Recent Ecumenical Initiatives of the Assyrian Church of the East

1. Introduction

This paper sets forth some of the important ecumenical initiatives the Assyrian Church of the East has undertaken during the last few years. It will reflect the Assyrian church of the East’s relations with Churches of different traditions in the Middle East, and the recently renewed relationship with the Roman Catholic Church.

The first event in the process of ecumenical renewal - an event of utmost importance - took place in the Assyrian Church of the East on 17 October, 1976, when the Assyrian bishop of Tehran, Iran, Mar Khanania Dinkha (the present head of the Church) was elected as the 121st Catholicos-Patriarch of the East. The Assyrian community in Iran, which Mar Dinkha had served from 1958-1976, was in a unique position to provide her bishop with a vision, one which encompassed issues of social justice and ecumenism. The fact that Christians in Iran constituted a small group (less than 1% among a Muslim population of 50 millions) caused men and women from all Christian Churches to close ranks with one another in search of a true and effective witness to the Gospel of Christ. Their difficult socio-political situation forced them to develop a survival mode, one which would provide a shield against the wars and massacres which had been their fate for many centuries. As a consequence of his experience in Iran, during the first year of Mar Dinkha’s tenure as Catholicos-Patriarch a vigorous program was initiated, with the objective of re-establishing ecumenical contacts in two different spheres, i.e., with the Churches of the Middle East, and with the Roman Catholic Church.

2. Relations with the Middle East Council of Churches

The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) was formed in 1974 by a number of Churches in the region who belonged to three confessional families: Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Protestants/Evangelicals. The Eastern Catholic Churches joined the Council after 17 years - in 1991. The Assyrian Church’s attempt to become a member of MECC began in 1985, when Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV delegated one of his bishops to petition the MECC at its 4th general assembly in Limassol, Cyprus. The reply of the Council was shockingly negative. Under pressure of some of the Oriental Orthodox bishops, the application was put on hold for an indefinite time. The problem, according to those bishops, was that the Assyrian Church of the East was still perceived to be closely associated with the “Nestorian” heresy. Nevertheless, in 1991, after the arrival of the fourth family of Churches, the MECC reviewed her position towards the Assyrians. The executive committee appointed a special commission of theologians and staff to enter into a theological dialogue with the Assyrian Church.
of the East in order to clarify its position relative to the allegations of "Nestorianism", with the end in view of satisfying the constituent members of the Council and, that being achieved, of making a positive recommendation to grant a membership in the Council to the only isolated Christian Church in the region.

The MECC side was represented by members from the four confessional families of the Council. The Coptic representatives were probably the most concerned and watchful. In reality, the two parties which had the most at stake in these talks were the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. These two ancient bodies had been proponents of two differing schools of thought, the Alexandrian and the Antiochian, each of which approached history, Biblical exegesis, and theology from different vantage points. The Alexandrian school approached Scripture and scriptural history from an allegorical perspective, and the Antiochian with literal analysis. The methodologies employed by the theologians and exegetes in the two schools led ultimately to divergent understandings of the manner in which the Incarnation of the Word ought properly to be expressed. Historically, the Copts have insisted upon acknowledging one nature in the person of Jesus Christ, while the Assyrians maintained the existence of two natures in the person of the Lord. The acceptance of the teaching of the third ecumenical Council, held in Ephesus in 431 AD, was the central point at issue between the Copts and the Assyrians.

The fist of three sessions of the dialogue was convened in September 1992 in Limassol, MECC's liaison office in Cyprus. The Assyrians there presented two papers at this meeting; they reflected the Church of the East's Christological faith drawn from two important sources, i.e., its official synodical records (the Synodicon, or, as it is commonly recognized in the West, Synodicon Orientale), and its eucharistic and liturgical texts. The objective of both papers was to illustrate the fact that though the Assyrian Church of the East does not employ terms such as the "hypostatic union" yet the practical sense of such a theological concept was not only implicitly present but, sometimes, even explicitly expressed in its theological and liturgical elaboration of the mystery of Christ. The Coptic representatives read two papers in which they presented their own Christological thought along with their point of view on how they understood the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East. Only minor progress was made at this first friendly encounter between ecclesiastical adversaries who officially met for the very first time in fifteen centuries, a period of time characterized by mistrust and separation. No one from either side had realistically expected further progress than what was, in fact, achieved.

The organizers of the dialogue were keen to schedule a second session in this round of meetings in the following months, and consequently both sides met again in Limassol in March 1993. There were no papers presented at this meeting, but only further clarification of what had already been presented and discussed in the last session. As these meetings progressed, social interaction on part of the participants led to a growth in fraternal understanding and an appreciation by each side of the other's tradition and theological presupposition. Though each side retained its zeal for preserving the apostolic faith as it had been handed down to it, yet each experienced a positive change in its evaluation of the other's tradition. After six months, in September of the same year, the third round of meetings was called in Limassol. There the MECC had also called upon expert theologians to express their objective evaluation of the Christological positions of each Church. Some real progress was made, but the meetings ended without solving the core issues in dispute. The dynamic of the dialogue revealed that the Assyrians were there to clarify their Christological teachings while the Coptic Orthodox Church continued to press many issues in dispute, which included the following points:

1. The Assyrian Church of the East's veneration of Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius of Constantinople.
2. The Assyrian Church of the East's accusations against and anathemas upon Cyril of Alexandria, Severius of Antioch, and the "Egyptians" (the followers of Cyril of Alexandria).
3. The acceptance of the Council of Ephesus (AD. 431).
4. The relation between Christological faith and ecclesial practice in the Assyrian Church of the East.
5. Christological Formulas and the terminology employed in framing them in the Assyrian Church: "Two Natures, Two Qnome, in One Person."

By the conclusion of the last meeting in this round it was clear that the dialogue had opened up a number of very pressing issues for both Churches, touching on the understanding and interpretation of history, dogma, and soteriology. But the willingness of all involved to overcome the controversy was stronger than the problems at hand. Considering the bulk of issues in these discussions, a fourth meeting was scheduled, to take place after two years, in 1994. However, the Assyrian Church delegation had to subsequently excuse itself from attending the meeting because of a conflict in scheduling with the convocation of the Church's Holy Synod (the fifth in the Patriarchate of Mar Dinkha IV), which was held in Sydney, Australia, in August 1994. In this Holy Synod a number of key issues were introduced for discussion. One of these was the point two above. The bishops in the Synod were convinced that it was time to remove the indictments and anathemas which had been proclaimed against the Fathers of the Coptic and Syrian Orthodox Churches.

Three months later, on 11 November 1994, Pope John Paul II and Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV signed in Rome an official document, known as the "Common Christological Declaration", expressing agreement between their respective Churches on the expression of Christological faith. The theological clarification achieved by this agreement, and the ecclesial ramifications brought about by it, quickly had their effect among the other Churches of the Middle East. At their 6th General Assembly on 21 November 1994 the news of this development was warmly and widely welcomed, and immediately a new attitude towards the Assyrian Church of the East was demonstrated by almost all Churches. But most significantly, the Assyrian at the assembly received an invitation from His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, to visit Egypt and hold a new round of dialogue directly between the two Churches. (It should here be noted that a great deal of credit is due to the important efforts exerted by the MECC's unit on "Faith & Unity" to bridge the wide gap which had existed between the Assyrians and Copts for over 1500 years.) Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV welcomed the invitation of Pope Shenouda III, and the Assyrians began preparations for what was hoped might be a historic opportunity to bring healing and renewal to the Body of Christ.

On 13-14 January, 1995, theologians from the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East gathered at Saint Bishoy Monastery in Egypt in order to
seek to arrive at a common agreement in Christology between their Churches, which would, in turn, be submitted to the authorities of both Churches. The Coptic delegation was headed by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, and included Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette, and two other theologians. The Assyrian delegation commissioned by His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV, was composed of Archbishop Mar Nas-sai de Baz, and Mar Bawai Soro. Participating in the discussions was Metropolitan George Saliba from the Syrian Orthodox Church, and, from MECC, Father Paul Sa-yah, Director of the unit on „Faith & Unity”, who had moderated the dialogue of MECC with the Assyrian Church of the East. At the end of this meeting a draft of a „Common Christological Declaration” was worked out in mutual agreement. Replies to this draft have not yet been finalized by either side, but it is hoped that both Churches will agree on the same text in order for it to be signed by their Patriarchs some time in 1995.

The gist of the draft deals with Christological concerns of both Churches. For the Coptic Orthodox Church the draft-agreement asserts that though the Assyrians use a terminology of „two nature, two person, in one person,” nevertheless, there is only one final subject in Jesus Christ, God the Word Incarnate, who is both perfect God and perfect man. The term „two person”, which historically has been at the center of this theological debate, is clarified by the Assyrian Church of the East to be the concrete realization (individuation) of each nature of divinity and humanity. For the Assyrian Church of the East the strength of the agreement lies in the fact that it recognizes that the union of the two natures did not in any manner cancel the continuing dynamics of each of Christ’s two natures, divinity and humanity. And that Christ’s divinity and his humanity are united in one person, without confusion or change, without division or separation, and that in Him are preserved all the properties of the divinity and all the properties of the humanity, together in a real, perfect, indivisible and inseparable union.

3. Relations with the Roman Catholic Church

The separation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East grew out of a dispute over the proper use of terminology in describing the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, a dispute which began in the Byzantine Empire with the Council of Ephesus (AD. 431), and spread to the Church in the Persian Empire. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of the East have insisted upon acknowledging the two natures, divine and human, in the person of Jesus Christ from the beginning of the dispute. In this they have always been in agreement. Where the differences came about was in accounting for the union of those two natures in the one person of Christ. The western Church adopted a modified terminology to describe the incarnation at the Council of Chalcedon (451), while the eastern Church continued to use terminology of an older period which in the West was deemed inadequate for the purpose of describing a true metaphysical union of the natures.

The political isolation of the Assyrian Church of the East under Persian - and later Arab, Mongol, and Turkish - rule, made the resolution of this conflict almost impossible. The separation was not only ecclesial, but geographical, political, cultural, and linguistic, and it was greatly exacerbated from the fifteenth century on by the near destruction of the Church in the East and the loss of its educational and monastic institutions which had for so long supplied it with theologians and scholars. For the past 500 years there has been only limited contact between the leaders of these two ancient churches.

On November 9, 1984, the present Catholicos-Patriarch of the East, Mar Dinkha IV, made his first official visit to the Vatican and expressed to Pope John Paul II his desire that the ancient misunderstanding be resolved between the two bodies. The Patriarch had long felt that the scandal of separation had to be removed so that the Church of Christ could present a common witness to the modern world, and also work in a unified way to relieve the sufferings endured by many in the Middle East and elsewhere. In joy and hope the two leaders of the two ancient apostolic Churches set in motion a process of theological dialogue aimed at bringing understanding and clarity to the issue under dispute. Between 1984-1994 five meetings took place in which discussions were conducted in a spirit of mutual charity with a sincere desire on each side to understand the other’s linguistic and cultural traditions and presuppositions, and the process culminated in the setting forth of a „Common Christological Definition” which removed the ambiguities which had for so long been the source of suspicion and distrust.

On November 11, 1994, a historic event took place at the Vatican between the Roman Pontiff, His Holiness, John Paul II, and the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, His Holiness, Mar Dinkha IV. This meeting resolved an ancient misunderstanding which has kept the two churches at a distance from one another for 1500 years. At the meeting of the Patriarch and the Pope the Christological Definition was signed by both leaders and by dignitaries representing the Vatican and the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East. In it they make the affirmation: „Our Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true man, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, consubstantial with the Father and consubstantial with us in all things but sin. His divinity and his humanity are united in one person, without confusion or change, without division or separation. In him has been preserved the difference of the natures of divinity and humanity, with all their properties, faculties and operations. But far from constituting „one and another", the divinity and humanity are united in the person of the same and unique Son of God and Lord Jesus Christ, who is the object of a single adoration. (…) the same God the Word, begotten of His Father before all worlds without beginning according to his divinity, was born of a mother without a father in the last times according to his humanity. The humanity to which the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth always was that of the Son of God himself. That is the reason why the Assyrian church of the East is praying the Virgin Mary as „the Mother of God and Saviour”. In the light of this same faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as „the Mother of God” and also as „the Mother of Christ”. We both recognize the legitimacy and rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety."

In his official address to the Pope at the time of the signing Mar Dinkha IV expressed the fervency of his zeal for unity: „Today the time has come to bring down the walls which have separated us and kept us apart for fifteen centuries. Today, the door of opportunity is open and
we are bidden to enter and labor together toward the noble goal of unity in the Church, the unity for which our Lord Jesus Christ so fervently prayed, 'that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.'

The Pope in his remarks took note of the tragic history of suffering which Christians in the East had undergone and pledged his personal support and that of the Roman Catholic Church in efforts to relieve their plight:

'We do not forget the long night of suffering endured by your Eastern Syriac communities, which were scattered, persecuted and massacred down the centuries for professing the name of Christ. Those who despite everything have remained in their countries in the Middle East - and who have had to face war and unjust deprivation of every kind - should know that the Holy See will employ the means at its disposal, particularly through its contacts with Governments and International Organizations, to lessen their sufferings and if possible make them cease. Finally, a Church so distinguished in its past for its heroism as regards fidelity to the faith cannot remain marginalized in the Christian world, and especially among the Churches of the Middle East. We hope to be able to help you break down any isolation that still exists.'

Both leaders stressed the profound importance of the occasion. Both were fervent in emphasizing the need for Christian unity in a world in which new challenges arise with frequency and call for a common front and unified action on the part of Christ's body, the Church. The need for clergy and laity to be adequately prepared to meet those challenges was addressed by Pope John Paul II who put at the disposal of the Assyrian Church of the East the help of the Catholic Church in the areas of education and catechesis.

Throughout the ceremonies and public appearances the dignitaries of the Vatican and the Assyrian prelates affirmed the unique and valuable contributions made by each of the Churches to the general spiritual patrimony of historic Christianity. In the words of His Holiness, Pope John Paul II:

'We all recognize that it is of supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve and foster the rich heritage of each of our Churches, and that a diversity of customs and observances is in no way an obstacle to unity. This diversity includes the power of our Churches to govern themselves according to their own disciplines and to keep certain differences in theological expressions which, as we have verified, are often complementary rather than conflicting.'

Though this historic occasion has opened the way toward further unity between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Catholic Church, full visible unity has not yet been achieved. Though the desire for oneness is sincere and the progress toward unity has moved forward, there is much yet to do before it can be completely realized. The dialogues will continue and prayers will be constantly offered before Almighty God to provide the divine wisdom and spiritual understanding necessary to achieve the goal of proclaiming together in one voice the Good News of salvation to a world in need. In the words of His Holiness the Pope:

'Together let us ask the Most Holy Trinity, Model of true Unity within diversity, to strengthen our hearts so that we will respond to the call for one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world, that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God. May God who has begun this good work in us bring it to completion in Christ Jesus. Amen.'

To the end that all this may be achieved, the Catholicos-Patriarch, Mar Dinkha IV, committed himself and his fellow-bishops:

'With thanksgiving for this day and the promise which it holds - and with prayers for the health and well-being of our most honored brother, His Holiness, Pope John Paul II - we remember the words of the Psalmist, 'How good and how comely for brothers to dwell in unity.' How good indeed, and fair in the eyes of God and men when in true humility the servants of Christ give themselves to one another in mutual love and service... To you our brothers we offer the hand of fellowship and our unfeigned fraternal affection, and to the Holy Trinity we commit these our labors toward unity. Amen.'

Joint Patriarchal Statement
between His Holiness Mar Raphael I, BiDawid, Catholicos Patriarch, His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos Patriarch, and their respective delegations concerning proposals for the re-establishment of full ecclesial unity between the Chaldean and Assyrian Churches of the East

1. On Friday, 29 November 1996, at the Chaldean Chancery in Southfield, MI (USA), the two Patriarchs of the Church of the East held their first ever official meeting to discuss prospects of unity between their two churches. Present with His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV was Mar Bawai Soro, Bishop of Seattle and General Secretary for CIRED, and with His Holiness Mar Raphael I, BiDawid were Mar Ibrahim Ibrahim, Chaldean Bishop of USA, Mar Yohanan Zora, Bishop of Ahwaz, and Sarhad Jammo, Vicar General of the Chaldean Diocese in USA who also was appointed by both Patriarchs to function as the common secretary for the meeting. At the end of this meeting, the two Patriarchs wished to sum up their findings in the following statement.
2. 'Their Holiness, as heads of their two churches, offer gratitude to Almighty God the Father for granting them this historic opportunity to meet in a serene fraternal confidence and to discuss with deep and mutual understanding future prospects for a full and visible ecclesial reunification of their churches - the two branches of the historically One Church of the East. In a humble love to their holy church-fathers and with such a vision of unity in their minds, they pray, today, to God to send His Spirit of Holiness to help them achieve a complete rapprochement between their two churches. For, it is precisely through such path that they find themselves able to comply with our Lord's prayer for the unity of his disciples (Jn 17,21), and, similarly to encourage all Chaldeans and Assyrians, their sons and daughters in Christ, to preserve their Christian faith and to maintain their glorious Assyrian-Chaldean heritage.
3. In accordance with the Church of the East's canonical practice, Their Holiness wish to state that their task in this meeting is to discuss and to formulate proposals that
shall be subsequently submitted for the approval by their two respective Holy Synods. They, along with the other members of their two delegations, have carefully deliberated on a number of important issues that they hope will prepare the way and, one day, will lead their churches to unity. The following are their proposals:

(i) The emphasis on, and exploration of, the several common ecclesial and cultural dimensions that, today, bind their two churches and people together, mainly, our mutual faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, our common patristic, liturgical and theological tradition, as well as the belonging to our same ancestry and culture, and the same thousands-of-years history of glory and suffering that inseparably unites the Assyrian-Chaldean people.

(ii) The Formation of a „Joint Commission for Unity” shall be appointed respectively by both of their Holy Synods to function as a task force in order to formulate and carry out a comprehensive ecclesial-educational plan through which both the Chaldean and Assyrian Churches of the East will be able to achieve the following objectives:

a. The development of a „Catechism of the Church of the East.”

b. The establishment of an educational ecclesial institution within the Chicago-Detroit Region for the purpose of training future priests, deacons and catechists for both of the churches and to offer continuous religious educational programs for the active clergy in the whole Church of the East.

c. The articulation of a joint and common attitude toward emphasizing the Aramaic mother tongue in liturgical usage and in cultural endeavors by both of the churches.

d. The development of pastoral programs and literary projects as means of ecclesial and cultural collaboration between parishes and dioceses of the two churches throughout the world.

4. In light of their discussions of these findings, they have accordingly commissioned Bishop Mar Bawai Soro and Sarhad Jammo to present to them, by 31st March 1997, a comprehensive draft of a plan outlining the structure and the functionality of the above proposals, in order for them to present this plan to both of their Holy Synods for the agreement.

5. Meanwhile, Their Holiness would ardently ask all of their brothers archbishops, bishops, clergy and faithful, everywhere they may be, to continue their prayers and support for the success of this noble cause that shall restore their holy and ancient Church to its historic fullness. Their Holiness pray that all of us will offer our best efforts to rally behind them, in order to be able once again to transform our beloved Church of the East into an instrument of promoting the evangelical virtues of faith, hope and charity in the world, for the glory of God’s name and to the benefit of all of our Assyrian-Chaldean people."

6. Signed on the 29th day of November 1996 at the Chaldean Chancery in Southfield, MI (USA).

Reverend Sarhad Jammo
Vicar General of the Chaldean Diocese in USA
and Secretary of the „Joint Patriarchal Meeting”

Sebastian Brock

The Assyrian Church of the East
First non-official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition Vienna 1994

Summaries

Alfred Stirnemann:

The Vienna Dialogue between Catholic and non-Chalcedonian Theologians and its Treatment of Nestorius and Nestorianism (= Syriac Dialogue No.1, pp.27-33)

The President of PRO ORIENTE outlined the history of PRO ORIENTE’s consultations between theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, which had begun in 1971. Particularly important was the communiqué of the first Vienna Dialogue (1971), which included a statement that has come to be known as the "Vienna Christological Formula", whose basic assumptions can be summarized as follows:

(a) different formulations can exist within one Church and can be regarded as orthodox even by those who do not use them in their theological tradition.

(b) Instead of just reinterpreting the terminology and the expressions of the fifth century it is essential to redefine the mystery of our faith in terms of the concepts of contemporary philosophy and theology and to use a modern language.

(c) In this effort the different traditions have either stressed unity or duality. Both attempts were considered orthodox as long as the stress on unity or duality in the incarnate Christ did not deny the other aspect (human or divine, respectively).

The proposals of the Vienna Dialogues had subsequently been received by popes and patriarchs, and had even been taken over as the basis for common declarations of faith signed by the Roman Pontiffs and the Patriarchs of the Coptic Orthodox and Syrian Orthodox Churches. Although the subjects of Nestorius, Nestorianism, or the Assyrian Church of the East had not been on the agenda of any of the five non-official consultations, extreme dyophysitism had been repeatedly condemned under the name 'Nestorianism', just as extreme monophysitism had also been condemned under the label 'Eutychianism'.

In view of the general success of the Vienna Dialogues with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, it would seem sensible to follow a similar general pattern in dialogue with the Assyrian Church of the East, the possibility for which arose at the First Regional Symposium, held in Egypt in 1991. There, although the inclusion of the Assyrian Church of the East in the PRO ORIENTE consultations between the Roman Catholic and the Oriental Orthodox Churches was considered premature, it was left open to PRO ORIENTE to open a separate dialogue with the Assyrians. It had, furthermore,
been suggested that this might include theologians belonging to all the Churches of Syriac tradition, and it was this suggestion that was being put into practice at the present Vienna Consultation.

Mar Bawai Soro/ J. M. Birnie:

The Vienna Christological Formula in an Assyrian Perspective (= pp 34-49)

In this paper, one of the most important of the Consultation, Mar Bawai provided a commentary, from the standpoint of the Assyrian Church of the East, on the Vienna Christological Formula. For convenience, the Formula was divided up into twelve segments.

Segment 1: "We, as Christians, feel united in a spirit of brotherhood in our faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, God and Savior, and recognize equally the commission and prayer of our Lord that we may all be one in Him in order that we may bear common witness to him that the world may believe (John 17, 21). "We find our common basis in the same Apostolic tradition, particularly as affirmed in the Nicean-Constantinopolitan Creed, we all confess the dogmatic decisions and teachings of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381),..."

Comment: The Church of the East has never been officially approached by the other Churches to accept the Christological formula and dogmatic teachings of the Council of Ephesus, but in the modern context there is opportunity for dialogue and ultimately for progress in regard to the question of the relationship of the Church of the East to the Council of Ephesus, such discussion would need to be based on mutual respect and a desire for mutual understanding. Three points might be considered.

1. Since every Christological statement is simply an attempt to explain the inexplicable, and no single formula or series of statements can ever capture in words the essence of the mystery of the Incarnation, the Christological formula of the Council of Ephesus needs to be considered as one among other genuine expressions from both Eastern and Western traditions.

2. The Christological debate, which had led to the convening of the Council of Ephesus, persisted for many years after the conclusion of the Council, and required a more definite resolution at the Council of Chalcedon. The theological formulation of the Council of Ephesus therefore needs to be considered in the light of its refinement effected through the Christological formula of the Council of Chalcedon.

(3) Particular attention also needs to be paid to the Christological definitions and formulae which have been canonically sanctioned in the Church of the East (an English translation of these was provided in the appendix to Mar Bawai's paper).

Segment 3: "We all agree in rejecting both the Nestorian [position about Jesus Christ]."

Comment: Clarification of what the "Nestorian" Christological definition actually consists of and what it means to the different Churches is a pre-requisite for progress here. If the term "Nestorian" is used to describe a union of the two natures that results in "one and another" or "two Sons" in Christ, or suggests that Christ is an "ordinary man" whom God adopted in order to reside in him and inspire him, as in the righteous and prophets of old, then the Church of the East will also condemn and reject such teaching regardless of the "name" it has been presented under. At the same time it must be recognized that the Church of the East has never understood the term "Nestorian" to mean what has been suggested above; rather, the term has been conceived by the Church of the East to refer to a Christological position in harmony with the orthodox teaching which they had received from their Fathers, who, in turn, received it from the Apostles.

Segment 4: "and we all agree in rejecting the] Eutychian positions about Jesus Christ."

Comment: The Church of the East has for centuries rejected the Eutychian position in its various forms.

Segment 5: "We have endeavoured for a deeper understanding of the Chalcedonian and Non-Chalcedonian Christologies which have separated us until now."

Comment: The recent on-going dialogue between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Unit on "Faith and Unity" of the Middle East Council of Churches has been an occasion for the Church of the East to get a better understanding of and insight into the (for her) problematic Christological terminology of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. The Church of the East reaffirms her long-held view that, though using different language and terminology from that of Cyril of Alexandria at the Council of Ephesus, she does in reality share the same "essence" of the one Apostolic faith that the Catholic Church and all the Orthodox Churches also share. Since no one statement of faith will ever be sufficient to express the mystery of the Incarnation, provided a distinction is established between the "content" of our common faith and the "terminology" utilized to articulate that faith, it should be possible to overcome most of the Christological problems which have thus far been the primary obstacles to the re-establishment of communion. The Church of the East thus welcomes any bi-lateral or multi-lateral attempts to increase the understanding of all the participants in this Christological dialogue so that ultimately we may be enabled to remove all the obstacles which stand in the way of our unity in faith, love and service.

Segment 6: "We believe that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is God the Son Incarnate; perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity. His divinity was not separated from his humanity for a single moment; not for the twinkling of an eye. His huma-
always seek the objective that will legitimize a pluralism of expression within the one

different ecclesiastical traditions".

Comment: Such an understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation is essential for
dialogues such as the present one. Such an assertion, if sincerely held, should prevent,
or at least minimize, the possibility of a Church or ecclesial authority condemning or
rejecting the expression of a historically-rooted and consistent statement of faith by any
of the apostolic Churches when such a statement arguably contains the same essence of
the faith as their own, even though the formulation is different.

Segment 8: "We see that there are still differences in the theological interpretation
of the mystery of Christ because of our different ecclesiastical and theological tradi­tions."

Comment: The differences in certain theological interpretations is partly a conse­quence of the different emphases which our Christological formulae have made in or­der to protect the one faith from different "heretical" implications. Such differences in
theological interpretation need to be first stated and then clarified, in order to assess
the nature or the source of the differences, whether they stem from the "essence" of the
Apostolic faith, or from the "form" through which that faith is being expressed. What
is needed above all is humility, openness, and a willingness to put aside suspicion
about our mutual intentions.

Segment 9: "...we are convinced, however, that these differing formulations on
both sides can be understood along the lines of the faith of Nicea and Ephesus".

Comment: The scope of such an accord should be extended to include the Christo­logical formula of the Council of Chalcedon as well, assuming that the problem of the
terminology has been dealt with and successfully resolved. A significant part of the
Christological teachings of the Council of Chalcedon have been accepted by the
Church of the East, and the Council is included among the various "Western" synods
considered canonical (Synodicon Orientale, p.610).

Segment 10: "Realizing that there can be 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 this mystery in harmony with our
different ecclesiastical traditions".

Comment: We agree very strongly with the affirmation of this paragraph. We will
always seek the objective that will legitimize a pluralism of expression within the one
apostolic faith in Jesus Christ, while preserving at the same time the essence of that

faith. Differences of formulation within these limits should be seen as complementary
rather than conflicting.

Segment 11: "We have also discussed generally the problem of the Ecumenical
Councils, their authority and reception, and we urge that these problems be exten­sively
studied on both sides".

Comment: The Ecumenical Councils were major ecclesial events for the Church
within the domain of the Roman Empire. The Church of the East, being within the
Persian Empire, was never directly involved in any one. Yet, it has ultimately received
Nicaea, Constantinople I, and the canons of Chalcedon, and is in agreement with the
tone and substance of others. In the modern context it should be asked: Is positive ac­ceptance of all dogmas of the Councils an absolute prerequisite for agreement on other
issues and for the question of unity?

Segment 12: "We commonly submit ourselves to the witness of the Holy Scriptures
of the New Testament and thus to the Apostolic Kerygma and express our intention not
to become weary in the search for a common language of the mystery of salvation in
our Lord in a brotherly spirit... 'until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the
knowledge of the Son of God' (Eph 4:13). We wish to see the mystery of the compas­sion of God translated into a life of Christian compassion.

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
helpful discussions".

Comment: Commitment to such a hope and expectation is a crucial step towards
reflecting in the here and now the Reign of God in our lives. With love which reflects
that of Christ we can transform the Church to be a loving community of believers, a
church that is conciliatory and is conformed to 'the mind that is in Christ Jesus'.

In conclusion, the following points can be made:
- The Vienna Christological Formula essentially reflects the apostolic teaching
that is compatible to the theology of the Church of the East, though the terminology
of some of its segments poses some linguistic difficulties. In future formulae, it is recom­mended that a distinction be made between the "content" and "form" of our common
faith. This will enable us to eliminate a significant part of the difficulties which form a
barrier between the different parties in the dialogue.
- We affirm that dogmatic unity in pluralistic expression should go hand-in-hand
with reconciliation and ecclesial unity. There needs to be tolerance of the concept of
"pluralistic dogmatic expression in one faith".
- Credal statements may be regarded as the outward expression of the inner exi­gencies of a lived faith, they should not be forcibly imposed by external authorities on
groups of people not prepared for them by their corporate historical experience.
- Christological formulae should not be seen as statements of abstract philosophy
using concepts that are alien and confusing to members of our Churches, but rather as
statements which reflect the liberating recognition that the God of love was and still is
present and active among the lives of his people today. In the course or the discussion it
became clear that clarification was needed over what was meant by the expression "the
Christological teachings of Ephesus", since no specific formula was issued by the Council.

Mar Aprem G. Mook:en.

The Vienna Christological Formula in an Assyrian Perspective (= p.50)

The Church of the East does not find it difficult to subscribe to the Vienna Formula of Christology since it accepts, like all other Churches, the decisions and decrees of the first two ecumenical Councils, of Nicea and Constantinople. It recites the Nicene Creed without any of the later additions, such as the Filioque clause in the Western Churches, or the term "Mother of God".

The liturgical book of the Church of the East known as the Hudra makes it quite clear that the beliefs accredited by Pope Shenouda III to Nestorius are very different from those of the Church of the East. The misunderstandings on both sides lie in differing interpretations given to certain specific key terms such as "hypostatic union", and the Syriac term "qnome". The inscription which Pope Shenouda III had put on the commemorative medal for the Consultation in 1991 says everything: "...Perfect in Divinity, Perfect in Humanity - CHRIST OUR LORD - 1 Tim 3,16".

Luise Abramowski:

The History of Research into Nestorius (= pp.54-65)

Modern research takes its starting point in F. Loof's Nestoriana (1905), in which he collected all the extant Greek and Syriac remains of Nestorius' writings. Though some further fragments can now be added, Loof's work remains fundamental. An important new source was provided in 1910 when P. Bedjan published the Syriac "Book of Heraclides", a collection of texts, several of which are genuinely by Nestorius. A French translation by F. Nau, and an English one (less satisfactory) by G.R. Driver and L. Hodgson, made the work more widely available. The complex literary problems of the work were the subject of a monograph by L. Abramowski (1963): as a result of this investigation it became clear that the main part of the text is Nestorius' Second Apology (though with some later interpolations), the introduction, however, which is in the form of a dialogue, is not by Nestorius himself, but by an unknown author who may be called Pseudo-Nestorius. This latter document is an important witness to the survival of Antiochene Christology into the late fifth and early sixth century, probably in Constantinople. Ps-Nestorius in fact develops Nestorius' teaching concerning the prosopa, and differs from him in his use of qnome (=hypostasis).

Three fundamental propositions of Nestorius can be isolated:

1) The unity of the one Christ is a matter of course, and is seen from the outside, so to speak, the one prosopon is a prosopon of doxology; it is also seen in Christ's work and reign.

2) The absolutely transcendent nature of the God Logos which cannot unite itself with human nature in a "physical" manner;

3) The full human nature without any diminution.

The problem for him was how to present the inner structure of unity in Christ, and for this reason he introduces the concept of the prosopon physikon of each nature: these prosopa physika "use" each other, and this mutual "usage" cannot be conceived to be interrupted even for a moment, otherwise there would not be the "one common prosopon of union" of both. What Nestorius really aims at is the identity of existence of both natures.

The starting point, however, both for Nestorius and for the Antiochene and Syriac dyophysite theologians of the fifth century can be traced back to a single passage in Theodore of Mopsuestia's de incarnatione (VII.63).

Among the more important discussions of Nestorius in recent times, the following contributions are especially notable. M.V. Anastos (1962), going a step further than Grillmeier, argued that Nestorius was "completely orthodox, whether judged on the criterion of the Chalcedonian Symbol or from the point of view of speculative theology". Anastos also took as his point of comparison Cyril's Second Letter to Nestorius, and claimed that Cyril's characteristic notion that 'the Logos suffered in the flesh' is theologically the exact equivalent of Nestorius' dogma that the Logos suffered in the proso­pon of the manhood he took for his own. A very different point of view was taken by G. Bebis (1964), who takes a much more negative attitude, though he rightly refutes the traditional list of heretical clichés attributed to Nestorius.

Two significant books have been contributed by L.I. Scipioni: the first, Ricerche sulla cristologia del 'Libro di Eraclide' di Nestorio (1956) takes a fundamentally positive view (he of course still treats the introductory Dialogue as genuinely by Nestorius). Especially helpful is his explanation of the relationship between the terms nature, hypostasis and prosopon with the help of Stoic texts. The second, Nestorio e il concilio di Efeso (1974), is cooly critical of Cyril's Christology, which he sees as inadequate considering the problems raised by the teaching of Apollinaris.

In an article of 1961 A. Grillmeier distinguished two viewpoints from which the teaching of Nestorius has been judged, and can be judged. The first, given the circumstances of the time, was unavoidable; but in the history of theology judgement has to be much more favourable, for Nestorius was sincerely trying to find a solution of the christological problem as it had been posed by Arianism and Apollinarianism. In the third edition (1990) of his Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche he gives emphasis to the ecumenical importance of the theological rehabilitation of Nestorius, and the need to distinguish between the popular presentation of Nestorius as a heretic and his actual teaching. Concerning the Council of Ephesus Grillmeier points out that, if one wants to speak of an "Ephesinian symbol", this will be the formula of the synod held by John of Antioch which, with some alterations, became the Symbol of Union in 433.

The survey concludes with two articles published in 1993 by the late A. de Hal­leux, one on the First Session of the Council of Ephesus, the second entitled 'Nestorius, histoire et doctrine' (specially written for the Middle East Council of Churches). In the
former article de Halleux emphasizes the need to make proper use of Schwartz's critical edition in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, and cognizance taken of the way the Acta for this session had been edited in antiquity. From an ecumenical point of view it is important to note that the first session of the synod was not the doctrinal debate demanded by the emperor, but a judicial action against Nestorius as a heretic; in view of this irregularity, two questions pose themselves: (1) Was the process against Nestorius equitable? and (2) Where is the "dogma of Ephesus"? The answer to these questions needs to be sought in the spirit of Vatican II, and on the second point de Halleux considers that the Symbol of Union in 433 can be considered to be the true conclusion of the Council of Ephesus.

De Halleux's second article deals first with the history of the dispute over Nestorius and then with his teaching. In the first part he again lays stress on the juridical irregularity of the First Session, and points out that nowhere is Nestorius "heresy" put in precise terms. Though judged in Ephesus to be in opposition to the faith of Nicea, Nestorius' reply to Cyril's Second Letter in fact gives a philologically correct Antiochene interpretation of the second article of the Nicene Creed; furthermore, his mode of expression needs to be understood against the background of pre-Chalcedonian Antiochene christology with its strong anti-Apollinarian impetus. In connection with the term "Theotokos", it should be noted that, while Nestorius opposed an "Apollinarian" interpretation of it, he nevertheless was willing to use it in a sermon of 430; and in any case it must be remembered that the title was far from being in universal usage prior to the Council of Ephesus. In his concluding "Une perspective pour le dialogue", de Halleux suggests that, after clearing up the misunderstandings in matters of terminology, the Assyrian Church of the East could agree to consider orthodox the Cyrillic and Chalcedonian formulas of the one hypostasis of the Word incarnate, situating the Hypostasis at the ontological level of person. However, this Church must not be asked by the other Churches to receive the formulas mentioned into her own christology; at the same time, her own formula of two hypostases (qnoma) in Christ is to be understood in an entirely orthodox sense, given the different concept of hypostasis.

De Halleux's insights are of crucial importance for the present Consultations. Finally, it is important to be aware of the inadequacies of some modern translations of Syriac christological terminology; in particular, the rendering of qnoma by 'person', 'personne', found in a surprising number of even recent translations, is totally misleading.

Sebastian Brock:

*The Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire up to the Sixth Century and its Absence from the Councils in the Roman Empire* (= pp.69-85)

The paper falls into two parts: first a rapid sketch is provided of the history of the Church of the East living within the Sasanian Empire; and secondly, some prerequi-
ning', and so 'providing a stumbling block to many'. As far as Nestorius is concerned, it is important to note that he does not feature a single time in any of the fifth- or sixth-century synods. Although Narsai treats him as one of the three 'Greek Doctors' (along with Diodore and Theodore), he clearly knows very little about his teaching, and he is included simply because he is seen as a martyr for the Antiochene christological position. Knowledge of certain of Nestorius' writings in Syriac translation, incorporated in the Book of Heracleides, only reached the Persian Empire c. 540.

The second section opened with a plea to avoid misleading nomenclature and the perpetuation of sobriquets that derive from a hostile heresiographical tradition. Thus, to say that "the official adoption of Nestorianism by the Persian Church took place at the Synod of Seleucia in 486" is not only misleading but also historically incorrect. It is also important at the outset not to employ the over-simplistic threefold model found in most textbooks, where the Chalcedonian position is seen as the orthodox middle position, flanked on either side by the heretical extremes of Nestorianism and Monophysitism. A sevenfold model, allowing for various gradations of opinion across the christological spectrum is proposed, and in this model as a basic criterion for orthodoxy the formula "the incarnate Christ is consubstantial with us as well as with the Father" might be adopted. It is also of fundamental importance that the Church of the East be allowed to speak in its own terms, and not to judge its christology by the yardstick of the Greek theological agenda of the fifth to seventh centuries.

As far as the technical theological terminology is concerned, two points are essential:

(a) First of all, it goes without saying that we need to try to understand what writers actually meant by the technical terms they used, rather than rely on what their opponents claimed that they meant. In this connection it is necessary to be aware that several of the key terms used in the Chalcedonian Definition meant rather different things at different times, and that complications are further introduced when these terms are translated from Greek into other languages.

(b) Secondly, it is important to be aware of the varying starting points of the different christological traditions, both from a positive and from a negative point of view. In other words, what was their primary concern in formulating their christological teaching, and what position were they trying at all costs to avoid. Different starting points, and in particular, two different views of how salvation for humanity is effected, not surprisingly produced very different formulations: in order to do full justice to the reality of the incarnation, without which salvation would not be effective, the Alexandrine christological tradition lays stress on terms of unity, whereas the Antiochene tradition of the Church of the East sees the promise of salvation for humanity as being intimately linked with the ascension in glory of the human nature of Christ, the homo assumptus, and this requires stress to be laid instead on the terms of duality in order to maintain the full reality of the link between Christ's humanity and humanity in general.

The paper ended with some examples illustrating the varying understandings of the key terms kyana ('nature') and qnome (used to translate 'hypostasis'), and some of the ways in which the Church of the East continued to preserve archaic phraseology long after the other Churches had ceased to use it.

Sarhad Jammo:

Three Synods of the Church of the East and Their Two Ecclesiologies (= pp. 87-95)

A comparison is offered of the differing underlying ecclesiologies of two sets of early synods of the Church of the East, namely, the synods of 410 (under Mar Isaac) and 420 (under Mar Yahballaha) on the one hand, and that of the synod of 424 (under Mar Dadisho') on the other.

From the point of view of the synods of 410 and 420, the Church, East and West, is one body of Christ. It has its principle segment in the West, the East being an extension of the same body. The bishops of the West have the perfect apostolic tradition. They have the true faith. They have issued protective commandments. It is only normal for the Church of the East to adhere to their faith and order. Furthermore, the bishops of cities of the eastern Roman Empire, among them the bishop of Antioch, were collectively valid representatives of the Church in Roman Empire. However, according to the acts of these two synods, no single one of them is seen individually as a point of reference for the Church of the East. The Church of the East has accepted the care and guidance of the Western Fathers.

A completely different point of view is taken by the synod of 424, and the principle of prymacy is totally transformed: the regional church takes the place of the totality of the church, and Dadisho', the Catholics of the time, is "Peter for us". This transposition of primacy from a perfection of the universal church to a perfection of the local church is done, not through any theological rationale, but as a means of survival in a situation of emergency. If Dadisho' represents Peter, then there is nobody above him. Thus, the right of appeal to the Western Fathers is to be abrogated, the other patriarchs being "like him".

Within the space of fourteen years two different patterns of ecclesiology have been adopted by the Church of the East in the Persian Empire, each one responding to a particular concrete situation. After fifteen hundred years the Church of the East and its people are again divided between these two patterns. On the one side is the Chaldean Church, implementing basically the catholic principles and policy of the synod of Mar Isaac and Mar Yahballaha; and on the other, the Assyrian Church of the East, implementing the more regional ecclesiology of the synod of Mar Dadisho'. It is the first of these ecclesiologies that is expressed by 'Abdisho' in 1319 in his Collection of Synodical Canons.

Each of these two diverse ecclesiological attitudes has its own justification in history, and both have their own merit and validity. The former, however, would seem to represent the normal mode of ecclesiastical life, whereas the latter represents the survival mode. The Church of the East and her people are divided today into two segments, each representing one of these ecclesiologies and attitudes, instead of having
one Church of the East representing the best of both modes. In the actualization of that 
prospect lies the hope of the heirs of the primordial Church of the East.

J.-M. Fiey:

The Spread of the Persian Church (= pp.97-106)

This paper gave a succinct historical and topographical overview of the history of 
the Church of the East, its expansion across Asia in the seventh to thirteenth centuries, 
and its subsequent decline in the fourteenth, followed by the divisions within it which 
were brought about in the following centuries as a result of renewed contact with the 
Christian Churches in the West.

Bernard Dupuy:

The Christology of Nestorius (= pp.107-114)

When dealing with the theology of Nestorius it is always essential to keep in mind 
his Antiochene background; he probably studied under Theodore, and, like all the 
Antiochenes, he was engaged in the fight against Apollinarianism. It is also important not 
to exaggerate his opposition to the term Theotokos: this was not a term in wide use be­­fore 
it became a matter of dispute in Constantinople in 428, and indeed before the controversy had erupted even Cyril had never used the term; moreover, there is one homily where Nestorius himself does employ it. Nestorius' soteriology has often been misrepresented, but is in fact fully orthodox, as he himself wrote, 'God the Logos was in­ominated in order to make humanity the image of God in himself and to renew it in the 
very nature of his own humanity'.

His emphasis that 'the properties of Christ's flesh cannot ascend into the essence of God', and his desire to avoid the term 'becoming' in connection with the Logos, which he saw as implying mutability, lies at the heart of his thought. Along with the Antiochene exegetical tradition, he understood 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14) as his 'indwelling' in the Temple of his body (cf John 2:21), using vocabulary that had been employed by Athanasius, but which was abandoned by Cyril after 428, thus im­­plies the person, whereas for Nestorius it is always the essence. Here, as in the case of 
'hypostasis', he is essential to interpret Nestorius according to his own understanding of 
the terms. In fact it must be recognized that Nestorius is never absolutely clear on the 
question of the prosopon of Christ, and the relationship of the 'prosopon of union' to 
the 'prosopon of he who has clothed and the prosopon of he who is clothed' is never satis­factorily explained.

Many today are convinced that Nestorius never taught what was called the 'Ne­­torian heresy' after him, though his thought does suffer from serious shortcomings. As 
far as the Church of the East is concerned, it is needs to be recognized that the theolog­ians of this Church have always rejected what their opponents describe as 'Nestor­ianism', and so this is a totally different issue from the question of Nestorius' own chri­sto­logy; on this latter point one thing at least is clear: Nestorius was condemned irre­gularly by the court at Ephesus, and so a dispassionate evaluation of his christological ex­pressions is required for the Churches today. What is needed is a purification of their 
memories and a clarification of the real significance of the ancient individual anathe­mas.

Mar Bawai Soro/M. J. Birnie:

Is the Theology of the Church of the East Nestorian? (= pp.116-132)

Two questions need to be distinguished. If it is asked "Does the Church of the East 
venerate Nestorius and continue to employ his theological vocabulary (two kyanes/ na­tures, two qnome/hypostaseis, one prosopon), then the answer is obviously yes. But if 
the question is "Is the Church of the East Nestorian?", the answer is not so immediately 
evident. Was Nestorius himself a "Nestorian" as that heresy is universally understood and described? Many scholars in modern times have given an answer in the negative, and it is very likely that if the same question applied to the Church of the East, the an­swer would similarly be in the negative. The question needs to be dealt with in three 
stages: (1) the relationship of the Persian Church to the ecumenical councils of the By­zantine Empire; (2) the historical development of the Christological terms and their 
use; and (3) an answer to the question from the Church of the East's own viewpoint.

(1) Though the Council of Nicea was received in 410 at the Synod of Seleucia/ 
Ctesiphon, no mention is made of Constantinople until the Synod of Mar Yausep in 
554; it is significant that no mention, however, is made at that Synod of the other inter­vening Councils (Ephesus, Chalcedon and Constantinople II). Perhaps part of the rea­sons for this official silence lies in the administrative independence of the Church of the East which had first been spelled out at the Synod of Dadisho' in 424; on that oc­casion the administrative separation vis a vis the Western bishops was not motivated by 
thetical issues, but was purely practical and the result of political conditions.

(2) It was the closure of the Persian School in Edessa (489), and its relocation in 
Nisibis, that effectively spread the influence of the Antiochene school of thought with 
its strongly dyophysite Christology. To the Antiochene partisans at Nisibis Nestorius 
was venerated as a staunch defender of Antiochene orthodoxy and as a martyr to the 
pride and arrogance of Cyril. The Cyrilline position, however, also came to be repre-
sented in the Persian Empire, due to large-scale deportations of captives from the Byzantine Empire; though ultimately these ‘monophysites’ received the status of a separate Christian body, at first they were officially part of the Patriarchate of the Church of the East, and this may help explain the reticence of the Synods of the Church of the East over the controversial Councils of the Byzantine Empire. It is also notable that Nestorius is not named in the Sunhados until a canonical letter from the Catholicos-Patriarch Giwargis (660-80). An avoidance of inflammatory rhetoric and controversial terminology is also characteristic of the earliest Christological definition by the bishops of the Church of the East at the Synod of 486.

The action of the Second Council of Constantinople (553), approving the condemnation of the “Three Chapters” and the anathematization of Theodore of Mopsuestia and his writings, drew a strong reaction from the Church of the East, for whom Theodore was the Interpreter par excellence, and in the Synod of Isho’yahb I (587) those who condemn Theodore are unequivocally anathematized. It is important to note, however, that in its own christological formulation the Synod maintained a position very close to that of the Chalcedonian Definition, though avoiding the use of the (to them ambiguous) term gnomon/hypostasis outside a Trinitarian context.

It was the threat in 612 that the Persian king might impose a ‘one nature’ candidate on the vacant patriarchal see that led to a hardening of positions, and the introduction into an official confession of the term gnomon in the sense of Nestorius’ usage, as opposed to that of Cyril. That this did not imply a dividing up of Christ into two subjects can be seen from Babai the Great’s Book of the Union; here it is quite clear that he understands a unified “subject” of the incarnation: there is one Son of God who takes his own flesh, not another’s, from the Blessed Virgin.

In conclusion, the Church of the East indeed venerates Nestorius and makes use of his vocabulary, but it rejects the epithet "Nestorian" because it does not accept all the implications of that name (and in any case, that Church does not originate with Nestorius or with his followers). The Church of the East confesses two natures in Christ, inseparable and unconfused, subsisting in one personal subject, whose subject, God the Word, the Son of God, God over all, is consubstantial with his Begetter in his own essential nature, and consubstantial with us in the nature which he took from the Virgin and made his own. Whether the formulae employed by this confession are adequate to express a true metaphysical union of the two disparate natures we are unable to say with any degree of certainty, for we are well aware that the "mystery" of the incarnation has eluded the powers of human thought and tongue to express to the satisfaction of all.

Mar Bawai ended by emphasizing the need for humility and the realization of the inadequacy of all our attempts to describe the indescribable. Only with a humble recognition of one’s own frailty, and in a spirit of contrition for the wilful misunderstandings of the past, will it be possible to convert the present situation of divisions and schisms into a future process of healing and reunion. (An Appendix gives a helpful schematic diagram that illustrates the Church of the East’s understanding of the Incarnation).

Adelbert Davids:

Is the Theology of the Assyrian Church Nestorian? (= pp.134-141)

The paper began by examining how the term ‘Nestorian’ was used. It is already to be found employed at the Second Council of Ephesus (449) and at Chalcedon. In the Synodicon of the Church of the East the term first appears in a document of 612, where it is simply an abusive synonym for ‘dyophysite’. It is only in 680 that Nestorius is mentioned by name in an official document of the Church of the East. Theodore, on the other hand, was already mentioned by name in the (schismatic) synod of 484, and then features again in the synods of 544, 585, 596 and 605. These texts indicate that in the latter part of the sixth century Theodore of Mopsuestia had become the name that stood for Oriental Orthodoxy.

The various synods of the Church of the East during the fifth to seventh centuries provide an instructive sequence of credal statements, and the developments in phrasedology and content were illustrated by means of substantial quotations.

Mar Aprem G. Mooken:

Is the Theology of the Assyrian Church Nestorian? (= pp.142-151)

The main problem in finding a suitable answer to this question lies in the different ways in which the word ‘Nestorian’ is understood. Those who accept the Council of Ephesus (431) consider Nestorianism as a heresy because they thought that Nestorius taught two personalities in Jesus Christ, and that Jesus was born as a human being to whom divinity was later joined. Nestorius, however, did not teach any such heresy, and in view of the irregularities of the Synod of Ephesus it remains doubtful that the Church of the East could accept it as an ecumenical Council of the universal Church.

The relevance of ‘Nestorianism’ (i.e. a strongly dyophysite Christology) for today lies in its emphasis on the humanity of our Lord: this emphasis was necessary at the time of Nestorius because of the influence of Apollinarius, and it is just as relevant today. Likewise his objections to the use of the term “Theotokos” should not be ignored in the context of excessive Mariology found in some parts of the Roman Catholic Church (but rightly opposed by Vatican II).

A number of modern scholars have shown that the charge of Nestorianism cannot justly be levelled against Nestorius’ own teaching, and on an official level at the beginning of this century moves were made in the Anglican Church to clear the Church of the East from the charge of heresy. In the context of more recent ecumenical discussions, the results of the Aarhus consultation (1964) are in a way discouraging, for if a unilateral declaration of a Christological compromise is made by the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, then the Church of the East may find more affinity with the West than the East from the christological point of view. If the “eastern ecumenism” is based on Cyril of Alexandria and the Council of Ephesus, “western ecume-
nism” will be based on the Tome of Leo and the Council of Chalcedon. As the non-Chalcedonian Churches insist on the reunion with the Orthodox Churches without having to recognize the Council of Chalcedon, then the Church of the East has a legitimate claim to insist on the reunion without recognizing the Council of Ephesus.

Is the theology of the Assyrian Church Nestorian? The answer is both Yes and No. If Nestorius himself was never a Nestorian, why should anybody bother whether the reply is Yes or No? The Assyrian Church is “Nestorian” to the extent that it considers Nestorius a saint and a Greek Doctor of the Church. The answer is “No” if the questioner thought that Nestorianism is the denial of the divinity or the total separation of the divine and human natures in Christ.

Archbishop Emmanuel Delly:

Comment Expressing the View of the Chaldean Church Today on the Christological Controversy (= pp.153-155)

The root of the trouble behind many centuries of misunderstandings lies in the use of the same terminology, but with different meanings, by the two philosophical currents represented by the Antiochene and the Alexandrian christological traditions. The writings of the Church of the East should be judged in the context of their own time and own understanding of the terminology, and not by the criterion of philosophical and theological terminology used by us today.

Archbishop Delly illustrated this point vividly from his own experience: as a young man he had written a monograph on the theology of Elia bar Shenaya, and judged him then to be a true Nestorian - unjustly, as he would say today, for the teachings of Elia, when read in the context of his own understanding of the terminology, are those of his Fathers and of the Apostles and basically those of the Church Universal. Today, he would say that the christological faith of the Church of the East always remained that of the Apostles and the Church Universal.

After commenting on the different senses in which the key terms kyana, qnome and parsopa (and their Arabic equivalents) are used, Archbishop Delly concluded that, in dealing with the question of the christology of the Church of the East, we are not dealing with an error but with a different way of conceiving and understanding the meaning of terms.

Geovarghese Chediath:

The Theological Contribution of Mar Babai the Great (= pp.155-166)

The paper opened with some details about the life and writings of Babai (531/2-628). His major work, the Book of the Union, was the first large-scale treatise on the incarnation by a writer of the Church of the East and it remains one of the most authoritative statements of that Church’s christological position.

Babai accepts as an unquestioned fact that the Son is one and unique and that he has two perfect natures in the union without mixture. His concern was to explain the duality in the union, and he does this by providing a synthesis of various traditions. As a follower of the Antiochene tradition he begins with the historical Jesus Christ and ascends to the divinity. On the other hand, his starting point is on occasion the Word of God, then coming down to the union, as is the case in the Alexandrine tradition. And as a follower of Theodore, Babai uses concrete and abstract expressions side by side.

In speaking of the terms Word and Son of God Babai makes a subtle distinction: he uses “Word” pointing to the common nature (divinity) and the qnome, while “Son” is indicative of the particular property of the nature, the parsopa of Filiation, which is incommunicable with the Father and the Holy Spirit while communicable with the creatures. His key terms are kyana, qnome and parsopa. Kyana is the same as nature in the abstract, and is the universal compared to the particular. Qnome is the concretisation of the abstract kyana. It is incommunicable, and on Babai’s understanding of the term, a union of two perfect qnome so as to form one qnome is impossible. Qnome may be translated as “this or that substance”, “substance”, “reality as opposed to the unreal or illusion”. It is primarily referring to concrete reality or actuality rather than Person. The qnome of Babai is not the Chalcedonian hypostasis (which is identified instead with prosopon). Parsopa for him is the property which distinguishes one qnome from another qnome of the same species. The indivisible and singular property of the qnome is given by the parsopa. Thus the second qnome of the Trinity is the Word, and his parsopa is “Sonship”. God the Word, having the parsopa of Filiation, assumed our humanity to his parsopa and gave his parsopa to the Man formed in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Thus the parsopa of filiation of the Word became the parsopa of that which is formed in her, at the very moment of conception. The Word is a perfect qnome and the humanity is a perfect qnome, as any other man.

Babai lays great emphasis on the oneness of the Son, and he expresses the union of the two natures in Christ by means of a number of different terms, "union", "assumption", "conjunction", "indwelling", "putting one": all of these terms, he says, have their limitations; since each different term or phrase expresses a different aspect of the mystery that cannot be expressed in language, it is important to use a variety of terms in conjunction.

The union of the two natures is without any mixture or confusion, and Babai emphasizes that the properties of each nature are preserved. Since the divine properties subsist in the divine qnome, and the human properties in the human qnome, it is necessary to speak of two natures and two qnome. The "Son", that is, the parsopa of Filiation of the Word and of the man, is the subject of attribution of all the predicates. Duality is applicable when considering the incarnate life of Christ; after the Resurrection, however, one cannot speak of duality, for there is only oneness.

Babai’s Christology is Parsopic Christology. He presents a Christology which is not orthodox as the Christology of the Alexandrian tradition. His stress is on the parsopa of Filiation of the Word; till the incarnation he speaks in terms of the Word, and after it in terms of the Son, or Christ (i.e. the parsopa of Filiation). The concrete expression
"man" for the humanity does not mean a duality of Filiation, but the actuality and reality of the humanity assumed. The two gnome are indicative of the reality of the duality in Christ without confusion. The "homo assumptus" was in the tradition of the Church. When there are two independent gnome, then it becomes heretical. But as long as the two exist in one parsopa, the one having dependence on the other, it is orthodox.

Provided it does not lead to misunderstanding, Babai is prepared on occasion to use the term Yaldat Aloha (= Theotokos). If one confronts Babai's Christology with the Alexandrian Christology, and looks at it from that point of view, one may have doubts about it. But if one considers it as a particular Christology of a particular Church, contributing to the richness of the one Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, then one would happily accept it as a particular Christology acceptable in the Christian Tradition. Babai's Christology expresses the very same truth, which the Cyrillic Christology presents to the Church. Although the same words meant different things to different people, in each context they are correct, and the words must be accepted in the particular sense of each.

Sarhad Jamuno:

The Quddasha of the Apostles Addai and Mari and the Narrative of the Eucharistic Institution (= pp.167-181)

Of the three anaphoras, or Qaddashe, used by the Church of the East it is well known that the anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari lacks an Institution Narrative. Prior to the liturgical reforms of the Catholics Ischo'yahb III in the mid seventh century there had also been other anaphoras in use, for some of which the name of attribution is known, and for one of which fragments survive in an early manuscript; in this last, it is important to note that the narrative of institution does not report the words of Christ.

From a detailed examination of the various commentators of the Church of the East on the eucharistic liturgy, it can be concluded that (1) Either explicitly or implicitly, all Assyro-Chaldean commentators refer to the Institution Narrative as part of the anaphora on which they comment. (2) One line of authors focuses more on the epiclesis and the coming of the Holy Spirit as the divine power effecting consecration. (3) Another line of commentators, led by Gabriel Qatraya (7th cent.), attributes to the Last Supper and to the words of the Lord an importance, if not a value, equal to the one attributed to the epiclesis: both form together cardinal parts of the consecratory rite.

In view of the presence of an Institution Narrative in the Maronite anaphora known as the Shararre, or Peter III, which is otherwise very close to the anaphora of the Apostles, it has been argued by many scholars (including the speaker in his youth) that an Institution Narrative was once present in the anaphora of the Apostles as well, but that it had been later removed. The reasons for such an excision are, however, impossible to conceive, and accordingly this view must be considered untenable. Rather, the anaphora of the Apostles must be regarded as a text of great antiquity which has no been conformed to the norm that was later to be adopted in all other anaphoras, including the two also in use in the Church of the East. It should be noted that the anaphora of the Apostles does in fact refer to the action of the Lord at the Last Supper in two specific places.

In conclusion, the anaphora of the Apostles is a venerable and valid consecratory form of eucharistic prayer, seeing that (a) it is an authentic euchological witness of prordial Christianity; (b) even though the Institution Narrative is not included, the connection between the celebration of the Church and the Last Supper is clearly and concisely established; and (c) the Church of the East has adopted two other Quddasha containing the Institution Narrative, thus declaring her intention of relating to the scriptural institutional rite of eucharist, accepting, as well, the theological and liturgical developments in Western Christianity.

Peter Hofrichter:

The Anaphora of Addai and Mari in the Church of the East - Eucharist without Institution Narrative? (= pp.182-191)

The liturgical reforms of Ischo'yahb III restricted the anaphoras in use in the Church of the East to three, the Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari, that of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and that of Nestorius. The second and third belong to the Byzantine tradition and were only translated into Syriac in the sixth century. The Anaphora of the Apostles, however, must have originated in Syria itself at a very early time, probably in Edessa in the third or second century.

The absence of an Institution Narrative in the anaphora of the Apostles caused problems for Roman Catholic theologians in the sixteenth century when they came across it in use in India, in view of the Latin concept of the consecration and transubstantiation by and at the moment of the words of the Institution (dating back to the twelfth century). Most Western theologians took the view that the Institution Narrative had simply been omitted in the manuscripts out of respect, and that originally the words had been said by heart. Thus in many Western editions of the anaphora of the Apostles an Institution Narrative has been supplied (in older Chaldean and Syro-Malabar missals it is printed only at the end of the anaphora). There are strong reasons, however, for supposing that in the pre-Nicene period an institution narrative was absent from the eucharistic anaphora, and that the East Syrian tradition has simply preserved this tradition.

Examination of other anaphoras of Syrian origin in fact brings to light the fact that there are several anaphoras which, although they have an institution narrative, lack the actual words of institution. This is the case with the fragmentary sixth-century East Syrian anaphora, the Ethiopian anaphora of Jacob of Serugh, and three Syrian Orthodox anaphoras (those attributed to St Peter, Xystus of Rome, and Dionysius bar Salibi). Support for the original absence of an institution narrative in the eucharistic liturgy can be found, not only in the Acts of Thomas and Acts of John, but also in the
Didache (dating from between c.80 and 130), which has explicit instructions for the eucharistic prayer, but without any reference to the institution. In fact two patterns of the Eucharist can already be found in the New Testament, the first, of Paul and the Synoptic Gospels, with its emphasis on the institution of the Eucharist, and the other of John, who provides a very different emphasis.

In the new Catechism of the Catholic Church sections 1412-3 specifically speak of the words of consecration in the Institution Narrative. Since, however, this is a sententia certa, and not a doctrine de fide that is exclusive of other approaches, there is still room for the possibility of the Catholic Church agreeing to the anaphora of the Apostles in its original form, without the institution narrative. Indeed, both Catholic and Orthodox Christians should be extremely thankful to the Church of the East for having preserved an original and authentic tradition that was totally displaced and forgotten in all other branches of Christianity. Furthermore, the commentary to the Lima "Declarations of Convergence" (1982) on the Eucharist would certainly seem to be applicable to anaphora of the Apostles, as well as to other Eastern anaphoras, even though it did not have that anaphora specifically in mind.

Sebastian Brock

PRO ORIENTE's Second Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition 1996

In the volume about the First Syriac Consultation from 1994 (pp.223-226), a report was given of the First Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition, held in Vienna in June 1994 under the auspices of the Stiftung PRO ORIENTE. The aim was to incorporate the Assyrian Church of the East into PRO ORIENTE's ongoing non-official dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox Churches. At the end of February 1996 PRO ORIENTE arranged a Second Consultation that again brought together theologians from various Churches of Syriac liturgical tradition. At the First Consultation the participants had been confined to theologians of the Syriac Churches, which meant that the Oriental Orthodox position - at the opposite end of the christological spectrum from the Assyrian Church of the East - was represented only by the Syrian Orthodox and Indian Orthodox participants; at the Second Consultation, however, the Oriental Orthodox were also represented by theologians from the Armenian Apostolic and Coptic Orthodox Churches (a participant from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was unfortunately unable to come); an observer from the Mar Thoma Church in India also attended.

Between the First and Second Consultations two events of greatest significance, as far as the Assyrian Church of the East was concerned, had taken place: on November 11, 1994, a common declaration of faith had been issued in Rome by Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Mar Dinkha IV, and then, only a few days later that month, the Executive Council of the Middle East Council of Churches was requested by the MECC’s Sixth General Assembly to set in motion the process for receiving the Assyrian Church of the East into full membership of the MECC (this was duly effected in the course of 1995).

These two developments have had a very important effect on the way in which the Assyrian Church of the East sees its relationship with other Churches, giving it a new confidence that it is now on equal terms with them, and no longer, as it were, on probation. The Common Declaration in Rome had put the Assyrian Church of the East on a par, vis a vis the Roman Catholic Church, with the Syrian and Coptic Orthodox Churches, with whose Patriarchs Pope John Paul II had already made similar common declarations of faith. Acceptance as a full member of the MECC was also of great significance for relationship with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, by whom the Assyrian Church of the East had in the past sometimes been marginalised; here it is interesting to note that the Assyrian Church of the East was given a place in the Catholic group of Churches (among whom, of course, are the Syrian Catholic, Chaldean and Maronite Churches), since inclusion into any of the other three groups, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Protestant, would have been very problematic. Though at first surprising, this allocation in fact makes good sense from the point of view of doctrinal history, Rome always having been the strongest defender of a more strictly dyophysite position in Christology.

The topics discussed at the Second Consultation covered four main areas, the Christological declaration of November 1994, the Council of Ephesus, the "Three Chapters" episode leading to the condemnation of both the person and the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia at the Fifth Council (553), and the liturgical texts of the Church of the East as an expression of Christology. At the First Consultation the papers had either been by theologians of the Church of the East (Assyrian and Chaldean), or by western "experts"; at the Second Consultation, however, several papers were also given by theologians of the Syrian and Indian Orthodox Churches: this provided extremely helpful, since it high-lighted the kinds of problems (not always so obvious to Churches in the Chalcedonian tradition) which the Oriental Orthodox Churches perceive as foremost in any dialogue with the Assyrian Church of the East.

The final Communiqué (see above, pp. 191-194) contains a number of remarkable features which stand out all the more when this Communiqué is compared with that of the First Consultation, where it had not proved possible to offer anything much more than a description of the proceedings. In the present Communiqué, by contrast, it states at the outset that the participants had been "able to proceed from the Unity of Faith that was expressed in the Vienna Christological Formula ..." Here it needs to be recalled that the Vienna Christological Formula was formulated at the 1971 PRO ORIENTE Consultation between Roman Catholic and Oriental Orthodox theologians, at a time when the Assyrian Church of the East had no part in ecumenical dialogue on Christology: the fact that its central Christological statement is now also considered acce-
ptable by the theologians of the Assyrian Church at the Second Consultation is of no small significance. Equally significant is the passage (initially suggested by a participant from the Assyrian Church of the East) which states that the "theological contents" of the Council of Ephesus could indeed be considered as a theological basis that could unite these Churches (sc. of the Syriac Tradition) in the same faith in Jesus Christ."

There is, admittedly, an element of ambiguity here, in that the Council of Ephesus (which has not been accepted by the Church of the East) never issued any doctrinal statement, and there are a number of different interpretations of what the "theological contents" might in fact be.

Both these elements in the Communiqué can be seen as reassuring, from the point of view of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, in that they indicate that the Assyrian Church of the East is in fact (and contrary to their traditional perception) perfectly happy to accept statements which describe a position which they regard as their own.

Likewise of greatest importance in this context is the statement that "there is a necessity to make an absolute distinction between the doctrinal position of the Assyrian Church of the East and the position, recognized by all to be heretical, which holds that there are two Sons, two prooora in the one Incarnate Christ, a position which is traditionally described by the Chalcedonians and Oriental Orthodox as 'Nestorianism'". This makes it absolutely clear that the Assyrian Church of the East does not hold (any certainly never has held) the doctrinal position of which its theological opponents have traditionally accused it. In connection with this, the specific explanation, given by the participants of the Church of the East (both Assyrian and Chaldean), of their understanding of one of the key christological terms (qnome) is very helpful, in that it makes it perfectly clear that when the East Syrian tradition speaks of the "two natures and their qnome" in the incarnate Christ, this does not mean two hypostases. Likewise, the open acknowledgement of the different senses accorded to several of the central christological terms in the different traditions is important for the process of clearing away past misunderstandings.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to the explicit mention of the ultimate aim of the Dialogue: no Church is being asked to reconsider its preferred christological formulation, but rather, each Church, while remaining completely true to its own tradition, when "should come to perceive that the christological teaching of the other Syriac traditions, when correctly understood, represents a legitimate expression of our common faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the mystery of whose Incarnation can never be exhaustively formulated in words." In other words, there is no question of one side being required to make concessions to the other; rather, if the Dialogue proves successful, it will be the case that all parties are winners, in that they will all have become richer in understanding.

Having the privilege of participating in both the First and the Second Consultations, I was very aware of a noticeable difference in atmosphere between the two: at the First, although good will on all sides was very much in evidence, there was always the feeling that the Assyrian Church of the East was "on trial", with the result that there was sometimes an underlying element of suspicion on either side present. At the Second Consultation, however, the atmosphere was generally very different: this was not just due to the new confidence given to the Assyrian Church of the East by intervening events, as indicated above; equally important was the sense that a real mutual trust and respect had now been achieved among the participants. It is by no means easy to dispel the accumulation of misunderstanding and mistrust that has grown up over the centuries, and it is often not fully realised by members of the Chalcedonian Churches how difficult it is to bridge the perceived gap between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Oriental Orthodox Churches in matters of christology. In this context it was very helpful to have Armenian and Coptic Orthodox participants present, and the critical but constructive contributions of His Eminence Amba Bishoy were particularly valuable. These two Consultations organized by the PRO ORIENTE Foundation, under the guidance of its President Alfred Stirnemann, have ensured that the foundations for this bridge between the two very different christological traditions are being soundly laid at a non-official level, and it is earnestly to be hoped that dialogue at an official level, as well as non-official, will now build up further from these foundations.

Dietmar W. Winkler

The Current Theological Dialogue with the Assyrian Church of the East

Up to now the Assyrian Church of the East has been called Nestorian Church. From a theological point of view this is a name which we have to reject today, since the term "Nestorian" has been used to insult them. Somewhat better is the expression pre-Ephesian Church, because it accepts only the first two imperial synods (Nicea 325, Constantinople 381) as ecumenical. But the Church of the East expanded outside the bounds of the Roman Empire. Therefore the term East Syrian or Syro Oriental Church would be more correct than a name which refers to the reception of Councils of the Roman Empire. However, the most appropriate is to respect how they call themselves: Assyrian Church of the East or just Church of the East.

My aim in this paper is to give a brief survey of the contemporary ecumenical dialogues this church is involved in, together with some observations: (1) The dialogue within the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), (2) The relationship to the Coptic Orthodox Church, (3) The unofficial Syriac Dialogue initiated by PRO ORIENTE, and finally (4) The official bilateral dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. 

* Based on a paper read at the Villum Symposium Syriacum in Uppsala/Sweden (12-14 August 1996). I would like to thank the Austrian "Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung" who supported my work, and Fr. Anthony Ruf OSB who improved my English text.

2 Cf. D. W. Winkler, "Theologische Notizen zu den ökumenischen Dialogen mit der Assyrischen Kirche des
1. The theological dialogue within the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC)

Already in 1985 at the 4th general assembly in Nicosia (Cyprus), the Assyrian Church tried to become a member of the MECC. But since this Church was closely associated with the "Nestorian" heresy the application was turned down under the pressure of some (pre-chalcedonian) Oriental Orthodox bishops. The Coptic Orthodox Church was particularly uninterested in a dialogue with the Assyrian Church. Only when the family of the seven Catholic Churches in the Middle East joined the Council in 1990 at the 5th general assembly (Nicosia) did the discussion concerning the MECC-membership of the Church of the East get a fresh impetus. A MECC-committee for dialogue with the Assyrian Church of the East was founded in 1991. From 1992 to 1994 two official dialogue sessions were held and several unofficial encounters were arranged with a reduced number of participants. No final communiqué was issued, but important theological work was done.5

The reservations of the Coptic Church are easily explained by the confrontation between Cyril and Nestorius and the proceedings around the Council of Ephesus (431). The discussions made it clear that above all the Oriental Orthodox have a problem with the East Syrian terminology, especially concerning the term qnomâ. But if we look closer it becomes evident that the Assyrian Christology agrees in substance with the Chalcedonian and pre-Chalcedonian theology. Nevertheless only minor progress was made at this first encounter after about fifteen centuries of separation and mistrust.

The second official meeting (September 15-20, 1992) brought the person and the teachings of Nestorius into focus. Here I just want to mention the marvellous investigation of the late André de Halleux.6 Today any serious analysis of the subject will have to take into consideration the results of this study.

André de Halleux shows "that one cannot suspect the fundamentally orthodox intention of the Christological faith of Nestorius" and that it "corresponds in substance to the apostolic tradition."7 De Halleux also evaluates critically the proceedings of the first Council of Ephesus (431), a rereading of the sources is given. As everybody knows it was not possible to open the Council on 7th June 431 because of John of Antioch's and the Roman delegate's delay. John of Antioch wrote a letter to Cyril in which he announced that he would arrive a bit later because of some external circumstances. Nevertheless Cyril opened the Council on 22nd June ignoring the protest of the delegate of the emperor and of 68 bishops. The first session therefore started with an important insufficiency: there was a lack of impartial verification and official authentification.8 In de Halleux' paper presented at the second MECC-meeting we read: "In this manner, then, the ecumenical council of Ephesus began illegally. ...there are no other examples of an ecumenical council opening against imperial orders."9 Furthermore there were considerable defects in the process against Nestorius. Although the assembly tried to compensate its irregular opening by the observation of canonical forms of the juridical procedure "it did, nonetheless, violate an elementary rule of natural right."10 Cyril was the head of the synod, the accuser and the judge. Even the theological positions of Nestorius were not discussed: "...the heresy which is imputed to him is not otherwise indicated than by the act of thinking and preaching impious things", or of "having committed blasphemy against Christ".11 Finally the condemnation happened in the absence of Nestorius.

Following the explications of André de Halleux one cannot help feeling that the condemnation of Nestorius at Ephesus was more important than the struggle for unity in faith. The Council passed no new formal definition of the orthodox faith. Cyril transformed an imperial synod into a process against heretic.

However, the discussions at this second meeting of the MECC-committee for dialogue with the Assyrian Church of the East also showed the need of clarifying the christological terminology, especially the problem of hypostasis and qnomâ.

The 6th general assembly of the MECC (November 15-21, 1994) in Limassol (Cyprus) gave an official mandate to examine the conditions of membership of the Assyrians. The Executive Committee took valuable steps at its meeting in February 1995 "to set in motion the process for receiving the Ancient (Assyrian) Church of the East into the membership of the MECC."12 As the MECC has a confessional family system, there was still another problem left: to which of the four families (Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Protestant/Evangelicals) should the Assyrian Church be joined?

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5 De Halleux, "Nestorius" 168.
6 Cf. De Halleux, "La première session" 50.
7 De Halleux, "Nestorius" 40.
8 Ibid. 42.
9 Ibid. 45.
3. The non official Syriac Dialogue initiated by PRO ORIENTE

In June 1994 the foundation PRO ORIENTE issued invitations to a first non-official Consultation in Vienna: "Orthodoxy and Catholicity in the Syriac Tradition with Special Attention to the Theology of the Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire." For the first time theologians of all the Syriac churches came together: from the Assyrian Church of the East (Old and New Calendarian), from the Oriental Orthodox Churches (Syrian Orthodox from Antioch, Malankara Orthodox from India), and from the Oriental Catholic Churches (Chaldean, Syrian, Maronite, Malabar, and Malankara). I want to comment on some results of this consultation.

1. First it has to be pointed out in the ecumenical discussion, though it sounds very simple: The East Syrian or Persian church came not into being because of the condemnation of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus (431) or a schism from the Roman Imperial Church. It can be proven that the origin of the Persian church "dates from the end of the first century, or, at latest, the beginning of the second century."16 Persian bishops were neither present at the Council of Ephesus (431) nor at the Council of Chalcedon (451). The Church has its history outside the bounds of the Roman Empire. As Sebastian Brock notes this "is especially important to remember in connection with the 'Ecumenical Councils'. These were gatherings confined to the bishops of the Roman Empire and they were in any case convoked by the Roman Emperor, whose authority of course was not recognized outside the bounds of the Roman Empire. This of course meant that the creeds and canons issued by these Councils were only authoritative within the Roman Empire - though they might ... be subsequently accepted by the Church outside the Roman Empire."17 The fact that the so-called "ecumenical" Councils were imperial synods, is of utmost importance for the question of the reception of councils in the contemporary ecumenical dialogue.

2. At the time when Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, the Persian kings regarded the Christians as a potential endangering of their interests and suspected their loyalty. During the persecutions of the 4th century many Christians had to seek refuge in the Roman Empire. The Persian Christians got caught between the politics of the ancient superpowers Persia and Rome: they needed to distance themselves from the state religion of the Roman Empire to avoid suspicions to be collaborators of the enemy. So this could be one reason that the East Syrian church decided for a diphysite christology at the synods of Beth Lapat and Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 484/486.

3. Despite the investigations of André de Halleux it is difficult to prove the orthodoxy of Nestorius, because the sources available do not give a precise picture of his faith.18 But based on an analysis of east Syrian synods and theologians it is possible to show that the Church of the East handed down an orthodox christology. Adalbert J. Davids concludes in the light of the Synodicon Orientale that there is an explicit Antiochene Christology present "since the end of the fifth century and will be developed in an 'anti-Eutychian' sense from 585 onwards. At the same time there is a growing importance of the person and of the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia for the Persian

13 Soro, "Recent Ecumenical Initiatives".
14 PRO ORIENTE was founded in 1964 by Cardinal Franz König of Vienna to promote ecumenical relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the (Byzantine) Orthodox, pre-Chalcedonian and pre-Ephesinian Churches.

17 S. Brock, "The Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire up to the Sixth Century and it's Absence from the Councils in the Roman Empire", in: PRO ORIENTE, Syriac Dialogue 70.
18 Cf. the papers of B. Dupuy and Mar Aprem G. Mocken, in: PRO ORIENTE, Syriac Dialogue. A. de Halleux wrote in a letter to my colleague E. Renhart (5. August 1993): "Montrer que cette appellation [i.e. 'nestorienne'] est injuste me paraît plus délicat, étant donné la difficulté de définir avec précision l'hérésie de Nestorius."
The theological reflection always takes as its point of departure the Nican and Nicerian-Constantinopolitan creed.

We remember that even the great scholar Wilhelm de Vries wrote: "the official adoption of Nestorianism by the Persian Church took place at the Synod of Seleucia in 486." But the fact is that the brief Christological statement of that synod does not reveal Nestorianism but a dyophysite christology. Today there should be no doubt about the fundamental orthodoxy of this passage. Sebastian Brock finds "nothing specifically Nestorian in the formulation of the wording" and directs attention to William F. Macomber who mentioned already in 1958, "It is also true that the words used can be taken as materially orthodox." Mar Bawai Soro, the Assyrian bishop for inter-church relations, stated in a very important paper of his, "It is of some note that the name 'Nestorius' did not appear in Sunnados [Synodicon Orientale] until a canonical letter from the Catholicos-Patriarch Giwargis (660-680)." We have to recognize that the theology of the Church of the East is more "Theodorian" than "Nestorian". Among the Greek doctors of the Church of the East such as Diodor of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius, the latter seems to be more a symbol than an important theologian. But the influence of Theodore is obvious.

The road to a better understanding leads us to terminology. We have to find out what the east Syrian theologians intended to say with the terms they used, rather than asking what their opponents imagined to read in these expressions. Are ἁπν (kyanā), amwq (qnomā) and awpox̓ (parsopā) really identical with ἐνος (physis), ἐπονομασία (hypothesis) and ἐνονομασία (prosopon) (prosopon)? Along such lines we have to examine the formula two kyan and two qnomé in one parsopā forced by Babai the Great (551/2-628) and adopted by the Church of the East in 612. Babai the Great has been accused to be a real Nestorian, because the Syriac and the Greek terminology was regarded to be identical in their meaning. Luise Abramowski as well as Gevarghese Chedidh show the richness, nuances and brilliance of Babais' Christology. In an analysis of Babai's terminology Chedidh shows that amwq may not be translated with ἐπονομασία: "Babai finds the unity of Christ on the side of the parsopa of Filiation and the duality on the side of natures with their proper qnomē. There is only one Son, and he is God and man, having perfect godhead and perfect manhood." Although the Greek hypostasis was always translated into Syriac with qnomē, the Syriac term has a wider field of meaning and is often closer to ἂνδοντες (idiotes). Sebastian Brock therefore suggested not to translate the Syriac term qnomē.

Especially today, in times of a new discovery of contextual theology and inculturation, we have to bear in mind that there is a valuable heritage of and contribution to Christology outside the bounds of the theology approved by the Roman Imperial Church.

A second non-official Syriac Consultation has been planned by the PRO ORIENTE Commission on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition (short: Syriac Commission). This commission had its constitutive meeting in September 1994 in Kaslik (Lebanon) and further gatherings in February and June 1995 in Vienna. The very successful second Syriac Consultation then took place in Vienna on 22-27 February, 1996. The subjects treated there were the Christological agreement already achieved, problems of the Council of Ephesus (431), the Three Chapters controversy and the liturgical expressions of Christology in the East Syrian tradition.

For the first time in ecumenical history some sort of christological convergence between the pre-Ephesinian, the pre-Chalcedonian and the Chalcedonian Syriac churches was achieved at this consultation. In the Joint Communiqué we read: "the participants agreed with and were able to proceed from a common understanding with the Unity of Faith that was expressed in the Vienna Christological Formula." This "Vienna Christological Formula" is a common expression of the faith in Christ produced by Oriental Orthodox and Catholic theologians at the first PRO ORIENTE Consultation in Vienna 1971, which was the basis for subsequent official declarations between Roman pontiffs and Oriental Orthodox Patriarchs.

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21 A. J. Davids, "Is the Theology of the Assyrian Church Nestorian?", in: PRO ORIENTE, Syriac Dialogue 234-142.
25 PRO ORIENTE, Syriac Consultation (unpublished]. Emphasis mine.
26PRO ORIENTE, Syriac Dialogue 224-226.
27 PRO ORIENTE Syriac Commission assyrian members: Mar Bawai Soro, Mar Aprem of Trichur (Assyrian), Orthodox-assyrian members: Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo (Syrian-orthodox), Fr. A. M. George (Malankara Syrian-orthodox); Catholic members: Mar Joseph Povithal (Syro-malabar), Fr. Joseph Habhi (Chaldean), Mgr. Boulous Yousef Matar (Maronite), Mgr. Michael Alban-Jamil (Syrian-catholic), Alfred Stirnemann, Prof. Philipp Harmoucourt, Prof. Peter Hofrichter, Fr. Franz Bouwen (Roman-catholic).
28 Joint Communiqué of the second PRO ORIENTE non-official Syriac Consultation [unpublished]. Emphasis mine.
29 Cf. W. de Vries, "Die syrisch-nestorianische Haltung zu Chalkedon".
It is noteworthy too that a theological correspondence between the Church of the East and the Imperial Church was discovered: "The theological thought and formulations of the Church of the East as present in its liturgical and synodal sources are considered to be in line with the teachings of the Ecumenical Councils of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381) and compatible with those of the Council of Ephesus." Further the Joint Communique points out, "that there is a necessity to make an absolute distinction between the doctrinal position of the Assyrian Church of the East and the position, recognized by all to be heretical which holds, that there are two Sons, two prospoa in the one Incarnate Christ, a position which is traditionally described by the Chalcedonians and Oriental Orthodox as 'Nestorianism'."

Another important step was done with the distinction "between the understanding in the Church of the East of the term qnoma (i.e. individuated, but not personalized nature) and that of some other Syriac Churches where qnoma is regularly understood as the equivalent of hypostasis in the sense of person." Further the Assyrian, Chaldean and Syro-Malabar delegations of the Church of the East presented an explanation of the term qnoma: "In Christology, as expressed in the synodical and liturgical sources of the Church of the East the term 'qnoma' does not mean 'hypostasis' as understood in the Alexandrine Tradition, but instead, individuated nature. Accordingly, the human nature which the Holy Spirit fashioned, the Logos assumed and united to Himself without any separation, was personalized in the Person of the Son of God. When we speak of the two natures and their qnome, we understand this very much the same sense as two natures and their particular properties (dilayatha). It is important to note that the term 'qnoma' is used in a different way in Trinitarian theology. This definition should be taken into consideration in any further discussion.

Concerning the Three Chapters Controversy it was very interesting for me that the historic proceedings before and at the Council of Constantinople (553) seemed to be of little interest for the participants of the Church of the East. Their papers spoke about the condemned persons and writings, but not in the context of the council. However, the joint communique states that the Three Chapter controversy "led us to see the need to make the distinction between doctrines condemned and persons anathematized."

Participants also focused on the East Syrian liturgical tradition. On the basis of the axiom "lex orandi - lex credendi" extracts from the various offices of the Church of the East were analysed, with the result that the "papers on the liturgical tradition by members of the Church of the East illustrated, among other things, how prayers addressed to Christ are always directed to a single subject in the person of Christ and how examples can also be found of the exchange of predicats (Communicatio idiomatum)."

A very hopeful sequel to this second PRO ORIENTE Syriac Consultation was a letter written by the Assyrian and the Syrian-Orthodox participants to H.H. Mar Dinkha IV and H.H. Mar Ignatios Zakkia I Iwas. They ask the Patriarchs to give permission to create a Joint Committee for a theological dialogue between both ancient and apostolic sister churches. Mar Dinkha IV already agreed to this request.

4. The official bilateral dialogue with the Roman-Catholic Church

At the meeting of Mar Dinkha IV and John Paul II on 11th November 1994 the well known historic Common Christological Declaration was signed and a Mixed Committee for the theological dialogue was installed to overcome the obstacles towards visible unity. The first meeting of this official committee took place in November 1995 in Rome, the second in October 1996 in Beirut. The relations started in 1978 when Mar Dinkha visited the Vatican for the installation of Pope John Paul II. At the first official visit to the Vatican in 1984 (November 7-9) the two heads of churches initiated a process of theological dialogue. In the next ten years five meetings took place, which culminated in the Common Christological Declaration. The text was already worked out in 1992 at a meeting of experts in Rome. Afterwards it was given under the consideration of the respective authorities.

The last important step was taken at the fifth synod of the patriarchate of Mar Dinkha IV in July 1994 in Sydney, where the Assyrian synod agreed unanimously to sign the Declaration. This synod decided upon this for some ecumenically most relevant steps. They renewed the invitation to the Old Calendar Assyrians to convene in a joint synod to discuss the problems of their schism; they decided to establish new bonds with other Apostolic Churches with whom the Church of the East has not yet established any dialogue; for preparation for and participation in theological consultations and dialogues a new ecclesiastical department under the name "Commission on Inter-Church Relations and Educational Development (CIRED)" was established and H.G. Mar Bawai Soro was appointed as its Secretary General, and last but not least the decisive step for signing the Christological Declaration with the Catholic Church was taken.

Basilienliturgie und der syrischen Vita Dioscori als Quellen der Wiener Christologischen Formel" Journal of Coptic Studies (forthcoming).

33 Joint Communique of the second PRO ORIENTE non-official Syriac Consultation.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid; cf. D. W. Winkler, "Die Beitrage zur Liturgie in den PRO ORIENTE-Konsultationen mit den Kirchen

39 Ibid; cf. D. W. Winkler, "Die Beitrage zur Liturgie in den PRO ORIENTE-Konsultationen mit den Kirchen
311 (1995) 31-36; "Die Beitrage zur Liturgie in den PRO ORIENTE-Konsultationen mit den Kirchen

ken: "The Holy Synod decreed unanimously in favor of signing the agreement between our Church and the Church of Rome. This agreement protects and preserves the faith, liturgy, order, leadership of each Church individually."45

This Christological Declaration could be an ecumenical landmark. The text should not be a problem for the pre-Chalcedonian churches, because it takes into consideration previous christological declarations with the Oriental Orthodox, like those with the Coptic Orthodox Church (1973), the Syrian Orthodox Church (1984), and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church (1990).

The Christological Declaration begins with a common witness to the Nicene Creed and to the only begotten Son who became man for our salvation, and then continues: "The Word of God, second Person of the Holy Trinity, became incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit in assuming from the holy Virgin Mary a body animated by a rational soul, with which he was indissolubly united from the moment of his conception." The emphasis on the rational soul of Christ became standard in orthodox theology and especially in the Antiochene tradition since the discussion concerning Apollinarius of Laodicea (~310-390). Cyril of Alexandria († 444), who quoted by error his main Christological sentence mìva fusi tou' geou' logov' sesarkwmenh (one Nature of God the Logos incarnate) from an Apollinarianistic forgery,44 gave an orthodox interpretation to this phrase and underlined the rational soul. Further the statement that the Logos and the human body were indissolubly united from the moment of conception is of great importance for the dialogue with the ("miaphysite") Oriental Orthodox churches, since this is a central matter of Alexandrine theology.

The Christological Declaration continues: "Therefore our Lord Jesus Christ is true man, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, consubstantial with the Father and consubstantial with us in all things but sin. His divinity and his humanity are united in one person, without confusion or change, without division or separation. In him has been preserved the difference of the natures of divinity and humanity, with all their properties, faculties and operations." This paragraph takes us back to the Formula of Union (433), which was worked out at Ephesus (431) and sent to Cyril of Alexandria by John of Antioch. Cyril quotes this symbolum antiochenum in the so-called Laetentur-letter and agrees to it.45 But Aloys Grillmeier remarks that Cyril makes a slight modification. He strengthens the unity of the subject by adding "in" twice: perfect in his divinity, perfect in his humanity.46 And that is what the Common Christological Declaration does too.

Afterwards the four adverbs of the Chalcedonian definition are quoted: ajsun-gcu vt (inconfuse), ajtrevtw (immutable), ajdiairevtw (indivise) and ajcwrivstw (inseparable). "It should be noted... that at Chalcedon it was Dioscorus who for the first time made a statement implying the four famous adverbs."47 And they are de facto also included in Cyril's Laetentur-letter to John of Antioch to refuse those who teach a mixture of the Natures in the sense of the Stoic kro' si (krasis). Incidentally, this is a concern of both, Cyril and Nestorius.

The statement of the Common Christological Declaration about the difference, properties, faculties and operations of the two natures in the one Christ leads us to the Tome of Leo. Pope Leo the Great takes the term proprieties from Tertullian48 and tries to explain the coexistence and the reality of the two natures on the basis of the communicatio idiomatum.49 In the post-Chalcedonian quarrels this was a point of harsh criticism by the Cyrillic party. But if we read the Laetentur-letter properly, we see that Leo and Cyril had the same concern.

The Common Christological Declaration settles also the quarrels about the Qeotov­toke-title: "In the light of this same faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as 'the Mother of God' and also as 'the Mother of Christ'. We both recognize the legitimacy and rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety." The incomprehensibility of the Mysterium Christi and the problem of the right expression of the faith is touched when the Christological Declaration concedes the possibility of different terminologies. During the controversies of the 5th century it was not possible to discuss calmly different expressions (like qeotovko or cristotovko), which is necessary to understand the theological thinking of the other. Today the Christological Declaration makes more emphasis on a common understanding of our faith than on a standardized terminology, liturgy or piety.

So we can summarize our brief analysis,49 saying that the core of the Christology of the Common Declaration goes back to the Formular of Union (433) and to Cyril of Alexandria. In a sense it corresponds with the Vienna Christological Formula of 1971. There the main Christological part is: "We believe that our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is God the Son Incarnate, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity. His divinity was not separated from his humanity for a single moment, not for the twinkling of an eye. His humanity is one with his divinity without confusion, without confusion, without division, without separation. We in our common faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ regard his mystery inexhaustible and ineffable and for the human mind never fully comprehensible or expresable."50 The last sentence is also found in

48 Cf Tertullian, "Adv. Prax. 27,14" CCL 2, 1200, 80f.
49 Cf Leo, "Ep. 28 ad Flavianum Episcopum Constantinopolitanum contra Eutychis perfidem et haeresim" PL 54, 755A-781A.
the Common Christological Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV.

It should be possible to work out an official Christological consensus between the pre-Ephesinian and pre-Chalcedonian churches on the basis of previous official and unofficial declarations. The preconditions are not only results of theological research but also mutual trust and the courage to overcome the quarrels of the past. Although we have to respect tradition we should not be paralysed by it.