

DOES EPHESUS UNITE OR DIVIDE?
A RE-EVALUATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS—
AN ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST PERSPECTIVE

by
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I. INTRODUCTION

When Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV signed the “Common Christological Declaration” (CCD) in Rome on 11 November 1994, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Catholic Church affirmed their unity in the faith of Jesus Christ despite past suspicions on both sides growing out of different interpretations of the Council of Ephesus. Both the Pope and the Patriarch declared that *troversies of the past led to anathemasthe con* “[and the] *divisions brought about in this way were due in large part to misunderstanding*”.¹ In a historically significant and amiable discourse the Pope, during an introduction of the Patriarch to the faithful of Rome, officially stated that *[this]“ will resolve the separation created by the Council of Ephesus in tion declara* ”431year .² It was clear that by this declaration both heads of the respective churches were actually bringing to an end one of Christianity's oldest Christological conflicts and thus effectively initiating a process whose ultimate aim is to heal a wound that has persisted for over 1,500 years in the Church, the Body of Christ. Though, according to the Catholic and Assyrian Churches, the issue of the Council of Ephesus was dealt with and successfully resolved by this Declaration, this paper, the topic of which was proposed by the “Pro Oriente Ecumenical Foundation”, will *retrospectively* consider the viewpoint of the Church of the East toward the Council of Ephesus with an eye to relations between the Orthodox Churches and the Church of the East.

It is within this ecumenical context of dialogue³ that this paper has been prepared to clarify the Assyrian Church's understanding and attitude towards

¹ Editorial, “Common Christological Declaration between Catholic Church and Assyrian Church of the East,” L'Osservatore Romano, (Vatican City) 16 November 1994, weekly edition in English, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ Immediately after the signing of the CCD, a number of Orthodox Churches expressed their desire to reconsider their centuries-old position toward the Church of the East in a spirit of good will. This new spirit was reflected in the proceedings of the dialogue

Ephesus in order to achieve further reconciliation with the Orthodox Churches. This paper will state in part II the Church of the East's historic understanding of the Council of Ephesus as it relates to Cyril's teaching and his treatment of Nestorius. Then in part III, I will draw upon the recent theological developments between the Coptic and the Assyrian Churches which have narrowed the gap between the Christologies of the Church of the East-Mesopotamian tradition and that of the Coptic Orthodox-Alexandrian traditions.

II. ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EPHEBUS

There are two important points which we need to establish before entering the discussion proper which should eliminate needless evaluation. It is a matter of historical record that the Church of the East did not take part in the discussions of the Ecumenical Councils of the Roman Empire, including the Council of Ephesus. Since these Councils were not only discussions of theology and ecclesiastical affairs but also matters of the state within the *ecumene* of the Byzantine Empire, the Church of the East Fathers were cut off from any participation in such gatherings in the West. One of the reasons for this was a self-distancing, made necessary by the fact that during a good deal of the time in question the Persian Empire in the East was at war with the Byzantine Empire in the West.⁴ Another important fact is that, in the time since the Council of Ephesus, the Assyrian Church of the East has not, until the present day, been of-

between the Assyrian Church and the Middle East Council of Churches, which had been in progress since 1985. Accordingly, in October of 1995 the MECC officially granted the Church of the East the Council's membership within the Catholic Family of the Middle East Churches. The main reasons, however, that the Orthodox had expressed criticism of the theology of the Church of the East were that the Christology of the Church of the East was thought to contain "heretical" elements because of its negative evaluation of the Council of Ephesus; and that such "heretical" elements were mainly the result of the Assyrian Church's application of the Christological formula of "two natures and two *qnome*, in one *parsopauquesnoc* dah siht taht dna ,,"ences in liturgical practice. Of equal seriousness to the Oriental Orthodox were the Assyrian Church's anathemas imposed on Cyril of Alexandria and Severus of Antioch, and, at the same time, her veneration of, and devotion to, Nestorius and Theodore.

⁴ Mar Bawai Soro and Michael Birnie, Is the Theology of the Church of the East "Nestorian", in *Syriac Dialogue #1* (Pro Oriente Foundation: Vienna, 1994), 117. JAAS Vol. IX No. 1 (1995) pp 8-32.

ficially approached, either by the Catholic Church or by any other Orthodox Church, to formally accept or to reject the Council of Ephesus.⁵

Further, the Church of the East's view of Ephesus is affected by two major considerations that also determined her verdict on the Council. The *first* issue is the Assyrian Church's suspicion of Cyril's Christological formula: *tureOne na* "of God the Word incarnate". The *second* issue is the manner in which Cyril of Alexandria, together with the Council of Ephesus, dealt with Nestorius and his teachings.

Cyril's "One Nature of God the Word Incarnate" Formula

Relations between the Persian Church in the East and the Church in the West had been periodically strained, even before the Council of Ephesus. This was due to the rise of certain heresies in the Roman territories—specifically Arianism and Apollinarianism; they had both gained enough influence in the West to become threatening. On the one hand, the Alexandrian Fathers were pioneer adversaries of such heresies. By defending the faith, they played a critical role in developing early church doctrine in the realms of the Holy Trinity and Christology. On the other, the Eastern bishops in upper Mesopotamia and Antioch were occupied with these matters as well, and were especially concerned with the Apollinarian threat, and therefore developed categories of thought and language to articulate the teachings of the universal Church, though with a different theological emphasis. The two centers were often competitive and sometimes in conflict, even when they seemed to be attempting to express the same meaning of the mysteries of God and the Incarnation. Thus differences arose, due in large part to the fact that each school of thought employed a set of distinct philosophical suppositions and terminology.⁶

The theologians in the "Persian" Church of the East were committed to the Mesopotamian traditional theology of "two natures". The Aristotelian thought world influenced their philosophical approach, with emphasis on the historic and concrete, and literal interpretation of Scripture. Concerning the Incarnation of the Word, they characteristically described it in terms which emphasized the reality of Christ's historical "humanness". A necessary element in this approach was to establish a distinction on the formulaic or terminological level which emphasized the concrete substantial reality of both Christ's divinity and humanity.

⁵ Mar Bawai Soro and Michael Birnie, The Vienna Christological Formula in an Assyrian Perspective, in Syriac Dialogue #1 (Pro Oriente Foundation: Vienna, 1994), 35. JAAS Vol. IX No. 1 (1995) pp 33-40.

⁶ Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., Christ in Christian Tradition, vol. 1 (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1975), 473-478.

They thus rejected any formula which implied or insisted upon a *natural* union, which for them implied change in one or both of the constituent natures within the union. Theologians in the schools of Edessa and Nisibis and in Antioch, too, stressed the integral wholeness of each nature, and they carefully distinguished the divine attributes from the human, ascribing them to one or the other nature. The logic behind the formulation of their teachings derived much of its motivation from opposition to the theological interest of Apollinarianism, which they vehemently fought against in order to protect the orthodoxy of their apostolic faith.⁷

On the other hand, the theological language of the Alexandrians was considerably influenced by Platonism, and in contrast to that in Mesopotamia and Antioch, its thought was dominated by the transcendental and mystical, and its Biblical interpretation by the allegorical. This difference in methodology led to clashes between the two systems concerning the propriety of language used or rejected by one side or the other.⁸ As a consequence theologians in Mesopotamia were suspicious when they heard an Alexandrian insist that God the Word was born, or that he suffered, or died, or was raised from the dead. This was interpreted by some as calling into question the divine immutability and impassibility, as though the divine nature could be subject *naturally* to beginning, or end, or be made subject to change or suffering. From the Mesopotamian point of view the Alexandrians seemed to have discounted the

⁷ Opposition to Apollinarius had forced the Antiocheans and theologians in the Church of the East to confront his heresy. In a protest against his claim that the incarnate Word had assumed an incomplete humanity, they maintained that if salvation was to be achieved, the Only-begotten must have assumed a complete manhood. Further they contended that Apollinarius' notion of the divinization of Christ's flesh could only imply that Jesus was not a real man but only appeared to be so. They, in opposition, insisted that two complete natures, divine and human, could unite and form a real person, namely, that the simultaneous existence of two distinct volitional principles in one individual was conceivable. Their conclusion was that if Christ did not possess a rational human soul—capable of choice either of good or evil—in union with his divinity, the salvation of mankind could not have taken place.

⁸ For an introduction to the discussion relating to the difference between Alexandrian and Antiochean Christologies, see, Leo Donald Davis, S. J., The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990) 142. The author makes the following statement which additionally clarifies the distinct orientation of each of the two schools of thought. -Just as all philosophers are said to be basically either Aristotelian or Platonist, so, roughly speaking, all theologians are in Christology either Antiochian in how dealing with the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels and attempting to explicate, begin this man is also God [*low Christology*], or Alexandrian, beginning with the Word of John's Prologue and attempting to understand the implications of the Logos taking flesh [*high Christology*].”

importance of Jesus' humanity in the Incarnation and possibly denied its integral wholeness. This ultimately led to an open dispute about the propriety of a popular epithet for the Blessed Virgin, "Theotokos," a term dearly beloved by Alexandrians and by the general populace in areas of the Empire influenced by them.⁹

The Eastern "diophysite" Fathers, who had been absorbed with the intensity of their conflict with Apollinarianism, could not see any real disagreement between what Apollinarius had advocated and the teachings of Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria who led the anti-Nestorius faction at Ephesus. Cyril's formula "*One incarnate nature of God the Word*," seems to originate with Apollinarius, though Cyril incorrectly attributed it to Athanasius, and it was viewed by Nestorius and the Easterners alike to be a new adaptation of the same heresy.¹⁰ By this phrase Cyril seems to have intended to stress the oneness of the human and divine natures in the person of our Lord after the Incarnation, but by using it he fanned the flames of suspicion among the Easterners, who stressed the concrete reality of the two natures after the Incarnation. Cyril's formula suggested that one or both of the two natures after the union seemed to suggest "the Word" was mixed in its essence had been compromised "in the union"

Cyril's Treatment of Nestorius at Ephesus

A good deal of the zeal of Nestorius in his Christological debate with Cyril was aimed at warding off the emergence of some new form of Apollinarianism. Nestorius thought that Cyril's formula would impute to the nature of the Logos the sufferings of the God-man. Such a formula was totally unacceptable since it had no roots either in the Sacred Scriptures or in the creed. He further thought that it negated the genuinely human life in which the Master grew in wisdom, was tempted, and suffered, and thus effectively redeemed all humanity.¹¹ But Nestorius ultimately judged wrongly and, as subsequent events bore testimony, Cyril was not advocating the heresy which Nestorius suspected, and his

⁹ Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, who received his education at Antioch, denounced the term as inappropriate. He preferred the terms "Christotokos" or "Mother of our Lord", both of which he considered broad enough to include both his human and divine natures in the union, but which did not specifically call into question the impassability and immutability of Godhead.

¹⁰ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 473–478.

¹¹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1982), 312. [A feature of Apollinarian teaching was to effectively deny that there was any moral development in Christ's life.]

teaching, after careful examination, ultimately received the approval of Rome and, after some compromise, even Antioch.

But did Nestorius himself receive a fair hearing? After thorough examination it might have been possible to conclude that criticisms of Nestorius were rooted in the fundamental differences in terminology between the two camps. Honesty and prudence might have brought resolution to the conflict, and even more, might have relieved the whole church of the enmity and suspicion it has had to endure among its members for centuries. Instead, a tumultuous council took place, with Cyril acting as both prosecutor and judge of Nestorius.

The trial of Nestorius at Ephesus in which he was condemned has always been viewed by the Church of the East as unfair and illegal. It should be noted that others, outside the Church of the East and with impeccable credentials as orthodox scholars, have also agreed with that judgment, attributing the chaotic and embittered atmosphere at Ephesus to personal animus and political ambition on the part of Cyril.¹² The Roman Catholic theologian Andre de Halleux, OFM, writing in 1992, described the proceedings in much the same way as Church of the East fathers have. I have summarized his conclusions below:¹³

What happened in reality is that Cyril had transformed a council at which the emperor wanted doctrine to be defined “without any dissension born of antipathy.” Held in illegality by a tribunal where the judge was also the accuser and where the charge was not made the object of scrupulous verification, this trial by default could only come to an end as a questionable deposition. And yet this deposition would soon be passed off as a doctrinal anathema, imposed on the oriental bishops by an emperor more and more hostile to the archbishop of his capital.

The Church of the East feels that such historical affairs, caused by the lack of a true and mutual understanding, ultimately made resolution to the matters under consideration impossible. Our attitude toward Ephesus has always been highly colored by this perception. And in fact any resolution to the dispute had to await the Council of Chalcedon, and the condition of Nestorius’ personal status, the Church of the East would prefer to leave up to God.

¹² Luise Abromowiski, The history of research into Nestorius, in 'Syriac Dialogue #1' (Pro Oriente Foundation: Vienna, 1994), 55-58.

¹³ Andre de Halleux, Nestorius: History and Doctrine, tr. into English by Annette Hedman, in 'Syriac Dialogue #1' (Pro Oriente Foundation: Vienna, 1994), 203-210. [This paper was originally presented in French at the second dialogue meeting between the representatives of the Assyrian Church and the Middle East Council of Churches, Limassol, Cypress: 1992.

The Aftermath

The effects of what took place at Ephesus in 431 and later in 433 made a large number of Antiochean and upper Mesopotamian clergy from all ranks feel that too much had been conceded to Cyril, and many of these were forced into exile, some making their way to the more friendly Christian communities in Persia. As for Cyril's followers in Alexandria (what is today known as the Coptic Patriarchate), they too became alienated, especially when the Council of Chalcedon in 451 affirmed that Christ is "*one person in two natures*". This seemed to them a repudiation of their great champion, Cyril, and a capitulation to Nestorius' way of thinking.

The Christological formula of the Council of Chalcedon proved acceptable to theologians in the Church of the East. However, interposed between "person" and "nature" was a third philosophical term, *hypostasis*. At Chalcedon the term "hypostasis" was used as a synonym for "person".¹⁴ Up until that time it was not so used except at Alexandria. The adoption of the Alexandrian usage of hypostasis, that is, its redefinition for the purposes of Christology, caused the bishops at Chalcedon to affirm a single hypostasis/person in the incarnate Christ. But in the Church of the East hypostasis continued to be used, as it always had been, as a synonym for *nature*. A "nature" was a given category, a description of a general species setting forth all the characteristics inherent in that species. A "hypostasis", on the other hand, was a concrete exemplar of such a given nature, a substantial representative of that nature.¹⁵ was considered to be "Person" ses of the stapoferent from other hytized nature uniquely difwhat makes a hyposta .same nature¹⁶

¹⁴ Aloys Grillmeier with Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2/part 2, (Mowbray: London, 1995), 428-432.

¹⁵ A hypostasis would contain the *ousia*, the "essence", of that nature—in men: a body, soul, spirit, etc. It would not differ, except in number, from any other hypostasis of the same nature, differing only with hypostases of other natures. A "person" was described as a hypostasis *plus* all *accidental* attributes, both internal and external, which distinguish one hypostasis from another of the same nature—in men: hair color, height, skin pigmentation, sex, etc.; or level of wisdom, particular knowledge, skill in a craft, or some other talent or bent.

¹⁶ Through personhood a hypostatized nature becomes a subject of interest on its own, not just as a specimen of a given nature. Through "person" we know "Paul", or "Peter", say, who present to us differing appearances, abilities, interests, talents, etc. The hypostatized natures of Paul and Peter are identical: the person of each one is uniquely his own.

This long-standing and familiar usage of “hypostasis” (*qnoma* in Syriac) made the Chalcedonian “one person, one hypostasis” formula appear to those in the East as either a mistake or a back-door means of re-asserting the “one nature” formula of Cyril. As a result, for the next 150 years after the Council of Chalcedon the Church of the East carefully avoided using the term hypostasis at all in its *official* Christological formulations which appeared in Synodical documents.¹⁷ Though the majority of individual bishops and teachers continued to instruct their catechumens using the old forms, namely, one person in two hypostatized natures (*qnome*), nevertheless, the official creeds of the Church set forth merely one person in two natures, seemingly side-stepping the controversial word “hypostasis”, and showing thereby the widespread ambivalence among the bishops toward the Chalcedonian formula.

III. A PROSPECT OF CONFORMITY WITH EPHESUS: THE ASSYRIAN–COPTIC UNOFFICIAL DIALOGUE

Following the decisions of Ephesus, specifically as they evolved and were given form through the compromises in 433 and at Chalcedon (451), what has been at the core of Christological dissension between the Church of the East and the West is a misunderstanding about the definition and the usage of the term “hypostasis”. Today theologians in the Church of the East have made a conscientious effort to deal with the intricacies of this terminological conflict and have made a serious attempt to clarify their received Christological formulations and terminology, so that the Church of the East might be able to re-evaluate her stance toward Ephesus and fully receive Chalcedon. At the same time, it was expected that the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, too, would re-evaluate their judgment of the Assyrians and their Church. With the stimulus of the progress which has marked the Churches' efforts in recent times as they have reached out for rapprochement with one another, this assignment was given to a number of theologians in the various Churches which sincerely desired to find a solution. The first and most significant result which took place was the signing of the CCD between the Catholic and Assyrian Churches. While preparations were on way for this historic accord, in recent years the ecumenical efforts of the Middle East Council of Churches and Pro Oriente Foundation have also bridged a significant portion of the gap resulting from misunderstanding and lack of trust between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. The progress achieved through these dialogues has been due to the good will present on all sides and to intense theological reflection.

¹⁷ *Synodicon Orientale*, ed., J. B. Chabot. See pp. 55, 134-136, 194-195, 197-198, 209-210.

The Assyrian Church, which has inherited the strict diophysite Christology, has attempted to make clear its Christological faith to the Copts, the successors of Cyril and of the Alexandrian strict miaphysite Christology, and they have done the same. This process of clarification has been an ongoing dialogue, taking place mainly in Middle East countries, from 1990 to 1994. The crowning jewel of this dialogue was the drafting of a common agreement in January of 1995, the approval of which still awaits the action of both Churches. The good will of each side in the dialogue was expressed in the mutual examination of one another's faith and the terminology which expresses it in a spirit of honest and prayerful inquiry. Since the draft of this agreement has yet to receive the full attention and approbation of the Holy Synods of the respective churches it would be premature to disclose its specific contents and recommendations. Nevertheless, concerning the status of future relations between the two Churches, both sides of the dialogue thanked God for having helped them rediscover the totality of faith that already united them, and have, therefore, pledged themselves to do everything possible to dispel the obstacles of the past which still prevent the attainment of full communion between them.

The issue of the Church of the East's judgment on Cyril's person and Christology was part of this discussion. In the light of fresh clarification, through encounters sponsored by the MECC, the delegation of the Church of the East was able to establish a distinction between Cyril's Christology and the manner in which he confronted Nestorius, and they have accepted the former while still objecting to the latter. To indicate precisely this positive evaluation of Cyril's thought, ecclesial authorities of the Assyrian Church have recently decided on lifting the anathemas imposed on both Cyril of Alexandria and Severus¹⁸ of Antioch. The actual canonical proceedings await the convocation of the next Holy Synod of the Church of the East some time in 1997. Additionally, in her quest to further this new relation with the Oriental Orthodox brethren, the Church of the East has given careful consideration to texts presented during the dialogue which dealt with Cyril's "twelve anathemas" against Nestorius. Ten years ago, such a proposition would have been impossible to imagine. But, though the anathemas were directed by Cyril against Nestorius, the Eastern bishops, and their perceived Christology, the Church of the East was able to transcend the contextual polemics of Ephesus in which these

¹⁸ The person and Christology of Severus of Antioch were not investigated during the discussions between the Assyrians and Copts at Anba Bishoy's monastery. But the prevalent ethnic, linguistic, and social bounds which connect the Assyrians with their Syrian Orthodox brethren—and as they were enhanced by the theological findings of this and other ecumenical encounters—have persuaded the Assyrian hierarchy to include the name of Severus of Antioch with that of Cyril of Alexandria, as far as the lifting of the anathemas is concerned.

assertions were made and find a ground for settlement with Cyril's *thought*. One could only pray and hope that the Oriental Orthodox Brethren from all ecclesial traditions would, in the near future, be able to take similar steps like those of the Assyrian Church and rise above the historical misunderstanding, misjudgment, or whatever difficulty they still may have with Nestorius' Christology which, I believe, today has been re-discovered, re-evaluated, understood, and accepted, by modern scholarly research, as an orthodox teaching.

Both the dialogue itself and the agreed recommendations are a historic contribution to the betterment of the atmosphere between these two ancient theological traditions. The Church of the East sees the need for continuing this dialogue, and welcomes the openness of the Coptic brethren—particularly the intellectual integrity of certain ecumenical officers/experts whose sensitivity and depth of knowledge have brought to bear on these matters. God willing, they will bear fruit unto life for many.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is worthy of note that by way of this dialogue it became very clear to the Assyrians that, though the Copts affirm “one nature *of two natures* yeht ,tey ,” tegrity of theinsist on the distinct intwo component parts of this *one* nature, that is, Christ's humanity and divinity remain unconfused, unmixed, and integrally whole. Such an awareness was decisive for the Church of the East, because just the opposite perception about Alexandrian Christology was the norm in the Church of the East until very recently. So too the Assyrians affirmed their faith in the unity of the person of Christ and their recognition that his humanity never had any independent existence, but came into being solely to serve as the vehicle of God the Word's incarnation and salvific work, from the moment of the conception in the womb of the Virgin, without any intervening time, space, or circumstance. The Assyrians emphatically agree with the Copts that the two natures were united and inseparable at the instant of the miraculous conception, and that the humanity of Jesus is the humanity of the Son of God—his own and no other's; He is the *subject* of the incarnation. His humanity was personalized in the same Person of the Son of God at the moment of Incarnation.¹⁹

Once this draft statement is signed by the Coptic and the Assyrian Patriarchs, it would be fair to say that the achievement of the recent dialogue has been to move very far toward resolving formerly irreconcilable differences which historically have embittered relations between those who hold different theological traditions. Thus, many obstacles specifically created at Ephesus will

¹⁹ See the Christological statements of the Synod of Mar Aba (544), and the Synod of Mar Sabriso (596) in *Syriac Dialogue #1* (Pro Oriente Foundation: Vienna, 1994).

have been reduced significantly. But there remains an unresolved issue between these two new partners in dialogue, which cannot be dealt with successfully without further reflection and commitment to charity and discussion. The mistrust, misunderstanding, and personality conflict between the two major opponents in this ancient debate, Cyril and Nestorius, will continue to be a barrier to future progress.

It is my personal judgment that, even though the Church of the East is willing to acknowledge the incompleteness of Nestorius' Christological formulations²⁰, it should not be asked to abandon his memory or to revile his name. The Chalcedonian definition represents, after all, a convergence and harmonization of the two strands of thought which Nestorius and Cyril strove to defend. As we have recently made an effort to separate Cyril's thought from the context of the very personal conflicts of Ephesus, and to focus on his orthodox concern to promote the use of language expressing the unity of the person of Christ, we would only ask that a like effort be made to understand Nestorius' equally orthodox concern to promote the use of language expressing Christ's complete and uncompromised human and divine natures. As we do not ask anymore anyone to revile the memory of Cyril, we would respectfully ask not to be required to abandon our long held admiration of, and appreciation for, Nestorius.

As indicated earlier in part two of this paper, historically the Church of the East was never officially approached by the Catholic Church or by any of the Orthodox Churches to take an official position in regard to the Christological formulas of the Council of Ephesus. Yet, today, in light of modern scholarship and contemporary ecumenical efforts such as those of the *Pro Oriente Foundation*, there has been a significant opportunity for understanding, appreciation, and dialogue to reconcile disputed Christological teachings and

²⁰ Recent scholarly findings [for a bibliography on the recent work focusing on Nestorius and his teaching, see, Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, 558-568] suggest that Nestorius was orthodox, though they also suggest that his Christological system was not equal to his faith in Christ—Nestorius' Faith in Christ was much better than his skills as a theologian. His faith indeed was orthodox. Not being an innovative theologian, Nestorius was unsuccessful in expressing the unity of natures in appropriate categories, which were only later worked out at Chalcedon. And in the process of his theological reflection he employed Antiochean Christology without regard to nuance, and interpreted Alexandrian Christology in a reductionist way. There is, however, another legitimate argument to the effect that the Christology of Nestorius was in fact too developed in its engaged logic, and that this was a factor in Cyril's favor. By having too rigid of a Christology, Nestorius could not bend to the variations in terminology and nuances of meaning used by Cyril. Nestorius was guilty of painting “ .”nto a cornerhimself i

their formulas, with mutual restraint and respect, and with a desire for understanding and tolerance. Therefore, when today the Assyrian Church of the East is asked the question “Does Ephesus unite or divide?”, before answering, one needs to consider the following points, which were briefly mentioned in the previous *Pro Oriente Syriac Dialogue First Consultation*,²¹ so that they are factored into any official reply to such question.

- i) Since, every Christological statement articulated by an authoritative body such as a Council, a Synod, or a Commission is an attempt to explain the inexplicable mystery of the Incarnation, and because of the fact that no single formula or series of statements are ever able to capture in words the essence of the mystery of the Incarnation, I therefore feel that the contents of Christological statements of the Council of Ephesus need to be respectfully considered as having validity among many other genuine expressions from both the Eastern and Western traditions that are legitimate and validly significant.
- ii) The Christological debate, which prompted the Emperor to convene the Council of Ephesus in AD 431 in order to resolve the ongoing debate over the modality of the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, continued to persist with intensity for years even after the conclusion of Ephesus. The universal Church felt an urgent need for a more definitive resolution of the same Christological problem, which was actually achieved in the Council of Chalcedon AD 451. I therefore feel that the theological contents of the Council of Ephesus need to be considered as they are refined and brought to a fuller completion in and through the Christological formula of the Council of Chalcedon, which unequivocally affirms the objective reality of both the Divine and human natures, as well as the personal (hypostatic) oneness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- iii) Today particular attention needs to be paid as well to the Christological definitions and formulae which have been canonically sanctioned in the Church of the East. And since such statements²² and others in both the Eastern and Western traditions stem from the one holy catholic and apostolic church of our Lord, it is necessary to

²¹ Soro and Birnie, The Vienna Christological Formula in an Assyrian Perspective, 35-36.

²² For reference, see Synodicon Orientale, ed., J. B. Chabot; pp. 55, 134-136, 194-195, 197-198, 209-210.

consider all of the statements in harmony with one another and as parallel in their common objective, for they all add spiritual enrichment and theological wealth to the one Christian tradition, each statement with its own unique genius and distinct authenticity.

Finally, with these points in mind, and based on the observations of this paper, I could, *retrospectively*, conclude the following: If a distinction is established between, on the one hand, the theological statements which were asserted by Cyril at the Council of Ephesus (“Theotokos”, “Twelve Anathemas”, etc.), and on the other, the manner with which Cyril and the other bishops at Ephesus treated Nestorius, and if the question of accepting Ephesus is limited to the former only, then, I think the Assyrians should view this as an opportunity for making progress toward ecumenical reconciliation and church unity, for the Church of the East would indeed accept Ephesus and consider it as a council that unites the Church, the “Body of Christ”.