthodox Church does not accept the Roman concept of primacy and jurisdiction: On the ecumenical level we see the church as having Jesus Christ as their head. If the apostles were heads or primates they could not move along except moving in the synod.

Regarding jurisdiction we must distinguish between jurisdiction in a certain area and jurisdiction in the whole church. The latter is reserved to Jesus Christ himself.

*The working draft is being read by Paulos Mar Gregorios.*

*Cardinal König joins the meeting at 10.10 a.m.*

Thanks are expressed to the drafting committee for bringing the contents in such a clear order.

Cardinal König: I appreciate this meeting very much. Vienna is proud to have it, it stands for precious work and service for Christian unity. The statement (=communiqué) seems to be a very carefully drafted document.

We must talk of possible unity, should we not add that we all live in an ecumenical process. We try to reconsider the unit we had once. We have reached a certain number of ecumenical steps and this process is important to bring us closer and closer together. The aim of unity can only be achieved by the process of approaching as essence of many meetings and the wise decisions of their members. Finally a personal remark. In Wadi Natrun I felt very much at home.

Bishop Krikorian: May I congratulate His Eminence heartfully for the anniversary of his ordination today, wishing "santé" in the church and in the ecumenical movement.

A present from the Oriental Orthodox participants is given to Cardinal König. Congratulations were also given to Father Bouwen because it is also the jubilee of his day of ordination.

Secretary General Stirnemann: I received a letter from the archbishop of Mossul, Mar Gregorios Saliba. He excused himself for not being able to come or to send a delegate.

Archbishop Keshishian: I want to introduce the term areas of convergence instead of agreement.

The church can live without councils, see the Oriental Orthodox Churches. He also proposes the term "pre-eminence" for the first three ecumenical councils. The Oriental Orthodox Churches are not in principle against the concept of primacy. Generally he proposes to say everything in a positive way.

Cardinal König: Pope Paul VI once said to me about the unity of the church: "I know that I am the obstacle". For me unity is a juridical construction. We could help to reach this goal by exchanging signs of friendship, letters, human relations, exchange of students etc.

Amba Bishoi: I propose meetings between the heads of the churches to discuss their life and experiences. We have some indications for that already in the epistles.

Communion in conciliarity continues also in times when there are no ecumenical councils.

Gregorios Mar Yohanna: I think that the word koinonia and its content are not very much developed in our paper. This would mean more weight for sacramental life should be given.

In the afternoon the final wording of the communiqué is worked out.

*Monday, June 29<sup>th</sup>: 6.00 p.m.*

*Final working session: Chair: Secretary General Alfred Stirnemann*

Secretary General Stirnemann: I declare that the study seminars will be published, the papers, the communiqué, the minutes. May I invite the participants to suggest important topics for the future.

Archbishop Keshishian: Ecclesiology, local and universal church.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: Jurisdiction, episcopate, primacy and councils in the light of the church.

Father Bouwen: Why not alter theological and practical themes? He suggests: Proselytism - common witness and mutual understanding, respect.

Paulos Mar Gregorios: There are two levels of discussion necessary: theory and practice, general principles and local practical issues.

Professor Harnoncourt: How to find a balance in the exercise of primacy and conciliarity.

Father George: Religious fundamentalism is on the rise and we have reached a consensus in Christology. How do we act jointly in one line in front of these fundamentalist movements?

Vardapet Kapoudjian: Councils and conciliarity. Laws and canons of general councils apart from the first three councils.

Father Khalil: Essential is the theology of baptism, in practice there are large differences, see the practice of rebaptism. What is to think theologically about this problem?

We live in a world where many values are put to the test. Let us look at the world and present our churches to the world. Let us become missionary again in a common way so that the conviction of our churches may be seen.

Secretary General Stirnemann: I can imagine a fruitful continuation of the Vienna Study Seminar after two years' time, in a rhythm of two years.

Professor Harnoncourt: The problem is not only that we see each other as sister churches but there are also mother and daughter churches. What about the respective theology? The Anglicans are daughters and have become sister churches now. The general framework is now on the rail, we can continue now.

Secretary General Stirnemann: I thank you for coming mostly from far away and hope that in two years we meet again to achieve more progress. I convey the best regards of Cardinal Groër to all the participants. In spirit and prayer he has been with us.

Bishop Krikorian: I thank Mr. Stirnemann and all the assistants for the technical and background work.

**Statement of the Second Study Seminar of PRO ORIENTE  
on Councils and Conciliarity, between theologians of the  
Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches  
Vienna, June, 26 to 29, 1992**

In view of the fact that the first PRO ORIENTE Study Seminar on Primacy in June 1991 felt the need for further study and clarification of certain issues, a second Study Seminar on Councils and Conciliarity was held at the Bildungshaus Lainz, Vienna from June 26th to 29th, 1992. The meetings were chaired jointly by Bishop Mesrob Krikorian and Fr. Frans Bouwen. Papers were presented by Rev. Tadros Y. Malaty on Ecumenical Councils and the Trinitarian Faith; by Prof. Hans-Joachim Schulz on The Great Councils - The Different Degrees of their Realization of Ecclesial Conciliarity and their Incorporation in the Respective Tradition; and by Fr. Khalil Kochassarly OP on Councils and Conciliarity in the Life of the Churches.

H.Em. Franz Cardinal König was present for part of the meeting and the participants expressed their gratitude for His Eminence's leadership and inspiration and also to PRO ORIENTE for the hospitality for this Study Seminar.

**Communiqué**

*Introduction*

The Vienna Conversations have helped to clarify a considerable area of agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, on the subject of Councils and Conciliarity. Some differences, however, remain, to be further discussed and clarified, in order that the consensus may become more comprehensive.

*Areas of Unofficial Consensus*

The main points of agreement emerging from the unofficial Vienna Conversations may be briefly summarized as follows:

(1) The Church is by its very nature conciliar, being an icon in the created order of the ineffable Holy Trinity, three Persons in one ousia, bound together in the perfect communion of love. Conciliarity means more than councils. Conciliarity is communion (koinonia). Communion in conciliarity can continue even during long periods when no formal ecumenical councils are held.

(2) This communion has two essential dimensions - (i) the vertical-transcendent communion of all members with the Triune God in the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and, (ii) the horizontal communion of all members in all time and all space with each other, a special aspect of which is the communion of the Church on earth with the heavenly Church. Without either of these dimensions the church would not be the Church.

(3) This communion is above all a communion of love; where love is not present, communion cannot be real.

(4) This communion is participation in the Body of the one Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, crucified, dead and risen, ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father; it is effected by the Holy Spirit, through faith and baptism-chrismation,

through the Eucharist, and through sharing in the Apostolic teaching and witness, guarded, authenticated and pastored by the episcopate with the presbyterate and the diaconate, and through loving service to each other and to the world.

(5) Conciliarity belongs to the essence of the Church. This conciliarity is expressed at various levels - in the eucharistic communion of the local church (diocese), with the bishop or bishops, and with the whole Church Catholic in all time and all space, as well as in local, national, regional and universal synods. In the local parish, the presbyter, as vicar of the bishop, is the focus of conciliarity. He exercises the ministry in conciliar fellowship with his people, - the ministry of (i) worship, prayer and intercessions, (ii) of pastoral building up of the people, and (iii) of loving service to the world - all three aspects being marked by conciliarity.

(6) The ecumenical councils of the Church Catholic are an important expression and instrument of conciliarity. The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem, described in Acts of the Apostles 15, is unique and in a class by itself because of the presence of the Holy Apostles. This Council, because of its uniqueness is usually not included in the list of ecumenical Councils. The first three ecumenical Councils Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431) accomplished, through the Holy Spirit, a clarification of the Apostolic faith and have become the basis of the present Christological consensus between the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith remains an unreplaceable foundation and expression of the faith of the Church.

(7) Unlike the Eucharist, there is no prescribed time-rhythm for the convening of ecumenical councils. They are held according to need, as and when necessary. Neither is there any prescribed procedure, acceptable to all churches, for convoking an ecumenical synod. In the case of the first three ecumenical Councils, the emperor was the convener and provided transport and hospitality. This cannot be a norm for all times and situations.

(8) Though a large number of councils were held during the period from 325 - 431 A.D., only three have been accepted as ecumenical and have come to enjoy universal pre-eminence. A council becomes ecumenical, not primarily by virtue of its representativeness or of a specific procedure followed, but when faithful to the one Apostolic Tradition of the Church, it is received and recognized by the churches everywhere as ecumenical. An ecumenical council is thus a living and ongoing process which begins with its convoking and is completed when there is worldwide recognition and appropriation by the churches.

(9) The Holy Spirit leads the Church into all truth, and the councils have played a major role in elucidating the revelation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Even when many members of the Church occasionally went astray as happened in the fourth century Arian domination, the Holy Spirit led them back to the truth. The Church is thus indefectible, but can be called infallible only in a strictly qualified sense. There is no a priori guarantee that a council convoked to be ecumenical would not stray from the Truth and make wrong decisions. But the Holy Spirit always leads the Church into all truth and brings back those who have gone astray, after they have repented. An ecumenical council can play a major role in such bringing back, but it is not indispensable to the process. Indefectibility of the Church is a gift of the Spirit and not something automatically operative. Infallibility is a term of more recent origin, and in the Roman Catholic church is applied primarily to dogmatic formulations.

(10) A council is a coming together (synodos) of the Church; bishops represent the fullness of the local church, but presbyters, abbots, deacons and laity also are present and help the discussion at ecumenical councils. Bishops sign the decrees of the councils as representatives of the local churches; but all believers can take part in various ways in the deliberations, even if all cannot be present. All members of the churches have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit and have a responsibility to use these gifts for the upbuilding of the Church, and therefore in the conciliar process.

*Points to be further clarified*

1. Ecclesiology forms an essential part of Christology in so far as our understanding of Christ includes Soteriology; for it is through the Church that the salvation in Christ is mediated to us. In the Vienna Conversations several differences in perspective have emerged in the ecclesiological area; for this reason there is much work to be done, before our present remarkable Christological consensus can be complete and ready for action by the churches.

2. The major ecclesiological difference has to do with the role of the Church of Rome and her Bishop in the unity of the Church Catholic and in relation to councils. Here it may be useful to place the positions of the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches side by side, and reflect further on how these differences can be overcome. Even in the areas of present disagreement we find a significant sector of agreement.

3. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that communion with the See of Rome is essential to the unity of the Church Catholic, and that outside that communion the Unity of the Church is incomplete. The Oriental Orthodox Churches, as does the Roman Catholic Church, insist on eucharistic communion, the episcopate and the unity of the Apostolic faith as essential elements for the Church. Both sides regard agreement of all churches as necessary for the unity of the church. The disagreement is on the insistence on communion with one particular See or bishop as absolutely essential and uniquely indispensable for the unity of the Church. But the progress so far in the ecumenical process has facilitated greater mutual understanding, dialogue and cooperation among our churches.

4. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that there is a special Petrine office, related to but distinct from the office of the other Apostles. This special office of Peter is regarded as divinely instituted as essential for the unity of the Church. The Oriental Orthodox Churches teach that all the Apostles received the same gifts and the same authority from our Lord, and that there is no distinct Petrine, Pauline or Thomasian or other apostolic office, though some churches are known by the name of their founder. The apostolic office is one and shared by all the apostles. Both sides agree that the Apostolic College is one and that the Episcopal college in the Church is the continuing presence of the one Apostolic College. The disagreement is on a unique, distinct and exclusive Petrine office, divinely instituted within the Apostolic College.

5. The Roman Catholic church teaches that the college of bishops, to which the Bishop of Rome belongs and who is its head, would be incomplete without him, and cannot act without his consent and approval. In the Oriental Orthodox Churches also the presence and role of the Primate is becoming increasingly essential for the functioning of the Episcopal Synod. The Oriental Orthodox position is that the consent of any one

particular bishop is not indispensable for the validity or acceptance of the ecumenical conciliar decrees, although consent of all bishops would be desirable. The disagreement is about the indispensability in a unique manner, of the consent of one particular bishop of a particular See.

6. There is thus an inseparable relationship between conciliarity and primacy. The Roman Catholic practice has been for someone other than the Pope (though on his authority) to preside in the council, the decisions of the council becoming valid only by subsequent ratification by the Pope. In the Oriental Orthodox Churches the Pope, Patriarch, Catholicos or other primate presides in the council of his church or of all the Oriental Churches together, but he has no independent right or authority apart from his synod or above it to ratify or refuse to ratify the decisions of an ecumenical council. The role of a primate in relation to a council needs to be further clarified in mutual discussions, since primacy is a living reality in all our churches though understood and exercised differently in the different churches.

7. As far as a universal council is concerned, the Roman Catholic Church has developed clear procedures for convoking, conducting and confirming a council. If, however, we are to think of a future council after communion has been restored between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, a new procedure will have to be jointly evolved, faithful both to the tradition of the Church and to the needs and possibilities of the time and upholding the conciliar principle at the levels of convoking, conducting and confirming.

8. The notion of infallibility does not belong to the tradition of the Orthodox Church, whether in connection with a prelate or a council or a dogmatic declaration. The Roman Catholic teaching on Papal infallibility has been subject to substantial study and reformulation in recent times; the historical form in which that doctrine developed at Vatican I was reaffirmed at Vatican II. This study and reformulation should proceed further in an ecumenical context.

9. There is disagreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches on the status of councils after 431 A.D., regarded as ecumenical by the Roman Catholic Church. The Oriental Orthodox are unable to accept these councils as ecumenical or binding. If there is anything of value in these later councils, these could be discussed between the Oriental Orthodox and the Roman Catholics; the former can benefit from their decisions if they are found useful and not inconsistent with their own tradition. The suggestion has been made that some of these councils can be regarded simply as General Councils of the Roman Catholic Church. Only the first three Councils would be regarded as ecumenically binding and pre-eminently the expression of the faith of the Apostolic Church.

*Conclusion*

The work done so far has, by grace of God, produced amazingly positive results. More work needs to be done, in order to reduce the areas of disagreement. The Holy Spirit always leads the churches into all truth, and has been with us in our work together. The same Spirit will continue to bless our future efforts also, and lead us to that unity for which our Lord prayed.



## Selected Literature on the Topic of Councils and Conciliarity

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#### Band I: **Konziliarität und Kollegialität**

Geleitwort von Dr. Theodor Piffl-Percevic, enthält die Referate der drei theologischen Konferenzen "Konziliarität und Kollegialität als Strukturprinzipien der Kirche", "Das Petrusamt aus ökumenischer Sicht" und "Christus und seine Kirche". Wien 1975

#### Band II: **Auf dem Weg zur Einheit des Glaubens**

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#### Band III: **Tomos Agapis**

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