

Union with the Monophysites: What Comes Next?

*by Michael Woerl**

ALL INTERESTED PARTIES are by now aware of the current scheme of “World Orthodoxy” to unite with the Monophysite churches. Dialogue with the Monophysites has been going on for decades; the upshot of these talks is the proclamation by “World Orthodoxy” that the Monophysites were wrongly condemned by the Holy Fathers of the Fourth Œcumenical Synod of Chalcedon. It seems that “World Orthodoxy” has discovered that these Holy Fathers not only misunderstood theological terminology, but were influenced, not by the Holy Spirit, but by the spirit of the times: that is, by such factors as ethnic, political, and economic rivalry and intrigue. In a nutshell, “World Orthodoxy” has determined that it was the Holy Fathers of the Fourth Synod who were in error, not the Monophysites!

The Joint Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches (“Oriental Orthodox”—or “Pre-Chalcedonian”—being the politically correct designation replacing the ecumenically unacceptable term “Monophysite”) has announced that the Orthodox and the Monophysites share the same Faith, and that there are absolutely no obstacles to union. Concrete steps have been taken: the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch (Monophysite, or more specifically, Jacobite) have issued a statement, “On the Unity of the Eastern and Syriac Orthodox Churches,” which outlines the conditions of the union. This agreement is awaiting the endorsement of both “World Orthodoxy” and the Monophysite communion.

All of this has been adequately reported and commented on, but there are a few particulars that seem to have escaped consideration. While these particulars are by no means “top secret,” “World Orthodoxy,” interestingly enough, has not seen fit to make mention of them. As both of these particulars are potential stumblingblocks to the union, this is no surprise.

Many Orthodox Christians have been disturbed—and rightly

so—by the fervid participation of “World Orthodoxy” in the ecumenical movement. Unfortunately for those Orthodox Christians who will be party to this union, the torchbearers of “World Orthodoxy” are mere novices in the ecumenical arena in comparison to their soon-to-be Monophysite brethren. An example of the Monophysite enthusiasm for ecumenism, above and beyond the call of duty, is the speech prepared by Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Delhi, India, of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church (a Monophysite church in India, autonomous under the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch mentioned above). This Monophysite hierarch is also President for Asia of the World Council of Churches; his speech was prepared for opening festivities celebrating the Centennial of the 1893 Parliament of the World’s Religions and publicizing the 1993 Parliament. The remarks of Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios are long-winded, but shed a good deal of light on the ecumenist and pan-religious agenda of the Non-Chalcedonians:

It is a perennial yearning of the human race to find its own unity...., the yearning for that which binds humanity together, the unity of humanity on a spiritual basis.... Our purpose shall be to provide a multifaceted foundation on which, in mutual respect, the cultures of the world can come together and live in a global concourse of religions.... Marxists have recognized that the values which shall unite humanity and shall make it possible for all nations to live together in peace cannot come out of secular ideology, but will have to come from a moral vision of humanity.... [W]hat I would like to see is a *concourse*—a flowing together, a running together—of all religions.... [I]f religion is not relevant to justice in this world, religion is not worth having.... [A]mong perpetrators of injustice, the religious people have most often been on the side of the oppressor.... This is what has made religion repulsive to many people. The reason why the secular humanist movement had to arise in the West was because the Christian religion lost its humanist vision.... [W]e don’t need to fight secularism, but rather should learn from it. We need to learn those great human values to which all people of good will stand committed.... In each religion there are two levels. One level is exclusivistic and expansionist, ...[which] says, ‘We have the truth and if you want the truth, join us...’ But in religions there is also a higher type, a type which is universal in its orientation, which is all-embracing in its love.... That good, humanistic, open tendency in all religions will have to be brought to the top.... [A]iling and alienated humanity is desperately in need of transcending national loyalties.... [H]istory is pushing us to move out of national parochialism and into a universal humanism, ...out of nation patriotism to patriotism of the globe—the love of humanity, planetary patriotism.... [S]cience itself is the best tool that has come the way of man.... The various religions of the world have honored and cherished the experience of the transcendent throughout hu-

man history.... We have done so through our doctrines and practices, through our prayers and rituals, through our mystic quests and experiences, through our compassion for humanity and our devotion to the Source and Ground of all being. Of course, in religion, too, we have made a mess of things.... Religion, too, needs an emancipation.... [L]et us move also to common prayer, that all humanity may be brought into a single concourse and all of us acknowledge together in various idioms the Transcendent Love, Wisdom, and Power that really unites us all.¹

The ecumenism of “World Orthodoxy” seems rather tame when contrasted to this speech. While “World Orthodoxy” has hastened to emulate the policies of ecumenism, the author of the speech quoted above seems to be an architect of such policies. This is a hidden snare of unity with the Monophysites; we can expect from “World Orthodoxy” yet further entanglement with ecumenism, and on a deeper level, after the union. “World Orthodoxy” will leave no stone unturned to reach the heights attained by the Monophysites as part of the vanguard of the ecumenical movement.

Another hidden snare of unity is that the Monophysites have not been so naïve as to place all of their “unity eggs” into one basket. It was noted above that the Orthodox–Monophysite dialogue has been going on for decades. But Monophysite dialogue with Rome has also been going on for decades. This dialogue has resulted in agreements—both finalized and pending—that surpass any Orthodox agreements with Rome thus far. The old adage tells us that “All roads lead to Rome.” The road of union with the Monophysites will not prove to be an exception.

The “Catholic–Syrian Orthodox [Monophysite] Statement” was signed on July 23, 1984, by Pope John–Paul II and Patriarch Moran Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas of Antioch. This statement declared that the Roman pontiff and the Monophysite patriarch

...kneel down with full humility in front of the exalted and extolled heavenly throne of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks for this glorious opportunity which has been granted us to meet together in His love in order to strengthen further the relationship between our two sister churches—the relationship already excellent through the joint initiative of their holinesses of blessed memory, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mar Ignatius Jacob III.... Their holinesses Pope John–Paul II and Patriarch Zakka I wish solemnly to widen the horizon of their brotherhood and affirm herewith the terms of deep spiritual communion which already unites them and the prelates, clergy, and faithful of both their Churches..., and to advance in finding a wholly common ecclesial life.... The confusions and schisms that arose between our churches...arose only because of differences in terminology and culture.... We

find no real basis for the sad divisions and schisms that subsequently arose between us..., notwithstanding the differences on interpretation of such a doctrine which arose at the Council of Chalcedon [does this all sound familiar?].... Hence we wish to reaffirm our common profession of faith..., as Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mar Ignatius Jacob III did in 1971. They denied that there was any difference in the faith that they confessed.... Our identity in faith, though not yet complete, entitles us to envisage collaboration between our churches in pastoral care.... It is not rare, in fact, for our faithful to find access to a priest of their own church materially or morally impossible. Anxious to meet their need and with their spiritual benefit in mind, we authorize them in such cases to ask for the sacraments of penance, the eucharist, and the anointing of the sick from lawful priests of either of our two sister churches.... It would be a logical corollary of collaboration in pastoral care to cooperate in priestly formation and theological education.... [W]hile doing this we do not forget that we must still do all in our power to achieve the full visible communion between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch..., thanking the Lord Who has allowed us to meet and enjoy the consolation of the faith that we hold in common....²

More recent is the “Agreement between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church on Inter-Church Marriages,” finalized on January 25, 1994. This agreement was “prepared taking into account” the Catholic-Syrian Orthodox Statement quoted above. Noting the “common profession of faith between the Pope and the Patriarch,” and the “possibility given by the declaration for a pastoral collaboration, including the mutual admission of the faithful belonging to both churches to the reception of the sacraments of penance, the eucharist, and the anointing of the sick,” the parties “accept the pastoral reality that inter-Church marriages do take place,” and agree that

...both churches should facilitate the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony in either church, allowing the bride/bridegroom the right and freedom to retain his/her own ecclesial communion.... On the occasion of these celebrations, the couples as well as their family members belonging to these two churches are allowed to participate in the holy eucharist in the church where the sacrament of matrimony is being celebrated.³

“The Coptic Church was near to a similar agreement on sharing the eucharist after an agreed statement of faith,”⁴ but that agreement has not yet been finalized. The Copts, too, have been negotiating with Rome for decades.

Now that the Fourth Ecumenical Synod has been effectively de-

clared “null and void,” what could be next?

The Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV [Nestorian], and Pope John–Paul II signed an agreement on November 11, 1994, that moved beyond the christological divisions that marked the Council of Ephesus in 430 C.E. The text includes a commitment to move toward full communion.⁵

It will be most interesting to learn, after all these centuries, the “real” reasons behind the condemnation of Nestorios at the Third Œcumenical Synod. Could Nestorios have possibly been misunderstood, and could the Holy Fathers of the Synod of Ephesus have been influenced by the political, ethnic, and economic situation of the day? It will also be interesting to see the reaction of both “World Orthodoxy” and the Monophysites to Rome’s latest ecumenical overture. Will they both concur in the negation of the Third Œcumenical Synod, too? If so, will it take anyone by surprise?

And, after all these “sad divisions of ancient Christianity” have been “healed” by the realization that the Holy Fathers were in error, and that modern man, from the vantage point of the spiritually bankrupt and apostate twentieth century, is wiser by far than the Holy Fathers, we ask again, and with trepidation: *What comes next?*

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1. Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios, “The Vision Beckons: From Parliament of Religions to Global Concurrence of Religion,” in *A Sourcebook for the Community of Religions* (Chicago: The Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions, 1993), pp. 15–17.

2. “Catholic–Syrian Orthodox Statement,” in *NADEO Handbook* (1984).

3. “Agreement Between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church on Inter–Church Marriages” (Rome: Information Service of the PCPU, 1993).

4. The Rev. Ernest R. Falardeau, S.S.S., Director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Archdiocese of Santa Fe, letter, January, 1995.

5. Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C., “Christological Agreement Celebrated in Rome” (Washington, D.C.: Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, 1994).