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Growing Consensus

The dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches

In January 2004 in Cairo, for the first time in history, the whole family of Oriental Orthodox Churches began to meet *par cum pari* with the Roman Catholic Church on an official level for theological dialogue; before that the Catholic Church was only in official dialogue with Oriental Orthodox Churches on a bilateral basis.¹ However, these Churches have been meeting unofficially since 1971 on the initiative of the Foundation *Pro Oriente* (Vienna, Austria), where a considerable amount of theological work has been done and a lot of ecumenical material have been made available.

In the present paper, it is not possible to reflect on all these endeavors in an extensive way, but we might give an overview and focus on some theological aspects, since these themes have been discussed *con variazioni* in all the other dialogues, too. We shall first introduce the *Pro Oriente* dialogue and focus on its Christological deliberations and disputed ecclesiological topics. Second, we will have a glimpse to the official Oriental Orthodox/Catholic bilateral dialogues and declarations before 2004, and finally give insight to the present official dialogue.

I. The unofficial dialogue sponsored by *Pro Oriente*

Two weeks before the third session of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) came to an end with the passage of the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), the then Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Franz König (1905-2004), on the advice of some Austrian intellectuals, decided to found *Pro Oriente*. The Foundation – an institution of the Catholic Archdioceses of Vienna and not an official tool of the Roman Catholic Church

or the Vatican – intends to contribute to ecumenical dialogues on an unofficial level. This approach prepared the ground for the official dialogue with the Byzantine Orthodox Church², and contributed substantially to official agreements with the Oriental Orthodox Churches. The idea has been that *Pro Oriente's* work, because it is “unofficial”, makes it possible for Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox theologians to confer frankly with their Roman Catholic colleagues in order that important historical and theological research on the common heritage of the Churches of East and West as well as personal encounter could occur on this level to support official relations.

As we explore the results of *Pro Oriente's* Consultations and Study Seminars between Roman Catholic and Oriental Orthodox theologians we have to be aware of the fact, that the joint communiqués are always preliminary results and only become “official” when they are received by an official dialogue committee, signed in a joint declaration between Popes and Patriarchs/Catholicoi, and agreed upon by the respective Holy Synods. However, it is a fact, too, that the results of the *Pro Oriente* dialogues are achieved because theologians and representatives of the various churches, faithful to their traditions and heritages, have come to the conviction that the discussed topics are points of consensus or at least emerging consensus. As the Communiqué of the third Vienna Consultation (1976) states: “As an unofficial consultation, we are not in a position to act as official representatives of our Churches or to take decisions in their names. We offer here to our Churches the results of our experience.”³ Moreover, as well known, some of the results have been incorporated in documents officially accepted by the Churches. The unofficial status did not reduce the sense of responsibility towards the Churches; on the contrary, the sense of responsibility was strong. Indeed, some of the theologians were also bishops and some would later occupy important positions in their Churches.

The inspiration for the unofficial Oriental Orthodox/Roman Catholic dialogue comes from the series of unofficial conversations between the Oriental Orthodox and Orthodox Churches.⁴ In 1971 *Pro Oriente* started a series of five unofficial ecumenical *Consultations* between Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians in Vienna, continuing 1973, 1976, 1978, and 1988. These consultations were followed by so-called *Study Seminars* (On Primacy 1991, On Councils and Conciliarity 1992, On Ec-

clesiology 1994, Authority and Jurisdiction 1996). They organized further *Regional Symposia* in Wadi Natrun, Egypt (1991); Kerala, India (1993); Kaslik, Lebanon (1994); and Kröffelbach, Germany (1997). The aim of these Symposia was to inform a wider public – bishops, priests, theologians, laypeople – about the results achieved in the Vienna dialogues.⁵

1. Christology

Already the first Consultation (1971) arrived at a Christological Consensus. It is valuable to study not only the very paragraph of the Christological Agreement, which has become famous as the so-called *Vienna Christological Formula*, but also its context.

a. The basis

The theologians had to look for a consensus clearly founded upon the common ancient tradition, the experience of communion in life and faith of the first generations. This common basis was found

in the same Apostolic tradition, particularly as affirmed in the Nicean-Constantinopolitanian Creed; we confess the dogmatic decisions and teachings of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431); we all agree in rejecting both the Nestorian and Eutychian positions about Jesus Christ.⁶

This basis is confirmed again at the end of the Communiqué of the first Consultation: “We commonly submit ourselves to the witness of the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament and thus to the Apostolic Kerygma [- -].”⁷ The second and fifth Consultation further confirmed this common basis, i.e. the Apostolic tradition, the Nicean-Constantinopolitanian Creed, and the first three Ecumenical Councils.⁸

b. The consensus

Solidly founded on this common traditional basis, the Joint Communiqué now comes to an Christological Consensus, the core of the *Vienna Christological Formula*:

1. We believe that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is God the Son Incarnate; perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity.
2. His divinity was not separated from his humanity for a single moment, not for the twinkling of an eye.
3. His humanity is one with his divinity without commixtion, without confusion, without division, without separation.⁹

Occasionally it has been said that this formula used a new language to express the common faith in Christ, avoiding the disputed technical terms *hypostasis*, *physis* and *prosopon*. In fact, it uses an "old" language, embedded in the tradition.¹⁰

The first sentence refers to the *Formula of Union* (433) as quoted in the letter of Cyril of Alexandria to John of Antioch, the so-called *Laetentur-letter*.¹¹ The phrase is also present in the Dogmatic Formula of the *Council of Chalcedon* (451): "[- -] our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the Same perfect in Godhead, the Same perfect in manhood."¹²

The next sentence shows that significant elements of this formula are from the Confession of Faith of the *Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil*, a profession found in the so-called post-Anaphora declared loudly by the priest just before communion. It is important to remark that this liturgical confession has been prayed through the centuries by the Coptic Orthodox Church and now it is part of an ecumenical consensus. Furthermore, the remarkable expression that His divinity parted not from his humanity "for a single moment nor for a twinkling of an eye" can be found in the *Life of Dioscorus*, which was written by Theopistos (6th century). The text is preserved in Syriac.¹³ This is a tragic irony of history: The tradition ascribes this expression to Dioscorus, the Alexandrian Patriarch, who was deposed at the Council of Chalcedon. He is now honored to be part of an ecumenical consensus.

As ecumenical research has proved, we have to refer to Dioscorus also concerning the last sentence of the above quoted text. The famous adverbs are an important part of the *Chalcedonian Definition* of the unity of Christ and they are also found in *Cyril's letters*.¹⁴ At Chalcedon it was Dioscorus of Alexandria, who for the first time made a statement implying these adverbs.¹⁵ Last but not least we will find three of the adverbs also in the Confession of faith of the *Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil*. Thus, the four adverbs are part of the common tradition.

This christological agreement was re-affirmed and supplemented on certain points by the second Vienna Consultation (1973). The crucial paragraph is:

We all agree that our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is consubstantial with the Father in his Divinity Himself became consubstantial with us in His Humanity. He perfectly unites in Himself perfect Godhead with perfect Manhood without division, without separation, without change, without commixture. The flesh possessing rational soul did not exist before the union.¹⁶

The most important elements are the “rational soul”, which eliminates every suspicion of Apollinarism, and the double “consubstantiality”, which is part of the *Chalcedonian definition*, but was already present in the *Formula of Union* (433).

This brief analysis of the sources of the Vienna Christological Consensus reveals how much the Churches preserved in common, despite the theological stereotypes and accusations prevalent in the post-Chalcedonian struggles. It also shows how much the Christological Consensus, as well as the Council of Chalcedon, is shaped by Cyrillian theological language.

c. The terminology

In attempting to describe the relationship of divinity to humanity in the incarnate Christ, human language is too weak. The various doctrinal definitions with verbally conflicting formulae caused trouble, even though their underlying intentions were clearly the same. In fact, the second Vienna Consultation (1973) remarks:

The problem of terminology remains with us. For those of us in the Western tradition, to hear of the one nature of Christ can be misleading, because it may be misunderstood as a denial of his humanity. For those of us in the Oriental Orthodox Churches to hear of two natures can be misleading because it can be misunderstood as affirming two persons in Christ.

[- -] Our common effort to clarify the meaning of the Greek terms hypostasis and physis in the Trinitarian and Christological context made us realize how difficult it was to find a satisfactory definition of these terms that could do justice to both contexts in a consistent manner.¹⁷

The text tries to open the way to a right understanding of apparently contradictory points of view. It became clear that differing terminologies could express substantially the same faith. Faced with a variety of views on matters of doctrine that were seen unsatisfactory, the Church fathers of the 4th and 5th centuries developed their own preferred formulations on different theological topics using the analytical tools of Greek philosophy. Because the theologians involved came from different backgrounds, some technical terms were not understood in the same way, and this – not surprisingly – led to misunderstanding and confusion. However, if the different formulations are understood in the way each theologian intended the terms to be understood, then it becomes clear that, despite the verbal conflict, the various formulations are seeking to express the same truth concerning the mystery of the Incarnation. It is of utmost importance to find out what each theologian intended to say with the terms he used, rather than asking what his opponents imagined they read in these expressions. The different approaches are complimentary, and underlying the verbally conflicting formulas, there is usually a common understanding. The second Vienna Consultation (1973) is very clear about that:

We recognize the limits of every philosophical and theological attempt to grasp the mystery in concept or express it in words. If the formulas coined by the fathers and doctors of the Churches have enabled us to obtain an authentic glimpse of the divine truth, we recognize that every formula that we can devise needs further interpretation. We saw that what appears to be the right formulation can be wrongly understood, and also how even behind an apparently wrong formulation there can be a right understanding. We understand that when our common father in Christ, St. Cyril of Alexandria speaks of the one Incarnate nature of God's Word, he does not deny but rather express the full and perfect humanity of Christ. We believe also, that the definition of the Council of Chalcedon, rightly understood today, affirms the unity of person and the indissoluble union of Godhead and Manhood in Christ despite the phrase 'in two natures'.¹⁸

This quote asserts that our human attempts to express in words the mystery of the Christ-event are never able to grasp the truth in its fullness. The text shows mutual understanding and acceptance concerning the different terminologies. Every human expression always is preliminary and needs further interpretation.

In all the Consultations of the Vienna dialogue participants are fully aware of the fact that the person and salvific work of the Lord Jesus Christ is a mystery. It can never completely be expressed in words nor even fully understood by the human mind. Already the first Vienna Consultation states briefly: "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."¹⁹ And the second Consultation (1973) states, "no created mind can fully comprehend the mystery of how Godhead and Manhood became united in the one Lord Jesus Christ."²⁰

d. The Methodology

The Vienna Consultations could only accept various Christological terminologies that contain the same substance of faith by defining limits. It had to be clear within which framework different terminologies are possible. Therefore the first Consultation (1971) rejected "Nestorian and Eutychian positions about Christ". The fifth Consultation (1988) is even more detailed and emphasized

that the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God could not be exhaustively formulated in words, and that within the limits of condemned errors like Arianism, Nestorianism and Eutychianism, a certain plurality of expressions was permissible in relations to the inseparable and unconfused hypostatic union of the human and the divine in the one Lord Jesus Christ [- -].²¹

As the apostolic tradition and the first three councils are the common basis, so "Nestorian and Eutychian positions" are rightly seen as the heretical extremes of the Christological spectrum as far as these terms are correctly understood.

Drawing the line between acceptable differences in expression and unacceptable teaching on central theological issues is never easy. Since the Council of Chalcedon and especially in the controversial literature of the 5th and 6th centuries, supporters and adversaries of the Council accused each other mutually of "Nestorianism" and "Eutychianism". The two expressions became stereotypes and every side was sure they knew what content the two words have. In the twentieth century a lot of research has been done

on the questions of whether the heresy of “Nestorianism” was the faith of the historic Nestorius, and whether the heresy called “Eutychianism” was the faith of the seemingly uneducated monk Eutyches. Here it is not the place to discuss this research, but we have to be aware of this problem.²²

We must discuss the term “Nestorianism” very carefully in the light of scholarly developments since the beginning of the 20th century. In the present official dialogue it is essential for both sides to be aware of the Christological Consensus and to keep distance from the mutual accusations of the 5th and 6th centuries. One factor in these severe accusations was the different understandings of the key technical terms beneath their stereotyped usage. In the course of the ecumenical dialogues we realized that terms could have various meanings and contents. Rejecting the mentioned theological positions “Nestorianism” and “Eutychianism” just by using their names is therefore not sufficient. In this context we have to refer to the Oriental Orthodox/Reformed dialogue, because this Christological Agreement has the most precise description of the limits of Christological expressions of all ecumenical agreements of the last decades. The document, signed in the Netherlands (1994) by H.G. Metropolitan Amba Bishoy and by Rev. Milan Opocensky, contains the remarkable paragraph:

Both sides agree in rejecting the teaching which separates or divides the human nature, both soul and body in Christ, from His divine nature or reduces the union of the natures to the level of conjoining. Both sides agree in rejecting the teaching which confuses the human nature in Christ with the divine nature so that the former is absorbed in the latter and thus ceases to exist.²³

Rather than using the terms “Nestorianism” and “Eutychianism” which are subjects of scholarly theological dispute, this Christological Agreement profoundly describes exactly what the two parties believe. This certainly was also the conviction of the Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians in the Vienna Consultations. The focus was on substance not mere epithets. It has to be clear on the one hand that Christ is not an ordinary man whom God adopted, that there are neither two Sons nor two Subjects. It has to be clear on the other hand that divinity and humanity are not mixed into a third nature, and that divinity is not a principle of union that absorbed humanity.

2. Ecclesiology

Although the final Communiqué of the second Vienna Consultation focuses on Christology, the major part of the papers and discussions were about ecclesiology. Among other topics, Ecumenical Councils and the difference in number were studied, but the Consultation concluded that “no consensus is easily attainable in this issue.”²⁴ Participants decided to study the topic more deeply in the third Consultation, starting with a general view on ecclesiology.

a. Universal and Local Church

After a recapitulation of the two previous Consultations the third PRO ORIENTE Consultation (1976) started to study each other’s concepts of the Church. Excellent papers were presented to discuss the notions of local Church, universal Church, and Church Catholic. The final Communiqué conveys the result of this discussion as follows:

We confessed that it is the same mystery of the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church, the body of our Risen and Ascended Lord, that is being manifest both in the ,local’ Church and in the ,universal’ Church. One and the same Church, for there cannot be more than one, is manifested both locally and universally as koinonia of truth and love, characterized by Eucharistic communion and the corporate unity of the episcopate. The unity of the Church has its source and prototype in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, into which we have been baptized.²⁵

This paragraph touches several issues. First, there is agreement that the universal Church exists in and from local churches. There is only one Church; its unity is expressed through participation in the Eucharist and collegiality of the episcopate, while the model for this unity is the Triune God. Theologically we can summarize this text in terms of the concepts of *Communio Ecclesiology*, *Eucharistic Ecclesiology*, and *Trinitarian Ecclesiology*. These subjects were taken up again in a Study Seminar “On Ecclesiology and the Unity of the Church” (1994). In that Seminar’s Agreed Report one can read:

On each place where the Eucharist is celebrated in the one faith and around the bishop in Apostolic succession the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is present in its fullness. This local church is in communion with all other churches that celebrate the same Eucharist in the same Apostolic Faith. The links of communion are the bishops. The worldwide church (Church universal) is a communion of local Churches, bound together at every level by ways of a conciliar fellowship. It is within this conciliarity that presence and function of Primacy should be seen, at the local, regional and universal levels.²⁶

Although there is this common understanding and although the Third Study Seminar (1994) states that the Catholic Church and Oriental Orthodox Churches have so much in common “regarding the Apostolic Faith and sacramental life that they can call each other Sister Churches”, further ecclesiological problems became evident, especially the interrelation between primacy and conciliarity. The integral connection of ecclesiology, catholicity, conciliarity, primacy, and church unity is a very sensitive point in the debate. They have to be seen in a holistic way, which has made the systematic discussion since 1978 difficult. The third, fourth, and fifth Consultations as well as all the Study Seminars tried to cut the Gordian knot. There has been no final solution, only a lot of useful results.

b. Ecumenical Councils and Conciliarity

This issue was the major question of the Third Vienna Consultation (1976) and of the Second Study Seminar (1992). As a result of the schism and the fact that the Oriental Orthodox Churches recognize only three Councils as ecumenical, there are a multitude of questions related to this topic.

There is agreement in the Third Vienna Consultation (1976) that “conciliarity, i.e. the understanding of the Church as a *koinonia* [is] so essential to the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ”²⁷. Therefore the participating theologians made the important methodological step of distinguishing “between the council or synod as an event, and the synod as an aspect of the continuing structure of the Church’s life.”²⁸ Furthermore, the communiqué indicates:

As for the council as an event, we could not agree on how and by whom such a world-wide council of churches should be convoked and conducted, nor could we agree completely on the procedure for the reception of past or future councils.²⁹

This paragraph alludes to unresolved questions about the relationship between local and universal Church, the relationship between Councils and Primacy, the reception of Councils, and the criteria of their ecumenicity. Despite this divergence both sides affirm “the right of the churches to convoke a council whenever found necessary” and that there is “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.”³⁰

The second Study Seminar (1992) showed that “Conciliarity” itself is no longer a controversial issue. It is a main point of consensus that the “Church is by its very nature conciliar” and that “Conciliarity means more than Councils. Conciliarity is communion (koinonia)”³¹ with a vertical-transcendent dimension as well as a horizontal dimension of all faithful in time and space.

Both sides agree that Ecumenical Councils are an important expression of conciliarity. In particular, the first three Councils of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), and Ephesus (431) are the basis of the Christological Consensus, a fact that has been underlined since the first Consultation (1971), and which implicitly seems to suggest the idea of a “Hierarchy of Councils”³². For future discussions on this topic we will have to speak about councils of the different degree and their embedding in the respective traditions.³³

Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic participants were in agreement that there is neither a prescribed time rhythm for holding ecumenical councils nor any prescribed procedure. Furthermore, there is agreement that the ecumenicity of a Council is not expressed through the number of participants, or a specific procedure, but through reception.

The Study Seminar (1992) mentions several points to be further clarified. All of these have to do, in one way or another, with the role of the Church of Rome and her bishop.

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. [- -] The disagreement is on a unique, distinct and exclusive Petrine office, divinely instituted within the Apostolic College. [- -] The disagreement is about the indispensability in a unique manner, of the consent of one particular bishop of a particular See.³⁴

However, there is agreement that after communion has been restored between the Churches a new procedure has to be developed for convoking, conducting, and confirming a council, "faithful both to the tradition of the Church and to the needs and possibilities of the time"³⁵.

c. Primacy, Jurisdiction and Authority in the Church

Already the Second Vienna Consultation (1973) started to discuss the topic of primacy but did not find a consensus to bridge the ministry of St. Peter, as the Roman Catholic Church understands it, and the Ecumenical Councils. The principle of collegiality emphasized by the Second Vatican Council has been appreciated as "a move in the right direction"³⁶.

The fourth Vienna Consultation (1978) had as its primary topic the nature and scope of primacy in the exercise of ecclesiastical authority. Further, an entire Study Seminar (1991) focused on Primacy, and the fourth Study Seminar (1996) worked on Authority and Jurisdiction. It is evident that in the context of this paper only certain tendencies can be elaborated. There is a significant amount of fruitful theological work in the papers.

The Catholic theologians at the fourth Consultation (1978) showed the willingness to reinterpret the First Vatican Council without infringing on the essence of the dogma. According to the discussion notes, these efforts were appreciated by Oriental Orthodox participants. The Catholics analyzed the historical, sociological, and political background of this council of the 19th century and pointed out that the qualities given to Roman primacy were conditioned by this background and also had pragmatic motives. Behind the definition were fears of the Church being threatened by the mood of the time and the response was an exaggeration of the ideas of sovereignty. The conciliar decision is a response to a challenge posed by a particular historical situation. This is also reflected in the final Communi-

qué's insight that "infallibility [- -] pertains to the Church as a whole, as the Body of Christ and abode of the Holy Spirit."³⁷

Another problem noted is the various functions today effectively exercised by the bishop of Rome: the service of the Bishop of Rome, metropolitan for the bishoprics centered on Rome, Primate of Italy, the function of Western Patriarch, and at least until 1870 the function of a sovereign of the Church State. Catholic theologians made it clear that the duty as Bishop of Rome is the first and fundamental activity of the Pope.

Some of the papers of the Oriental Orthodox participants did not accept a universal primacy of jurisdiction. However, all are convinced that authority and primacy as well as conciliarity and the believing community properly belong to the nature of the Church. Further the Communiqué points out that the goal is a full union of sister churches with a basically conciliar structure. There was no agreement regarding one particular Church as the center of the unity, but the "need of a special ministry for unity was recognized by all."³⁸ In this context also the Oriental Catholic Churches are mentioned. While the right of the Eastern Catholic Churches to exist is affirmed, any proselytism is clearly rejected "according to the principles of Vatican II and subsequent statements of the See of Rome"³⁹.

The first *Study Seminar* (1991) focused on Primacy, too. The intention was to compare the various concrete forms of primacy in the respective churches. For this purpose organigramms of the individual participating churches were presented. The problem was that ecclesiological, theological, and juridical elements came together at once. Altogether it has been observed that all the present structures are the result of historical processes and reflect responses to various demands facing particular churches in particular contexts.⁴⁰

Significant differences were observed in the relation between Head and Synod of Bishops and in the way the churches understand the meaning of primacy. This touches in particular the different understanding of the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches concerning the place and the functions of the Bishop of Rome in the one Church of Christ. The main problem is the contrasting approaches to the subject: the Roman Catholic church developed a theology of primacy, while the Oriental Orthodox Churches regard primacy as a historical and jurisdictional institution. This becomes clear in two separate reflections drafted by

the participants of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and a Roman Catholic participant in addition to the Final Statement of the Study Seminar.

In the Oriental Orthodox statement a 'Petrine office' is very much questioned, and probably the core of these three pages is the following paragraph:

The Oriental Orthodox believe that no See could exercise authority over all the churches in the world. Nor do they believe that communion with the See of Rome is any more indispensable than communion with any other See for the visible manifestation of the unity of the Church.⁴¹

The Roman Catholic reflection starts with the necessity of a systematic approach, and stresses points of consensus: Primacy is practiced in all our Churches on different levels and in different ways; it is necessary to distinguish these levels; primacy has to be studied in organic relation with the principle of conciliarity; and it is vital to distinguish between the principle of the need for a primacy and the concrete way it is practiced, as the practice has taken very different forms in different Churches. The current praxis has to be seen in the context of its historical development. Therefore the western primacy as exercised in the 19th and 20th centuries is not the only possibility.⁴² From a Roman Catholic point of view, however, it is important that

Primacy cannot be reduced to its purely juridical dimension. It is fundamentally a service to preserve, manifest and promote unity in faith, witness, service and liturgy. The concept of primacy of jurisdiction, which seems to constitute a major difficulty for the Oriental Orthodox Churches, should be studied within the full meaning and the manifold dimensions of primacy as a service of communion.⁴³

Primacy has to be seen in a holistic sense, in its place within an ecclesiology of communion on various levels and in constant interaction with conciliarity.

If one reads carefully all the papers of the Vienna Consultations and Study Seminars concerning ecumenical Councils and primacy, more points of emerging consensus could be excavated than are reflected in the Joint Communiqués and Agreed statements. The key is to respect and

learn to understand the different developments of our traditions in very different historical contexts after the division.

The upcoming question obviously is how to develop a model of church union – faithful to the tradition of the Church – that reconciles the ecclesiological tension between universal responsibility and local autonomy, between collegiality and primacy. There are different approaches to this challenge in the respective Church traditions.

II. Official Declarations between the Catholic Church and particular Oriental Orthodox Churches

We were analyzing *Pro Oriente's* efforts because tremendous work has been done and immense progress has been achieved on that level and had inspired later official endeavors. The importance of the *Vienna Christological Formula*, produced on an unofficial level, is evident: it served as a basis for subsequent dialogue and Common Declarations between these Churches on an official level.

In an overview reference should be made to Common declarations approved or signed by the Bishop of Rome on the one side and the Head of a particular Oriental Orthodox Church on the other.⁴⁴ Rather than chronological, we would like to focus on three main topics which can be found in these Joint declarations: Christology, Sacramental Life and Ecclesiology.

1. Christology

One of the first Christological Statements was signed by Pope Paul VI and the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatius Yocoub III in 1971 approving that there

[- -] is no difference in the faith they profess concerning the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and became really man, even if over the centuries difficulties have arisen out of the different theological expressions by which this faith was expressed.⁴⁵

This pioneering statement was a first direct result of the unofficial *Pro Oriente* Consultation. A more comprehensive Christological agreement was signed in 1973 by Paul VI and Coptic Pope Shenouda III.⁴⁶ This one is directly quoting the so-called *Vienna Christological Formula* and has not to be repeated here. Anba Shenouda was active participating and drafting this Formula in this first PRO ORIENTE Consultation, just a few months before he became Patriarch.

About ten years later an equally extensive agreement on Christology was signed by Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas and Pope John Paul II in 1984.⁴⁷ Also this one follows quite literally the *Vienna Christological Formula* and thus the Declaration between Paul VI and Shenouda III.

In 1990, Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Mar Basilius Marthoma Mathews II from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church approved a Christological Agreement, which might be the most mature between an Oriental Orthodox and the Catholic Church. Therefore a part of it should be quoted here:

We affirm our common faith in Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior, the Eternal Logos of God, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit from the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. We believe that Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is true God and true man. The Word of God has taken a human body with a rational soul, uniting humanity with divinity.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is one, perfect in his humanity and perfect in his divinity – at once consubstantial with the Father in his divinity, and consubstantial with us in his humanity. His humanity is one with his divinity – without change, without commingling, without division and without separation. In the Person of the Eternal Logos Incarnate are united and active in a real and perfect way the divine and human natures, with all their properties, faculties and operations.⁴⁸

This is a concise and transparent text based on a balanced combination of the descending Alexandrian perspective and the Chalcedonian terminology.

Furthermore in 1993, when Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarch Abune Paulos visited Rome, Pope John Paul II touched the Christological question in his Greeting Address⁴⁹. He affirmed the one faith in Christ although “our traditions used different formulations to express the same ineffable mystery”.

Although the earliest common declarations between a bishop of Rome and a Head of an Oriental Orthodox Church had been signed with the Armenian Church in 1967 and 1970⁵⁰, a first explicit Christological agreement is to be found only in December 1996. Pope Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I of Etchmiadzin signed a short and concise Christological statement which is reminiscent to previous statements going back to the Vienna Christological Formula.⁵¹ Only about one month later, in January 1997, Pope John Paul II signed an analogical declaration with Catholicos Aram I of Cilicia, referring to the communion in faith declared with Catholicos Karekin I without going into details or quoting the previous text.

From a catholic point of view, the recognition of the orthodoxy of Christological faith of the Oriental Orthodox Churches can be considered as accomplished although an official Christological Consensus between *all* the Oriental Orthodox Churches as a family and the Roman Catholic Church is still missing. If such an Christological agreement should be formulated in future it would be possible, on the firm basis of the already achieved common faith, to deepen our understanding of both theological understanding and theological terminology.

2. Sacramental life

Several of the above mentioned Common Declarations also deal with sacramental theology and practice. There can be found some highly significant though concise statements regarding the sacraments of the Church. The Common Declaration signed by Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin II of Etchmiadzin in 2000 might serve as an example here⁵², because it is one of the latest official text signed by the heads of Churches on a bilateral basis:

We acknowledge furthermore that both the Catholic Church and the Armenian Church have true sacraments, above all – by apostolic succession of bishops – the priesthood and the Eucharist. We continue to pray for full

and visible communion between us. The liturgical celebration we preside over together, the sign of peace we exchange and the blessing we give together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, testify that we are brothers in the episcopacy.

However, the most extensive and substantial agreement on sacramental life and practice is to be found in the Common Declaration signed in 1984 by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Zakka I Iwas.⁵³ This text is probably the most elaborated agreement the Catholic Church has with an Orthodox Church. On the basis of the doctrinal agreement on Christology both Church leaders acknowledge that the “identity in Faith” is “not yet complete” and that for this reason “the Holy Eucharist cannot yet be celebrated by us”, but nevertheless they feel themselves entitled to envisage collaboration between both Churches in pastoral care, particularly in the field of sacramental life, which finds its centre in the Eucharist. Because of the “precarious conditions of these difficult times” the Church heads diagnose situations of pastoral necessity and permit the following:

It is not rare, in fact, for our faithful to find access to a priest of their own Church materially or morally impossible. Anxious to meet their needs and with their spiritual benefit in mind, we authorize them in such cases to ask for the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick from lawful priests of either of our two sister Churches, when they need them. It would be a logical corollary of collaboration in pastoral care to cooperate in priestly formation and theological education. Bishops are encouraged to promote sharing of facilities for theological education where they judge it to be advisable. While doing this we do not forget that we must still do all in our power to achieve the full visible communion between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and ceaselessly implore our Lord to grant us unity which alone will enable us to give to the world a fully unanimous Gospel witness.

This is an excellent Christian witness with a deep pastoral concern demonstrating a notable degree of consensus between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church. It has to be said, that the Catholic Church formally recognizes the validity of all sacraments celebrated by the Oriental Orthodox Churches and it would be an enormous step forward to have

similar pastoral agreements with all Oriental Orthodox Churches like the one with the Syrian Orthodox. This would, however, presuppose, that all Oriental Orthodox Churches also recognize the validity of the sacraments celebrated in the Catholic Church.

3. Ecclesiology

The third doctrinal field of growing consensus has to do with Ecclesiology. The official agreements touch various ecclesiological issues and so does especially the official bilateral dialogue between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church from 1974 to 1992.⁵⁴ Topics have been the hierarchical communion of the Church, ecclesiology of communion, elements of communion, unity and diversity, refusal of proselytism etc. which cannot be touched in detail here. These were topics also discussed in the PRO ORIENTE meetings mentioned above. And all these previous endeavors and results on the unofficial and official bilateral level flew into the official dialogue which finally started in 2004.

III. The official Oriental Orthodox/Roman Catholic Dialogue

On January 27-29, 2003, a Preparatory Committee for the establishment of a Dialogue Commission involving representatives of the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches came together in Rome and developed a work plan for a future theological dialogue. The dialogue then started in 2004 in Cairo. Since then the *“International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches”* has been meeting every January either in Rome or in a country of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.⁵⁵ This Commission consists of 14 Catholic and 14 Oriental Orthodox representatives comprising the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of all Armenians, Holy Etchmiadzin), the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias), the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church.

The first phase of this dialogue (2003 to 2009) focused on Ecclesiology and resulted in the common text "Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church"⁵⁶. The methodology of the dialogue is as simple as effective: scholarly (theological, patristic, historical, liturgical) papers are presented on specific issues from each side and provide the basis for further discussion. By that the document presents a synthesis of basic insights and conclusions. Particularly the following topics were part of the theological exchange and dispute: "Church as Communion" in Rome (2005), "Authority in the Church" in Etchmiadzin (2006) and "Mission of the Church" in Rome (2007).⁵⁷

After an Introduction, the document starts with a reflection on the "Mystery of the Church" with subchapters on "The Holy Trinity and the Church of Communion", "The Attributes of the Church", "Growing Towards Full Communion", "Points For Further Study And Discussion". An amount of consensus could be found on the sacramental Nature of the Church, even after fifteen hundred years of separation. Although this chapter is highly theological, it does not forget the pastoral implications and ends with:

27. Where full communion is still unattainable for historical or canonical reasons, advanced convergence in matters of faith should allow further theological and pastoral agreements to be made between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, particularly in answering to the urgent needs of their communities, where they live together. In this effort, our Churches will have to address the questions of mutual recognition of baptism and mixed Christian marriages.

The second chapter focuses on ecclesial hierarchy and "Bishops in apostolic succession" while the third part develops the field of "Synodality/Collegiality and Primacies" (the latter in Plural!) with subchapters on "Local/Diocesan Churches and their Bishops", "Relationship between Synodality/Conciliarity and Primacies", and the "Ecclesiological meaning of Synods/Councils". Points for further Study and Discussion are added with the not surprising statement:

While our Churches are in basic agreement concerning the functioning of primacy and synodality/conciliarity at the local and regional levels, they differ on the way these concepts can be applied at the universal level.

However, one has to add, that the fraternal atmosphere of the discussion on this topic is not comparable with the one in the official Orthodox/Catholic dialogue. The Joint Commission for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches is working in an extremely constructive way, in a fraternal character and a true desire to step forward towards unity. There is a cordial atmosphere of openness and love, with mutual respect and faithfulness. That the Joint Commission could pass such a substantial paper in a comparatively short time is also due to this togetherness *and* to the substantial preliminary work on the unofficial level. The participating representatives have already gone a long way together in the ecumenical movement and mutual trust has grown throughout the years.

A second phase commenced with the meeting which took place in the Armenian Apostolic Catholicosate in Antelias/Lebanon in 2010, which focused on the reception of Councils and the way in which each Church expressed their communion in the first five centuries. It has to be taken into consideration that only with Emperor Constantine the structure of the imperial church has started to develop patriarchates of different ranks. The present ecumenical discussion on Autocephaly and Primacy – especially in the Orthodox Churches – usually focuses on this model, which has been called the “Pentarchy”. But this is a model, which only applies for the Church within the Roman Empire and *prima vista* does not include Churches like those in Armenia, Persia, Ethiopia, and India. In that sense the pre-Constantinian era seems to be interesting and the dialogue started to study the ways how communion and communication among the Churches existed until the mid-fifth century. The report of the plenary session of the eighth meeting in Rome 2011 states:

In these various studies, the members of the commission focused more precisely on the concrete expressions of communion and communication among the churches before the separation. Indeed, communion was expressed primarily through various forms of communication. It was noted that in the pre-Constantinian period, there was an intense communication among the churches, especially in times of crisis. There was a common sense of responsibility towards the other churches that was found most clearly in the exchange of letters and synodal decisions. These provided a means of conveying encouragement and challenge to one another, as well

as theological clarifications. This exchange was mutual among the various churches. It exemplified a remarkable degree of communion among local communities in a process that lacked central direction after 250 years of expansion throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, including Armenia, Persia, Ethiopia and India.

In the meetings of Rome (2011), Addis Abeba (2012) and Rome (2013) studies focused specifically on the exercise of communion among the Churches in the Early Church and its implications for our search for communion today. Theological and historical studies on the New Testament evidence, the exchange of letters and visits, Synods/Councils and their reception, prayer and liturgy as means of communion and communication, Martyrdom as an element of communion and communication, Monasticism, and the veneration of Saints have been presented so far. The comprehensiveness of the topics might demonstrate that the dialogue would like to understand Church Unity in a more holistic way than in simple canonical terms and the dispute about a “protos” or a “primus inter pares”, which has to be regarded as a narrowing of ecumenical perspective. The Joint Commission is on the way to draft a second document, but there is no pressure to issue it, since it needs time to understand Church Unity in a more integral way.

The results of these studies might give new insights, as well for other theological dialogues. But also the fraternal atmosphere as one important fact might serve as a model for ecumenical conversations. It may be good to remember that the divisions of the Church tragically weakened Christianity especially in the Middle East, where it was born. In the course of the last decades, little by little a new awareness developed, leading gradually to the discovery that the various traditions were in fact trying to express the same faith with different and sometimes apparently contradictory concepts and expressions. This theological and ecumenical process realized that “Councils and Fathers previously anathematized or condemned are orthodox in their teachings”, as the official Orthodox/Oriental Orthodox dialogue expressed it.⁵⁸ Despite possible upcoming difficulties, the present situation of our Churches demands that we devote renewed energy to our common journey towards unity in the form of mutual understanding, solidarity, and common witness.

Notes and Literature

- ¹ There is one exception: The national official dialogue in the United States that has met regularly since 1978. Cf. National Conference of Catholic Bishops/Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches (eds.), *Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic Interchurch Marriages and other Pastoral Relationships* (Washington, 1995).
- ² Cf. The path-breaking first ecclesiological consultation between orthodox and roman catholic theologians KOINONIA, which was organized by Pro Oriente in 1974 in collaboration with the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate Chambésy and the Pontifical Secretariate (now Council) for Promoting Christian Unity. Published as: Pro Oriente (Hg.), *Auf dem Weg zur Einheit des Glaubens*. Innsbruck-Wien 1976.
- ³ Communiqué 3rd Consultation, in: *Wort und Wahrheit Suppl. Issue 5* (1988) 156. In the following I use the abbreviation WuWS with the respective number of the volume.
- ⁴ Cf. P. Gregorios-W.H. Lazareth-N.A. Nissiotis (eds.), *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite? Towards Convergence in Orthodox Christology* (Geneva, 1981). The main impulse for the Vienna Consultations came from Vardapet (now Archbishop) Mesrob K. Krikorian, who was involved in the unofficial Orthodox/Oriental Orthodox conversations and has participated in all the Vienna Consultations.
- ⁵ Published as Vienna Consultations between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Papers and Minutes: WuWS 1-5 (1971.1973.1976.1978.1988). And Pro Oriente (Hg.), *The Vienna Dialogue*. Vienna 1993 (Booklet 4: On Primacy. First Study Seminar 1991); Vienna 1993 (Booklet 5: Councils and Conciliarity. Second Study Seminar 1992); Vienna 1995 (Booklet 7: On Ecclesiology. Third Study Seminar 1994). The PRO ORIENTE dialogues as well as the official ones (esp. Oriental Orthodox/Roman Catholic, Oriental Orthodox/Eastern Orthodox) are analyzed in detail in my *Koptische Kirche und Reichskirche: Altes Schisma und neuer Dialog*. (Innsbrucker theologische Studien 48) Innsbruck, 1997.
- ⁶ Communiqué 1st Consultation, in: WuWS 5, 152.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Cf. Ibid. 153, 149.
- ⁹ Ibid. 152. verses: D.W. Winkler.
- ¹⁰ Cf. D.W. Winkler, "Ein Passus aus der koptischen Basileiosliturgie und der syrischen Vita Dioscori als Quellen der Wiener Christologischen Formel", in: S. Emmel, M. Krause u.a. (eds.), *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit. Vol 1* (Sprachen und Kulturen des Christlichen Orients 6,1) Wiesbaden, 1999, 534-545.
- ¹¹ Cf. Cyril Alex., *Ep. 39 ad Joannem Antiochenum Episcopum, missa per Paulum Episcopum Emesae* (PG 77, 173C-181C); Johannes Ant., *Ep. 38 Joannes Antiocheni ad Cyrillum* (PG 77, 169D-173B). Cyril quotes the symbolum antiochenum of the Letter of John of Antioch but makes a slight modification: He strengthens the unity of the subject by adding "in" twice to the Antiochian expression 'perfect God' and 'perfect man'. Cf. A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition I*. 7th ed. Atlanta, 1975. 500.

- ¹² Engl. Trans R.V. Sellers, *The Council of Chalcedon*. London, 1953,210.
- ¹³ Theopistos, "Histoire de Dioscore, Patriarche d'Alexandrie", ed. M. F. Nau, in: *Journal Asiatique* 10 (1903) 21-108 (syr.), 241-310 (french); for the expression "not for an twinkling of an eye" cf. 65.36 (syr.), 279.254 (french).
- ¹⁴ Cf. Cyril, *Letter to Acacius of Melitene*, in: L.R. Wickham, *Selected Letters*. Oxford, 1983, 49; Letter to Succensus, in: *ibid.* 76f. Cf. M.K. Krikorian, "The Christological Consensus", in: Pro Oriente (ed.), *The Vienna Dialogue: Middle East Regional Symposium Deir Amba Bishoy* (Booklet 3). Vienna, 1993; 92.
- ¹⁵ Cf. ACO II 1,1 p. 112, nr 263: "We do not speak of confusion, neither of division nor of change. Let him who says confusion, change or mixture be anathema." At the first Consultation it is V.C. Samuel, "The Council of Chalcedon: An Analysis of a Conflict", in: *WuWS* 1 (1971) 53 who makes this important comment. Communiqué 2nd Consultation, in: *WuWS* 5, 153.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.* 153f.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Communiqué 1st Consultation, in: *WuWS* 5, 152.
- ²⁰ Communiqué 2nd Consultation, in: *WuWS* 5, 153.
- ²¹ Communiqué 5th Consultation, in: *WuWS* 5, 149.
- ²² Cf. esp. L. Abramowski, "The History of Research into Nestorius", in: Pro Oriente (ed.), *Syriac Dialogue 1*. Vienna 1994, 54-65.
- ²³ Agreed Statement on Christology. Reformed-Oriental Orthodox Dialogue, in: J. Gross-H. Meyer-W.G. Rusch (eds.), *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1999*. Geneva-Grand Rapids, MI, 1992, 292f.
- ²⁴ Communiqué 2nd Consultation, in: *WuWS* 5, 154.
- ²⁵ Communiqué 3rd Consultation, in: *WuWS* 5, 155.
- ²⁶ Agreed Report on the third Pro Oriente Study Seminar 'Ecclesiology and the Unity of the Church' (Vienna, 1-5 July 1994), in: *The Vienna Dialogue. On Ecclesiology Third Study Seminar July 1994* (Booklet 7), Vienna, 1995, 174f.
- ²⁷ Communiqué 3rd Consultation, in: *WuWS* 5, 155.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ *Ibid.* 155f.
- ³¹ Statement of the Second Study Seminar of Pro Oriente on Councils and Conciliarity between theologians of the Roman Catholic Church and Oriental Orthodox Churches. In: *The Vienna Dialogue. On Councils and Conciliarity Second Study Seminar June 1993* (Booklet 5). Vienna 1993, 58.
- ³² The term is used by the late Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan in the first Pro Oriente Consultation. Cf. *WuWS* 1 (1971) 71.
- ³³ Cf. the contribution of Hans-Joachim Schulz in the Second Study Seminar: "The Great Councils – the different degree of their realization in the respective traditions", in: *ibid.* 44-51.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.* 60.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*

- ³⁶ Communiqué 2nd Consultation, in: *WuWS* 5, 154.
- ³⁷ Cf. Communiqué 4th Consultation, in: *WuWS* 5, 158.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.* 158.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ Statement of the First Study Seminar of Pro Oriente on Primacy, in: *The Vienna Dialogue. On Primacy June 1991* (Booklet 4). Vienna, 1993, 77.
- ⁴¹ Questions for Future Study on Primacy and the Unity from the Oriental Orthodox Perspective, in: *ibid.* 82.
- ⁴² Cf. Reflections of a Roman Catholic participant after the discussions during the Seminar, in: *ibid.* 80f.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.* 81.
- ⁴⁴ In the following I will refer to the Information Service published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Vatican City). Some of these documents are also found on the website of the Council (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/sub-index/index_ancient-oriental-ch.htm); Cf. also the three Volumes *Growth in Agreement* published in 1984, 2000 and 2007.
- ⁴⁵ Cf. *Information Service* 16 (1972) 3-5.
- ⁴⁶ Cf. *Information Service* 22 (1973) 9-10.
- ⁴⁷ Cf. *Information Service* 55 (1984) 59-63.
- ⁴⁸ Cf. *Information Service* 73 (1990) 39.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. *Information Service* 84 (1993) 150-152.
- ⁵⁰ Cf. Common Declaration between Pope Paul VI and Catholicos Khoren I, in: *Information Service* 3 (1967) 4-6; Common Declaration between Paul VI and Catholicos Vasken I, in: *Information Service* 11 (1970) 10.
- ⁵¹ Cf. *Information Service* 94 (1997) 30f.
- ⁵² Cf. *Information Service* 108 (2001) 133-141.
- ⁵³ Cf. *Information Service* 55 (1984) 59-63. Cf. also: J. Oeldemann (ed.), *Gemeinsamer Glaube und pastorale Zusammenarbeit. 25 Jahre Weggemeinschaft zwischen der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche und der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche*. Freiburg 2001, esp. the article of A. Shemunkasho, „Die Gemeinsame Erklärung vom 23. Juni 1984. Pastorale Erfahrungen, Kritik und Perspektiven“, 52-83.
- ⁵⁴ Cf. D. W. Winkler, *Koptische Kirche und Reichskirche* 300-330.
- ⁵⁵ So far ten plenary meetings have taken place: 1. Cairo (Egypt), January 27-30, 2004; 2. Rome, January 26-29, 2005; 3. Etchmadzin (Armenia), January 27-30, 2006; 4. Rome, January 28 - February 3, 2007; 5. Maarrat Sednaya (Syria), January 27 - February 2, 2008; 6. Rome, January 27-30, 2009; 7. Antelias (Lebanon), January 26. - February 1, 2010; 8. Rom, January 25.-28, 2011; 9. Addis Abeba (Ethiopia), January 17-21, 2012; 10. Rom, January 23. - 26, 2013.
- ⁵⁶ Cf. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/anc-orient-ch-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20090129_mission-church_en.html.
- ⁵⁷ Cf. the Final Reports of the meetings: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/sub-index/index_ancient-oriental-ch.htm
- ⁵⁸ Communiqué Geneva 1993. Joint Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, November 1-6, 1993.

Tiivistelmä

Dietmar Winkler, *Kasvava yksimielisyys. Katolisen kirkon ja orientaalistien ortodoksisten kirkkojen välinen dialogi.*

Tammikuussa 2004 katolinen kirkko aloitti virallisen dialogin orientaalistien ortodoksisten kirkkoperheen kanssa. Kirkot olivat kohdanneet toisiaan vuodesta 1971 asti *Pro Oriente* -säätiön (Wien, Itävalta) aloitteesta.

Pro Oriente perustettiin Vatikaanin toisen konsiilin (1962-1965) aikana edistämään ekumeenisia dialogeja epävirallisella tasolla. Vuonna 1971 käynnistynyt konsultaatioiden sarja jatkui vuosina 1973, 1976, 1978 ja 1988. Konsultaatioita seurasivat nk. tutkimusseminaarit, joissa käsiteltiin primaattia (1991), konsiileja ja konsiliaarisuutta (1992), ekkelesiologiaa (1994) sekä auktoriteettia ja jurisdiktiota (1996). *Pro Orienten* ponnistukset toimivat perustana myöhemmälle viralliselle dialogille ja sen julkilausumille.

Ensimmäisessä konsultaatiossa (1971) saavutettiin kristologinen konsensus Nikean (325), Konstantinopolin (381) ja Efeson (431) ekumeenisten synodien pohjalta. Osapuolet torjuivat yksimielisesti sekä nestoriolaisuuden että eutykhiolaisuuden. Konsultaation kristologisen määritelmän mukaan ”Jeesus Kristus, on Jumalan lihaksi tullut Poika; täydellinen jumaluudessaan ja täydellinen ihmisyydessään.” Vuoden 1973 konsultaatio täydensi muotoiluja korostamalla Kristuksen kaksinkertaista konsubstantiaalisuutta. Kristuksen olemuksen ykseydestä se totesi: ”Hän yhdistää täydellisesti itsessään täydellisen jumaluuden ja täydellisen ihmisyyden, jakaantumatta, erottamatta, muuttamatta, sekoittamatta.” Kyseisten adverbien liittämistä kristologiseen dogmaan esitti Khalkedonin konsiilissa ensimmäisenä Aleksandrian patriarkka Dioskuros. On historian ironiaa, että hänet syrjäytettiin Khalkedonissa, mutta kunnoitetaan nyt osana ekumeenista konsensusta. Konsultaatioitten muotoilussa eivät esiinny kiistellyt tekniset termit *hypostasis*, *physis* ja *prosopon*, vaan kieli on ”vanhaa”, yhteiseen traditioon sisältyvää. Etenkin Kyrillos Aleksandrialaisen teologinen käsitteistö osoittautui merkittäväksi tekijäksi niin kristologiassa saavutetulle konsensukselle kuin Kalkedonin (451) konsiilin muotoilujen ymmärtämiselle.

Vuoden 1973 konsultaatio kiinnitti huomiota vaikeuteen löytää molempia osapuolia tyydyttävä terminologiaa kuvaamaan jumaluuden ja ihmisyyden suhdetta Kristuksessa. Osapuolten tunnustamien oppien taustalla nähtiin sama perusintentio, vaikka niiden muotoilut olivat verbaalisella tasolla keskenään ristiriidassa. Toisistaan poikkeavilla terminologioilla on silti mahdollista ilmaista olemuksellisesti samaa uskoa. Eri terminologiat mahdollistavassa viitekehyksessä kirkot torjuvat nestoriolaisuuden ja eutykhiolaisuuden. Kalkedonin jälkeisissä kiistoissa konsiilin puolustajat ja vastustajat kuitenkin syyttivät toinen toistaan nimenomaan ”nestorialaisuudesta” ja ”eutykhiolaisuudesta”. Erilainen ymmärrys kristologian avaintermeistä vahvisti näitä stereotyyppioita. Orientaalisten ortodoksien ja reformoitujen dialogissa kristologisten ilmaisujen hyväksyttävät rajat on ilmaistu ehkä kaikkein täsmällisimmin: ”Molemmat osapuolet torjuvat opetuksen, joka erottaa tai jakaa Kristuksen

inhimillisen luonnon, sekä sielun että ruumiin, Hänen jumalallisesta luonnostaan tai rajoittaa luontojen yhdistymisen yhteen liittämisen tasolle. Molemmat osapuolet torjuvat opetuksen, joka sekoittaa Kristuksen inhimillisen luonnon jumalallisen luonnon kanssa niin, että edellinen sulautuu jälkimmäiseen ja siten lakkaa olemasta.” Samanlainen täsmällisyyteen pyrkiminen leimaa katolis-orientaalista dialogia.

Kristologiaa enemmän konsultaatioissa keskityttiin ekklesiologiaan. Kolmas konsultaatio käsitteli paikallista, universaalista ja katolista kirkkoa. Osapuolten mukaan on vain yksi kirkko, jonka ykseyttä ilmaisee osallistuminen eukaristiaan ja episkopaatin kollegiaalisuus. Ykseyden mallina on kolmiyhteinen Jumala. Kolmannen tutkimusseminaarin (1994) mukaan kirkot ovat apostolista uskoa ja sakramentaalista elämää koskevilla kysymyksillä niin lähellä toisiaan, ”että ne voivat kutsua toisiaan sisarkirkoiksi”. Kuitenkin ekklesiologia osoittautui kirkkoja eniten erottavaksi tekijäksi. Etenkin primaatin ja konsiliaarisuuden välinen suhde ja yhteys kirkon katolisuuteen ja ykseyteen aiheuttaa erimielisyyksiä. Keskeisin kiistakysymys liittyy Rooman piispan merkitykseen kirkon kokonaisuudessa; voiko kommuunio yhden tietyn piispanistumien kanssa olla absoluuttisen oleellinen ja erityisen elintärkeä kirkon ykseydelle? Kolmas, neljäs ja viides konsultaatio ja kaikki tutkimusseminaarit ovat yrittäneet purkaa tästä vallitsevaa erimielisyyttä, lopullista ratkaisua kuitenkin löytämättä. Vaikka yhteisymmärrystä ei olekaan saavutettu Rooman piispan asemasta ykseyden keskuksena, dialogin osapuolet ”tunnistivat tarpeen erityiselle ykseyden viralle.”

Rooman piispan asema Kristuksen kirkossa ymmärretään katolisessa kirkossa ja orientaalisissa ortodoksissa kirkoissa perustavasti eri tavalla; orientaalit ortodoksit eivät usko, että yksittäinen piispanistuin voi harjoittaa auktoriteettiaan yli muiden kirkkojen. Katolisten teologioiden mukaan primaattia tulee tarkastella organisisessa yhteydessä konsiliaarisuuden periaatteeseen. On tärkeää erottaa toisistaan tarve primaatille ja ne konkreettiset tavat, joilla sitä harjoitetaan. 1800- ja 1900-luvuilla harjoitettu läntinen primaatti ei siten ole ainoa mahdollisuus primaatin toteuttamiseksi. Haasteena on luoda kirkon yhteydelle malli, joka sovitaa jännitteen yhtäältä universaalista vastuusta ja paikallisen autonomian välillä ja toisaalta kollegiaalisuuden ja primaatin välillä.

Rooman piispa on myös suoraan käynyt keskusteluita orientaalisten ortodoksisten kirkkojen johtajien kanssa. Ensimmäisiin kahdenvälisiin kristologisiin lausumiin lukeutuu paavi Paavali VI:n ja Syyrian patriarkan Mar Ignatius Yocoub III:n vuonna 1971 allekirjoittama dokumentti. Kattavamman lausunnon Paavali VI allekirjoitti koptilaisen paavin Shenouda III:n kanssa 1973. Tämä, samoin kuin kymmenisen vuotta myöhemmin Syyrian patriarkka Mar Ignatius Zakkana kanssa allekirjoitettu lausuma, perustui melko kirjaimellisesti Wienin konsultaatioitten muotoiluun. Vuonna 1990 paavi Johannes Paavali II ja katolikos Mar Basilius Mathews II Malankaran syyrialaisesta kirkosta allekirjoittivat syvällisimmän yksittäisen kristologisen asiakirjan orientaalis-ortodoksisen kirkon ja katolisen kirkon välillä. Lausunnossa yhdistyy tasapainoisesti aleksandrialainen kristologinen perinne ja khalkedonilainen terminologia. Kristologisia yhteislausuntoja on allekirjoitettu myös Armenian ortodoksisen kirkon kanssa (1996 ja 1997). Katolisen kirkon

näkökulmasta orientaalisten ortodoksisten kirkkojen kristologian ortodoksisuus on tunnustettu, vaikka virallinen kristologinen konsensus *koko* orientaalisten ortodoksisen kirkkoperheen kanssa puuttuu.

Kristologian ohella kahdenväliset julkilausumat käsittelevät lähinnä sakramenttiteologiaa ja -käytäntöä. Kattavin ja huomattavin julkilausuma sakramentaalisesta elämästä ja käytännöstä on paavi Johannes Paavali II:n ja patriarkka Zakka I Iwaksen julkilausuma vuodelta 1984. Se on kaikkein yksityiskohtaisin julkilausuma minkä katolinen kirkko on laatinut minkään ortodoksisen kirkon kanssa. Vaikka kirkkojen kesken ei ole ehtoollisyhteyttä, kirkot ovat oikeutettuja tekemään yhteistyötä sielunhoidon, erityisesti sakramentaalisen elämän alueella. Käytännössä tämä tarkoittaa mahdollisuutta osallistua sisarkirkon papin toimittamaan katumuksen, ehtoollisen ja sairaanvoitelun sakramenttiin, mikäli mahdollisuutta oman papin toimittamiin sakramentteihin ei ole.

Virallinen dialogi roomalaiskatolisen kirkon ja orientaalisten ortodoksisten kirkkojen välillä alkoi vuona 2004 Kairossa. Vuosittain kokoontuvaan dialogikomissioon (*International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between Catholic Church and Oriental Orthodox Churches*) kuuluu 14 katolista ja 14 orientaalis-ortodoksista edustajaa. Dialogin ensimmäinen vaihe (2003-2009) keskittyi ekklesiologiaan ja tuotti dokumentin *Kirkon olemus, konstituutio ja missio*. 1500 vuoden erossa olosta huolimatta osapuolet löysivät siinä konsensuksen kirkon sakramentaalisesta olemuksesta ja päätyivät pastoraalisiin implikaatioihin. Huolimatta täyden kommuunion puuttumisesta, kirkkoja kehoitetaan solmimaan teologisia ja pastoraalisia sopimuksia (mm. koskien kasteen molemminpuolisesta tunnustamisesta ja kysymystä seka-avioliitosta). Kirkot ovat perustavasti samaa mieltä primaatin ja konsiliarisuuden toiminnasta paikallisella tasolla, mutta odotetusti erimielisiä siitä, miten näitä käsitteitä voi soveltaa universaalilla tasolla.

Dialogin toinen vaihe alkoi 2010 Libanonin Anteliaksessa, jossa käsiteltiin konsiilien reseptiä ja tapaa, jolla eri kirkot ilmaisivat kommuuniotaan ensimmäisten viiden vuosisadan aikana. Nykyinen ekumeeninen keskustelu autokefaliasta ja primaatista – erityisesti ortodoksisessa kirkossa – keskittyy yleensä pentarkiaksi kutsuttuun malliin. Malli pitää sisällään ainoastaan Rooman imperiumiin rajoittuvan kirkon, eikä esimerkiksi Armenian, Persian, Etiopian ja Intian kirkkoja. Siksi esi-konstantiinolaine aika ja kirkkojen silloinen tapa olla keskenään kommuuniossa on dialogin kannalta merkittävä. Tapaamiset Roomassa (2011 ja 2013) ja Addis Abebassa (2012) keskittyivät kommuunion tutkimiseen varhaisessa kirkossa ja sen implikaatioihin tämänhetkisille yhteyspyrkimyksille. Dialogi pyrkii ymmärtämään kirkon ykseyttä holistisemmalla tavalla kuin vain kanonisin termein tai kiistellen primaatista, minkä voi katsoa kaventavan ekumeenista perspektiiviä.

Katolis-orientaaliselle dialogille on leimallista avoimuus ja rakkaus, keskinäinen kunnioitus ja uskollisuus sekä aito halu edetä kohti ykseyttä. Yhteisomissio on päässyt tuntuviin tuloksiin lyhyessä ajassa. Tämä ei olisi mahdollista ilman osapuolten kesken koettua yhteisyyden tunnetta ja epävirallisella tasolla tehtyä pohjustustyötä. Katolis-orientaalistien dialogin rakentavaa ja veljellistä ilmapiiriä ei voi verrata vaikkapa katolisen kirkon ja ortodoksisten kirkkojen väliseen dialogiin.

Katolis-orientaalisen dialogin tulokset ja niiden ilmapiiri voivat toimia mallina muille ekumeenisille keskusteluille. Viime vuosikymmenien ekumeenisissa prosesseissa on havaittu, että erilaiset kristilliset traditiot yrittivät ilmaista samaa uskoa erilaisin ja joissakin tapauksissa jopa näennäisen ristiriitaisin käsittein. Virallinen ortodoksisten kirkkojen ja orientaalisten ortodoksisten kirkkojen dialogi ilmaisee tämän todetessaan, että ”konsiilit ja isät, jotka aikanaan asetettiin anateemaan tai tuomittiin, ovatkin ortodoksia opetuksessaan”.