

## PROVISION BETWEEN THE CHALDEAN CHURCH AND THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity recently issued a document entitled *“Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church”*. This document has been elaborated in agreement with the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. The purpose of the article at hand is to clarify the context, the content and the practical application of this provision.

### 1. The Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East

Since the very early times of Christian missionary activity, a flourishing local Church developed in Mesopotamia or Persia. As this Church was situated outside the eastern borders of the Roman Empire, it became commonly called the “Church of the East”. In 1552, after a series of individual conversions of bishops or provisional unions, part of the “Church of the East” entered into full communion with the Apostolic See of Rome. Since then, the particular Church in full communion with Rome has usually been called the “Chaldean Church”, while the other particular Church took the name of “Assyrian Church of the East”. Both particular Churches, however, still share the same theological, liturgical and spiritual tradition; they both celebrate the Sacraments or Sacred Mysteries according to the East-Syriac tradition.

On November 11th, 1994 Pope John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, signed a Common Christological Declaration [1]. This Declaration removed the main doctrinal obstacle between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. Both Church leaders declared: *“Whatever our christological divergences have been, we experience ourselves united in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace. We wish from now on to witness together to this faith in the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, proclaiming it in appropriate ways to our contemporaries, so that the world may believe in the Gospel of salvation. (...) Living by this faith and these sacraments, it follows as a consequence that the particular Catholic churches and the particular Assyrian churches can recognise each other as sister Churches”*.

In their Common Christological Declaration, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV also pledged themselves *“to do everything possible to dispel the obstacles of the past which still prevent the attainment of full communion between our Churches, so that we can better respond to the Lord’s call for the unity of his own, a unity which has of course to be expressed visibly”*. For this purpose they decided to establish a *Joint Committee for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*. This Joint Committee started its regular activities in 1995; during its annual meetings, it mainly dealt with questions of sacramental theology, in view of a future “Common Statement on Sacramental Life”. The Common Christological Declaration also paved the way for a process of ecumenical rapprochement between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. Since 1994 Mar Dinkha IV and Mar Raphael I Bidawid, Patriarch of the Chaldean Church, supported by their respective Synods, approved several initiatives to foster the progressive re-establishment of ecclesial unity between their particular Churches. This process is supported by both the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

Nowadays, many Chaldean and Assyrian faithful are living in a widespread diaspora. Due to various and sometimes dramatic circumstances, they left their motherlands (Iraq, Iran, Turkey) and moved towards the West. The great majority of the Assyrian faithful now lives in the Middle East, Scandinavia, Western Europe, Australia and North America; only a small minority remains in the motherlands. Although a majority of Chaldean faithful still lives in Iraq, about one third of them moved to the Middle East, Europe and North America. Both the Chaldean and the Assyrian Church

are thus confronted, in various parts of the world, with a similar pastoral necessity: namely that many faithful cannot receive the sacraments from a minister of their own Church.

Given the great distress of many Chaldean and Assyrian faithful, in their motherlands as well as in the diaspora, impeding for many of them a normal sacramental life according to their own tradition, and in the ecumenical context of the bilateral dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, the request has been made of a pastoral arrangement for admission to the Eucharist, when necessity requires, between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church.

## **2. The Anaphora of Addai and Mari**

The principal issue for the Catholic Church in agreeing to this request, related to the question of the validity of the Eucharist celebrated with the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, one of the three Anaphoras traditionally used by the Assyrian Church of the East [2].

This particular Anaphora must have originated in Mesopotamia, possibly in the region of Edessa. There is no hard evidence for the dating of its final redaction: some scholars situate it about the year 200, others in the beginning of the 3<sup>th</sup> century, others in the course of the 3<sup>th</sup> century. The Assyrian Church of the East highly respects this Anaphora as an essential element of the apostolic heritage they received from Addai and Mari, whom they venerate as two of the 72 disciples of Christ and as the founding missionaries of their particular Church. The Anaphora of Addai and Mari, however, as reproduced in the oldest codices retrieved, as well as in the uninterrupted liturgical practice of the Assyrian Church of the East, does not contain a coherent Institution Narrative. For many years, scholars discussed which version of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari might have been the original one. Some scholars argued that the original formula of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari was longer and did contain an Institution Narrative. Other scholars are convinced that the Anaphora of Addai and Mari did not contain a coherent Institution Narrative and that the short version is consequently the original one. Nowadays, most scholars argue that it is highly probable that the second hypothesis is the right one. Anyhow, this historical question cannot be resolved with absolute certainty, due to the scarcity or absence of contemporary sources. The validity of the Eucharist celebrated with the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, therefore, should not be based on historical but on doctrinal arguments.

The Catholic Church considers the words of the Institution as a constitutive part of the Anaphora or Eucharistic Prayer. The Council of Florence stated “*The form of this sacrament are the words of the Saviour with which he effected this sacrament. A priest speaking in the person of Christ effects this sacrament. For, in virtue of those words, the substance of bread is changed into the body of Christ and the substance of wine into his blood*” (D.H. 1321). The same Council of Florence also characterised the words of the Institution as “*the form of words [forma verborum] which the holy Roman Church [...] has always been wont to use [semper uti consuevit] in the consecration of the Lord’s body and blood*” (D.H. 1352), without prejudice to the possibility of some variation in their articulation by the Church. Although not having any authority as to the substance of the sacraments, the Church does have the power to determine their concrete shaping, regarding both their sacramental sign (materia) and their words of administration (forma) (cf. CCEO, can. 669). Hence the doctrinal question about the validity of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, when used in its short version without a coherent Institution Narrative. Do the words of administration (forma) correspond to the conditions for validity, as requested by the Catholic Church? To answer this question, three major arguments have to be taken into due consideration.

In the first place, the Anaphora of Addai and Mari is one of the most ancient Eucharistic Prayers, dating back to the time of the very early Church and the first liturgical regulations. It was composed and used with the clear intention of celebrating the Eucharist in full continuity with the Last Supper, in obedience to the command of the Lord, and according to the intention of the Church. The absence of a coherent Institution Narrative represents, indeed, an exception in comparison with Byzantine and Roman traditions, as developed in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century. This

exception, however, may be due to its very early origin and to the later isolation of the Assyrian Church of the East. The validity of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, in fact, was never officially contested.

The Assyrian Church of the East also uses two other Eucharistic Anaphoras, which are some centuries more recent: the *Anaphora of Nestorius*, reserved to five liturgical occasions, and the *Anaphora of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, used from the beginning of the liturgical year till Palm Sunday, for approximately sixteen weeks. The Anaphora of Addai and Mari, however, is used during the longest and most important period of the liturgical year, which goes from Palm Sunday till the end of the liturgical year and covers about two hundred days. Moreover, the use of these three Anaphoras is not free, as in the Latin tradition, but prescribed by the liturgical calendar. In conscience of faith, the Assyrian Church of the East was always convinced to celebrate the Eucharist validly and so to perform in its fullness what Jesus Christ asked his disciples to do. She expressed this conscience of faith, whether using the Anaphora of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the Anaphora of Nestorius or the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, independent from the fact that only the first two Anaphoras, of later origin, contain the Institution narrative. It should be added that, for the period of the Catholic Patriarchate under Patriarch Sulaka (1551-1662), no document exists to prove that the Church of Rome insisted on the insertion of an Institution narrative into the Anaphora of Addai and Mari.

The Assyrian Church of the East also practices the so called sacrament or mystery (Rasà) of Holy Leaven. From times immemorial, the Assyrian tradition relates that from the bread Jesus took in his hands, which He blessed, broke and gave to his disciples, He gave two pieces to St. John. Jesus asked St. John to eat one piece and to carefully keep the other one. After Jesus' death, St. John dipped that piece of bread into the blood that proceeded from Jesus' side. Hence the name of "Holy Leaven", given to this consecrated bread, dipped into the blood of Jesus. Until this day, Holy Leaven has been kept and renewed annually in the Assyrian Church of the East. The local bishop renews it every year on Holy Thursday, mixing a remainder of the old Leaven within the new one. This is distributed to all parishes of his diocese, to be used during one year in each bread, specially prepared by the priest before the Eucharist. No priest is allowed to celebrate Eucharist using eucharistic bread without Holy Leaven. This tradition of the sacrament or mystery of Holy Leaven, which precedes the actual Eucharistic celebration, is certainly to be seen as a visible sign of historic and symbolic continuity between the present Eucharistic celebration and the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus.

Secondly, the Catholic Church recognises the Assyrian Church of the East as a true particular Church, built upon orthodox faith and apostolic succession. The Assyrian Church of the East also preserved full Eucharistic faith in the presence of our Lord under the species of bread and wine and in the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. In the Assyrian Church of the East, though not in full communion with the Catholic Church, are thus to be found "*true sacraments, and above all, by apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are still joined to us in closest intimacy*" (U.R., n. 15).

Finally, it must be observed that the eastern and western Eucharistic Anaphoras, while expressing the same mystery, have different theological, ritual and linguistic traditions. The words of the Eucharistic Institution are indeed present in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, not in a coherent way and *ad litteram*, but rather in a dispersed eucharological way, that is, integrated in prayers of thanksgiving, praise and intercession. All these elements constitute a "quasi-narrative" of the Eucharistic Institution. In the central part of the Anaphora, together with the Epiclesis, explicit references are made to the eucharistic Body and Blood of Jesus Christ ("*O my Lord, in thy manifold and ineffable mercies, make a good and gracious remembrance for all the upright and just fathers who were pleasing before thee, in the commemoration of the body and blood of thy Christ, which we offer to thee upon the pure and holy altar, as thou hast taught us*"), to the life-giving mystery of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection, which is actually commemorated and celebrated ("*that all the inhabitants of the world may know thee ... and we also, O my Lord, thy unworthy, frail and*

*miserable servants who are gathered and stand before thee, and have received by tradition the example which is from thee, rejoicing and glorifying and exalting and commemorating and celebrating this great and awesome mystery of the passion and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ*”), to the eucharistic offering for the forgiveness of the sins, to the eschatological dimension of the eucharistic celebration and to the Lord’s command to ‘do this in memory of me’ (*“And let thy Holy Spirit come, O my Lord, and rest upon this offering of thy servants, and bless it and sanctify it that it may be to us, O my Lord, for the pardon of sins, and for the forgiveness of shortcomings, and for the great hope of the resurrection from the dead, and for new life in the kingdom of heaven with all who have been pleasing before thee”*). So the words of the Institution are not absent in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, but explicitly mentioned in a dispersed way, from the beginning to the end, in the most important passages of the Anaphora. It is also clear that the passages cited above express the full conviction of commemorating the Lord’s paschal mystery, in the strong sense of making it present; that is, the intention to carry out in practice precisely what Christ established by his words and actions in instituting the Eucharist.

A long and careful study was undertaken of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, from a theological, liturgical and historical perspective, at the end of which the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001 concluded that this Anaphora can be considered valid. Pope John Paul II subsequently approved this decision.

### **3. Pastoral provision**

The Catholic Church provides special regulations for situations of pastoral necessity, such as those the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church face today. The *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 671, §2 and §3, states: *“If necessity requires it or genuine spiritual advantage suggests it and provided that the danger of error or indifferentism is avoided, it is permitted for Catholic Christian faithful, for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister, to receive the sacraments of penance, the Eucharist and anointing of the sick from non-Catholic ministers, in whose Churches these sacraments are valid.( ...) Likewise Catholic ministers licitly administer the sacraments of penance, the Eucharist and anointing of the sick to Christian faithful of Eastern Churches, who do not have full communion with the Catholic Church, if they ask for them on their own and are properly disposed”*. The *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism*, n. 123 and 125, gives the same regulations.

This provision of the *Eastern Catholic Church Law* and the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, can henceforth be applied between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. When necessity requires, Assyrian faithful are permitted to receive Holy Communion in a Chaldean celebration of the Holy Eucharist; in the same way, Chaldean faithful for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister, are permitted to receive Holy Communion in an Assyrian celebration of the Holy Eucharist. In both cases, Assyrian and Chaldean ministers should continue to celebrate the Holy Eucharist according to the liturgical prescriptions and customs of their own tradition, especially regarding the use of the Anaphora (cf. CCEO, can. 674, §2).

When Chaldean faithful are participating in an Assyrian celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the minister of the Assyrian Church is warmly invited to insert the words of the Institution in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari. This possibility already exists in the Assyrian Church of the East. Indeed, the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East, assembled in 1978 in Baghdad, offered ministers in the Assyrian Church the option of reciting the words of the Institution in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari. Although this option does not affect the validity of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, it might have a particular relevance from a liturgical, as well as an ecumenical viewpoint. From a liturgical viewpoint, this might be an appropriate means to bring the present use of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari into line with the general usage in every Eucharistic Prayer both in the Christian East and in the Christian West. From an ecumenical viewpoint, it might be an appropriate expression of fraternal respect for members of other Churches who receive Holy Communion in the

Assyrian Church of the East and who are used, according to the theological and canonical tradition of their proper Church, to hear the recitation of the words of the Institution in every Eucharistic Prayer.

It should be noticed, that the present considerations on the use of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari and the guidelines for admission to the Eucharist, are exclusively concerned with the admission to the Eucharist between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church. The Anaphora of Addai and Mari pertains to the liturgical patrimony and ecclesial identity of the Assyrian Church of the East, since time immemorial, and should remain so. The Assyrian Church of the East cherished and respectfully transmitted this Anaphora from age to age, avoiding any alteration or adaptation in its recitation, out of respect for its venerable origin, traditionally related to the apostolic period. Because each particular Church celebrates the sacraments according to its own traditions, principles and norms, it would be liturgically improper to transfer particular elements of one liturgical tradition into another liturgical tradition. Liturgical traditions, indeed, are like languages, having their particular vocabulary and grammar; essential elements from one liturgical tradition cannot be transferred into another without taking from the particularity of the first and harming the coherence of the second.

### **Conclusion**

The present Guidelines have been transmitted to both H.H. Mar Dinkha IV, Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East and H.B. Mar Raphaël I Bidawid, Patriarch of the Chaldean Church. The promulgation of this provision between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church belongs to the competence of both particular Churches and their respective authorities (cf. CCEO, cann. 670, §1; 671, §4.5). Taking into consideration concrete circumstances and conditions, they will have to establish particular procedures and provide appropriate pastoral means to implement it.

This provision for admission to the Eucharist in situations of pastoral necessity is not to be equated with full Eucharistic communion between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. Although closely related to one another in matters of faith and sacramental life, both particular Churches are not yet in full communion. They are still travelling, with hope and courage, towards that blessed day when full and visible communion will be attained and when it will be possible to celebrate together in peace the Holy Eucharist of the Lord. As Pope John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*: “*From this basic but partial unity it is now necessary to advance towards the visible unity which is required and sufficient and which is manifested in a real and concrete way, so that the Churches may truly become a sign of that full communion in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church which will be expressed in the common celebration of the Eucharist*” (UUS, n. 78).

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[1] The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Information Service*, 88 (1995/I), p. 2-3.

[2] Cf A. GELSTON, *The Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 48-55.

### **Links:**

(italiano) [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20011025\\_chiesa-caldea-assira\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20011025_chiesa-caldea-assira_it.html)

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