The Scythian Monks' Latin-cum-Eastern Approach to Tradition: A Paradigm for Reunifying Doctrines and Overcoming Schism

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In trying to find a proper way to proceed in respect of a dialogue between churches that have already been living for centuries under the shadow of schism, we struggle to see that there is already a paradigm for such a dialogue to hand. This was furnished already in the first half of the sixth century, in the midst of what was probably one of the most important theological quarrels afflicting both East and West: one which concerned two issues, the union of natures in Christ and the doctrine of grace. Those who stood behind this paradigm were the Scythian monks, who united, in both their faith and their overall way of thinking, Western and Eastern traditions. The Scythians saw both traditions as one, and therefore did not hesitate to address problems simultaneously of concern to both Rome and Constantinople, putting forward a solution based on a synthesis of Augustine's and Cyril's theologies. Their proposal was not well received in Rome, but was surprisingly welcome in Constantinople and exercised a significant influence on the defense of the Chalcedonian faith. The present paper will be devoted to analyzing it from a methodological point of view, as well as to the question of whether and how it could be adopted as a model for modern theologians.

1. Historical and Theological Background

Today, hardly any scholars would doubt that the theology of Chalcedon (451) was very much in accord with Cyril's own thought.[1] The evidence shows that the Council relied on his theology to such a great extent that Cyril can justifiably be said to have been considered the ultimate embodiment of orthodoxy, and an unquestioned doctrinal authority. Even the *Tome* of Pope Leo received its endorsement in the form of a recognition that it was in accord with the Second Letter of Cyril to Nestorius.[2]

[1] This article presents some results of the author's research carried out within the framework of the project 'Neochalcedonian Philosophical Paradigm', financed by Poland's National Science Centre (grant UMO-2016/22/M/HS1/00170).

[2] Richard Price, 'The Council of Chalcedon (451): A Narrative', in *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils, 400–700*, ed. Richard Price and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 78; and Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, Translated Texts for Historians 45 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 2:117–18.

And yet it seems that much of the East took the Chalcedonian doctrine to constitute a betrayal of Cyril's teaching.[3]

If we take a closer look at the Chalcedonian achievement as a whole, the reaction of its opponents does not seem entirely unreasonable. First of all, the Chalcedonian definition employed some terminology whose provenance and connotations were theologically dubious. More specifically, the clause from the *Tome* of Leo referring to 'the distinctive character of each nature being preserved and coming together into one person' was incorporated almost verbatim into the *Horos*.[4] The term 'person' was used by Pope Leo to refer to an independently existing individual subject, and most certainly, such an understanding would have been by no means alien to Eastern thought.[5] The problem, though, lay in the fact that Leo was using this term while simultaneously emphasizing the distinction between the two natures in Christ. In this context, a unity of natures described using the terminology of 'one person' could easily appear to resemble Nestorius' notion of the 'personal mode' (*prosopikōs*) of the unity of Christ, which is only relational, not real. To be sure, Leo's clause was modified in the Council's own definition, through the addition of terminology that better reflects Cyril's teaching, the expression 'one person' being replaced by that of 'one person and one hypostasis'.[6] Besides, the Council, in its documents, employed the term 'hypostasis', which was known to have been introduced into Christology by Apollinarius. To be sure, the same expression was used by Cyril as well, but he mainly employed it in the formula 'union/united according to hypostasis' in order to clarify how natures were united.[7] In contrast, in the Chalcedonian definition it was employed to refer to the very subject of the union.

Secondly, although the *Horos*, in affirming that Christ is one person and one hypostasis in two natures, seems to agree with Cyril's essentially dyophysite thought, the Chalcedonian teaching refrained from embracing the entirety of Cyril's Christology. That is to say, the formulation in the *Horos* appeared to be in conflict with Cyril's famous formula of 'one incarnate nature of God the Word' through which he sought to describe the inseparable unity of human and divine natures after the incarnation. Cyril, primarily for soteriological reasons, put special stress on the unity of Christ. Even when recognizing the distinctness of the two natures, and their differences, in Christ, he underlined that they were only distinct in contemplation, not separated in reality as two independent entities. On the other hand, Cyril also emphasized a point not embraced at Chalcedon, which was that the one who died on the cross was

[3] Cf. Andrew Louth, 'Why Did the Syrians Reject the Council of Chalcedon?', in *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils, 400–700*, ed. Richard Price and Mary Whitby, Translated Texts for Historians, Contexts 1 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

[4] Leo, *Tomus*, 54–5: '*Salva igitur proprietate utrisque naturae et in unam coeunte personam.*'

[5] Cf. Basil Studer, '"Una persona in Christo": Ein augustinisches Thema bei Leo dem Grossen', *Augustinianum* 25 (1985).

[6] On the changes made to Leo's clause, see Price and Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, 2:17, n. 43.

[7] Cf. Hans van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 508–9.

not just a man associated with God, but the only-begotten Son of God (the doctrine known as 'theopaschism'). Moreover, Chalcedon passed silently over Cyril's third letter to Nestorius and *Twelve Chapters* (i.e., Cyril's polemical works), whose terminology emphasizes the unity of Christ. This omission only served to reinforce the impression that Chalcedon had embarked upon a deviation from Cyril's teaching as a whole.[8]

Thirdly, the Council also condemned Cyril's successor as the Alexandrian see, Archbishop Dioscorus. To be sure, neither Dioscorus nor the Second Council of Ephesus that he summoned—known as the 'Robber Council'—were condemned on grounds of heterodoxy. Instead, they were found guilty of antagonizing the Church and violating its peace and its order. For all his doings, Dioscorus was widely perceived as a zealous follower of Cyrilian Christology and opponent of Nestorianism. Likewise, Ephesus II was viewed as a confirmation both of Nicea and of Cyril's teaching (since it fully endorsed Ephesus I), and thence as a strong anti-Nestorian voice. In addition, Chalcedon rehabilitated two widely known supporters of Nestorius, Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Ibas of Edessa, who had been condemned at Ephesus II. Given such circumstances, it is not surprising that the Council of Chalcedon had sparked off such a negative reaction. It was viewed as apostasy from the standpoint of the orthodox Christological doctrine laid down by the First Council of Ephesus, and at the same time as bringing in Nestorianism through the back door.[9]

It is safe to say that with the exception of the relatively small group represented by the Constantinopolitan Church, the Roman legates, and a small number of Palestinians and Antiochenes, the teaching offered by the Chalcedon Council almost immediately aroused vehement opposition in much of the East, from Egypt to Palestine, and ultimately also in Syria. The sharp and sometimes even bloody quarrels over Chalcedonian doctrine lasted for decades, if not centuries (since one can argue that the rise of miaphysitism and monotheletism can be seen as a result of those quarrels). Moreover, the attempts to reunite the pro- and anti-Chalcedonian factions led, in turn, to an even deeper division—one that brought about the Acacian schism with Rome that lasted for thirty-five years.[10]

Communion with Rome was restored on Easter Sunday of 519 by Emperor Justinian. Still, prior to the consensus with Rome being achieved, there took place, in 518, an event of ostensibly little significance, but which in fact proved to be of the utmost importance from the standpoint of the present study. It is often referred to as 'the affair of the Scythian monks'. It was on that occasion, and long before being

[8] Richard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553; with Related Texts on the Three Chapters Controversy*, Translated Texts for Historians 51 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 1:66, 276.

[9] See, for instance, Zacharias Rhetor, *Historia ecclesiastica* III, 1.

[10] For my take on the debates over Chalcedon, and a concise presentation of the events that took place during those debates, see Anna Zhyrkova, 'The Council of Constantinople II: 553; A Christology Seeking Refinement and Subtlety', in *Seven Icons of Christ: An Introduction to the Oikoumenical Councils*, ed. Sergey Trostyanskiy (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2016), 223–75.

named Co-Emperor, that Justinian entered the arena of ecclesiastical politics. A group of Scythian monks, backed by Vitalian, was given the opportunity of presenting, at the court in Constantinople, their proposal to the effect that the proper elucidation of Chalcedon required the introduction of the theopaschite formula asserting that 'one of the Trinity was crucified'. This would have then placed the Chalcedonian teaching firmly in the domain of Cyrilian Christology and prevented any Nestorian readings. The initiative of the Scythian monks met with sharp rejection. They then had to take their chances in Rome, where they also failed to gain support for their cause, and were expelled. However, their doctrine did have a profound effect on Justinian. At first, he was probably apprehensive about endangering the union with Rome, since immediately after the meeting he sent a letter to Hormisdas denouncing the Scythian proposal. Yet, in a letter sent to the Pope only a few days later, he supported it wholeheartedly, arguing that it was absolutely essential to 'the peace of the Church' ('*pax sanctarum ecclesiarum*'). It seems that Justinian realized that the theopaschite formula could, after all, bring about true peace between the pro- and anti-Chalcedonian factions. He himself became a champion for theopaschism and adopted this doctrine as part of the imperial orthodoxy, which was officially and ecclesiastically affirmed at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. To be precise, the Council proclaimed that the Christ who suffered on the cross was indeed one of the Persons of the Trinity.

The monks, led by their champion John Maxentius, were from Tomis, a town located in the region of Scythia Minor and known for its quite specific multicultural ethos and bilingual (Greek-Latin) customs. The Scythian monks themselves were rather Latinists, who depended on translations of Greek texts made by one of their own group—the exceptionally talented and renowned sixth century linguist Dionysius Exiguus. Yet it is quite possible that it is just because of this particular culture, and the mentality that accompanied it, that the monks not only had a deep appreciation and sound knowledge of Eastern theology but also understood this as constituting, together with Western theology, one catholic tradition—that of the one Church. It is both thanks to, and within the context of, such an understanding of Church tradition that the Scythian monks brought onto the scene their own quite unprecedented Christological conception—one that in their view amounted to a solution to the problem of how to properly elucidate Chalcedonian doctrine, and consequently also to a way for the divisions that had opened up within the Church as a result of the debate over the significance of the Chalcedon Council to be healed.

To be sure, the Scythian Monks were clear about their own acceptance of the Chalcedon Council and its doctrine.[11] Still, it is certainly hard not to notice that

[11] *Libellus fidei oblatus legatis apostolicae sedis,* 8.12.161–3; *Epistula ad Episcopos* II.3, V.12. All texts of Scythian Monks and John Maxentius are cited according to the edition of François Glorie, *Maxentii aliorumque scytharum monachorum necnon Ioannis Tomitanae urbis episcopi Opuscula, accedunt Capitula S. Augustini*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 85A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978).

in their works they placed the utmost emphasis on the importance for theological doctrine of including into the discourse the aspect of Christ's suffering and crucifixion—precisely what seemed to have been given less prominence in the Chalcedonian *Horos*, even if it was not entirely omitted there.[12] For in contrast to the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds, both of which admitted this truth crucial to the Christian faith, in the Chalcedonian *Horos* there was no mention of the suffering and/or crucifixion of the Son of God and the true God. It appears, then, that the Scythian monks believed strongly that through a reconciliation of Chalcedonian teaching with this pivotal truth—which, in the Scythians' view, was a part of the Catholic faith and an important part of Cyril's Christology as expressed explicitly in his *Twelve Chapters*—it would be possible to arrive at a proper elucidation and interpretation of Chalcedonian doctrine, redeem it from accusations of Nestorianism, and forge some kind of peace between pro- and anti-Chalcedonian factions. Meanwhile, if the above amounted to one of the two main theological projects undertaken by the Scythian monks, then the other can be identified as their attempt to defend and properly elucidate yet another quite problematic issue: namely, Augustine's doctrine of grace. In order to accomplish both of those honorable projects, they employed a highly original and innovative understanding of Church tradition and doctrine—one not only far beyond the time in which they found themselves, but also potentially innovative and relevant when viewed even from a contemporary perspective.

2. The communio theologorum and the Perichoresis of Teaching

The Scythians' approach to tradition was constituted out of several elements, the first of which is linked to the issue of how to pursue a proper reading of the teaching of a given theologian—something that can be illustrated by analyzing their treatment of Cyril's and Augustine's works, which did not meet with unanimous ecclesiastical acceptance.

In the case of Cyril, what were indubitably at stake were his *Twelve Chapters*, given that these (a) contained his account of theopaschism, (b) had been passed over by Chalcedon, and yet (c) were fiercely supported by the anti-Chalcedonian faction. Having as the ultimate goal of their approach a corrected and clarified interpretation of the Chalcedonian *Horos* that was to be achieved through a reintroduction of the theopaschite doctrine, for which the Twelve Chapters served as the best available support, the Scythian monks faced two quite difficult challenges. They needed (1) to show to the defenders of Chalcedonian doctrine that Cyril's *Twelve Chapters* were not against it, while (2) proving to adversaries of the Council that neither this same doctrine nor Leo's teaching were opposed to the *Twelve Chapters*. The Scythian

[12] It should be noted that Severus of Antioch, in *Homiliae Cathedrales* 1.12–25 (PO 38:260–67), also criticized the *Horos* for omitting the truth about the crucified Christ.

monks accomplished both goals by adopting a kind of hermeneutical approach to the work under consideration.

First of all, the Scythians set out to show that Cyril's theological thought is coherent as such. By juxtaposing the texts from Cyril's works that were accepted by pro-Chalcedonians with texts from the *Twelve Chapters*, they showed that the content of the work under scrutiny did not contravene the thrust of his own teaching as disclosed through the entirety of his other works. For instance, Cyril's belief that the Word of God became flesh (*Verbum caro*) is expressed in works solidly accepted by all factions, as well as in his *Twelve Chapters* itself.[13] The next step was to show that Cyril's teaching on incarnation presented *inter alia* in *Twelve Chapters* was in accord with Chalcedonian doctrine. While, as was shown, for Cyril, the Word of God and Son of God became flesh, the Council proclaimed that the Word of God became a human being, consubstantial with God in accordance with His divinity and with us in accordance with his humanity. Both of these views—or, rather, ways of expressing the very same theological truth—are in absolute accord with each other.[14] Not only that, but also Pope Leo—who quite evidently represented for the Scythians the voice of Latin orthodoxy and Catholic faith, and whose Christological teaching had been affirmed by the Council's Fathers—recognized Christ to be a true Son of God, coeternal, equal, and not different in essence from Father.[15]

It was in this manner, then, that the Scythian monks sought to demonstrate that Cyril's work *Twelve Chapters*, being in agreement with the entirety of his teaching as endorsed by the Council of Chalcedon, was not opposed to the Chalcedonian *Horos*. Such a line of argumentation can be illustrated with the help of a basic (Darii) syllogism: if the teaching presented in *Twelve Chapters*, as a part of Cyril's thought, was in accord with Cyril's teaching in its entirety (SiM), and Cyril's teaching in its entirety was embraced by and in Chalcedonian doctrine (MaP), then the teaching presented in *Twelve Chapters* had also to be agreement with Chalcedonian doctrine (SiP). Still, this was only one half of the Scythians' argument, as the other half contained a proof to the effect that since Leo's teaching was accepted and approved by the Catholic Church and Council, which in turn had already been shown to itself be in agreement with Cyril's thought, Leo's teaching could not run counter to Cyril's account as such, and consequently could neither be opposed to that presented in the *Twelve Chapters*. In other words, not only was the part of Cyril's thought questioned by pro-Chalcedonians but fully endorsed by anti-Chalcedonians in agreement with Chalcedonian doctrine, but also those parts of Chalcedonian doctrine regarded as

[13] See for instance Joannes Maxentius, *Libellus fidei*, XII.23, where the text of Cyril's *Scholia de incarnatione Unigeniti* IV (ACO I.V–I, p.186, 16/18; ACO II.IV, p.131, 2/4) is compared to and shown as being in agreement with the text from the *Twelve Chapters* anath. α′ (ACO I, I–I, p. 40, 22/24; I.I–5, p. 16, 29/30; I–6, p.111, 17/19).

[14] See Maxentius, *Libellus fidei* XIII.24.304–7, citing Chalcedon's Definitio fidei 34 (ACO II, I–II, p. (325) 129, 27/29).

[15] See Maxentius, *Libellus fidei* XIII.24.307–18, citing Leo I, *Epistula 28*, 2 (ACO II, II–I, p. 25, 13/20).

of questionable character by anti-Chalcedonians were not at odds with the teaching they themselves had accepted and acclaimed—namely that of Cyril himself.

There is, however, more to the Scythians' reading of Cyril's and Leo's texts. For instance, when speaking of the revealed truth that Christ is one and the same entity, being simultaneously God and man, they first cited the text of Pope Leo, which states that an impassible God did not refuse to became a man capable of suffering, and that the one who is immortal submitted himself to the laws of death. This citation is immediately followed by one from *Twelve Chapters*, where Cyril declares that if someone does not profess that God the Word suffered in the flesh, was crucified in the flesh, etc., they should be anathematized.[16] When those two texts are put together in this particular order, a reader or listener will naturally tend to interpret the second text in the light of the first one. In this way the questionable theopaschite statements of Cyril get to be clarified by being properly viewed against a backcloth of ubiquitously and ecumenically accepted truths. On the other hand, Leo's thought is shown to be in perfect accord with Cyril's teaching, and a key to its proper interpretation. Therefore, it is possible to say that the Scythians interpreted Cyril and Leo in light of one another, or, as Matthew Pereira has put it, 'melted Cyril and Leo into a singular proclamation of the Gospel'.[17]

Within the framework created by the Scythian's interpretation, Leo and Cyril appear to be in perfect accord with one another. What is important to note, however, is that this state of affairs should not be equated with a mere synthesis of complementary components. Leo and Cyril never differ on the subject: they are rather just expressing the same truth in different ways. The teachings of Leo and Cyril are not parts of one puzzle, such as might be said to complete each other. Instead, they express two points of view—those of two different spectators contemplating the same picture. And still, because they are two and not one, they do notice different details, emphasize different things, and so on. Even so, it is not that they are looking at the picture in question, as it were, from different angles, as would be the case if each saw only a part of the whole picture. Quite the opposite: their views are complete, and do not need completing. Each description is to some extent self-sufficient in its truth. Moreover, in order to express what they see they need to recreate this picture using human words and expressions. Hence, in addition to the fact that we have two different spectators, thanks to their personalities, cultural environment, preferences, etc., while looking at one and the same picture they inevitably give us two quite different descriptions—ones that differ also with regards to the words and expressions employed. Given this, in order to get closer to a proper understanding of the object observed by them both, their teachings do each need to be

[16] Maxentius, *Libellus fidei* XIII.26.329–39, citing Leo I, *Epistula 28*, 4 (ACO II, II–II, p. 28, 5/6); Cyril. *Epistula 17 (ad Nestorium)*, anath. ιβ′ (ACO I, I–I, p. 42, 3/5; I. I–V, p. 25, 13/15; I. I–VI, p. 144, 15/17).

[17] Matthew J. Pereira, 'Reception, Interpretation and Doctrine in the Sixth Century: John Maxentius and the Scythian Monks' (PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 2015), 279.

seen in the light of the other. Thus, what the Scythians are really doing is situating their teachings within a dialogue of faith—that within which, and through which, orthodox doctrine and tradition are themselves formulated.

What this dialogical approach towards the interpretation of theological teachings amounts to can be seen more clearly in the context of the Scythian monks' reading of Augustine's doctrine of divine grace—one that raised, and still continues to prompt, numerous questions as regards its orthodoxy. Certainly, the monks were committed to Augustine's doctrine of divine grace. However, they did not see it as an independent and complete achievement of one of the biggest authorities in Western theology, to be accepted on the basis of the ecclesiastical authority and role of St Augustine himself. I dare say that they had not been blinded by Augustine's authority and did not support his heritage uncritically. They rather accepted and adhered to the latter's doctrine of divine grace because they saw it as being grounded in the tradition of the one Catholic church of East and West. Therefore, without being blind to such problems as could issue from Augustine's thought, the Scythians proposed a way of interpreting him using viewpoints afforded by the tradition that would allow them to achieve an orthodox and proper reading of his teaching. This approach can be illustrated by their attempt to elucidate one of the problematic elements of Augustinian teaching on the matter of divine grace—namely, the issue of so-called *massa perditionis*.

The notion of *massa perditionis* captures the thought that on account of sin, the whole of humanity has become a mass of perdition. Out of this mass, God chooses those who, by sheer grace, are predestined to receive absolution and eternal life, while the rest are left to await the judgement they deserve, belonging as they do to the mass of perdition itself.[18] In order to elucidate this questionable conception of St Augustine, the Scythians, after having presented the more or less standardly accepted points of Augustine's doctrine (such as original sin, Christ as the source of solvation, understanding faith as a gift of God, the incomprehensibility of the judgements of God, etc.), introduce a concise description of *massa perditionis* based on Augustine's own text.[19] This discerption was followed first by a question also posed by Augustine: that of why it is that Christ, as one 'who wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim 2:4), while accomplishing so many great works in Chorazin and Bethsaida, did not opt to pursue any in Tyre or Sidon.[20] The Scythians also added to this a question of their own: Why was Paul the Apostle prohibited from preaching the word of salvation in Asia and Bithynia? In their view, it was necessary to admit that there are things that cannot be understood. Thus, one

[18] Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccati originali* II, 29.34. See also Donato Ogliari, 'Gratia et Certamen: The Relationship between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the So-called Semipelagians', (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 343–4, n. 209.

[19] See *Epistula ad Episcopos* VI.14–VII.21; the discussion of *massa perditionis* starts on VII.21.272, with a reference to Augustine's text mentioned in the above note.

[20] Augustine, *Enchiridion* XXIV.95.

simply had to adhere to the fact that the Lord's judgements are beyond comprehension. Otherwise, one would oppose truth as revealed by Holy Scripture.[21] Augustine's conception of *massa perditionis* is shown, therefore, as being in agreement with the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of the Lord's judgements, and with truth as revealed in Holy Scripture. In other words, the questionable part of Augustine's teaching, as with the case of the *Twelve Chapters* of Cyril already discussed, is shown to be in line with the teachings of the same author that had received ecclesiastical endorsement.

Now what comes after that is of even greater importance. In order to show what a proper approach to reading and interpreting Augustine's doctrine would look like, the Scythian monks invoked St Basil:

> The blessed Basil, bishop of Caesarea, in his Prayer at the Sacred Altar, which almost the whole East frequently uses, among other things says, '*Grant, Lord, strength and protection, make those who are evil to be good, preserve those who are good in goodness, for you can do everything and there is no one who could contradict you. When you will — you save, and no one resists your will*.'[22] See how briefly and definitively the eminent teacher already in the past had brought an end to this controversy [Ecce quam breuiter quamque districte doctor egregius olim huic controuersiae finem posuit], teaching through this prayer that not by themselves but by God that bad people are made good, and not by their virtue by an assistance of the divine grace they persist in that goodness. (*Epistula ad Episcopos*, VIII.25.307–16)

The monks were not attempting to correct or adjust Augustine's doctrine of predestination when they invoked the words of St Basil: just as they were not aiming to say that Basil shared the very same ideas as Augustine. What they were doing was essentially different: namely, they were asserting that Basil had anticipated a future controversy (i.e., the Pelagian-Augustinian Controversy) and brought an end to it through his liturgical prayer, which taught that evil persons are made good by God alone, and are sustained thereafter in a state of divine goodness through the assistance of divine grace. Therefore, it seems that in line with the Scythians, Augustine's teaching on predestination should be viewed in the light of, and read in accordance with, two of Basil's assertions: firstly, that God and only God is the sole cause of human goodness, and secondly, that God and only God is the sole cause of the preserving of that state of goodness. Viewed through Basil's eyes, Augustine's

[21] See *Epistula ad Episcopos*, VII.22.278–23.299.

[22] The prayer is ascribed to Basil also by Petrus Diaconus in *De Incarnatione et Gratia Domini nostri Iesu Christi, ad Fulgentium et alios episcopos Africae*, Epistle 16, VIII.24, in the collection of epistles by and to Fulgentius Ruspensis, PL 65, 449CD. See John Anthony McGuckin, 'The "Theopaschite Confession" (Text and Historical Context): A Study in the Reinterpretation of Chalcedon', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35, no. 2 (1984): 253–4, n. 66, doi:10.1017/S0022046900026968.

teaching remains within the limits of orthodoxy. It is also important to note that the Scythians stressed that Basil's Prayer was in use by almost the whole East ('*quam paene universus frequentat Oriens*'). It is Eastern theological teaching and liturgical customs that give directions as to how Augustine's teaching is to be interpreted. In this respect, the Eastern theology does not merely impose certain constraints; rather, it also furnishes a perspective, informing how Augustine is ultimately to be read and understood. Nevertheless, the Scythians did not content themselves with that, but continued to also give examples from Latin authors exhibiting similarities to the liturgical language of Basil's Prayer at the Sacred Altar. Hence it is not the Western or Eastern tradition as such, but rather just the one tradition of the Holy Catholic Church that is supposed to shape our reading of a given author.

I should emphasize that neither in the case of the questionable views of Cyril, nor in that of Augustine, did the Scythian monks try to correct elements of their theological legacy that had proved controversial. Instead, they proposed reading the elements in question in terms that would be consonant with the overall teaching of the theologian in question. And, what is of even greater importance, they advocated viewing those elements from the standpoint of the entire Catholic Tradition. In this way, the legacy and thought of a given theologian becomes a part of something that I would like to call the '*communio theologorum*' and '*communio theologiarum*'—the communion of theologians and their teachings that received recognition and endorsement by and within Church Tradition. Thus, this or that theological teaching and its elements are not looked at in separation, but rather viewed and interpreted in observance of the code of the orthodox doctrine as formulated by both theologians and the Holy Fathers themselves. The teaching of a given theologian becomes, then, a voice sounding—or perhaps a chord sounded—in a dialogue whose overall unfolding could be described as a symphony of faith. All the voices—or all the chords—of the latter pervade and complete each other as they contribute to forming a new and greater whole, which is more than any one of them, or even several of them together, could ever be. Consequently, the whole made up of all of these, and only this whole, is what furnishes the proper perspective and source of guidance when it comes to determining how each of the constituent theological teachings should be interpreted.

One may, of course, quite reasonably wonder whether all theological views and teachings can be put forward and interpreted as seen through the eyes of the Tradition itself—(i.e., seen as a part of the latter and on this basis given an orthodox reading). The answer, very simply, is 'no'. The example actually discussed by the Scythians was the case of Nestorius. In their *Disputation on Twelve Chapters of Cyril*, the monks showed that even Cyril's most radical claims could be read in the light of his other texts — meaning ones both accepted and properly explicated by the Tradition. They could therefore be construed as not being in disagreement with, for instance, Chalcedonian doctrine. Yet the same could not be done with Nestorius,

whose teaching is simply unorthodox, going as it does against both Church Tradition and the truth received through revelation and through sacred texts. Invoking once again the image of voices or chords in a symphony, one might say that there some voices are performing (or that some chords are being executed) following a separate score, so that they are out of tune or out of sync with the overall unfolding (and the overall score) of the symphony. The other image I would be tempted to use here is that of a prism. We know that the light going through a prism becomes a spectrum of colors (a rainbow), but I propose to look at it from the other direction — such that all of those different colors come to be seen as right and compatible inasmuch as they together make up one light. Tradition and Church doctrine, one might say, are such a prism: one that shows us what colors can be part of the light.

3. Theological Discourse within the Tradition of the One Church

In the works of the Scythian Monks, the issue of proper interpretation is not limited to the question of how one should approach the teachings of particular authors claiming to speak for the Church: it also bears on theological discourse as such. In each of the cases discussed, the Scythians did not just show that this or that Church Father was in accord with Tradition, but rather went much farther, creating interpretative tools and explaining the rules governing how theological teachings generally were to be read, such that one might continue to adhere to the Catholic tradition. Similarly, they went far beyond just giving a defense of Chalcedonian doctrine in the sense of merely showing that it was in accord with the entirety of Cyril's thought, in that they managed to express the very norms responsible for regulating how theological discourse itself is to be conducted.

It is worth noting that even when it came to supporting and defending Chalcedon, they did not hesitate to single out a weak point in Chalcedonian teaching—this being, in their view, its omission of the actual mystery of the cross and the suffering and death of the Son of God, the second hypostasis of the Holy Trinity. To say that the Scythians saw the theopaschite doctrine as a potential link connecting Cyril's *Twelve Chapters* with Chalcedon and so providing a solution to the conflict over the Chalcedonian *Horos* would be a great simplification. For while the Scythians really did, to say the least, regard theopaschite teaching as highly important for theological discourse, they found Chalcedonian doctrine to be lacking in regard to this crucial element.

Compared to the Creeds of Nicea and Constantinople, the Chalcedonian *Horos* passed over a not unimportant issue firmly located at the very center of our salvation — i.e., the suffering (see the Nicene Creed) and crucifixion (see the Constantinopolitan Creed) of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible to argue that Chalcedon-based Christology was, to some extent, a Christology without the cross. Considering theopaschism to be an integral part of the Christian faith, the Scythians

saw its omission as a very serious problem. This was because excluding the theopaschite element from Christological doctrine could be viewed as tantamount to a rejection of the Gospel in all its fullness. Therefore, the Scythians wanted to repair the Chalcedonian *Horos* by filling this serious doctrinal lacuna. However, when they actually dared to remind the Church about theopaschite teaching, they were accused of seeking to foist something novel onto existing doctrine.[23] In order to answer to such accusations, they were obliged to explain with the utmost clarity the underlying premises of theological argumentation itself.

First of all, the monks stressed that in their argumentation they were referring to authors already recognized by, and in the context of, Church Tradition as orthodox and authoritative teachers. Therefore, they were not introducing anything new that would contradict orthodox doctrine. Secondly, they explained the difference between novelty or, as they called it, 'augmentation' (*augmentum*), explanation (*explanatio*), and corruption (*corruptio*) of the theological faith. They asserted that the Catholic faith not only does not need any augmentation, but also cannot in fact receive any such thing, as it is perfect and complete in everything, while only something imperfect could do so. What, however, the Catholic faith can be in need of is explanation. Thus, as and when required, there could be instances of addition in the form of explanations of faith. Still, we should be concerned about the possibility of introducing some additional and new content that in itself is not an explanation but rather a corruption of faith, or that contradicts it.[24] Just as Cyril and Leon did not perform any augmentation or addition, but instead simply explained and defended Catholic faith, being in agreement with the Symbol of Faith and the Holy Fathers, so in the same way the Scythians did not undertake any augmentation, but rather drew upon the words of the Holy Fathers mentioned by the Council itself.[25] Thirdly, the Scythians strongly objected to the claim that nothing should be said beyond what had been expressed by Council. They pointed to the fact that there were many things not covered by the Council or pronounced in any canonical Scripture that we nevertheless absolutely do not hesitate to speak about or assert: for example the Trinity, the Father's being unbegotten, and several others.[26]

In accordance with those three premises, the Scythians, in their *Libellus Fidei*, presented their take on the theopaschite doctrine. Their principal declaration, to the effect that they believed that the 'Word of God, the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who for us suffered in the flesh, is one of the three hypostases of the one Deity (*unum de tribus subsistentiis unius deitatis*)', was substantiated by providing arguments based on the Greek and Latin Fathers. The argumentation

[23] See Dioscorus' correspondence with Pope Hormisdas in *Dioscori Diaconi ad Hormisdam*, *Ep*. 224 in Coll. Avel. (CSEL 35.2: 686).

[24] Maxentius, *Libellus fidei* I.1.9–II.2.27.

[25] Ibid., II.3.27–43; III.4.43–IV.6.71.

[26] Ibid., IV.8.85–93.

consists of two parts. In its first part, it seeks to demonstrate that in the West and East (i.e., throughout the entire Church) a belief reigned to the effect that one of the Trinity was crucified. The second part then goes on to lend further support to this, showing that in the East and the West it was accepted as orthodox doctrine that Mary was the mother of the true God, who was one of the Trinity.

The first part starts with the Scythian monks presenting the relevant material from Augustine. To be sure, the latter did not explicitly claim that one of the Trinity was crucified or suffered in the flesh, but, according to the Scythians, he did nevertheless assert that Christ is both: He is 'from the Trinity' (*ex trinitate*) and 'One of the Three' (*unus trium*). Moreover, the monks point to the fact that Augustine, in his works, poses such questions as, for instance, whether it can be the case that when any One of the Three is named in connection with a certain divine action, the whole Trinity should be understood to be involved in that action, whether God appeared to our forefathers in some more undefined way prior to Christ's appearing in the flesh, or whether it was a definite person of the Trinity that did so—or, for that matter, whether persons from the Trinity may appear in sequence, so to speak, one after the other. Augustine also stated that it is unclear whether one person of the Trinity, or God Himself as the Trinity, appeared to Abraham.[27]

Obviously, those claims and questions are insufficient, to say the least, when it comes to furnishing the basis for a proper explication of Augustine's thought on the subject. However, in the Scythians' opinion, the words of Augustine can be explained and clarified by viewing them in the light of the teaching expressed by Proclus the Patriarch of Constantinople (434–46). Hence, they present the texts by Proclus in which he most clearly explains that the Christ who was crucified was One from the Trinity. According to Proclus, the One who was incarnated (*incarnatus*) was the very same One who was crucified (*crucifixus*), for the cross is the cause of incarnation. Therefore, the One from the Trinity who became flesh also suffered in the flesh and was crucified in the flesh. Proclus underlines that the One of the Trinity suffered and was crucified in *His flesh*, and *not in the same essence* and *Divinity* that He shares with, and which unites Him with, the Father and the Spirit. In other words, it firstly is not that the entire Trinity suffered in the flesh, but just One of the Three, and secondly, even though One of the Trinity suffered and was crucified, the nature of the Trinity remained passionless.[28]

It is in the light of Proclus' account that the questions asked by Augustine can be given clear answers, and it is also evident that Proclus' teaching is not foreign to Augustine's thought. Thus, it can be justifiably regarded as a voice of the entire Church Tradition. In the Scythians' opinion, disagreeing with the teaching so lucidly

[27] Ibid., IX.14.185–16.206, referring respectively to Augustine, *Enhiridion* XII.38 and *De Trininitate*. II 9.16, 10.19. For '*ex trinitate*' in Augustine, see De Trinitate II 9.16, 10.19, 15.26; III, proem. 3; for '*unus trium*' — *Enhiridion* XII.38.

[28] Maxentius, *Libellus fidei* X.17.207–19.248, citing Proclus, *De fide* 3.

formulated and argued for by Proclus would be comparable to accepting the Sabellian account of the Trinity, which in fact proclaimed one hypostasis for the latter in its (the Trinity's) entirety.[29] On the other hand, rejecting the truth that Christ is both One of the Trinity and He who suffered for us in the flesh would be tantamount to rejecting yet another theological truth unambiguously acclaimed by the Church tradition—namely, that which states that the Virgin Mary was the mother of the true God. This then brings us to the second part of the Scythians' argumentation.

As has already been explained, the Scythians accepted Proclus' highly logical argument that the One who was crucified was the very same One who was incarnated. In other words, the One who was crucified was the very same One believed to be born from the Virgin Mary. Therefore, if we do not hold that it was One of the Trinity that was crucified, it follows that we cannot, at one and the same time, believe that the One who was incarnated was One of the Trinity. Consequently, we would be challenging the core doctrine of Christology itself: namely, that Jesus Christ who was born from the Holy Virgin is a true human, given his humanity as received from the Virgin Mary, and a true God by virtue of His very nature as the incarnated Word of God the Father.

The Scythians thus took care to show that the entire Church as represented by such authorities as Cyril of Alexandria and Pope Leo had accepted the truth that the Jesus Christ given birth to by the Virgin Mary as a human was also the true God, and thus the incarnated second hypostasis of the Trinity. The very same Christ was crucified — i.e., the second hypostasis of the Trinity itself suffered in the flesh and died. Moreover, both of the aforementioned ecclesiastical authorities had maintained the opinion that the incarnated Word of God as a true human became subject to suffering and (the laws of) mortality, was crucified and died in the flesh, and was made first-born from among the dead.[30]

Summing up, we may say that the Scythian monks managed to show that the theopaschite doctrine proposed by them was hardly a novelty, but rather an established and essential part of Christology. On the one hand, it was a logical consequence that followed from acceptance of such theological truths fully acclaimed by the Church as the Divinity of Christ and the doctrine of Theotokos, and on the other, it had already been accepted and implicitly affirmed by even the highest theological authorities of the Church as a whole. Thus, theopaschism was not to be passed over, so much as recovered and reinstituted within Christological discourse, and this so that Chalcedonian doctrine could itself be properly understood—through

[29] Maxentius, *Libellus fidei* XI.20.249–63.

[30] Ibid., XI.21.263–XIII.26.339, citing and referring to Cyril, *Scholia de incarnatione Unigeniti* IV (ACO I, V–I, p. 186, 16/181; *Epistula 17 (ad Nestorium)* anath. α′ and ιβ′ (ACO I, I–I, p. 40, 22/24, p. 42, 3/5; I, I–V, p. 16, 29/30, p. 25, 13/15; I, I–VI, p. 111, 17/19, p. 144, 15/17); Chalcedon, Definitio fidei 34 (ACO II, I–II, p. (325) 129, 27/29); Leo I, *Epistula 28* 2 and 4 (ACO II, II–I, p. 25, 13/20, p. 28, 5/6).

being viewed from the perspective of a complete and orthodox Christology in all its integral entirety.

Conclusions

So what can we ourselves take from this Scythian endeavor? What is there about this that could prove useful and relevant for us?

First of all, I must point to the obvious: for them there were no two traditions or two churches. They treated Latin and Greek theological teachings as forming just one tradition and also viewed the entire Catholic Church as one. Secondly, it needs to be stressed that the Scythians came up with their proposal at a time when a schism that lasted for 35 years was still in force. Therefore, the argument to the effect that one hardly can speak at all about one Tradition of one Church after the Great Schism seems less than persuasive. Thirdly, even though the Scythians recognized the Catholic Faith as a perfect one, they did not hesitate to stress that at a certain point the Church's teaching was in need of further explanation in respect of its own doctrine. My fourth point would be that this need for further explanation, in the opinion of Scythian monks, was not to be understood as requiring the introduction of any novelty into the existing Tradition, but rather consisted in a recapitulation and a new verbalization of what had already been put forward in the context of the Tradition of the Catholic Church.

Nevertheless, this should not be construed as implying that the Scythians brought nothing new to the table. The monks did indeed express in a clear way what they saw as growing from the Tradition, and as being a necessary corollary of already accepted truths. Their argumentation was, moreover, built on the basis of the multiple voices of different Church Fathers, representing the entirety of Church Tradition. And it is not that they failed to see the differences that existed between the various authors they invoked. Nevertheless, they saw them as different voices or instruments — ones that, put together, constitute a symphony, where it is the sound of the orchestra as a whole that shows the idea of the composer, determining the line or melody sung by a particular voice or played by a certain instrument. What is also important is that there is no single author — not even the most authoritative and holy — whose teaching could be held equivalent to the whole tradition (much as there is no single voice or instrument equal to an entire symphony, in which it plays only a part assigned in the score). Each author must be experienced and interpreted through the prism of the Tradition that alone can afford a proper interpretative perspective, and as just one of the plurality of voices making up the entirety of ecclesiastical doctrine.

So what should we do if we want to be members of one Church? The answer, if it is to be in accordance with the Scythians' account, should be that we ought not to forget about our differences. Rather, we should inspect and interpret our theo-

logical positions and views from the viewpoint of the totality of the Tradition and the entirety of the one Catholic faith. If one wants to be a member of one Church, one should start to think and behave as if there were indeed only one Church, one Tradition, and one Truth. For no matter how much we may disagree with each other, there is one Christ, who is One of the Trinity and who was incarnated and suffered in the flesh for us all.