

Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East

Commission on Inter-Church Relations and Education Development

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JOINT COMMUNIQUE

of the PRO ORIENTE unofficial Consultation on the Theology of the Church of the East

In the last working session of the unofficial Consultation organized by the foundation PRO ORIENTE at Vienna on "Orthodoxy and Catholicity in the Syriac Tradition, with the Special Attention to the Theology of the Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire" on June 28, 1994, this Communiqué has been worked out in mutual agreement by all participants of the Consultation, which reads as follows:

“In her quest to promote theological understanding and ecumenical relations among the apostolic Churches, **PRO ORIENTE** Foundation has invited to Vienna from June 24-29, 1994, participants from the Oriental Catholic churches (Chaldean, Syrian, Maronite, Malabar and Malankara), from the Oriental Orthodox churches (Syrian Orthodox from Antioch and Malankara Orthodox from India) and the Assyrian Church, namely who share a common ecclesial heritage in the Syriac language and tradition. This is the first conference to include all the Syriac Churches mentioned.

Participants coming from twelve different church backgrounds and twelve nations, twelve bishops and a number of theologians have come together for this purpose. Present there were also staff of **PRO ORIENTE**, expert scholars on the theology and the history of these Churches, a representative of the Middle East Council of Churches and an observer from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

This historic ecumenical initiative of **PRO ORIENTE** was most warmly welcomed by all participants who gratefully accepted the fraternal hospitality of the foundation. The presence of His Eminence Hans Hermann Cardinal Groër, Archbishop of Vienna, underlined the importance of the event and was met with respect and enthusiasm.

The subjects that were treated, were Christology, the history of the Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire and the Eucharistic Anaphoras of the Church of the East. These topics were treated by Assyrian and Chaldean participants and a number of international renowned experts.

The theological papers dealt with the main topics:

1. The Christology of the Synods of the Church of the East under the Sasanian Empire, and of Bawai the Great's "Book on the Union", with special attention paid to the various understandings of the key Christological terms (in particular 'qnoma') current in the 5th-6th centuries. Here it was made very clear how different understandings of the meaning of these terms had led to verbally conflicting Christological statements.
2. The context and the different stages by which the Church of the East came to adopt distinctive 'qnomi' terminology.
3. The Christology of Nestorius and the problems of its interpretation.
4. The Vienna Christological Formula from the point of view of the Assyrian Church of the East.

Finally, there was a call for the further and common exploration of the different Christological traditions, especially the tradition of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius of Constantinople.

In the historical papers special attention was paid to two specific areas:

1. The early history of the Assyro-Chaldean Church of the East from 1st-7th centuries.
2. The expansion of this church across Asia, as far as China, in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Of particular relevance to the theme of the Consultation is the fact that the Assyro-Chaldean Church of the East was located to the east of and so outside the Roman Empire, with the important consequences that it was never directly involved in the Church Councils convened by the Roman Emperor within the Roman Empire. In the case of the Council of Nicea (325), however its creed and canons were subsequently officially accepted at the synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (410).

Two papers, on the anaphoras used by the Church of the East have been presented to the Consultation. Both focused on the issue of the absence of the Institution Narrative in the extant manuscripts containing the text of the anaphora of Addai and Mari. One paper dealt with the subject matter from the standpoint of the history of liturgy, the other from the biblical and patristic point of view.

Similar conclusions were reached; that the anaphora of Addai and Mari, as it stands in the manuscripts is an authentic anaphora of early Christianity, close to the primordial patterns of the Eucharistic prayer, and therefore quite valid as a consecrative liturgy, even in the context of Catholic theology.

We as Christians, seek to be united in a spirit of brotherhood in our faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, God and Savior. Thus, we recognize our Christian duty

to strive through prayer and dialogue towards reconciliation until Christ's wish to his One church (John 17: 21) is brought to a perfect and complete realization.

We have all endeavored for a deeper understanding of the pre-Ephesian, non-Chalcedonian, and Chalcedonian Christologies which have separated us until now.

Although we see that there are differences in the theological interpretation of the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ because of our different theological traditions, we were able to recognize the fact that we, in our common faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, regard his mystery to be inexhaustible and ineffable, and for the human mind never fully comprehensible or expressible. For this reason, we, at this consultation have started to discuss and further explore the principle of various theological expressions in the one Faith.

But realizing that there are still different emphases in the theological and dogmatic elaboration of Christ's mystery, we wish to encourage common efforts for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of our different Christologies in harmony with our different theological traditions. We are convinced, however, that these different Christological formulations on all sides need to be discussed in order to clarify further the teaching of the Council of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

To continue this understanding, participants in the consultation have agreed to form a *Follow-up Commission* constituting of one representative from each church tradition. The task of this commission will be to plan future consultations, symposia, publications, etc., and to develop the appropriate procedures and methods.

We recommend that **PRO ORIENTE** invites members of the Assyrian Church of the East to attend the forthcoming **PRO ORIENTE** regional symposia, as part of the effort to promote further contacts and collaboration with the Assyrian Church or the East.

The participants have also decided that an unofficial tri-lateral dialogue of **PRO ORIENTE** on issues of common concern for the three ecclesial traditions of the Oriental Catholic, Oriental Orthodox and Assyrian Church of the East should be organized. For the first dialogue round the topic will be on Christology.

In conclusion, we commonly submit ourselves to the witness of the Holy Scriptures and thus to the Apostolic Kerygma and express our intention not to become weary in the search for a common language concerning the mystery of salvation in our Lord in a fraternal spirit " . . . until we attain to the unity of

faith and to the knowledge of God's Son" (Eph 4: 13). We wish to see the mystery of compassion of God reflected in our enhanced life of Christian compassion.

All of us have experienced how fruitful this Consultation has been, and we pray that God who brought us together may bless us and guide our future efforts in such a way that one day we are all united in one communion of faith and love".