

CONFERENCE  
OF THE  
ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES

FOURTH MEETING  
OF THE  
STANDING COMMITTEE  
HELD AT  
THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE  
DAMASCUS, SYRIA  
JUNE 20-23, 1968

GENERAL SECRETARIAT  
ADDISABABA, ETHIOPIA  
1968



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FOREWARD

The Fourth Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches took place at the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate Damascus, Syria, from June 20 to June 23, 1968 at the invitation of His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Yacob III, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. The deliberations of the meetings went on smoothly as a result of the arrangements made in advance by a local committee consisting of His Grace Mar Malatius Barnaba (Chairman), Very Rev-Saliba Shamoon (Secretary) and others in consultation with the the General Secretariat.

In additions to the programmes of the meeting, the host Church had kindly arranged interesting visits to places of religious and historical importance in both Damascus and Homs.

A brief account of the meetings, the discussions and tentative conclusions of the Conference in Damascus are given in the following pages.



CONFERENCE OF ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES

FOURTH MEETING, DAMASCUS, SYRIA

20 - 23 June, 1968

Participants

- I. Coptic Orthodox Church
  1. Bishop Athanasius of Beni-Souef
- II. Syrian Orthodox Church
  2. Bishop Severius Zakka of Mosul (Vice-Chairman)
  3. His Grace Gregorius Eoulos Banam, Archbishop of Baghdad
- III. Armenian Orthodox Church
  4. Rev. Fr. Datev Sarkissian
  5. Rev. Fr. Yephrem Tabakian substitutes for  
Bishop Karekin Sarkissian  
Rev. Fr. Mesrob Ashjian
- IV. Ethiopian Orthodox Church
  6. Abba Gebre Medhin Gebre Yohannes
  7. Dr. Getachew Haile
- V. Syrian Orthodox Church of India
  8. Bishop Theophilos Philipos
  9. Dr. K.C. Joseph (Vice-Chairman)

General Secretary

10. Ato Mikre Selassie Gebre Ammanuel

Consultants

11. Mr. Philips Thomas, General Secretary of the Orthodox Youth Movement in India
12. Fr. Joseph Vendrappilly, Secretary, Christian Education Curriculum Committee who acted as Recording Secretary for the meeting.



A G E N D A

Thursday, 20th June 1968

8:30 a.m. Opening Session

- (a) Prayer
- (b) Welcome from the host Church
- (c) Reply on behalf of the Committee
- (d) Roll call
- (e) Appointment of (i) Recording Secretary (ii) Drafting Committee
- (f) Adoption of Agenda
- (g) Presentation of General Secretary's report and discussion thereon.

11:00 a.m. Second Session

Further discussion on the work of the Standing Committee and the problem of getting our Churches committed to the implementation of our common concern.

3:30 p.m. Visit to His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Yacob III,  
Patriarch of Antioch and All the East.

4:00 p.m. Third Session

- (a) Report on the question of Easter date and discussion thereon
- (b) Report on Fasting and discussion thereon.

6:00 p.m. Fourth Session

- (a) Report on the Curriculum Committee's work
- (b) Report on the Institute of Advanced Theological Studies.

Friday, 21st June 1968

8:30 a.m. Fifth Session

- (a) Report on the publication of pamphlets by the various Churches
- (b) Report regarding the Armenian Church's participation in the work of the Standing Committee.

11:00 a.m. Sixth Session

- (a) Discussion on Cardinal Bea's letter about mixed marriages
- (b) The problem of Christian presence in the Middle East.



3:30 p.m. Seventh Session

- (a) Relations with other Churches
- (b) Nomination of a Consultant from C.O.O.C. to the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

6:00 p.m. Eighth Session

- (a) Reorganization of the General Secretariat
- (b) Finance and Budget
- (c) Date and venue of the fifth meeting of the Standing Committee.

Saturday, 22nd June 1968

8:00 a.m. Trip to Homs

7:00 p.m. Participation in the inauguration of the Patriarchate Building.

Sunday, 23rd June 1968

9:00 a.m. The Holy Eucharist presided over by His Holiness the Patriarch.

11:00 a.m. Ninth and Closing Session

- (a) Adoption of resolutions of the Standing Committee
- (b) Adoption of resolution of thanks to the host Church

2:30 p.m. Visit to the Greek Orthodox Monastery of St. Mary

4:30 p.m. Closing worship and prayer, and departure from Damascus.



CONFERENCE OF ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES

Fourth Meeting of the Standing Committee

Syrian Patriarchate, Damascus

June 20 - 23, 1968

Brief Notes on the Meeting

Opening Session

The fourth meeting of the Standing Committee of the Oriental Orthodox Churches was opened with a solemn prayer by His Grace Anba Athanasius of Beni-Soueif at the Patriarchate of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Damascus. Dr. K.C. Joseph presided over the meeting.

Bishop Severius Zakka of Mosul welcomed the participants on behalf of the host Church. His Grace Severius Zakka stated that it was a pleasure and a **privilege** to welcome the participants in the name of His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Yacob III, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. He addressed the delegates as follows:

"Dear Brethren,

I have been given a great privilege and honour to welcome you all on behalf of His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Yacob III, the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, at this new building of the most ancient Patriarchate on this auspicious occasion of the 4th Meeting of our Standing Committee.

As you are all aware, Damascus, the city of Saint Paul, has replaced Antioch, the ancient capital of Syria, and the headquarters of the Holy See of St. Peter was moved to Damascus in 1959 by H.H. the present Patriarch.

Having you all here as representatives of the sister Oriental Orthodox Churches, a bright page has been added to the history of the Holy See of Antioch.

Brethren, at no time in the history of the Christian Church has there been so deep and sincere a desire to gather the Christian denominations together and develop a genuine understanding of the fact that all the Churches should fully cooperate and unite efforts towards the one goal of serving the word of God as it is today. Since our Churches share the same faith and full communion and have suffered together through the ages



for the sake of keeping the faith of our Fathers pure and holy, it is due time to awake now and cooperate again so that our Churches may flourish and grow from strength to strength.

In our age it was the blessing of God that His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I called the Conference of the Heads of our Oriental Orthodox Churches in Addis Ababa in 1965 to strengthen the links amongst them.

We hope that through the meetings of the Standing Committee we will complete the desire of our Lord Jesus Christ that "all be one" and fulfil the recommendations of the Conference.

May the Almighty God bestow His blessings upon us, and may the guidance of the Holy Spirit lead us through our meetings so as to be of fruitful service.

Once again, brethren, I welcome you on behalf of His Holiness the Patriarch and wish you a good and comfortable stay in Damascus. Thank you."

Dr. K.C. Joseph, the Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee, on behalf of the participants, expressed the gratitude for the profound welcome extended. He also stated that His Grace Anba Samuel, the Chairman of the Committee, could not be present owing to busy engagements in Cairo in connection with the grand 19th centenary celebration of St. Mark. Dr. K.C. Joseph remarked: "The Standing Committee should be a moving committee and it should move with the work of the projects that we take up. We stand for a new look at our life and traditions. It is for that His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I brought many of us to Addis Ababa."

Dr. Joseph also mentioned the lavish and loving support that the Ethiopian Church is giving to our work. He also remarked that it would be good to have different persons to chair the meetings at different sessions. Accordingly Bishop Athanasius of Beni-Souef, Bishop Theophilos, Rev. Fr. Datev Sarkissian, Abba Gebre Medhin and Dr. Getachew Haile were chosen to chair the different sessions in addition to the Vice-Chairman. Fr. Joseph Vendrappilly, Secretary of the Christian Education Curriculum Committee, was appointed the Recording Secretary.

The following were appointed to be a drafting committee: His Grace Theophilos Philipos (convener), Rev. Fr. Sarkissian and Dr. Getachew Haile.

The General Secretary, Ato Mikre Selassie, presented the draft agenda already circulated and invited alterations or additions. Some changes were made in the draft agenda accordingly.



## Second Session

### Presentation of the Annual Report

The work was resumed under the chairmanship of Bishop of Athanasius of Beni-Souef.

The GERAL Secretary, Ato Mikre Selassie, gave an oral report on the work of the Secretariat during the past year. Among other things he said that it was an year of experience and expectations. He could travel widely in the Middle East and Europe, meet and consult all the supreme Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Good hospitality and promises of assistance were given by all of them. At the outset, that gave some encouragement. Some tasks of the secretariat at Addis Ababa were entrusted to branch offices at Beirut, Cairo and Kottayam. Being a Professor in a theological seminary, he worked only as a part-time secretary.

The past year was also a critical year to the Secretariat. The enquiries from the secretariat were not responded to properly or in time by some member Churches. Hence some publications which were scheduled to be brought out this year could not be done. The secretariat could get only U.S.\$,1655.00 after he took charge. Financially it was a critical year. The General Secretary was forced to doubt whether all the member churches were really and fully concerned about this organisation.

After the presentation of the report the following remarks were made on it by some participants.

His Grace Mar Theophilos: We are deeply grateful to the General Secretary for the great work done and the frank report of the statement of affairs. The situation is disappointing and frustrating. Five years ago we met in Addis Ababa with great hopes. We thought a new age was beginning. But we have been duped in that hope. We have to sit and think aloud to discover ways and means. We have to think seriously of the desirability of the Association.

Dr. K.C. Joseph: The Churches by and large did not express their concern for witnessing to the Gospel. It is a great thing that the Oriental Churches did not have to unsay anything in their doctrinal formulations. But we should not always be looking back. We have to look around and forward. We are the salt of the earth. We have to recapture the spirit of the Apostles. Really active cooperation of the Orthodox Churches is necessary.



Dr. Getachew remarked that we have to foster the idea of co-operation in the member churches. He expressed great regret at our not getting down to doing most of the work previously agreed upon. He suggested that we have to rethink our decisions.

Fr. Sarkissian: We have not seriously taken the decisions of the past. Moreover the members of the Standing Committee are tied up with so many other activities of their dioceses.

He suggested that the question should be taken up when the members of the Standing Committee met the Heads of the Churches at Cairo and Uppsala. After a long discussion a resolution was passed to this effect. (See Resolution No. 1).

#### Visit to His Holiness the Patriarch

At 3:45 p.m. His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Yacob III, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, graciously granted the delegates an audience. His Grace Bishop Athanasius welcomed His Holiness on behalf of the Standing Committee. He remarked that at Addis Ababa people looked forward with great expectations and hopes for a strong revival in our Churches in the near future. We have now met under the ~~roof~~ of the Patriarchate of the Syrian Orthodox Church to **seek** further ways of reaching our goals. The Head of this ~~glorious~~ Church is highly competent to give us leadership.

#### His Holiness the Patriarch's Address

"We are very glad to see you in our Patriarchate. We are very happy that you accepted our invitation and came to stay here for a few days. You know very well that our Church is **the most** ancient one and is considered to be the first church established. But due to some calamities we lost much in the past centuries. Our desire was to see all the Oriental Orthodox Churches gathering together and studying their common problems so that they may come to a good understanding. After our installation as Patriarch we sent two Metropolitans to Addis Ababa to meet His Imperial Majesty the Emperor to convey to him our best wishes and a letter requesting His Imperial Majesty to invite the leaders of our ancient churches to Addis Ababa. Due to some reasons or other it was postponed for some years and later, as you know, we met at Addis Ababa in the year 1965 and thus our desire was fulfilled. The Christendom considered it as an event of history. We thank God that our name and fame is spread everywhere and we hope in future we will have good



fruits from this meeting. Such meetings are necessary and we must study well the problems of our churches so that we may succeed in the future. Now we thank you for coming here and pray for God's blessings and prosperity upon your deliberations."

After His Holiness's speech, His Grace Mar Theophilos brought to the kind notice of His Holiness the sad state of affairs pointed out in the report of the General Secretary. His Grace said that many things have been left undone as the promised quotas of contributions have not been received by the Secretariat. His Grace appealed to His Holiness to give some thought to this matter when the Heads of the Churches met at Cairo some time next week. His Holiness promised his hearty support and assured the members that he would take up the matter with the Heads of the Churches when he met them at Cairo.

### Third Session

#### 1. Annual Report (continued)

The subject discussed in the Second Session was continued under the Chairmanship of His Grace Mar Theophilos. Much time was spent on considering how the member churches could be made more aware of the need of the C.O.O.C.

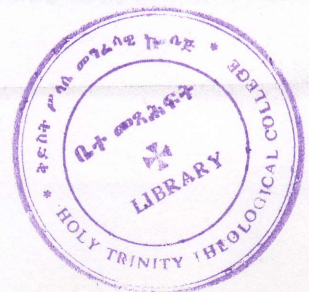
The report of the General Secretary was accepted and he was warmly congratulated for the splendid work carried out in spite of great financial strain and difficulties. It was resolved that the General Secretary be asked to present his report in writing in the future. (See Resolution No.2).

#### 2. Easter Date

The preliminary study book-let on the Date of Easter and Calendar Revision, prepared by Rev. Fr. Paul Verghese, was distributed to the members. After over-night study of the subject, the matter was discussed and the meeting decided to circulate the proposals among the member churches for further study and discussion. (See Resolution No. 3).

#### 3. The Question of Fasting

A report was orally presented by His Grace Bishop Athanasius of Beni-Souef on the question of fasting. It was noted that only the Coptica and the Ethiopian Churches had responded to the questionnaire forwarded to all the churches, and that this report was based on the answers received from these two churches. He mentioned that it was too difficult at this stage to make changes or modifications in the observances and practices of fasting now prevailing in these two churches. It was pointed out that some sister churches had already effected certain modifications in the





observance of fasting. In the light of the discussion, His Grace Anba Athanasius was requested to continue the work and produce a final report in the next meeting embodying not only details of the existing practices in fasting but also suggestions for modifications to make liturgical life more meaningful in order to carry our young folk also with us. (See Resolution No. 4).

#### Fourth Session

##### 1. Curriculum Committee's Work

The working of the Curriculum Committee was taken up under the chairmanship of Rev. Fr. Datev Sarkissian. Fr. Joseph Vendrappilly, Secretary of the Curriculum Committee, presented the printed copies of the report of the last Curriculum Consultation which was held at Antelias. The book, which was edited by Fr. Paul Verghese, was accepted with gratitude and referred to the Committee for further implementation. Dr. K.C. Joseph suggested that the Curriculum must be such as to inculcate a sensitivity in the children to human needs around them, like poverty, illness, illiteracy, etc. Church history must not be the history of controversies but the history of what God has done and is doing in the history of man. (See Resolution No. 5)

##### 2. Institute of Advanced Theological Studies

The question of the Institute of Advanced Theological Studies came up for discussion. Rev. V.C. Samuel had been entrusted with this task. As he could not be present he had sent a letter to the General Secretary. The relevant passages in the letter were read in the meeting. He inquired whether the Committee members would reconsider their decision concerning the location of the proposed Institute of Advanced Theological Studies, in view of the recent crisis in the Middle-East. Dr. K.C. Joseph said that we have five theological colleges and we should find out whether the Institute for Advanced Theological Studies could be located in any one of these Theological Colleges in such a way as to give it a standing in university circles. Fr. Sarkissian asked whether co-operation with the recently formed "Association for Theological Education in the Near East" would be possible. It was also suggested that Haile Sellassie I University (The Theological College) should be considered as a possible centre for the Institute. The General Secretary made mention of the letter that he received from the Secretary of the Association of Theological Education in the Near East. (See Resolution No. 6).



### Fifth Session

#### 1. Publication of Pamphlets

Abba Gebre Medhin presided over the Session. The report on the publication of pamphlets by the various churches came up for discussion. On this issue it was reported on behalf of Fr. Mesrob Ashjian, who was entrusted with the publication of the pamphlet concerning the history of our churches, that he is working on it and a progress report will be sent to the General Secretary in due time. It was also reported that the pamphlet by His Grace Mar Athanasius Ephrem concerning the liturgical life was also getting ready.

His Grace Mar Theophilos explained what had happened in the Orthodox Church of India. At a recent meeting of the Synod, a new book of daily prayer for laity was circulated for careful study.

There was no report regarding the progress in the work related to the publication of the pamphlets concerning (1) monastic life in our churches, (2) our existing theological education, (3) our present practice on Christian education, (4) Directory of our churches, and (5) the social and evangelistic work in our churches.

Fr. Sarkissian wanted that the pamphlets to be published by the churches should contain what was happening in the member churches.

The report on our present practice of Christian education which was presented to the Standing Committee in the form of Appendix I in the Report of the Editorial and Training Committee was accepted. It was then resolved that in order to avoid duplication, it should be referred to the Secretary of the Curriculum and Training Committee, Fr. Joseph Vendrappilly, for further action.

During the last conference Dr. Getachew was entrusted with the work of nominating somebody to bring out a pamphlet on the social and evangelistic work in our churches. But as no nomination has been made so far, Rev. Fr. Gebre Medhin Gebre Yohannes was requested to take up that work. (See Resolution No. 7).

On the question of bringing out a Directory the General Secretary brought three things to the notice of the Committee. He said that if the work is to be effectively done somebody should travel to gather information from the churches and there must be responsible committees in the various



churches to respond properly to enquiries and a fund has to be found for these. He said that Heads of the Churches should be requested to appoint a responsible body for this in each church. At this juncture Rev. Fr. Sarkissian described what he had done in his church to bring out a Directory of the Armenian Church. His Grace Anba Athanasius was requested to draft a letter to be sent to the Heads of the Churches in this connection. (See Resolution No. 7 & also No. 1).

## 2. The Armenian Church's Participation

Then came the question of the report regarding the Armenian Church's participation in the work of the Standing Committee. It was suggested that the committee should not go into internal affairs of the church. But at the same time the committee expressed its great concern in the matter and suggested that it should be a matter for prayer.

## Sixth Session

### 1. Mixed Marriages

In this session the work was resumed under the chairmanship of His Grace Anba Athanasius. The letter of Cardinal A. Bea dated February 22, 1967, addressed to the Heads of the Churches, and referred by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to the Standing Committee, was taken up for discussion. The entire letter was read in the Committee by Dr. Getachew.

"Your Holiness,

One of the canonical rules of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, from which only the Holy See could dispense, rendered invalid the marriage of a Roman Catholic which was not celebrated by a Catholic priest. This law had some unpleasant consequences in the case of marriage between a Catholic and a member of an Orthodox Church. Since marriages of this kind were becoming more numerous the Second Vatican Council decided to ~~change~~<sup>in</sup> this law, so far as it affected Oriental Catholics marrying an Orthodox. After two years of experience, it has become apparent that even this decision caused grave difficulties in that it established a different canonical situation for oriental and western Catholics on this point, at the very time when this type of marriage was increasing in the west, where more and more Orthodox faithful are taking up residence.

As a result, the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, taking into consideration the fact that Catholics and Orthodox alike firmly believe that marriage is a



sacrament instituted by Christ, Our Saviour, has taken the following decision. For the future, when a Catholic marries an Orthodox, the marriage is valid, as long as it is celebrated before a Sacred Minister, whether this minister is a Catholic priest or an Orthodox priest. Evidently, the couple must fulfil the other prescriptions of law, and the general rule that a member of the Catholic Church must celebrate his marriage before a Catholic priest. However, as has just been said, the fact that this rule may not be observed no longer renders the marriage invalid for the case in which it is celebrated before an Orthodox priest. Furthermore, the Holy Father has also ordained that in cases of marriages between Catholic and Orthodox every Catholic bishop can dispense his own faithful from the general rule and, if in his prudent judgement it is opportune he can allow the Catholic party to celebrate his marriage in the Orthodox church by an Orthodox priest. It is the hope that through fraternal contacts, the Catholic pastor and the Orthodox pastor will take care that the marriage is properly entered in the registers of both parishes.

Through these new canonical dispositions, the Holy Father hopes that these marriages, which in the past have often been the occasion of strife between Catholics and Orthodox, will no longer be so for the future. Furthermore, it is hoped that collaboration between Catholic bishops and Orthodox bishops can develop in a spirit of mutual understanding both with regard to the concrete application of these dispositions and with regard to the search for a satisfactory solution to other problems which still are a cause for difficulty in this matter.

We are pleased to inform Your Holiness of the contents and the spirit of this decree, which will be published on Saturday, February 25th and will go into effect on March 25, 1967, the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

A copy of the official Latin text of the decree is joined to this letter.

With the expression of my respectful esteem and fraternal love in Christ Jesus, Our Lord, I remain, Your Holiness,

Yours very sincerely,

A. Bea."



Dr. Joseph described the difficulties in making a pronouncement in the matter. The change in the Roman Catholic system was recorded with special interest. A Committee consisting of Dr. K.C. Joseph, Fr. Sarkissian and Dr. Getachew was asked to discuss the question further and Dr. Joseph was asked to draft a letter conveying the concern of the Standing Committee, to be handed over to the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. The letter drafted by Dr. K.C. Joseph was discussed and approved by the Standing Committee. (See the letter in the form of Resolution No. 8.)

## 2. Christian Presence in the Middle-East

After this the question of a Christian presence in the Middle-East came up for consideration. Dr. Joseph spoke about the situation in the Middle-East and about the problem of making more effective the Christian presence in the area. The following is the note presented by him in the meeting,

### " MIDDLE EAST WORKING PARTY

The Staff of the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva, have special working parties to study the problems of the Christian Church in the various areas of the world. These working parties meet twice a year along with representatives of other Christian Organizations like the World Student Christian Federation, World YMCA, YWCA, World Council of Christian Education, etc. At the last meeting in May 1968 of the Middle East Working Party several problems affecting the Church in the Middle East, especially at this time of continuing crisis in that area, were discussed. It was agreed that special attention should be paid immediately to one urgent concern which is set forth hereunder.

The Middle East Working Party was very much concerned about the problem of making more effective the Christian presence in the tragic circumstances of the Middle East. The strengthening of the Christian witness of the native Christian population in the area is an ecumenical concern of the greatest importance.

The Christian population there, which have relations with the World Council of Churches, form three different groups: the Protestant groups represented by the Near East Council of Churches, the Eastern Orthodox Groups in communion with Constantinople, and the Oriental Orthodox Groups which are further subdivided on ethnical lines.

These three, almost mutually exclusive, groups have to be brought into



a closer fellowship and more living communication with one another if they are to make the Christian presence in the Middle East real and tangible.

The question is where do we begin. In this connection there was a suggestion that the Representatives of the Orthodox Churches who are going to meet in Geneva in June might be requested to think of this question. So might also the Representatives of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, scheduled to meet in Damascus towards the end of June, be requested to consider this problem.

The most important practical suggestion, however, was that all the representatives of the Churches of the Middle East who come to Uppsala should be brought together at a special meeting and that the problems discussed at the Middle East Working Party should be discussed at that meeting. That might be a first step in the process of getting the Churches of the area to take further action to establish a more living fellowship among themselves, and to organize the structures needed to foster it."

He said that the war between the Arabs and Israel should be the concern of the Christians also. Many Christians are leaving the Middle East. We have to look more seriously into the problem. We have to think of our fore-fathers. They did not flee from difficulties. They faced them in a Christian way. That is how we have to witness to Christ among others. We seem to be always on the defensive. We are a minority but we should be the salt of the earth. He also quoted Dr. Blake's reference to the Middle East situation in which he explained that the Missionary Organizations wanted not an Armenian or a Protestant presence but a Christian presence there. It is a pity that even at the Holy Sepulchre things are happening that cannot glorify God. He concluded that the Christian presence should stand for the purpose of God in the Middle East.

Then the General Secretary added that the lack of social awareness on the part of the Orthodox Church is the greatest problem. A resolution was passed to this effect. (See Resolution No.9).

### Seventh Session

#### 1. Relations with Other Churches

Dr. Getachew Haile was on the chair during this session. The question of Relations with other Churches came up for discussion. The Chairman asked the General Secretary to explain what had been done so far. The General



Secretary reported that except his little correspondence with "Syndesmos" (World Organization of Orthodox Youth Movements), the "Association of Theological Education in the Near East", the W.C.C. and the A.A.C.C., nothing fundamental had been done. Work of this type, he added, had been entrusted to the Cairo branch office. His Grace Mar Theophilos explained what had taken place in Bristol in the unofficial dialogue between the theologians of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. Ato Mikre Selassie remarked that the consensus of opinion at the Bristol meeting was that the differences between these groups of churches were not so much in their doctrinal positions but in the terminology used by them. He added that the unofficial dialogue between the theologians of the Chalcedonian and Oriental Orthodox Churches, started at Aarhus (Denmark), was continued during the Bristol Faith and Order Conference. Again, in Heraklion, during the Central Committee meeting the contacts were resumed. Furthermore, it was reported that in the recent Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chaux-de-Fonds, near Geneva, a formal decision had been taken by the Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches to start official conversation with our Churches.

As a result of these discussions and in view of the recent developments, it was resolved that a consultation be organized for the theologians and scholars of our churches to study the nature of such an official dialogue and the issues it involved before commencing the official consultation with the Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches. (See Resolution No. 10).

Among other things the question of proselytisation came up for discussion. It was reported that the Roman Catholic Church would be prepared to issue prohibitory orders against proselytisation if specific instances were quoted. Dr. Joseph reported that this was discussed in Rome in a consultation and he was authorized to inform this to the Standing Committee. Bishop Mar Theophilos reported a similar instance that happened in Kerals.

## 2. Representative on the Faith & Order Commission

The General Secretary reported that the Faith and Order Commission had invited the C.O.O.C. to appoint a liaison officer to the Commission with the status of a research consultant. The duties of the person will consist of attending the Commission Meetings, keeping in touch with its work, receiving Faith and Order materials and sending back to it relevant material and information.

While considering the nomination to the Faith and Order Commission of



the W.C.C. three names were put forth - Rev. Fr. Paul Verghese, Archbishop Gregorius of Baghdad and Bishop Gregorius of Cairo. It was suggested that it would be taken up in the next session so that the members could get sufficient time to think of the most suitable choice.

Later this question was again discussed. As it was expressed by some members that we should try to present new figures in the international forum, His Grace Anba Gregorius of Cairo was elected to represent the Standing Committee in the Faith and Order Commission. (See Resolution No. 11).

#### Eighth Session

##### 1. Reorganization of the Secretariat

This was the budget session and His Grace Mar Theophilos was on the chair. Along with it also came the question of reorganizing the secretariat. Everybody was taken by surprise when the General Secretary made the announcement of resignation as he intended to go abroad for higher studies. But he was kind enough to agree to continue in office up to June 1969. The Chairman, together with the members of the Standing Committee residing in Addis Ababa, was authorized to find out a successor to Ato Mikre Selassie in the post of the General Secretary. (See Resolution No. 12).

##### 2. Budget and Finance

The question of the budget for the next year (i.e. July 1968-June 1969) came up for discussion. The General Secretary again referred to the financial strain experienced by him in the last budget year, and requested that a committee be appointed to draft a budget for the next year (1968-'69). Accordingly a committee consisting of His Grace Mar Theophilos (Convenor), His Grace Anba Athanasius and the General Secretary was appointed to prepare and present a budget for the general secretariat. (See the budget as item 13, A & B in the Resolutions).

In the course of the long discussions, the representatives of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church expressed their strong objections to the unduly disproportionate quota of contribution allocated to the Ethiopian Church. Dr. Getachew expressed his doubt, in the light of the past experience, whether even the smaller quotas of other churches would be paid. When all the members promised to do their best to have the quotas of their churches fully paid in time, the delegates of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church agreed to the draft budget presented. And it was passed. (See Resolution 13).



While discussing the budget and the accounts, members suggested that hereafter, all the accounts of the General Secretariat and the Branch Offices should be audited and presented to the Standing Committee. The auditing might be done by the members of the Standing Committee resident in the area. (See Resolution No. 14).

3. Date and Venue of the fifth Meeting of the Standing Committee

When the issue of the next meeting of the Standing Committee arose, on behalf of the Syrian Orthodox Church of India, Bishop Theophilos extended an invitation to hold the meeting at Kottayam. The Standing Committee expressed its profound thanks for the kind invitation. But due to the heavy involvement of expenses for travel, it was fixed for Cairo, subject to an official invitation from the Coptic Church. (See Resolution 15).

On the third day of the Conference, the delegates took part in a pilgrimage to the Church of the Girdle of St. Mary at Homs and in the inauguration of the new wing of the Patriarchate building in Damascus.

On Sunday, 23rd June 1968, all the delegates participated in the Holy Eucharist celebration by His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Yacob III, the Patriarch, at the Cathedral.

Ninth Session

Adoption of Resolutions

On the chair was His Grace Mar Theophilos

1. A resolution was passed, expressing the deep gratitude to Rev. Fr. Paul Verghese for the book-let on Easter date and Calendar Revision and commending the proposals for careful dissemination among the people. (See Resolution No. 3).

2. The delegates expressed their deep sense of gratitude to His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Yacob III, the Syrian Orthodox Church and the organizing committee for their generous hospitality and the wonderful arrangements for the successful holding of the conference. (See Resolution No. 17).

All the resolutions of the conference were read and passed.

The Fourth Meeting of the Standing Committee concluded with prayer, expression of gratitude, and dedicating all of us to God's care and work.



## R E S O L U T I O N S

### 1. Implementation of Resolutions by the Member Churches

In view of the fact that most of the resolutions adopted during the previous meetings of the Standing Committee were not implemented,

(a) We urge that the Standing Committee members be more concerned about and committed to these decisions and by means deemed ~~suitable~~ to them, assure their implementation.

(b) A letter be addressed to the respective Heads of the member churches expressing the concern of the Standing Committee that some of the decisions have not so far been properly implemented and inviting deeper commitment for the greater participation in the proceedings and in the implementation of the various decisions. His Grace Bishop Athanasius of Beni-Souef was asked to draft the letter to be presented to the plenary session.

(c) It was further resolved that a sub-committee should visit the Heads of the member churches for the same purpose and submit the letter mentioned in (1 b) above to them. The following persons were suggested to form the Committee:

His Grace Bishop Severius Zakka

" " Theophilos Philippos (Convenor)

" " Kerekin Sarkissian

Dr. Getachew Haile

Rev. K.C. Joseph

The General Secretary

(d) The following is the text of the letter drafted by H.G. Bishop Athanasius (1b) and approved by the Standing Committee to be submitted to the Heads of the Churches.

Letter to the Heads of the Member-Churches from the Standing Committee

To: His Holiness

From: The Standing Committee of the Conference of  
Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Your Holiness,

Permit us to offer our filial regards and to request Your Holiness's



blessings on us all in the name of the Holy Trinity and of the Virgin Mother.

The Standing Committee at its fourth meeting in June 1968 at the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Damascus, considered the work of the General Secretariat during the past year and the present situation and decided to present to the Heads of our Churches certain grave concerns:-

1. The original expectation was that the office of the General Secretary in Addis Ababa and the Branch Offices would have been firmly established by the present time. Unfortunately that has not happened. The General Secretariat was obliged to drop all staff for lack of funds and the General Secretary himself had to carry on this work depending on his own private resources. The Branch Offices in Cairo, Beirut and Kottayam have not been much better off.

2. Consequently most of the publications that had been decided upon could not be brought out.

3. Travels by the General Secretary and other persons responsible for factfinding missions could not be undertaken.

4. The rank and file of our various Churches have so far not been made fully aware of the common thinking that has been initiated by the Heads of our Churches.

5. The central administrations of our various Churches have not so far been fully committed to fulfil their financial responsibilities in supporting the many-faced programme of work envisaged by the Standing Committee.

The Standing Committee, therefore, places before the Heads of our Churches this brief representation of the present situation in order to secure their active support in the carrying out of the duties they themselves entrusted three years ago to the Standing Committee. In practical terms, the Standing Committee would request Your Holiness to order the following things to be done immediately.

(a) Appoint one person to be in special charge of all matters concerning the Churches' correspondence and communications with the General Secretary and see that replies to inquiries from the General Secretary and the Branch Secretaries are sent within a reasonable time after receipt of such inquiries.

(b) Make sure that the requested financial contributions to the budget of the Standing Committee are sent from the Church to the appropriate persons before the middle of the budget year at the latest.



With most respectful inquiries regarding Your Holiness's health, and praying for apostolic blessings, we remain,

Your Holiness's humble children,

The Standing Committee

2. Circulation of the General Secretary's Annual Report

The oral report of the General Secretary was accepted with appreciation. The Standing Committee expressed its gratitude to the General Secretary for his efforts to carry out his duties in spite of all the difficulties he faced and requested the General Secretary to circulate his report in writing. It was also agreed that hereafter the report of the General Secretary should be circulated to members before the meeting of the Standing Committee at which it is to be considered.

3. Calendar Revision

The preliminary study of the Rev. Fr. Paul Verghese on the Date of Easter and Calendar Revision in the Orthodox Churches was received with great interest and gratitude. Considering the fact that it raised very important issues and contained far-reaching practical proposals, it was commended to all churches for careful consideration and proper discussion. It was suggested also that its contents be presented to the members of our respective churches in simple language for information in view of promoting serious discussions.

4. Report on the Work Connected with the Question of Fasting

With regard to the question of fasting, it was resolved that His Grace Bishop Athanasius be asked to continue the work and present a fuller written report to the next Standing Committee with special suggestions with regard to new lines of developments already undertaken by the various member churches.

5. Report on the Work of the Curriculum and Training Committee

The Report of the work of the Curriculum and Training Committee, presented in the form of a book, edited by Rev. Fr. Paul Verghese, was accepted with gratitude and referred back to the Committee for further serious study and necessary implementation.



## 6. Institute of Advanced Theological Studies

The Rev. Dr. V.C. Samuel, in a letter addressed to the General Secretary, had inquired whether the Committee members would reconsider their decision concerning the location of the proposed Institute of Advanced Theological Studies. It was resolved that the Committee responsible for organisation of the above-mentioned Institute take up the matter seriously together with the following suggestions:

(a) To see if co-operation is possible with the recently formed "Association of Theological Education in the Near East." (A.T.E.N.E.).

(b) To consider Haile Sellassie I University (Theological College) as a possible centre for the Institute (where competent scholars could be grouped as staff members) together with Cairo, the already suggested centre.

## 7. Publication of Pamphlets

(a) Abba Gebre Medhin Gebre Yohannes should produce the pamphlet on the social and evangelistic work in our Churches.

(b) A time-limit should be set up by the General Secretary in consultation with the concerned persons.

(c) Progress reports should be sent to the General Secretary and circulated among the member churches every three months.

(d) The churches should appoint special committees to discuss the basic issues to facilitate the work of the editors with the constructive proposals that may result from the discussions in these committees.

## 8. Resolution Regarding the Roman Catholic Church's Letter about Mixed Marriages

The Standing Committee of the Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches, at its fourth meeting in June 1968 at the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Damascus, considered the communication dated February 22, 1967 from His Eminence Cardinal A. Bea concerning the Roman Catholic Church's recent action regarding marriages between Orthodox and Roman Catholic partners.

While pointing out that the Orthodox Churches have never declared as invalid marriages blessed by the priests of the Roman Catholic Church the Standing Committee is happy to learn that the Roman Catholic Church has now decided to revise its old policy in this matter.

Nevertheless, the Standing Committee is of opinion that, in a so-called



"mixed marriage" as in any other, the issue is not entirely, or even primarily the technical validity of the act of marriage. The whole matter raises very serious questions regarding the future life of the Christian home to inaugurate which the act of marriage takes place. The Orthodox Church considers the relation between man and wife as a sacred and mystical union similar to the union of Christ and the Church. Hence the continued unity in sacramental worship binding together the man, the wife, and their children, is at least as important as the validity of the act of marriage.

Furthermore, some of the practical arrangements suggested in Cardinal Bea's letter such as registration of a "mixed" marriage in both the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Parishes, implying pastoral jurisdiction of priests of two separate churches over the same family, are likely to lead to future complications, not merely in relation to the Christian life of the family, but also in its relation to the laws of some States.

Therefore, the Standing Committee is of opinion that before the Orthodox Church can make any new declaration in this matter, there has to be further study and clarification of issues. The Standing Committee's recommendation, therefore, is that a joint commission of Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians and jurists should be set up for further joint study and exploration of the various issues affecting marriages between Orthodox and Roman Catholic partners.

#### 9. On the Christian Presence in the Middle East

The Standing Committee considered seriously the life and the responsibilities of our respective churches in the Middle East. It expressed its deep concern for a more effective Christian presence in the area and requests our churches to take appropriate initiatives in this matter.

#### 10. On Relations With Other Churches

In view of the recent developments, it was resolved that a consultation be organized for the theologians and the scholars of our churches to study the nature of such an official conversation with the Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches and the issues it involved. It was advised that it be organized in a year's time before the next Standing Committee meeting and the participation of experts be assured. The task of convening this consultation was assigned to a committee consisting of the Chairman of the Standing Committee, the Rev. Dr. V.C. Samuel and the General Secretary.



11. Nomination of a Representative to the Faith and Order Commission

In response to the kind invitation of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, His Grace Anba Gregorius of Cairo was elected to represent the Standing Committee on it.

12. Reorganization of the General Secretariat

The General Secretary in his report pointed out the urgent need of reorganizing the General Secretariat. Furthermore, he revealed that due to personal reasons, he was compelled to submit his resignation as General Secretary as from June 1969 at the latest. It was resolved that the Chairman, together with the Standing Committee members residing in Addis Ababa, be entrusted with the task of the reorganization of the General Secretariat, and the appointment of a successor to Ato Mikre Selassie if and when he resigns from his post.

13. Budget for the year July 1968 to June 1969.

A. Expenses of the General Secretariat at Addis Ababa: 1968-'69

	<u>Description</u>	<u>Per Month</u>	<u>Per Year</u>
1.	Part-time General Secretary	U.S.\$ 80	U.S.\$ 960
2.	Assistant Secretary	100	1200
3.	Copy-typist	60	720
4.	Office-boy	36	432
5.	One Guard	20	240
6.	P.T.T.	--	400
7.	Stationery	--	400
8.	Mimeographing	--	400
9.	Travelling	--	1100
10.	Maintenance of office, furniture and machines	--	400
11.	Miscellaneous	--	348
	Total	U.S.\$ 296	U.S.\$ 6,600

Annual expenses budget for the General Secretariat amount to U.S.\$ 6,600.



B. Allocation of Contributions to the Budget

This should be met by the following contributions agreed to by the different member churches:

Ethiopian Orthodox Church	U.S.\$.	4000
Coptic	" "	700
Syrian	" "	600
Armenian (Cilicia)	" "	650
Indian Orthodox Church		<u>650</u>
Total	U.S.\$.	<u><u>6,600</u></u>

C. Besides their **contributions** to the Head Office of the General Secretariat in Addis Ababa mentioned above, it was resolved that the Branch Offices should be responsible for various duties as follows and should obtain the money required for the purpose from the respective churches.

(a) Cario Office:

1. Pastoral work in our churches
2. Monastic life in our churches
3. Our present practice on Christian education

(b) Beirut - Damascus Office:

1. The history of our churches
2. The liturgical life in our churches

(c) Kottayam Office:

1. Editing and publication of study materials
2. Questions related to Christian year and calendar.

(d) Ethiopian Orthodox Church:

It was resolved that in addition to its contribution to the General Secretariat the Ethiopian Orthodox Church should be responsible for:

- (1) Continuation of the Missionary Project already under way
- (2) Organizing a seminar on missionary activities for our churches as soon as possible.

14. Presentation of audited accounts

It was resolved that the expenses of the General Secretariat and the Branch Offices be presented to the Standing Committee in the form of audited accounts. The Standing Committee members might audit the accounts.



15. Convening of the fifth meeting of the Standing Committee

On behalf of the Syrian Orthodox Church of India, a kind invitation was ~~extended~~ by His Grace Bishop Theophilos to convene the next meeting of the Standing Committee in Kottayam (India) in May 1969. The Standing Committee expressed its thanks and gratitude for this kind invitation, but considering the heavy travel expenses involved, it **resolved** to convene the next meeting in the first week of **July** 1969 in Cairo, subject to an official invitation from the Coptic Church.

16. Other Recommendation

Appointment of study groups in the Churches

It was suggested that the member churches appoint committees or organize seminars to study such vital issues as proselytism and pastoral care affecting the life of the members of the Churches.

17. Resolution of Thanks to His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Yacob III  
and the Syrian Orthodox Church

The members of the Standing Committee of the Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches, at the conclusion of the fourth meeting in June 1968 at the Syrian Patriarchate, Damascus, wish to place on record their very sincere gratitude to His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Yacob III, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, for the generous hospitality they received from His Holiness and the Syrian Orthodox Church in Damascus. The members were very happy with all the arrangements made for their comfort and especially enjoyed the visit to the Church of Our Lady of the Girdle and the Orphanage in Homs. We thank His Holiness as also all the bishops, the Dayaroyos, the organizing committee and the staff of the Patriarchate who gave generously of their time, energy and other resources to make the fourth Standing Committee meeting a success. We will long remember the happy days spent in Damascus. We raise our grateful thanks to Almighty God and commend the Syrian Orthodox Church to God's richest blessings.

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THE END