

Eastern Orthodox Churches and Oriental Orthodox Churches in Dialogue: Reception, Disagreement and Convergence

CIPRIAN IULIAN TOROCZKAI*

This paper presents details pertaining to the dialogue between Eastern Orthodox Churches and Oriental Orthodox Churches. A brief history of the official bilateral meetings between the representatives of these two Christian traditions is sketched in the first part of the paper. The texts which converge by way of doctrine are highlighted. In the second part I present some of the difficulties which still prevent Eucharistic intercommunion between Eastern Orthodoxy and Oriental Orthodoxy, in spite of the doctrinal agreement which has been reached. Finally, some possible solutions are drafted in the last part of the paper, with special reference to Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae's proposal of broadening the dogmatic expression from Chalcedon.

Keywords: *dialogue between Eastern Orthodox Churches and Oriental Orthodox Churches, ecumenism, Eucharistic intercommunion, reception, Chalcedon (A.D. 453), Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993)*

Introduction

Orthodox Churches are considered by some western scholars as conservative and anti-ecumenical. What these scholars tend to do in fact is nothing else than to adopt certain critiques which were formulated at the end of the 19th century¹. Moreover, Christian Orthodox may seem forthrightly obsessed with their insistence on a complete agreement of faith with other Christian traditions, steps which should by all means precede Eucharistic intercommunion.² To a great extent, even some Orthodox theologians admit

* Ciprian Iulian Toroczcai, PhD Assistant Professor at the Andrei Șaguna Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania. Address: Str. Timotei Popovici nr. 12, Sibiu, RO-550164; e-mail: torocipri@gmail.com.

¹ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma* vol. 4, trans. Neil Buchanan, Boston 1898, p. 25. And the more recent Christopher D.L. Johnson, „He Has Made the Dry Bones Live»: Orientalism's Attempted Resuscitation of Eastern Christianity», in: *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 82 (3/2014), p. 811-840.

² It is a symptomatic fact, also asserted in the „Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church»: Christian Orthodox Church „manifests sensitivity towards those who have severed themselves from communion with her and is concerned for those who do not understand her voice. Conscious that she constitutes the living presence of Christ in the world, the Church translates the divine economy into concrete actions using all means at her disposal to give a trustworthy witness to the truth, in the precision of the apostolic faith. In this spirit of

that such an agreement is difficult to accomplish. In spite of decades and centuries of ecumenical dialogue, convergence results are still to come. But there is a remarkable exception: the dialogue with Oriental Orthodox Churches.

This paper presents, in its first part, a brief history of the dialogue between Eastern Orthodox Churches and Oriental Orthodox Churches. Certain critiques are presented in the second part, namely the impediments that presently hinder Eucharistic intercommunion between the two Churches. Finally, in the last part of this study, I propose a few solutions for the better reception of the results of the dialogue, by also mentioning the solution that was proposed by the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993).

Eastern Orthodox Churches and Oriental Orthodox Churches in dialogue. A brief history³

The resolutions of the Council in Chalcedon (453) were accepted by some Churches and rejected by others. Due to historical circumstances, these Churches lived next to one another: the former have called for three more ecumenical councils, dealt with the schism with the West and have gradually been not only liturgically and doctrinally, but also politically unified with the Eastern Roman Empire. Those who have rejected Chalcedon continued to testify for Christ amidst their people, managing eastern aggressions and western colonists. Their isolation was even greater.

It was only in modern times, and especially in the 20th century, that new connections were made possible between the Orthodox and the Oriental. The frame was created by the Ecumenical Movement. The initiative for an official dialogue came from the First Pan-Orthodox Conference in 1961, followed by a letter exchange between the Ecumenical and Oriental

recognition of the need for witness and offering, *the Orthodox Church has always attached great importance to dialogue*, and especially to that with non-Orthodox Christians". Nevertheless, the Orthodox Church has at the same time „never accepted theological minimalism or permitted its dogmatic tradition and evangelical ethos to be called into question". Subsequently, „the multilateral dialogues undertaken by the Orthodox Church have never signified, and do not signify, nor will they ever signify, any compromise in matters of faith". See: <https://www.holy-council.org/-encyclical-holy-council?inheritRedirect=true>, viewed on the 12th of July, 2016.

³ See: Ioan Ovidiu, George Martzelos, „Eastern Orthodox – Oriental Orthodox Dialogue – A Historical and Theological Survey", in: Pantelis Kalaitzidis et al. (eds.), *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism. Resources for Theological Education*, Volos 2014, pp. 508-535; K.M. George, „Oriental Orthodox – Orthodox Dialogue", in: Nicholas Lossky et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva 2002, p. 859-862; Christine Chaillot and Alexander Belopoposky (eds.), *Towards Unity: The Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches*, Geneva 1998; P. Gregorios, W.H. Lazareth and N. Nisiotis (eds.), *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite? Towards Convergence in orthodox Christology*, Geneva 1981; Methodius of Aksum, *Papers Referring to the Theological Dialogue between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches*, Athens 1976.

Patriarchies. The preparations for the official dialogue were made alongside a series of unofficial meetings; four such meetings took place between 1964 and 1971: Aarhus, 1964; Bristol, 1967; Geneva, 1970; Addis Ababa, 1971. The first conversation declared: „We recognize in each other the one Orthodox faith of the Church. Fifteen centuries of alienation have not led us astray from the faith of our Fathers... On the essence of the Christological dogma we found ourselves in full agreement. Through different terminologies used by each side, we saw the same truth expressed”. The participants found a common agreement for their Christology in the formulation of St. Cyril of Alexandria – „one incarnate nature (*physis* or *hypostasis*) of God’s Word” – and thus they have rejected the Nestorian and Eutychian teachings⁴.

The fundamental agreement reached in Aarhus was re-enforced in subsequent conversations by agreement in several new areas. „Some of us affirm two natures, wills and energies hypostatically united in the One Lord Jesus Christ. Some of us affirm one united divine-human nature, will and energy in the same Christ. But both sides speak of a union without confusion, without change, without divisions, without separation. The four adverbs belong to our common tradition. Both affirm the dynamic permanence of the Godhead and the Manhood, with all their natural properties and faculties, in one Christ” (Bristol, 1967)⁵. Both sides could affirm together „the common Tradition of one church in all important matters – liturgy and spirituality, doctrine and canonical practice, in our understanding of the Holy Trinity, of the Incarnation, of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, on the nature of the church as the communion of the saints with its ministry and sacraments, and on the life of the world to come when our Lord and Saviour shall come in all his glory” (Geneva, 1970)⁶.

The consultation in Addis Ababa in 1971 gave special attention to the questions of anathemas. It was agreed that the Church has the authority to lift the anathemas which it once imposed for pastoral or other reasons⁷.

Considering the progress towards unity that was recorded⁸, the next step was the official dialogue between Orthodox Churches and Oriental

⁴ Original English version in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 10 (1964-1965), p. 7-160.

⁵ Original English version in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 13 (1968), p. 123-320.

⁶ Original English version in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 16 (1971), p. 3-209.

⁷ Original English version in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 16 (1971), p. 210-259.

⁸ Unofficial consultations have also revealed major difficulties on the way to the restoration of communion: 1) the meaning and place of certain councils in the life of the Church (the Eastern Orthodox Church accepted seven ecumenical councils, while the Oriental Orthodox Church only the first three as ecumenical councils); 2) the respective anathematization or acclamation as saints of certain controversial teachers in the Church like Leo, Dioscorus,

Churches. Four other meeting must be remembered: Chambésy, 1985; Anba Bishoy, 1989; Chambésy, 1990; Chambésy, 1993. The first official consultation of the Joint Commission of the theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Church recalls the two decades of unofficial theological consultations and the reconciling grace of the Holy Spirit, which led the two families of the Orthodox Tradition to take up the theological dialogue at an official level.

In the second meeting of this commission, at the Anba Bishoy monastery (Egypt), an historic agreement was signed which said: „We have inherited from our fathers in Christ the one apostolic faith and tradition, though as churches we have separated from each other for centuries. As two families of Orthodox Churches long out of communion with each other, we now pray and trust in God to restore that communion on the basis of the apostolic faith of the undivided church of the first centuries which we confess in our common creed”⁹.

The third meeting of the joint commission re-affirmed the earlier agreement on faith. Also, it recommended to local churches in both families that all previous anathemas against each other should be lifted. Now that both sides have accepted the first three ecumenical councils, the Oriental Church will respond positively to the Eastern Orthodox interpretation of the four later councils¹⁰.

The fourth meeting of the joint commission made proposals for the lifting of anathemas, which would be done unanimously and simultaneously by the heads of all churches through the signing of an appropriate act. This action would restore communion between the two Orthodox Churches with immediate effect. All condemnation against each other, synodic or personal, would be removed. A list of the heads of churches to be remembered in Liturgy (diptych) would be prepared. Questions of regional jurisdiction would be settled by the concerned local churches¹¹.

Agreement? Yes, but still...

During the meeting of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Old Oriental Churches, held in

Severus, and others; 3) jurisdictional questions related to manifestation of the unity of the Church at local, regional and world levels.

⁹ Original English version in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 34 (1989), p. 393-397.

¹⁰ Original English version in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36 (1991), p. 185-188.

¹¹ Original English version in J. Gros, H. Meyer and W.G. Rush (eds.), *Growth in Agreement* III, Geneva 2007, pp. 4-7. For other further steps see I. Ovidiu, G. Martzelos, „Eastern Orthodox”, p. 523-526.

Chambésy-Geneva, from November 1 to 6, 1993, it was declared that the two Churches had “reached a final agreement”. Thus, “it was found that, although there are different formulations, the essence of the texts adopted by the two Churches is the same, namely Orthodox.” Consequently, it was ordered that anathemas be annulled and steps be taken to achieve full communion.

But the community on Mount Athos has expressed great dissatisfaction with regards to the progress of the dialogue between Eastern and Oriental Churches. I mention here two documents: the first one, from February 1, 1994, is a “Report of the Holy Community on the Holy Mountain on the Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Antichalcedonian”; the second one, from May 14/27 1995, is an explanatory report of the Holy Community from the Holy Mountain about the “Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Nonchalcedonian”. Together with three other studies and common declarations of the dialogue, both documents were later issued in a single volume by prior Gheorghe (Kapsanis) of Grigoriu Monastery,¹² at the end of 1995.

In the first text¹³ a reference is made to the third common declaration of the Mixed Commission for Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental “Orthodox” Churches, reunited in Chambesy, Switzerland, from November 1 to 6, 1993, which has decided upon the “Orthodoxy” of both parties and, consequently, the reinstatement of full communion and the lack of applicability of past condemnations, be they synodic or personal. The Holy Mountain expressed its worries and alarm in this respect for, we are told, „a rushed union will result firstly into a false and dishonest union and secondly into an internal schism in our Holy Orthodox Church”¹⁴. A series of reasons that ground this affirmation are thereupon listed: it is thus considered that „in all three official statements the Orthodox have abandoned Orthodox ecclesiology”, in the sense that there was a renunciation of the principle that our Orthodox Church constitutes the only One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The affirmation that the Antichalcedonian were „Oriental Orthodox” implicitly means that both churches were two families, of equal rank, of the unique Church of Christ. But in this manner a „form of branch theory” is advanced, a fact which is contradictory to the Orthodox view, also expressed by Professor Gheorghios Mantzaridis¹⁵.

¹² See: (Anonymous Editor), *Sunt anticalcedonienii ortodocși?*, transl. Ștefan Nuțescu, București 2007.

¹³ Available online: http://www.impantokratoros.gr/dailog_orthodox_non-chalcedonian.en.aspx (viewed November 10th, 2015).

¹⁴ (Anonymous Editor), *Sunt anticalcedonienii ortodocși?*, p. 19.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

Another issue which was raised was whether these documents are not an attempt for a compromise: the 4th, 5th and 6th Ecumenical Councils, which were not accepted by the Antichalcedonian, were apparently wrong and we, nowadays, correct them by rejecting the condemnation of Dioscorus and Severus as heretics. Also the reformulation of Orthodox Christology, perfectly defined by the Holy Fathers within the aforementioned councils is considered “purposeless and dangerous”. Purposeless because a decision of an ecumenical council, formulated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, does not leave room for any other interpretation – and, because of this, the dogmatic resolution of the 4th Ecumenical Council is “by its nature and position, sufficient from a spiritual, ecclesiastical and synodic point of view”. Any attempt to question or to draw a new Christological formulation, besides or alongside the formulation of Chalcedon Council is not only not-allowed or harmful, but even dangerous, because it could make room for interpretation according to a „moderate or even hidden monophysitism”¹⁶.

Not even Eutyches’s condemnation by the Antichalcedonian party makes for a guarantee of its Orthodoxy; and that is because the condemnation of Severus’ and Dioscorus’ moderate monophysitism did not take place as well. As father Georges Florovsky affirmed, this position should also be rejected because it promotes an anthropologic minimalism, Christ’s diminution into human. The fact that the Antichalcedonian still promote such moderate monophysitism becomes clear both from the deeds of the unofficial meeting in Aarhus, and from certain declarations, such as those of the Coptic patriarch Shenuda III. Moreover, even in the second Common Declaration, it is asserted that the divine and the human natures are united in Jesus Christ “without confusion, without change, without division and without separation” – according to the Chalcedonian dogmatic formulation –, and that they are distinguished “only in theory (τη θεωρια μονη)” – an addition that makes room for interpretation of a monophysite kind: if the expression refers to the distinction between the two natures, it is correct, but if it indicates that the two natures exist only theoretically, then it is not Orthodox¹⁷.

The document issued by Mount Athos also analyses the 8th paragraph of the second Declaration, which refers to Ecumenical Councils: “our common heritage” would be made only of the first three Ecumenical Councils, and the other four subsequent councils are recognized as authoritative only by the Orthodox side, and “in this reading, the Oriental Orthodox answer...

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 22-23.

positively". One may conclude that the Antichalcedonian refuse the ecumenical feature in the 4-7 councils, by simply complying with the idea that the Orthodox accepted them. This idea has triggered serious uncertainties and concerns, sharing the same tone with the reserves that were expressed by the Metropolitan Bishop Hrisostom Konstantinidis of Mira, who wrote: „Definitely one such perception of Ecumenical Synods as not indispensable elements of absolute expression of the holiness and authority of the Church should create thoughts and uneasiness not only on the Orthodox side, but on the Roman Catholic as well with its well-known Synodology"¹⁸.

Another aspect that is viewed upon with reservations is the annulment of the anathemas pronounced by the Ecumenical Councils against the Antichalcedonian "fathers", annulment that should be made by the Heads of the Orthodox Churches, for the following reasons: 1. As Father Florovsky shows, we are dealing not with a simple disciplinary anathema, but one that is pronounced for theological grounds, an extremely serious situation; 2. In the church, what is made out of iconomy and only in an isolated manner cannot prevail against holy canons (see Can. 17, the Council of Constantinople, 861); 3. The annulment of the anathemas given by the Ecumenical Councils questions their authenticity and authority in what regards the flawlessness of the expression of the Orthodox Faith. It is in total contradiction with the Orthodox conception on the resolutions of Ecumenical Councils; the risk is quite substantial, since "if you destroy something, then everything gets destroyed"¹⁹.

The agreements that have been formulated so far do not carry the mark of synodality because they are limited to a commission that is made up of several church leaders and theologians; they lack a larger debate and, at the same time, the members of the Church, especially those interested in faith issues, are not properly informed. Acceptance should nevertheless be expressed after the results of the mixed commissions for dialogue have been presented by a larger council; this will address the issue in the final stage of the debates (a fact that is not stipulated in the text of the mixed commission, proposing, in exchange, the immediate annulment of anathemas and church unity).²⁰

According to the Athonite Fathers, they „will accept the Seven Ecumenical Synods, and they will also accept all the fathers of our Holy Church such as St. John of Damascus, St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Gregory

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 28-29.

Palamas as saints who truly express those Synods”²¹. It is a *sine qua non* condition for authentic unity, and its rejection raises the following problems:

“If the Non-Chalcedonians believe that they are fully Orthodox and therefore their salvation is not at any risk, why then do they wish to unite with our Church, the Church which they do not accept totally and why aren’t they coming towards it with humility and repentance? Also what is compelling us to accept their conditions and to violate our own fundamental ecclesiastical principles? It is possible that this expedient union is of a political nature which is initiated by heretical groups plotting a union to satisfy their own needs. Is that a sufficient reason for a union? Or perhaps ecclesiastical unions of peaceful coexistence are being pushed along to serve the political plans of unification and coexistence in our century?”²²

On the other hand, the fact that the Antichalcedonian theologians, who partake in the dialogue with the Orthodox accept common points of Orthodox Christology, has been acknowledged as a step forward. Still, it is questionable whether this Christology is accepted by all members of the non-Chalcedonian Churches, be it both at the level of the large community of believers and at the level of patriarchs and theologians who object to the decisions. The document concludes by highlighting two main directions within the dialogue with the Antichalcedonians (which are specific for the dialogue with the Roman-Catholic as well): 1. the acknowledgement that the heretic church is a “sister” church, a fact that would mean abandoning the declaration of the Orthodox Church as one, holy, synodic and apostolic and 2. the rush to accomplish unity by “by-passing differences” which are either ignored or minimized.

From what we have presented so far the result is that „until now the presuppositions for union with the Non-Chalcedonians have not been met and that a rushed union not only will not unite our divisions and bring harmony, but will destroy the unified parts”. For this reason, Church Hierarchy should assume responsibility and avoid creating a new schism within Orthodoxy, which would be even more widely spread than the one caused by changing the calendar. The actual unification should be preceded by other actions: „the whole body of the Church must be widely informed and must discuss this issue. Enough time is given to the conscience of the Church to function freely and without any haste, only then whatever will rest and comfort the conscience of the Church should be done”. For that matter, this text itself is considered a clue for the fact that the majority of the Orthodox

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 31.

Church was not satisfied with the decisions that had been made so far and would not accept such a unity²³.

The second official document issued by the Holy Mountain²⁴ opens with an article by the Co-president of the Mixed Commission for Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Antichalcedonian, Bishop of Switzerland, Damascene, an article which is entitled "The Theological Dialogue of the Orthodox Churches and the Oriental Orthodox Churches: Thoughts and Perspectives" [*Episkepsis* #516 / March 31, 1995]. This article is the author's reaction to the document we have analysed above, which is dated on February 1, 1994, a document that follows two main lines: fighting the attempt to accomplish a rushed unity between Orthodox and Antichalcedonian, in particular the need for a wider debate on problems raised by this unity within the body of the Church. For the Bishop of Switzerland such a debate is meaningless, because it is a critique exercised by certain religious circles in order to again bring into discussion matters which would be completely clarified by the two common declarations. For the representatives of the Holy Mountain, through such a characterization, „His Grace understands the theological Dialogue as a subject only for certain theologians, experts of dogmatics, who are quite indifferent to the disquiet of the pious". And this is made by not declaring the need of a church council that can affirm the Orthodoxy of the common declarations. By expressing its concern towards a possible unity that is based upon unorthodox premises, the Athonite community affirms that it falls within its responsibility to keep and protect the teaching of the Church, as it was received from the Holy Fathers, and therefore it communicates to His Sanctity, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, along with the patriarchal council in Constantinople, to the Heads of historical patriarchates, and also to the orthodox clergy and to the faithful people everywhere, the following denunciations:

- The questioning, by the Mixed Commission, of the testimony of the century old consciousness of the Orthodox Church, that it alone is the one, holy, synodic and apostolic;
- The assault upon the validity and authority of the Holy Ecumenical Councils, by accepting the „orthodoxy" of heretics which have been condemned, such as Dioscorus, Jacob, Severus and others;
- The possibility of annulment of an anathema pronounced by an ecumenical council, which thus questions its authority;

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 32-33.

²⁴ Available online: http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/mono_athos.aspx (viewed November 10th, 2015).

- The disagreement between the Holy Fathers who have rejected Non-Chalcedonian Christology as heretical (Maximus the Confessor, Sophrony of Jerusalem, John Damascene, Photios etc) and the Mixed Commission that established that it is Orthodox;
- The fact that the Mixed Commission has accepted the idea according to which the Antichalcedonians nowadays profess the same Christological teaching as the Orthodox one. But even in common declarations there is a series of formulations which allow for a monophysite type of interpretation;
- The Mixed Commission's stipulates that Nonchalcedonians should reject Euthyches' radical monophysitism alone. But Severus' and Dioscorus' moderate monophysitism is a heresy, as the Holy Fathers have taught and the consciousness of the Church has testified;
- Ambiguous declarations from which one should understand that the Antichalcedonians accept all ecumenical Councils. Nevertheless, upon a more attentive scrutiny, one can observe that they do not accept the Orthodox interpretation of the dogmatic resolutions made at the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Ecumenical Councils;
- The strange theory of the Mixed Commission according to which "the formal profession by the Nonchalcedonians of their ecumenicity (namely of the aforementioned Ecumenical Councils) is generally considered as the natural consequence of re-establishing full communion. Otherwise, it will be resolved in the future." It can therefore be said that unity could be possible without recognizing all Ecumenical Councils, and the matter is left at the discretion of the Nonchalcedonians;
- Certain visible intentions on the side of the Mixed Commission to "cover up the facts and lead church members into error", such as: that fact that the minutes of the official meeting of the Mixed Commission for Dialogue have not been printed, the declaration that there is an authority to sign the annulment of anathemas in the name of local Churches, but without synodic decisions, the claim that the Churches that partake in the dialogue positively accept the prospect of restoring communion, not only at the level of the Commission, but also at the broader level of the believers etc;
- The Mount Athos monastic community has heavily criticized the openness shown by the Romanian Orthodox Church in the dialogue with the Oriental Churches. Thus, it was stated in a document that the unilateral decision of the Holy Synod of the

Romanian Orthodox Church (8-9 December 1994) to sign the declaration of union would be alien to the mind of the Church on the following grounds: "A) considers that the anathemas were laid upon the heretics by the Ecumenical Councils in a spirit lacking love, while today, since love now exists, union can be accomplished. Such a way of thinking directs a profound blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, through Whose inspiration these decisions were made, and against the sacred memory of the Holy Fathers, whom the Church calls God-bearers, Mouths of the Word, Harps of the Spirit, etc. B) proposes the substitution of the authority of an Ecumenical Council by the unanimity of the local Sacred Synods – a new first in the history of the Church – approves the organizing of programs which will disseminate amongst the people the decisions of the Joint Commission without there having previously been a unanimous, pan-orthodox decision. These present conditions are certainly grievous and harmful for the pious Romanian people. For this reason, our hearts are filled with unspeakable sorrow for the Church of Romania".

- The extremely unsettling resolution of purging liturgical books of the texts that refer to Antichalcedonians as heretics. This action is characterised as unacceptable and liable to have harmful consequences on the very identity of the Orthodox Church, since what is at stake are holy writings which are not mere ornamental pieces of Orthodox hymnography, but fundamental elements of Orthodoxy.

In the light of these denunciations, the Athonite fathers humbly assert the feeling of responsibility which had caused them to request the immediate re-grounding of the theological dialogue on correct foundations in such a way that the Orthodox completely retain their righteous faith and the Non-chalcedonians have the possibility to return to the true Church of Christ. In the contrary stance, namely if unity "is made against the Only Truth – let it not be! – we clearly and categorically declare that the Holy Mountain will not accept such an untruthful union"²⁵.

Even if the Romanian Orthodox Church has not officially responded to these accusations - against the dialog with the Old Oriental Churches - the reaction of a Romanian Orthodox bishop should also be mentioned²⁶. This is especially important since similar documents containing accusations

²⁵ (Anonymous Editor), *Sunt anticalcedonienii ortodocși?*, p. 44.

²⁶ Nicolae Corneanu, *Pe baricadele presei bisericești* vol. 1, Timișoara, 2000, p. 567.

against the successful outcome of the ecumenical dialogue between Orthodox and non-Chalcedonians were published in Romania as well²⁷.

Toward an Expanded Formula of the Chalcedonian Dogmatic Definition?²⁸

I shall present below the greatest doctrinal contributions Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993) brought to a proper understanding of the Christology which the Oriental and the Eastern Churches share. His contributions are all the more important in that they were made in the early stage of dialogue, a stage full of hesitations when drafting a joint document seemed quite impossible²⁹.

Father Stăniloae's attitude towards the dialogue between the Eastern Church and the Oriental Churches was based on his conviction that their separation in the fifth century A.D. was caused by a terminological misunderstanding relating to Christology, in addition to national, political and social tensions aroused between Byzantium and the populations in the East. The direct consequence of this aspect is that, although it had unfortunate effects, this painful event did not affect the depth of Eastern Christianity in its entirety: "the separation did not widen further, but has remained shallow to this day, a terminological misunderstanding, not a separation of faith"³⁰.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae also refers to an event which took place around the time when he was writing his study, "The Informal Meeting" held in Aarhus (Denmark) in August 1964, with the participation of 16 scholars (8 Orthodox and 8 non-Chalcedonians). On the Orthodox side, J. Meyendorff, I. Karmiris and I. Romanides stressed the same thing, namely that the differences between the Orthodox and Oriental Churches were terminological not dogmatic-Christological in nature. This opinion was embraced

²⁷ Ion Vlăduță, Dumitru Popescu et al., *Acceptăm unirea cu monofiziții? Români ortodocși între optimism, dezinformare și apostazie*, Sfântul Munte Athos 2008.

²⁸ See: Ciprian Iulian Toroczka, "Toward an Expanded Formula of the Chalcedonian Dogmatic Definition? Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae's Contribution to the Dialogue with Non-Chalcedonian Churches", in: *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 59 (1-4/2014), pp. 145-160.

²⁹ Worth mentioning are the meetings of the Inter-orthodox Commission for the Dialogue with Oriental Churches, held between 18 and 28 August 1971 in Addis Ababa, and of the Orthodox subcommittee for dialogue with the Oriental Churches, held at Axum (Addis Ababa) between 8 and 13 January 1975. Father Dumitru Stăniloae attended both meetings and was appointed to study and present reports on the "Christology of the Councils". See: Dumitru Stăniloae, "Relațiile Bisericii Ortodoxe Române cu Bisericele Vechi-Orientale, cu Biserica Romano-Catolică și cu Protestantismul", in: *Ortodoxia* 20 (2/1968), pp. 208-223.

³⁰ Idem, "Posibilitatea reconcilierii dogmatice între Biserica Ortodoxă și Vechile Biserici Orientale", in: *Ortodoxia* 17 (1/1965), p. 5.

by non-Chalcedonians theologians as well, such as the Armenian bishops Sarkissian and Tiran Nersaian or the Bishop of the Church of Malabar, Mar Dionysius. On the other hand, there were some who did not recognize the orthodoxy of the Chalcedonian formula and even criticized it (see V.C. Samuel, representative of the Church of Malabar and the Coptic theologian K.L. Khella). Their positions remind us of the critical position adopted by Armenian bishop Terenin Paladian, who argued that the Orthodox had changed the old tradition of the Church and promoted the Nestorian heresy. In brief, the Christological position of non-Chalcedonian theologians divides them into three groups: 1. Some agree that the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian doctrines share the same identity, and consistent with this, agree to combine their formulas with that of Chalcedon; 2. Others agree that their teaching and the Orthodox teaching share the same identity, but are reluctant to accept a combination of the two formulas; 3. The members of the third group do not agree with the common identity of the non-Chalcedonian and the Orthodox doctrine, although the way in which they exposed their teaching shows no difference from the Orthodox position³¹. On the other hand, for the Orthodox, Fr. Stăniloae suggested that a double task be undertaken: 1. To convince, through theological meetings and scientific papers, all the Oriental theologians of the identity of the Orthodox teaching with the non-Chalcedonian one; 2. To convince them of the need for a common formula, i.e. a combination of their formulas and the Chalcedonian formula, showing them the effect of terminological separation: some have truly come to the conviction that there was a real Christological difference between the Oriental Churches and the Eastern Church³².

Father Stăniloae was convinced of the need to demonstrate the equality of the two formulas, and the need to find a possibility to combine them. However, he was aware of the problem of formally completing a dogmatic decision of an ecumenical council, namely the real possibility of merging the content of the non-Chalcedonian formula and that of the Fourth Ecumenical Council (i.e. by using “new terms, even in disagreement with the terms of that definition”)³³. The question was raised during the abovementioned meeting, in Aarhus, and was supported by J. Meyendorff, who said that: “Theological terminology is not always able to express the truth in full, but only partially, and somewhat inaccurately. It is nothing more than a communication tool, an instrument used by the Church to convey its

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 11.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

teaching... Conciliar definitions are essentially ad-hoc statements that can be understood only against the background of the heresy they condemn. They undoubtedly reflect and testify to an unchangeable truth, which is the one living truth, existing in the organic continuity of the one Church of Christ. A council is ecumenical and its decision is infallible when it defines something of this everlasting and organic Truth. However, no human word and conciliar definition can claim to have expressed it exhaustively. Conciliar definitions cannot be revoked without the Church ceasing to be the Church of Christ, but can be supplemented and reinterpreted as the Fifth Council supplemented and interpreted the Chalcedon decision³⁴. This position, supported by other Orthodox theologians (V. Borovoi, Bishop Emilian Timiadis) and found summarized in the Declaration of Aarhus, appears to Father Stăniloae as absolutely correct, unlike the idea of I. Karmiris that the Church, which is “not obliged to remain rigid and fight for words and sentences,” has the right to change and replace them. This opinion is categorically rejected by the Romanian theologian, who in turn further strove to show and argue that dogmatic formulas, even those related to the Ecumenical Councils, may be expanded.

The best example is that of the Second Council of Constantinople (381). When Arian subordinationism was no longer present, its place having been taken by the other danger, i.e. Sabellianism, they started to introduce in the text of the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325) expressions such as “before all ages” and “whose kingdom shall have no end”, and the removal of Nicene expression “from the essence of the Father” (which seemed to infer that the Son derives from the Divine being, so could confuse the Persons in the unique Being). This proves that “the Church has always sought balance between the two extreme tendencies: the subordinationist and antitrinitarian. When this balance was jeopardized on one side, the Church sought to re-establish it through counter-expressions. Moreover, when the opposing tendency was using these expressions to its own benefit, the Church used to supplement the previously drafted text with opposite expressions. Thus, the Church managed to express the revealed, transcendent truth more accurately with every correction.” What general rule can be thus derived? The “the balance of these formulas is unstable (emphasis added throughout). This progress is caused by the dynamism of the human spirit and the inexhaustible depth of the divine Truth. The human spirit tends to a more nuanced and appropriate expression of the unbounded revealed truth³⁵.”

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 11-12.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae argues that this balance requires, therefore, a certain existential tension, a tension between extremes, the only fact able to give amplitude to a teaching of faith: "If the formula does not cover the extremes, it no longer includes everything and thus is limited to small amplitude. It thus becomes simplistic and shallow. In this case it no longer embraces all truth, does not harmonize all its various aspects and leaves out much of the truth; as there is no iota of truth that does not win its supporters, the sizeable groups of supporters of those fragments of truth are also left out." The process described above also covers the way in which the Christological dogma was set; even if the Council of Chalcedon tried to achieve this balanced formula, its success was not full, given the social and historical circumstances which prevented the parties to know one another better³⁶. There were some attempts to explain the divergent positions for a possible unification - see Leontius of Byzantium's conception of enhypostasis, the decisions of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, the Henoticon of Emperor Zeno (588) or the Monothelite formula. Nevertheless, the failure of all these attempts made "during a not so long a time was caused probably by the fact that the reconciliation effort did not comprise explicitly enough both the Chalcedonian and the non-Chalcedonian expressions, failing to merge them in balanced formula, in which both opinions would have been equally important"³⁷.

Despite all failures, Father Stăniloae was absolutely convinced of the existence of a real possibility of combining the non-Chalcedonian and Chalcedonian formulas. The demonstration spans multiple pages and several conclusions are drawn:

1. the equality of Cyril's formula "one enfleshed nature of the Word" with the Chalcedon formula "two natures in one person" of Jesus Christ;
2. even denying the duality of natures in Jesus Christ, the most prominent theologian who opposed Chalcedon, Severus of Antioch, however admitted the persistence in full of the Godhead and humanity in Christ: He was both of one essence with the Father and with us. „Severus does not speak of one essence in Christ, as he speaks of one nature, but of the divine essence and the human essence, different from the divine one, stating that each persists in Christ. Nevertheless, he avoids using the number 'two' even in relation to the different essences he distinguishes in Christ." Consequently, Father Dumitru Stăniloae states that "if he had surrendered to the spirit of consistency," Severus would have come to ad-

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 13-14.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

mit the existence of two natures in Christ (as was the case with Leontius of Byzantium)³⁸;

3. regarding the meaning of the definition of the Council of Chalcedon, it should be emphasized that nature is here nothing but the active hypostasis; however, the nature is not active by itself, but the hypostasis is active in her, nature in the Chalcedonian sense is precisely what Severus termed the “essence”³⁹;

4. certain statements are made regarding the number of natures. On the one hand, the number does not necessarily indicate different items, which we must set apart; for example, although we say that man has “two eyes” or “two hands” this does not mean we are separating them from the human body. On the other hand, the justification of the number “two” (natures or essences) in Jesus Christ, does not justify the use of any number. Timothy Aelurus (died in 477) and today Bishop Paladian argue that just as one can speak of two natures in Jesus Christ, one can also speak of six natures: chemical, vegetal, animal, rational, angelic and divine. Their argument is in contradiction with what Leontius had stated before - “the Godhead and humanity of Christ are not mingled. And the soul and body are not parts of Christ, but parts of the part”⁴⁰; he had stressed that counting the human elements as equal parts in Christ would be absurd, as each part would be subdivided into other parts.

In conclusion, there is a real possibility to merge, to assimilate the contents of the non-Chalcedonian and Chalcedonian formulas. It could sound as follows: “It should be confessed that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the Same perfect in Godhead, the Same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the Same [consisting] of a rational soul and body; homoousios with the Father as to his Godhead, and the Same homoousios with us as to his manhood; in all things like unto us, sin only excepted; begotten of the Father before ages as to his Godhead, and in the last days, the Same, for us and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin Theotokos as to his manhood; One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only begotten, made known *of* and in two natures, namely *of* and *in two essences*, which exist without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the difference of the natures or *essences* having been in no wise taken away by reason of the union, but rather the properties of each nature or essence being preserved, and both concurring into one Person or one hypostasis, or

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 25 (PG vol. 86, col. 1292).

a nature of God the Word incarnated (*God the Word assuming and keeping in His hypostasis the human nature in its fullness, but without change and without confusion and without separation in the union with His divine nature and performing through them without separation and without confusion His theandric work, namely those that are human in a divine way, and those that are divine with the participation of His humanity*).⁴¹

Father Stăniloae also shows that the emphasized sections are non-Chalcedonian expressions interspersed in the Chalcedonian definition (on the other hand, we are told, the text in brackets could be left out). This is the means of finding a formula for mediation, in which the Chalcedonian expressions will be protected from all Nestorian interpretations, and the non-Chalcedonian expressions will be spared any Monophysite interpretation. (At the same time, the balance between the Chalcedonian “extreme”, which tends to unity, and the Chalcedonian “extreme,” which tends to emphasize duality, will be established.)

Finally, the Romanian theologian expresses hope that non-Chalcedonians show more concrete preoccupation to reach reconciliation, especially since historical barriers have disappeared and dogmatic differences are insignificant⁴².

Conclusions

Unfortunately, a certain rigid understanding of Church Tradition and even a sense of fear may have made the extraordinary extended formulation of the dogma of Chalcedon remain a mere proposal. At an international symposium organized by the Ilarion Felea, Faculty of Theology in Arad, Prof. Dimitrios Tselengidis, speaking about the Romanian theologian's approach, expressed his astonishment and argued that the formulation of an Ecumenical Council cannot be altered, not even by another Ecumenical Council. However, the distinguished professor had forgotten that this had actually happened in the history of the Church. Marcellus, bishop of Ancyra, who had taken part in the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325), fell into a modalist heresy, for which he was convicted on the occasion of the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381): against the Marcellian view, that the Son and the Spirit are just temporary functions of God the Father, for the creation and salvation, and they will be reabsorbed into the divine unity at the Eschaton, the conciliar decision proclaims that “Christ's kingdom will have no end.” It is therefore true that a dogmatic formula sanc-

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 26-27.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 27.

tioned by an ecumenical council cannot be changed, but can suffer additions so that it remains compliant with the one promulgated before, and reveals other aspects required for problems arising in a different social, historical and theological context of the Church. The Holy Spirit remains alive in the Church, which means that the Tradition is both static and dynamic (and therefore not confined to the first eight centuries). Why would it not be possible therefore in the future that the acceptance of the proposal in question becomes a decisive step towards the theological fulfilment of the dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Church and Oriental Churches?

At the same time, there are a few problems that still do not find solution so that a full union may be reached between Orthodox and Oriental Churches. Lacking solutions for them, let us just list them as closure for this study:

1. What measures should one take within each Church, so that the fruit of the dialogue be extended from the “specialists” - the theologians - to the entire ecclesiastic community, cleric and lay alike?
2. Can a harmonisation in what concerns liturgy take place? What feasts should be observed together, what icons should be revered in both Churches? Oriental Churches – we know – possess a richer liturgical tradition than the Eastern Church: which differences are cultural, which are doctrinal? What is perennial, unchangeable in these, and what can be changed?
3. What can one make out of those Holy Fathers who are saints in one tradition and heretics in another? We must remember that changing one’s opinion, one’s point of view, does not take place from one day to the next.
4. What reactions will trigger eventual measures within each Church? Presently there are critical voices concerning the dogmatic agreement as well: in time can they wither or grow as intensity? Isn’t there the danger that, for the sake of resolving a schism, others may arise?