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Literature review on Oriental Orthodox Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, History, Theological Perspectives, and Interactions

ለራብዓይ ክፍል የጥናትና ምርምር ተከታታይ ትምህርት ማሟያ የቀረበ የተዛማጅ ጽሑፍ አሠሣ ጥናት
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ቁጥር (ID Number)

1. ህሊና ጌታቸው	12
2. ተስፋሁን ሀብታሙ	
3. ቃልአብ ህገ መንግስት	56
4. ቃልኪዳን አለማየሁ	63
5. መቅደስ መሸሻ	104
6. የአብፀጋኢያሱ	138

ለመምህር:- ብሩክ ጌታቸው

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Abstract

This comprehensive literature review critically examines the historical evolution, theological perspectives, and interactions between the Oriental Orthodox Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. It offers a detailed exploration of the origins of both traditions, tracing the development of their theological and doctrinal differences and similarities from the early church to the present day.

The study analyzes pivotal historical events, such as the Council of Chalcedon, and their profound impact on the schism between the two branches of Orthodoxy, shedding light on the complex historical context that shaped their divergent paths. Furthermore, it delves into the distinct theological perspectives of each tradition, including their perspectives on Christology, ecclesiology, and sacramental theology, providing a nuanced understanding of their theological frameworks.

In addition to historical and theological analysis, the review investigates the historical and contemporary interactions between the Oriental Orthodox Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, highlighting efforts towards reconciliation, ecumenical dialogue, and interfaith cooperation. By examining the complexities of their relationship, this literature review aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the theological and historical significance of these two branches of Orthodoxy, as well as their potential for unity and cooperation in a contemporary global context.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
2. Theological Perspectives.....	6
3. Interactions.....	7
4. Conclusion	9
5. References.....	10

1. Introduction

When we discuss some of the largest divisions in Christendom today often the divisions cut along these lines there are the Catholics Protestants and the Orthodox however just like the Catholics in the Orthodox had a Schism in 1054 (The Great Schism) the Orthodox Churches today are also in Schism and there are two separate wings that are not in communion this stretches even further back than the East-West Schism of 1054 back to the 400s as a result of the Schism today we have the Eastern Orthodox church and the Oriental Orthodox Church these titles are used to distinguish them as both groups view themselves as the Orthodox church.

Oriental Orthodox is made up of six autocephalous churches. The Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch the Armenian Apostolic Church the Malankara Orthodox Syrian church The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church

The Eastern Orthodox communion has at least 14 autocephalous member churches The ecumenical patriarchate of Constantinople ,The patriarchate of Alexandria ,The patriarchate of Antioch ,The patriarchate of Jerusalem ,Russian Orthodox Church , Serbian Orthodox Church , Bulgarian Orthodox Church , Romanian Orthodox Church , Georgian Orthodox Church of Cyprus , Church of Greece Orthodox , Church of Albania, Polish Orthodox church and The Orthodox Church of the Czech lands and Slovakia additionally there are two member churches which some of the other 14 recognizes as autocephalous and others don't accept. The Orthodox Church in America and The Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Also the differences between the two sides of the Eastern Orthodox Church are fewer and more difficult to isolate. So to understand these differences we must go back to the time of separation and in fact before it also and 325 A.D the Eastern Oriental and Western churches were together and held in that year the First Council of Nicaea in 381 they held the First Council of Constantinople and in 431 they held the Council of Ephesus. In 449 a fourth Council was held the second Council of Ephesus today this council is still held to as the fourth Council by Some Oriental Orthodox Churches two years later in 451 the Council of calcedon was held which invalidated the second Council of Ephesus it was at this Council that the Schism took place between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches rejected calcedon and still due to this day meanwhile the Eastern Orthodox churches in Western churches as one body would go on to have three more ecumenical councils to which the Oriental Orthodox Churches were not invited so what happened that caused the Schism at the time of the Council of calcedon within the churches and in the first three councils heresies were being addressed as response to these heresies sometimes certain Bishops or teachers would swing even further in the opposite direction and land in an equal and opposite heresy doctrines were being affirmed or denied as Church teachings at each Council and politics would come into play too the issue that would come to be the defining one

and the pretense for the split was the question of the hypostatic Union Jesus Christ was understood to be both God and man but how is it that he could be both the church's condemned adoptionism that Jesus was born simply a human that had been adopted by God and made Divine they rejected also the idea that Jesus had only a divine nature or that his divine nature had drowned out his human nature a view known as monophysicism as a heresy the churches rejected what has been termed nestorianism that there were two persons the man Jesus and the Divine Logos both dwelling in one body and that some things Jesus did he did as God and others were done as.

The following picture representation shows all the churches who claim that they are Christians.

2. Theological Perspectives

On the relation of Christ's Divinity to his Humanity would soon lead to a split because of a few key factors one is that the different Orthodox Churches had different theological schools and as a result things would often be explained in one way at some schools and differently at others often the same thing was meant but different terminology was used another issue was that language itself can vary and certain terms meant different things to the different churches at a time when anathemas were being handed out it was important to have the same definitions but this was not always the case.

Cyril of Alexandria the patriarch of the alexandrian church had been instrumental in the condemnation of Nestorius and was viewed by all as being Orthodox in the year 446 two years after Cyril's death a controversy was stirred up over accusations of various persons teaching Nestorianism within this controversy both sides accused the other of heresy and both claimed to be followers of the Orthodox teachings of Cyril here's the way that the theological argument went Cyril had said that there is only one physis since it is the Incarnation of God the word those who had become called the Eastern Orthodox and those who had become known as Oriental Orthodox agreed that Jesus was fully Divine and also fully human. Eastern Orthodox side said that Jesus was into Natures a Divine and human nature. The Oriental Orthodox rejected the into Nature's wording and said that Jesus was of two Natures that's the simple version.

The View that would be accepted at Chalcedon the Eastern Orthodox view which the Oriental Orthodox reject is called diophysicism while the view of the Oriental Orthodox is called miophysicism. Diophysicism affirms Christ into Natures mereophysitism affirms Christ of two Natures the view of myophysites was is that saying into physics or two Natures was to say that Christ was in two persons an obvious heresy one person has one nature two persons have two Natures since Christ is one person he had one nature since he was both human and divine and since he is not a separate human person and separate Divine person but only one he must have one nature that is both human and divine number in Christ's nature is in the miophysite view was an improper division a theophysite response to me of physicism is that for Christ to have this one

nature is to say that he isn't God like God is or man like man is but instead that he has some new hybrid nature.

The miophysite response to that is that Jesus is perfect in his divinity and perfect in his Humanity he made his Humanity one with his divinity without mixture nor mingling nor confusion part of the disagreement that the miophysite had with diaphysicism is that the miophysites viewed the term of Christ into Natures as if Christ was dumped into two Natures dividing him like we might say apples in two baskets the miophysite viewed Christ of two Natures as a unifying term that there are two Natures Divine and Human inseparably United.

In the one nature and person of Christ the theological disagreement here can be summed up this way the Oriental Orthodox viewed the Eastern Orthodox terminology as dividing Jesus's Natures in a way that made it sound like there were two persons. The Eastern Orthodox viewed the Oriental Orthodox terminology as uniting Jesus's Natures in a way that made it sound like he didn't have the full and unique qualities of each.

Most theologians from both sides have come to the conclusion that the theological issue of miophysitism versus diaphysicism is in language only and not an actual theological difference that is not to say that all theologians Bishops or laymen see things the same way.

3. Interactions

In 1961 leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Churches met together in the pan Orthodox Council in Rhodes Greece a council of this type the first and 12th centuries set the stage for discussion on the Eastern Orthodox relation to other Church bodies three years later in 1964 15 theologians from both sides met in RS Denmark in an unofficial capacity to discuss the division between the two sides of the Orthodox Churches a joint statement that they made set in part.

In our common study of the Council of calcedon the well-known phrase used by our common father in Christ Saint Cyril of Alexandria *Mia fizzly* or *miohypostasis* *tan theologan cesarcomen* the one physis or hypostasis of God's word incarnate with its implications was at the center of our conversations.

This dialogue would be followed by three more unofficial dialogues one in 1967 in Bristol England one in 1970 in Geneva Switzerland and one in 1971 in addis ababa Ethiopia official dialogues began with a 1985 meeting in Embassy Switzerland the second official dialogue in 1989 at Wadi al-natural in Egypt brought the first official agreed statement from both the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches in addition to affirming Cyril's statement like was affirmed at Denmark in the unofficial dialogue another part of their statement was as follows.

When we speak of the one composite *synthetos* hypostasis of our Lord Jesus Christ we do not say that in him a Divine hypostasis and a human hypostasis came together it is that the one Eternal hypostasis of the second person of the Trinity has

assumed our created human nature in that act uniting it with his own uncreated divine nature to form an inseparably and unconfusedly United real Divine human being the nature is being distinguished from each other in contemplation theoria only.

Further than making a joint statement in new terminology the third official dialogue which took place once again in Davos Switzerland in 1990 provided an opportunity for the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox to affirm the validity of each other's historic views on the hypostatic union

The Orthodox agree that the Oriental Orthodox will continue to maintain their traditional Chalcedonian terminology of one nature of the Incarnate Logos since they acknowledged the double consubstantiality of the Logos which Eudiclus denied the Orthodox also used this terminology the Oriental Orthodox agree that the Orthodox are justified in their use of the two Natures formula since they acknowledge that the distinction is in thought alone.

The Eastern Orthodox are referred to as simply the Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox are referred to as Oriental Orthodox this wording is a bit of a sore spot in something that many Oriental Orthodox think needs to be properly resolved as part of Union 2. If the two are to come together the Oriental or the Orthodox don't want it to be viewed as the unruly Oriental Orthodox coming back into the Orthodox fold instead they desire that both sides accept that the other has been through the centuries though divided a proper and true representative of true Orthodox.

The fact that all of the official and unofficial dialogues were worded in this way the Oriental Orthodox have continued to participate and in fact the same 1990 agreed statement by both sides recognized that both groups are Orthodox.

In the light of our agreed statement on christology as well as of the above common affirmations we have now clearly understood that both families have always loyally maintained the same authentic Orthodox christological faith and The Unbroken continuity of the Apostolic tradition though they have used christological terms in different ways it is this common faith in continuous loyalty to the Apostolic tradition that should be the basis for our unity and communion.

The agreed statement following the 1993 dialogue in Davos.

The lifting of anathemas should be unanimous and simultaneous and then stated the following the lifting of the anathemas should imply that restoration of full communion for both sides is to be immediately implemented and that no past condemnation synodical or personal against each other is applicable.

4. Conclusion

What has happened in the last quarter century part of the explanation for why there is still division is that it takes time for a church divided 1500 years to come back together slowly might be better than quickly but another reason is that there is real opposition to the union and there are also difficult decisions that need to be worked out one of the strongest expressions of opposition to the union came from the Eastern Orthodox monastic community of Mount Athos who in 1995 made the statement concerning the dialogue between the Orthodox and non-calcedonian it says.

It is well known that A hurried Union is being forced upon the Orthodox and the non-calcedonians in spite of the yet existing dogmatic differences and of unsettled ecclesiological problems such as for example the unconditional acceptance of the decrees of The ecumenical councils and of their sacredness and universality by the non-calcedonians.

All of the above by denouncing them to the venerable ecumenical patriarchate the venerable hierarchies of the Orthodox Churches the sacred clergy and the pious people we seek the swiftest possible re-establishment of the theological Dialogue on the right principles so that the Orthodox will preserve for themselves the Orthodox Faith unspoiled but also for the non-calcedonians so that they will have the possibility of return to the True Church of Christ from which they have been cut off for 15 centuries we believe that with the grace of Christ the unremitting Endeavors of all the members of the church will bring positive results in the event however that the union will come about outside of the only truth God forbid we declare expressly and categorically that the Holy Mountain will not accept such a false Union.

So is Union going to happen if you ask the Orthodox you'll get different answers some people are optimistic saying we've already signed the agreements we just need to take a few more steps some churches are already allowing the sharing of communion between the two sides others think the obstacles will never be overcome the Oriental Orthodox will never accept calciton and the Eastern Orthodox will neither give it up nor accept those who reject it and there are some on both sides that are fully committed to their own church so in the end some try to minimize the differences While others try to amaximize them only as the years go by will we see which differences weren't so big after all and what ones may remain Church dividing matters.

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