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The Anaphoras of the Ethiopian Church: A Challenging Orthodoxy

SUMMARY

Some points will first be made on the earliest anaphoras of the Ethiopian Church and the developments which took place in the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, explaining that there are today 20 anaphoras known: 15 of which are actually in use, 14 printed in the missal of the Orthodox Church and 17 in the missal published by the Vatican in 1945 after revision. These anaphoras are of different types and styles. In particular, the Institution Narrative is treated in ways which may cause surprise. Three questions will be addressed.

a) “**This bread is my body**”

The form of the words of Jesus Christ in the Institution Narrative of most anaphoras is: “This bread is my body; this cup is my blood”. Doubts have been raised at various levels as to the validity of this formulation or as to how proper or prudent this was. Unsurprisingly, the restored Missal of the Vatican (1945) removed the mention of the “bread”, while leaving the “cup” in a number of occasions. However, there is no real basis for the doubts raised and the merits of the formula are worth considering on their own terms.

b) **The Institution Narrative in the Anaphora of the Lord**

In the Institution Narrative of the Anaphora of the Lord, what concerns the cup are not Christ’s words, but a declarative statement on the part of the assembly concerning the present effect of these words: “Truly this is your blood which has been shed for our sins”. This contrasts with the quote of the Lord’s words on the bread in this as in most other anaphoras: “Take, eat, this bread is my body which will be broken for you for the forgiveness of sin”. Here again, the Missal of the Vatican (1945) rectified matters according to the Institution Narrative of the Anaphora of the Apostles. This phrasing differs from the formulation received in the Ethiopian *Testamentum Domini*, a literary narrative as opposed to an actual liturgical text meant for a sacramental action, and, in its wake, from 15th cent. anaphoras: “In the same way, having mixed the cup of wine, you have given [it to] them in the likeness of your blood, which was shed for us”. It appears that the statement of the celebrant expresses what the celebrating community is seeing in an immediate manner. Those who take part in this particular celebration are made participants and witnesses of the Last Supper by the same token, without distance. The memorial of the one historical event and the present celebration are one and the same thing for those who share in the liturgy: the believers are at the Last Supper and state what they see Je-

Jesus Christ has been doing for them and its result: the presence of the precious blood for us, perceived from our own present point of view of people who realise the gift they are in the position to receive.

The *textus receptus* will be corrected in the 16th cent. into: “In the same way, having mixed the cup of wine, you have given [it to] them: *truly* this is your blood, which was shed for our sins.” This edition betrays the loss of the typological language and the need to state that the transformation of the wine into the blood of Jesus Christ is “really” done, not “symbolically” as we might say. This shows that the language which used to mean a certain thing is now perceived as saying the contrary. The reality of the Eucharistic change needed to be asserted. However, the editor did not feel it useful to introduce the words Jesus Christ pronounced over the cup in the direct style: it must have been felt as obvious that they were included in the whole picture. This means in turn that the typological mind which sees in the Eucharist the re-presentation of the Last Supper, which itself contains the Passion, was and still is working despite the linguistic shifts.

c) The Institution Narrative in the Anaphora of St. James of Sarug

The Anaphora of St. James of Sarug – built on the *Proemion* of the Prayer of the Fraction of the Coptic Anaphora of St. Gregory of Nazianza – has been misconstrued as missing the Institution Narrative. Thus, the Missal of the Vatican (1945) interpolated the Institution Narrative of the Anaphora of the Apostles. True, the words of the Lord are not quoted but explicit reference to the Last Supper is made nonetheless, with the vivid expression of its impact on the participants in the present day celebration.

The actions of Jesus Christ, rather than his words, are emphasized. The traditional Ethiopian Commentary of the Missal mentions one action which is not in the text, namely the transformation of the bread and the wine. The action of breaking the bread is understood as including the words of Christ and therefore embraces the “consecration”. Moreover, it is Jesus Christ himself who accomplishes everything, making the celebrant’s hand his own, as the Commentary says. One of the classical phrases of the sacramental prayers is systematically repeated: “As you did this then, *now again* do it for us”. One recognises here the binomial *typos/antitypos*, the request for the Divine action to be brought about by the equivalent of the Greek (καὶ) ὂν: “*O you who blessed at that time, now bless this bread. O you, who with thanksgiving broke at that time, now break this bread. O you who sanctified at that time, now sanctify this cup. O you, who gave at that time, now give this cup*”.

In the context of the anaphoral prayer of thanksgiving, this Institution Narrative has an epicletic character related to a Λόγος epiclesis. In fact it is immediately made explicit by the double epiclesis which follows, first addressed to the Lamb of God, then to the Holy Spirit.

A challenge to re-focus

The Ethiopian anaphoras witness in their own way to the ontological relationship of the Eucharistic celebration with the Lord’s Supper, for an assembly of faithful sharing in the body and blood of Christ and finding there all the abundance of life given to them without limit on Calvary. This is nothing else but Biblical and Patristic typology and has a universal value which leaves behind particularisms which might be out of place (here the Ge’ez tradition meets the Syriac world). It explains the effort done by the Ge’ez-Catholic Church to recover its authentic Missal. The institution narratives of the Ge’ez tradition should be preserved in the Catholic books as in the Orthodox ones because they are one expression of the apostolic tradition alive and meaningful.

As a result, it is evident that the overall euchological tradition seen across space and time goes far beyond the categories developed in the Scholastic tradition. It is in fact unable to satisfactorily account for the mystery re-presented in the Church or, *a fortiori*, presume to judge of the validity of the Eucharist celebrated by another particular Church. The Roman Holy See having acknowledged the validity of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, there is ample freedom to discuss related issues.

The very things with which the Ethiopian tradition was reproached turn out to be an invaluable contribution to the whole Church of God. The Catholic Church is expected to vindicate the genuine variety of the expressions of the apostolic tradition (LG 23; OE 1, 6, 24; UR 15, 17).

BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

Born on 25 July 1947 in Paris (18e)

1967-1968: Novitiate in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.

1968-1970: Philosophical Studies, Mortain (F).

1970-1972: Overseas Service as French teacher and animator, St. Kisito-High-School, Bangassou (Central African Republic).

02.03.1974 Perpetual Religious Profession in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit at Chevilly-Larue (F).

1972-1975: Theological Studies at the Consortium of Missionary Studies, Chevilly-Larue (F).

30.06.1975: Diploma of Ethiopic, Catholic Institute of Paris.

03.08.1975: Ordination to the Presbyterate.

1975-1976: Ethiopian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

1977-1985: Assistant Priest, St. Irenaeus Byzantine-rite Catholic Parish and concurrently Assistant-Director of the Socio-cultural "Foyer Oriental," Lyons.

1985-2001: Missionary in the Vicariate Apostolic of Soddo-Hosanna (Ethiopia). Follow-up of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's Clergy Training Centre, Chencha, Gamo-Gofa.

2001-2002: Further researches (Chevetogne, PIO).

Nov. 2002: Addis Ababa: liturgical work for H. Em. Abuna Berhaneyesus, Metropolitan of the Geez-Catholic Church.

2003-present: Secretary of the Ethiopian Catholic Bishops' Liturgy Committee since its creation.

2005-present: Member of the *Societas Liturgiarum Orientalium* (SOL) since its inception.

2007-present: Associate researcher to the C.F.E.E. (Centre français des études éthiopiennes, Addis Abeba).

FIELD OF RESEARCH

The liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tawâhedo* Church. Particular researches in liturgical archaeology (study of the ancient Ethiopian churches and their furnishing) as documenting, with the help of Egyptian documentation, the period for which no written texts are available in Ethiopia (up to the 14th -15th centuries).

POSITION

Secretary of the Ethiopian Catholic Bishops' Liturgy Committee

Secretary of the mixed Ethio-Eritrean Bishops' Liturgy Committee

PUBLICATIONS

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- 2) Id., "Training Which Priests for Which Church?" in: Brendan Cogavin (ed.), *The Future of Religious Studies in Ethiopia and Eritrea*. A Symposium held at the Capuchin Franciscan Institute of Philosophy and Theology, February 14-19, 1994, *Ethiopian Review of Cultures* vol. IV - V (Special Issue) (Addis Ababa, 1994-1995) 67-87.
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