



The Oriental

Orthodox Churches

Addis Ababa Conference

January, 1965

The Oriental

Orthodox Churches

Addis Ababa Conference

January, 1965

EDITED BY THE INTERIM SECRETARIAT
ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CONFERENCE
Addis Ababa - August, 1965

Printed by Artistic Printers, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - 6480 G

INTRODUCTION

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

The Conference of the Heads of Oriental Orthodox Churches, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during January 1965, is undoubtedly an event of some importance in the history of the Church in our times. For the first time in history it brought together in a formal meeting the Heads of five of the historic Churches¹. Accompanied by a few delegates each,² they came together and thereby inaugurated a new era of cooperation and communication among their Churches. Although these five Churches have all along recognized one another officially as sister Churches holding full Eucharistic fellowship with each other, they have not had a common council or synod after the fifth century. The Addis Ababa Conference has now brought to an end this practical isolation one from another of these Churches and opened up a new age in which they may be expected both to manifest concretely their unity and to play their role together in serving the Christian cause in the modern world. It is the story of this historic event which is told in the pages that follow.

This book is in two parts. The first gives a brief report about the history and present state of each of the churches which took part in it, and the second contains an account of the Addis Ababa Conference. The first part aims at providing some basic information concerning a section of Eastern Christendom, which may be considered authoritative and which no other single volume so far published in any language has offered.

A WORD ABOUT THESE CHURCHES

The five Churches which took part in the Addis Ababa Conference have, each of them, a long history, which in most cases can be traced back to the first century of the Christian era. At the same time, with reference to the fifth

1. The five Churches are:- the Coptic Orthodox Church; the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch; the Armenian Orthodox Church; the Syrian Orthodox Church of India; and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

2. For the full list of these delegates, see Appendix I.

century Christological controversy they remain loyal to the Alexandrine theological tradition as it had been declared orthodox by the Council of Ephesus in 431. On this ground they renounce the Council of Chalcedon held in 451, which, they maintain, did practically contradict the Council of 431.

In consequence of this stand as well as of various other causes these Churches have been made to face disabilities of many kinds. This, to be sure, is one of the main reasons why these Churches happened to be isolated both from the rest of Christendom and from one another. However, in spite of all such disadvantages they have continued to exist in the world holding to "the faith once delivered to the saints", and today they include in their total membership over twenty million believers.

All these five Churches are members of the World Council of Churches. The wide contacts which this offered had led many in these Churches to hope and pray for a common Council of their own Churches to be convened. The leaders of the World Council of Churches have also been showing much interest in such a development.

ARRANGEMENTS MADE FOR A CONFERENCE

The Lord of the Church answered the prayers and put into the mind of His Imperial Majesty Haile Sellassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, the idea of convening a Conference of the Heads of these Churches in his own capital city, as a first step towards bringing the Churches into a state of concrete unity and mutual cooperation. A devout member and protector of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church which is one of the participating Churches, the Emperor himself had, ever since his elevation to the imperial throne of Ethiopia, been waiting for a suitable occasion to call together a Conference of these Churches.

At last the time came, and on 18th May 1964 the Emperor sent out invitations³ to Heads of the Churches, requesting them to take part in a Conference which he was

3. The Emperor's letter of invitation to the Heads of Churches is given on p. 11 below. The Conference had originally been planned to be convened in September 1964. But it had to be postponed for January 1965 in view of the fact that time for preparations was felt to be insufficient.

planning to convene. On receiving their replies of acceptance, he entrusted the responsibility of making the necessary preparations with three local committees.⁴ These were:— a Programme Committee under the chairmanship of His Beatitude Abuna Theophilos, Archbishop of Harar and Deputy Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; a Reception Committee led by His Excellency Balambras Mahteme Sellassie, Minister of Public Works of the Ethiopian Government; and a Secretariat with His Excellency Ato Abeba Retta, Minister of Public Health of the Ethiopian Government, as Secretary General. These Committees, in cooperation with the staff of the Theological College of the Holy Trinity and persons like the Reverend Father T. Paul Verghese of the World Council of Churches, did the work assigned to them during the several months preceding the Conference.

In consultation with the Heads of Churches, the Programme Committee prepared a tentative list of subjects to be discussed by the Conference. Besides, this Committee arranged for the convening of a preparatory consultation by a group of two theologians each deputed by every Church to work out the "Schema" as a basis of discussion at the subsequent Conference of the Heads of Churches.

PREPARATORY CONSULTATION OF THEOLOGIAN⁵

This was held during January 7 - 14, 1965 in one of the Committee Rooms of the Africa Hall. With solemn prayer and an address of welcome delivered by His Grace Abuna Philipos, Archbishop of Jerusalem, representing the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the work of the committee of theologians formally began at 11 a.m. on January 7, 1965. It was attended by delegates of all the five Churches, the Secretary General, and other officers of the Conference. The meeting elected His Grace Abuna Philipos, representing the host Church, to be its permanent chairman, and every session was presided over by a delegate of each Church who was chosen by a principle of rotation. Each of these sessions began and concluded its work with prayer led by every member of the Committee also by rotation.

4. The list of members of these Committees is found in Appendix III.
5. For the names of participants of this consultation see Appendix II.

Held behind closed doors, this consultation was indeed a great success and an unforgettable experience for those who took part in it. After long discussions carried on in a spirit of frankness and cordiality on the basis of the tentative list of subjects which the Programme Committee had prepared, these theologians unanimously recommended the "Schema" for the Conference of the Heads. A summary of the discussion is preserved in the short notes taken down by two recording secretaries⁶, whose services had been graciously lent by the World Council of Churches. Besides, the Committee had its official findings drafted by a body of three persons elected from among its membership. These findings were finally approved by a Committee with necessary modification in order that they may be presented to the Conference. The "Schema" thus proposed by the group of theologians to be submitted for deliberation by the Conference consisted of forty paragraphs dealing with the following subjects:- I. The Modern World and our Churches; II. Cooperation in Theological Education; III. Cooperation in Evangelism; IV. Our Relation with other Churches; V. Instituting a Machinery for the Maintenance of Permanent Relations; and VI. A Statement on Peace and Justice in the World.

THE CONFERENCE OF THE HEADS OF CHURCHES

The Conference had its sessions from January 15-21, 1965. The Heads with delegates other than those who had taken part in the preparatory consultation had arrived by plane on January 14th. They were received at the airport by His Imperial Majesty in person and high ranking dignitaries of both the Church and the State. Besides, there was a very large gathering of people at the airport to accord a cordial welcome to the holy Fathers on their arrival. They were also given a special reception at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in accordance with the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Reception Committee had made all the necessary arrangements for the comfortable stay of these most venerable guests in Addis Ababa.

The Conference was inaugurated at 11 a. m. on January 15th in the context of a short service of prayer. The rotun-

6. These persons were Miss Ellen Bogle and Miss Claudine Raymond.

da of the Africa Hall had been reserved for the delegates and all the seats in the gallery were occupied by invited guests. On the rostrum seats were arranged for the Heads of the Churches following the ancient tradition of precedence, and a Bible placed on a beautifully decorated table remained at the centre of the hall in front of these seats. At this inauguration ceremony the place reserved for the Patriarch of Alexandria remained vacant, as His Holiness Anba Kyrillos Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark arrived only two days later. The Conference was declared open by Emperor Haile Sellassie I as the host, who delivered the inaugural address⁷, welcoming the guests and expressing his unbounded joy in the great event signified by the Conference. Following him, two of the Heads, namely His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Yacub III, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, and His Holiness Vasken I, Supreme Catholicos and Patriarch of the Armenian Orthodox Church, also spoke⁸ thanking the Emperor and wishing the Conference every success.

The inaugural ceremony was followed by the regular sessions of the Conference, two sittings each day, except on 17th January which was a Sunday. Attended only by the Heads and delegates with the officers of the Conference, these sessions were also held behind closed doors. Each session began and concluded its programme of work with prayer led by one of the Heads, and in response to a unanimous request of the Conference His Excellency Ato Abeba Retta, the Secretary General, assumed the role of the Moderator, and Ato Aberra Jembere served as the General Secretary. During these sessions the recommendations of the Committee of theologians were read in the context of a very lively discussion of the issues raised in them. As at the preparatory consultation of theologians, the recording secretaries took down the salient points in the discussion, and a body of five persons was appointed to draft the findings. These men did the work assigned to them, and the statements which they prepared were finally approved by the conference, with necessary alterations, as its decisions⁹.

7. This address is given on pp. 11, 12 below.

8. Of these addresses, the one by His Holiness Ignatius Yacub III is given below on pp. 91, 92. The other was delivered extempore.

9. These decisions are reproduced on pp. 95 to 111 below.

The Conference came to a close on January 21st. At 4 p.m. on that day the concluding session was held in the presence of a large gathering of people. On this occasion also the Emperor delivered an address¹⁰, followed by speeches by all the Heads of Churches¹¹. This closing session most solemnly conferred on His Imperial Majesty Haile Sellassie I the title of "The Defender of Faith", and placed on record the feeling of sincere gratitude towards all those who worked for the success of the Conference. Finally the Heads put their signatures to the decisions approved by the Conference.

A PROBLEM IN THE ARMENIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Although this was a Conference of the Heads of five Churches, the Heads and delegates of the Armenian Orthodox Church expressed their inability to participate in it fully, because of certain internal difficulties of administration which they were facing between the Supreme Catholicos of Etchmiadzin and the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia. So at the closed sessions of the Conference the Armenian Orthodox Church was represented only by observers, and neither of the Catholicoses of the Armenian Orthodox Church signed the decisions at the conclusion of the Conference. We are happy to note, however, that His Holiness Khoren I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, has subsequently signified his willingness to be considered a full participant of the Conference. We hope and pray that the Armenian Orthodox Church will be so guided by the Holy Spirit that it will join fully with its sister Churches.

A WORD IN CONCLUSION

Following its adjournment, the Standing Committee¹² appointed by the Conference had several meetings, in which a number of decisions have been made with a view to follow up the work of the Conference. It should also be

10. For this address, see pp. 121, 122 below.

11. Four of these addresses are given on pp. 123, 131 below. Since the addresses of the Catholicoses of the Armenian Orthodox Church were delivered extempore, they are not reproduced here.

12. For the names of the members of the Standing Committee, see below p. 113.

noted that in response to the request of the Conference, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church soon set up the interim Secretariat in Addis Ababa with Ato Seifu Metaferia as its Secretary General. In this way the work which the Conference aimed to accomplish is being carried on.

We pray God to shower His unceasing blessings on these Churches, and guide them by His Holy Spirit that they may become effective witnesses of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.