

GEEVARGHESE CHEDIATH

## **PRO ORIENTE SYRIAC DIALOGUE**

The *Pro-Oriente* Foundation<sup>1</sup> is a Catholic Ecumenical Organization under the auspices of the Catholic Archdiocese of Vienna, Austria, founded by His Eminence Cardinal Franz Koenig, the former Archbishop of Vienna in 1964. Since then this foundation was doing excellent ecumenical service among the various Christian Churches. As Vienna was a link between East and West in the past, during the present generation also it is trying its God-given mandate of mediating between the Eastern and Western Churches for the unity of the One Church of Christ. The *Pro-Oriente* Foundation succeeded in bringing about unofficially, the Christological agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the various Oriental Orthodox Churches. And the Vienna Christological Agreement has become today a milestone in Ecumenical relationship<sup>2</sup>. The Foundation also tried to spread the results of the discussions in a worldwide level. So it held several Regional Symposia<sup>3</sup>. It had also several Study Seminars on relevant ecumenical topics<sup>4</sup>. In addition to that, it held Ecumenical Symposia with the churches of the Byzantine tradition. It paved the way for the meeting of

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<sup>1</sup> *Pro Oriente* are Latin words. The meaning is, „for the East“. It means for the Eastern Churches. This foundation is engaged in intense ecumenical activities with the Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox and the Ancient Church of the East (Assyrian Church). One can know about the activities of *Pro Oriente* Foundation from the following publications: (1) The Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic Ecumenical Dialogue, (5 Volumes + two additional volumes, giving in summary form the results of the five Dialogues). (2) *Pro Oriente* Booklet Series (already 10 volumes). (3) The *Pro Oriente* Dialogue within the Churches of Syriac Tradition (already 4 volumes). These volumes are available at the office of the *Pro Oriente* Foundation in Vienna: They are sent free of charge to those who ask for them. The email address of *Pro Oriente*: pro-oriente@netway.at They are also found at the Homepage: <http://www.pro-oriente.at>

<sup>2</sup> Five Vienna Consultations between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church 1971, 1973, 1976, 1978 and 1988; Selected Papers in One Volume. Published and edited by the ecumenical Foundation *Pro Oriente*, Vienna 1993.

<sup>3</sup> It held Regional Symposia in Dayar Amba Bishoi in 1991 (Egypt), Vadavathoor Seminary in 1993, (Kerala, India), Kaslik in 1994 (Lebanon), and Kroeffelbach in 1997 (Germany): Cfr. Booklet, Nos. 3, 6, 8, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Booklet, Nos. 4. (On Primacy); 5 (On Councils and Conciliarity); 7 (On Ecclesiology); 9 (On Authority and Jurisdiction).

the heads of various churches either in Vienna or in other places. The representatives of the Foundation regularly visit the various Churches as part of the ecumenical encounter. As a whole the Foundation carries out the mandate of the Second Vatican Council in its ecumenical orientation<sup>5</sup>

In 1994 the *Pro Oriente* Foundation undertook another very important ecumenical mission, namely the foundation and establishment of the Syriac Commission for a dialogue with the Ancient Assyro-Chaldean Church of the East. The Assyrian Church or the Church of the East as it is known today, was known down through the centuries as the Nestorian Church<sup>6</sup> Although there were several ecumenical initiatives after the Second Vatican Council, the Nestorian Church had no part in any of it. And almost all the churches kept them away from ecumenical encounter. The present author in his doctoral dissertation in 1978 deplored the situation and it was a voice in the wilderness for some more years. He pointed out in his doctoral thesis *On the Christology of Mar Babai the Great*, the reasons why they were kept aloof from ecumenical contacts<sup>7</sup>. And in the Kerala Regional Symposium under the auspices of the Pro Oriente Foundation in 1993, the present author again appealed to the assembly and the Foundation to enter into some kind of dialogue with this ancient Church of the East (Nestorian Church). And some others also expressed their desire to see the initiation of such a dialogue. The Syriac Dialogue is the result of such a move.

## 1. The Syriac Commission

In 1994 the *Pro-Oriente* Foundation constituted a Syriac Commission consisting one member each from each Syriac Church<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> More than one occasion, *Pro Oriente* clarified its method and purpose in the ecumenical world: to see the dialoguing churches as equal partners, avoid meaningless and futile discussions, concentrate on those elements which would enhance the coming together of the Christian churches, work for the peace and harmony among the various nations and peoples. Booklet, Nos. 3 (1993), 34-46; 6 (1995), 88-102.

<sup>6</sup> The Church in the ancient Persian Empire was known as the Church of the East, the East Syrian Church, Mesopotamian Church, Seleucian Church, Diphysite Church. It was later known as the Nestorian Church. Pope John Paul II in a recent statement appealed to all the Christians and especially to the Catholics, that these Christians should not be called Nestorians: „All the Christian Churches must humbly acknowledge their grave responsibility for the marginalisation and the sufferings endured by the Assyrian Church throughout the centuries; the pejorative epithet 'Nestorian' (often synonym of heretical) with which they have referred to this Church until recent times, is no longer acceptable and must be definitely abandoned". „Information Service" 91 (1996) 1-2, 25.

<sup>7</sup> G. CHEDIATH, *The Christology of Mar Babai the Great*, Rome 1978; Kottayam 1982 (Second edition), 195-198. This is the first serious study on the *Christology of the Church of the East* in an ecumenical perspective. This study paved the way for the Christological reconciliation with the Church of the East.

<sup>8</sup> *Syriac Dialogue I*, Vienna 1994, 226-227.

The following are the major Syriac Churches (name of the Syriac Churches, number of the faithful, representative in the Commission)<sup>9</sup>:

1. Syrian Catholic Church (129.000) – Archbishop Michael al-Jamil
2. Maronite Catholic Church (3,222.000) – Archbishop Butros Matar
3. Malankara Catholic Church (400.000) – Prof. Dr. Geevarghese Chediath
4. Malankara Orthodox Church (1,000.000) – Prof. Dr. K. M. George
5. Syrian Orthodox Church (250,000) – Archbishop Gregorios Juhanna Ibrahim
6. Assyrian Church of the East (400.000) – Bishop Bawai Soro
7. Chaldean Catholic Church (304.000) – Prof. Dr. Luis Sakko
8. Syro-Malabar Catholic Church (3.886.000) – Metropolitan Joseph Powathil

The Churches of the Syriac tradition were one Church in the beginning. It was the first Church as His Holiness Pope John Paul II puts it. Then come the Greek and the Latin Churches. The Syriac Church was widely spread from the apostolic times, in the Eastern Roman Empire, in the Persian Empire and in India. Later, with the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), this one Syriac Church was divided into several groups, having divergent ecclesial allegiances. The Syriac tradition contributed substantially to the development of Christian faith during the early centuries. Among these eight churches, the first five belong to the West Syriac liturgical tradition. The last three belong to the East Syriac or Chaldean liturgical tradition. But basically both are of the Syriac tradition with slight variations. In the Assyrian Church of the East there are two groups under two Patriarchs<sup>10</sup>. Malankara Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, and the Assyrian Church are not yet in full and canonical communion with the Roman Catholic Church, while the other churches of the Syriac tradition are in canonical communion with the Roman Catholic Church. These eight Syriac Churches belong to three geographical areas: Syrian Antiochene (Syrian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, and Maronite), Mesopotamian or Persian (Chaldean and the Assyrian), Indian (Syro-Malabar, Malankara Catholic and the Malankara Orthodox). The two strong pillars of the Syriac tradition today are the Syro-Malabar Church and the Maronite Church. The Malankara Catholic and Syro-Malabar Church are rich with priestly and religious vocations and doing excellent and incomparable missionary activity today

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<sup>9</sup> The number in the bracket indicates the number of the faithful of each church. The number of the faithful of each church is taken from R. G. ROBERSON, *The Eastern Christian Churches – A Brief Survey*, Rome 1999. There may be difference of opinion regarding the number of the faithful of each church. The Syrian Orthodox Church has, according to Roberson, 1 million adherents in India (Ibid., 37).

<sup>10</sup> Mar Dinkha IV Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East is in Chicago. He about 365000 faithful and Mar Addai II Patriarch of the Church of the East in Iraq has about 54000 faithful. See details about this Church in N. WYRWOLL, *Orthodoxia 2002*, Regensburg 2002, 108-111.

In addition to the above eight Syriac Churches, the Mar Thoma Church and the Thozhiyoor Church in India are also partly of the Syriac tradition. Mar Thoma Church is a separated church from the Syrian Jacobite (Orthodox) Church in Kerala, India, in 1889. They mutilated the Antiochene liturgy after the Lutheran theological tradition. It has about 0.6 million faithful<sup>11</sup> The Thozhiyoor Church is also a separated group from the same Jacobite church in 1772 and it has about 5000 faithful centered around a small place in Kerala<sup>12</sup>.

The *Syriac Commission* has also the representatives from the *Pro Oriente* Foundation: the President of the Foundation Mr. Alfred Stirnemann, Prof. Hofrichter, and Father Franz Bouwen<sup>13</sup>. The main objective of the Commission is to bring together the Churches of the Syriac tradition to full communion. It is the *unique forum* to discuss the various problems of the Churches of the Syriac tradition and also the forum to exchange the developments of these churches. The Syriac Commission had so far 12 meetings since 1994. This commission is responsible in arranging the *non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*.

## 2. Assyrian Church of the East – Main topic of discussion

Since its formation in 1994, the Syriac Commission was concentrating on the Church of the East. The main points of discussion were the following:

- 1) Is there Nestorian heresy in the present day Assyrian Church of the East?
- 2) How to handle the anathemas pronounced against the ancient Fathers, respected and venerated by the Church of the East?
- 3) What exactly is the Christology of the Church of the East?
- 4) Is the Christological difference among the churches one of verbal or regarding the content of faith?

The Syriac Commission under the auspices of the *Pro-Oriente* Foundation convened five Syriac Consultations, known as Syriac Dialogues. And two more Dialogues are planned to be held soon in the coming years. These Consultations within the Syriac Churches clarified a lot of points hitherto been unresolved. At least for the participants, several issues related to the so-called „Nestorian Church” were clarified. The members of the Syriac Commission, experts in the „Nestorian matters”, and the official representative from Vatican took part in all the consultations. The members of the Church of the East were unhappy about the expression *Nestorian*. They preferred the appellation, *Assyro-Chaldean*

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<sup>11</sup> G. CHEDIATH, *Keralathile Kreistava Sabhakal (The Christian Churches in Kerala)*, Kottayam 1998, 168-217.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 266-270.

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Stirnemann passed away suddenly on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2000.

*Church of the East.* In the same way it was clarified that the Nestorian heresy, the teachings of Nestorius and the Christology of the Church of the East are to be seen distinguished. The members of the Church of the East clarified that their Church's teaching is the apostolic teaching, and it was interpreted by St. Ephrem and Theodore of Mopsuestia and is seen today in the liturgical tradition and other traditions of the Church.

### 3. Syriac Dialogues (I-V)<sup>14</sup>

There were so far five Syriac Dialogues. Except the Third Dialogue, all the other Dialogues were held in Vienna. The first Three Dialogues concentrated on historical and doctrinal issues related to the Church of the East. The last two dealt with the sacramental theology of the Church of the East.

During the First dialogue in 1994 in Vienna, there were ten topics and fifteen papers. For some topics, there were papers from the Catholic, Oriental Orthodox and Assyrian points of view. During this Dialogue, „the Vienna Christological Formula of 1973” was examined. The Assyrian representatives also expressed their satisfaction at the Vienna Christological Formula<sup>15</sup>. Prof. Sebastian Brock remarked that, „we need to try to understand what writers actually meant by the technical terms they used, rather than rely on what their opponents claimed that they meant. Several of the key terms used in the Chalcedonian definition meant rather different things to different people at different times. It is also important to be aware of the varying starting points of the different Christological traditions”<sup>16</sup> The History of Research into Nestorius (Prof. Luise Abramowski), the History of the Church in Persia and its absence in the Councils of the Roman Empire (Prof. Sebastian Brock), The Ecclesiologies of the Church of the East (Sarhard Jammo), The Spread of the Persian Church (Jean Maurice Fiey), The Christology of Nestorius (Bernard Dupuy), The Theology of the Church of the East (Mar Bawai, Mar Aprem, and Prof. Adalbert Davids), The Theological Contribution of Mar Babai the Great (Prof. G. Chediath) The Anaphora of Addai and Mari (S. Jammo, Prof. Hofrichter) were the main topics discussed.

The Christology of the Church of the East is the Christology of Mar Babai the Great. The present author in his paper showed clearly that the Christology of

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<sup>14</sup> See above footnote no. 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Syriac Dialogue II*, 206: „The Vienna Christological Formula essentially reflects the apostolic teaching that is compatible to the theology of the Church of the East, though the terminology of some of its segments posses some linguistic difficulties. In future formulae, it is recommended that a distinction be made between the content and form of our common faith. We affirm that dogmatic unity in pluralistic expression should go hand in hand with reconciliation and ecclesial unity. There needs to be tolerance of the concept of pluralistic dogmatic expression in one faith.”

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

the Church of the East is not from Nestorius, but Mar Babai the Great<sup>17</sup> Other experts also presented the history, liturgy and theology of the Church of the East. The modern studies on Nestorius were also presented<sup>18</sup>. It became almost clear to the participants that the Nestorianism attributed to the Church of the East was the result of misunderstanding. It was indeed Mar Babai the Great (+628) who was responsible for the introduction of the typical East Syrian Christological expression in the Persian Church, two kyane, two qnome and one parsopa of Filiation<sup>19</sup> Although the expression had its roots in the early Antiochene writers, it was adopted in the Persian Church with Mar Babai's *Book of Union*<sup>20</sup>.

During the discussions it became clear that (a) different formulations can exist within one Church and can be regarded as orthodox even by those who do not use them in their theological tradition; (b) instead of just reinterpreting the terminology and the expressions of the fifth century, it is essential to redefine the mystery of our faith in terms of the concepts of contemporary philosophy and theology and to use a modern language; (c) in this effort the different traditions have stressed the unity or duality. Both attempts were considered orthodox as long as the stress on unity and duality in the incarnate Christ did not deny the other aspect.

#### 4. Catholic-Assyrian Christological Agreement

Between the First and the Second Consultations, an important event took place. On November 11, 1994 a common Christological declaration of faith had been issued in Rome by Pope John Paul II and the Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV of the Assyrian Church. In the joint communiqué it was stated: „Thanks to the spirit of openness and mutual respect, and with the firm conviction of the necessity of remaining loyal to our respective traditions, we were able to explore ways towards gaining a truer understanding of each other's traditions and putting away past and present misconceptions on all sides. It became clear in particular, in the course of our dialogue, that there is a necessity to make an absolute distinction between the doctrinal position of the Assyrian Church of the East and the position recognized by all to be heretical, which holds that there are two sons, two prosopa in the one Incarnate Christ, a position which is traditionally described by the Chalcedonians and Oriental Orthodox as Nestorianism”<sup>21</sup> Thus the Catholic

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<sup>17</sup> G. CHEDIATH, *The Theological Contribution of Mar Babai the Great*, in: *Syriac Dialogue I*, Vienna 1994, 155-167.

<sup>18</sup> *Syriac Dialogue I*.

<sup>19</sup> This was supposed to be the typical „Nestorian” expression. But today after the study of the present author (the Christology of Mar Babai the Great) and other experts and the ecumenical encounters, it is clarified that this way of speaking is not at all heretical, on the contrary, is orthodox like any other Christology.

<sup>20</sup> BABAI, *Magni Liber de Unione*, ed.& tr. by A. VASCHALDE, (CSCO 79/80) Louvain 1915.

<sup>21</sup> „Information Service” 88 (1995) 1, 2-3.

Church and the Assyrian Church of the East settled forever the Christological problem vexing these Churches since the council of Ephesus.

The Second Syriac Dialogue was held in 1996. It tried to understand the Christological agreement arrived at in Rome in 1994 between His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV of the Assyrian Church of the East<sup>22</sup> It analyzed also the Christology of the East Syrian liturgical tradition, *the Three Chapters Controversy of 553* and the Council of Ephesus (431). Altogether there were seventeen papers followed by extensive discussions and clarifications. The participants realized the need to make a distinction between the heresies condemned and the persons involved in the controversies. This was in the light of the papers *on the Three Chapters* by Prof. G. Chediath, M. J. Birnie, V. Poggi and Mar Gregorios Saliba<sup>23</sup> and further discussions.

During the discussion, the Assyrian, Chaldean, and the Syro-Malabar delegations of the Church of the East presented an explanation of the term *qnoma*:

„In Christology, as expressed in the synodical and liturgical sources of the Church of the East, the term *qnoma* does not mean *hypostasis* as understood in the Alexandrine Tradition, but instead, individuated nature. Accordingly, the human nature, which the Holy Spirit fashioned, the Logos assumed and united to Him without any separation, was personalized in the Person of the Son of God. When we speak of the two natures and their *qnome*, we understand this very much the same sense as two natures and their particular properties. It is important to note that the term *qnoma* is used in a different way in Trinitarian theology”<sup>24</sup>

## 5. The crucial Terms *Kyana*, *Qnoma*, and *Parsopa*

We have to understand each Christology in its particular and historical background. And in fact this is the method, which the Roman Catholic Church follows after the Second Vatican Council. Thus, the Catholic Church succeeded in understanding the non-Chalcedonian position of the Oriental Orthodoxy and accepted the *mia physis* formula as an orthodox expression in Christology. In the same way, the Pro Oriente foundation tried to understand the East Syrian Christological expressions in their particular context. This method enabled the Catholic Church to understand the Christological traditions of the Church of the East.

*Kyana*, *Qnoma*, and *Parsopa* are the three crucial terms used in the Christology of the Church of the East. The correct understanding of the terms is absolutely necessary to understand the East Syrian or „Nestorian” Christology. *Kyana* means nature in abstract (*physis*): e.g. the two (kyane) natures in Jesus

<sup>22</sup> *Syriac Dialogue I*, 230-231.

<sup>23</sup> *Syriac Dialogue II*, Vienna 1996, 113-153.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

Christ, namely, human nature and divine nature. For the members of the Church of the East, in order to assert that there are two (*kyane*) natures really and concretely subsisting in Jesus Christ, they have to assert that there are *two qnome* in Jesus Christ. *Kyana* is common. *Qnoma* is the concretization of the abstract *kyana*. *Kyana* exists only as *qnoma*. Since divinity and humanity are really subsisting in Jesus Christ, they assert that Jesus Christ has a *divine qnoma* and a *human qnoma*. In other words, the *two qnome* signifies the two realities of divinity and humanity in the one person of Jesus Christ. Although *Qnoma* is the translation of *hypostasis*, for Babai and for the Assyrians, it does not have a uniform meaning in Trinitarian theology and Christology. In the Trinity, *Qnoma* signifies person, but in Christology it signifies actual or concrete existence, or actualization of the abstract *kyana* (nature). So it was decided in the *Dialogue* that the term *qnoma* has to be kept as it is without giving an equivalent translation as *hypostasis* or *person*. *Parsopa* is person. In Jesus Christ, the ontological *parsopa* is the *parsopa* of the Second Person of the Trinity, namely *Filiation*. On the level of nature, there is divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ. But on the level of the ontological person, Jesus Christ is one and the same. He is Son of God. The man Jesus Christ has the same *parsopa* of the Son of God. That is to say, Jesus Christ is Son of God. The Only Begotten Son of God became the first-born of Mary through incarnation. Hence she is Mother of God. Since Christ is God and man, Mary could be called also Mother of Christ. Both are valid. Mar Babai saw the unity on the side of *Parsopa of Filiation* and the duality on the side of natures (*kyane*) and their proper *qnome*. But there is only one Son. He is God and man, having perfect Godhead and perfect manhood.

*Qnoma* has in the Assyrian context one meaning in the Trinitarian theology and another in Christology. In the Trinity, there are three *Qnome*: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Here *qnoma* means person. There are three persons (*parsope*) in the Trinity. But when we say there are two natures (*kyane-qnome*) in Christ, divinity and humanity, the Assyrians do not mean two ontological persons (*parsope*), but only two distinct realities.

In the West Syrian tradition, on the other hand, *kyana* (nature-*physis*) is person. Hence the expression, *mia physis* (one nature). One nature means one person. For those who think that one nature is one person, it is heretical to speak of *two natures* or *in two natures*<sup>25</sup> But those who speak of *two natures* do not give the meaning of *person* to the expression *nature*. *In two natures* means there are two realities in the one Lord Jesus Christ. They are in him without confusion or separation. In the same way for the Oriental Orthodox, *qnoma* has the same meaning both in the Trinity and in Christology, namely person. Accordingly, for them, in Jesus Christ, there is only *one qnoma*: i.e., the *qnoma* of the Word of God. For them *two qnome* is an impossibility. The West Syrian tradition identifies *kyana* and *qnoma*; basically they follow the line of thought of St.

<sup>25</sup> The Chalcedonian definition of faith.

Cyril of Alexandria who identified *physis* (*kyana*), *hypostasis* (*qnoma*), and *prosopon* (*parsopa*). But the theological point of view of the East Syrians is quite different from the West Syrians (the Oriental Orthodox). The East Syrians place *kyana* and *qnoma* on the same side and *parsopa* on the other side. On the level of nature there is duality, but on the level of *parsopa* or person, there is unity and oneness. This was basically the Antiochene Christology and eventually it became the Christology of the Church of the East in the Persian Empire and others stigmatized it as Nestorian. But the Antiochenes eventually inherited the Alexandrian Christology in the version of St. Cyril of Alexandria and it became the Christology of the so-called Monophysites (in today's language, Oriental Orthodox).

The Third Syriac Dialogue was held in Chicago in 1997. This Dialogue concentrated on the issue of the condemnation of the Fathers, venerated by the Church of the East and the removal of the anathemas pronounced against them. It dealt with Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius of Constantinople. We find in the history of Christianity that certain Fathers and Saints venerated by one church may be found as heretics by some other churches. It is a very painful situation in ecumenical relationships and is an anomaly. In the unofficial Dialogues between the Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, there was an understanding unofficially, that Saints and Fathers venerated by one church should not be condemned by other churches and if there exists such things, they have to be removed from the liturgical and catechetical books. The Assyrians also demand that such a process should take place in the case of the Saints of the Assyrian Church.

The first consideration was about Theodore of Mopsuestia (+428). Theodore was a great bishop of the ancient church, and he died in the communion of the Catholic Church. He was known as a great pillar of orthodoxy. He was the best representative of the Antiochene School of theology and this theology became normative in the Persian church. Although he was not the bishop of the Church of the East, he is venerated as a Greek Doctor, the abode of the Holy Spirit and teacher of teachers. He was the Interpreter (*mpasqana*) for them. There is also an anaphora in the East Syrian Church known after Theodore. He is not just one of the saints for them, but the one whom they consider the greatest teacher of the Church. He followed the footsteps of the Apostles, they taught<sup>26</sup>

It was after the Ephesian crisis and afterwards that there arose an animosity against the Fathers of the Antiochene Church, and especially against Theodore of Mopsuestia. This anti-Theodorian agitation culminated in the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, in 553 under Emperor Justinian. Under the pretext of reconciling the non-Chalcedonians and bringing them back to the Catholic Church, under the instigation of a certain bishop Theodore Ascidas, Emperor Justinian condemned the person and writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, in

<sup>26</sup> BABAI, *Liber de Unione*, 245-246/199.

spite of the protests from the part of Pope Vigilius who was at that time in Constantinople. So Theodore was condemned, 125 years after his death.

Nestorius of Constantinople (+after 451) was a pastor of souls and Patriarch of Constantinople. He was also not a bishop in the Persian Church, nor did he found their church. He was also a Greek Doctor, venerated by the Persians. But he did not have that honorable place which Theodore had among them. They were more Theodorian than Nestorian. They do not like to be called Nestorian, but they like to be called Theodorian. Experts like Andre de Halleux showed convincingly that there were serious defects in the proceedings of the Council of Ephesus of 431<sup>27</sup>, which condemned Nestorius. According to him one cannot suspect the fundamentally orthodox intention of the Christological faith of Nestorius and that it corresponds substantially to the apostolic tradition. There were considerable defects in the process against Nestorius. And in fact he was condemned in his absence. According to many modern experts, even natural justice was violated in the condemnation of Nestorius. In later centuries, Nestorius began to be venerated in the Church of the East and there is today an anaphora known after Nestorius in that church.

The Syriac Dialogue in Chicago came to the common statement that „it is time to reevaluate the anathema imposed on Theodore’s person and works at the second Council of Constantinople in 553 AD, one hundred and twenty five years after Theodore’s death. They request the churches to consider whether they could remove the anathema from their memories”<sup>28</sup> With regard to Nestorius, the joint Communiqué says, „in regard to the person and works of Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, we wish that a distinction should be made between the person of Nestorius, his faith and his pastoral concern on the one hand, and the heresy called Nestorianism on the other”<sup>29</sup>

Thus with these three Syriac Dialogues, there emerged at least among many of the participants a new way of approach to the Church of the East, a new attitude and a new understanding. What was considered impossible for centuries became possible in a few years of prayerful studies under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This, together with the historic signing of the Christological agreement between the Pope of Rome and the Assyrian Patriarch in Chicago paved the way for a new era of better relationship among the Churches of the Syriac tradition. In effect, the East Syrian Christology is recognized by the Catholic Church and by many others as one of the Christological interpretations of the mystery of Christ. The two *qnome* Christology as it is now explained by the Assyrians is acceptable, or at least need not be branded as heretical.

The next two Syriac Dialogues (in 2000, and 2002 in Vienna) turned their attention to the Sacramental life of the Syriac Churches. There is one more Dialogue on the Sacraments in the Syriac Tradition in 2003 to be held in Vienna.

<sup>27</sup> *Syriac Dialogue I*, 200-215.

<sup>28</sup> *Syriac Dialogue III*, 139.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

During the Fourth Dialogue in 2000, there were papers from the various Church traditions of the Syriac family on *Sacraments in general* and *Sacraments of Initiation*. The Syriac term corresponding to sacrament is *raza*<sup>30</sup>. But *raza* is closer to *mysterion* in Greek rather than *sacramentum* in Latin. Hence it was proposed to use the expression mystery or *raza* instead of sacrament to the sacred actions in the church. *Raze* par excellence is the Eucharistic mysteries. *Raza* is a visible sign endowed with a hidden power. *Raze* provides the means for salvation for the entire Christian community, affected through the ministry of the ordained priesthood. Under the Western influence the Syriac Churches also adopted the symbolic figure *seven*, but the content of the lists was not uniformly fixed among the Syriac churches. The Syriac tradition as such has never developed an equivalent of Western sacramental theology or any clear distinction between sacraments and the sacramentals. „Despite a number of outward differences, there is no essential difference from western tradition in the basic understanding of the underlying meaning and theological content of the various sacraments/*raze*”<sup>31</sup> The participants came to the conclusion that in the sacramental theology, there is no difference between the Western Churches and the Syriac Churches; basically the Church of the East has the same understanding regarding the Sacraments of the Church. „Sacraments are celebrations of the economy of salvation, namely God’s plan in Jesus Christ to save humanity by offering his divine grace through those rites which the Church recognizes as holy *raze*. Jesus Christ by his own sacrifice on the Cross made atonement for our sins and brought about reconciliation with God. Thus he brings God’s forgiveness and redemption to the world and renews God’s covenant with all humanity. Through the celebration of *raze*, the Church is built up as the Body of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The believer is given participation in the death and resurrection of Christ and in the life of the Kingdom to come. A distinctive emphasis of the Church of the East is the following: the work of the Holy Spirit simultaneously confers the earnest, or pledge, of immortality and empowers the human person to deal with sin successfully and live in obedience before God”<sup>32</sup>.

Another topic discussed was the *Sacraments of initiation* (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist). „It emerged that this Western terminology, with *Sacraments in the plural*, did not correspond to the situation in the Syriac tradition, where historically the rite incorporated all three elements into a single celebration; in particular, there was no separation between the baptismal immersion and the post-immersion anointing (to which the later Western notion of *Confirmation* corresponds). In the case of both the baptismal rite and the Eucharistic mysteries, it is important to treat the rite as a whole, and not as distinct units in an excessively analytical manner”<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Or *rozo* (West Syriac); plural *raze* or *roze*.

<sup>31</sup> *Syriac Dialogue IV*, 119.

<sup>32</sup> *Syriac Dialogue IV*, 119-120.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

The Sacraments in the Syriac Tradition was the topic of the Fifth Dialogue in 2002 also. It was named, *Sacraments in the Syriac Tradition-Part II*. This Dialogue focused on the rites, which are identified and listed differently as *raze* by individual Syriac Churches. There were Papers on *Marriage, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Leaven (Malka) and Sign of the Cross*. There were papers/reactions from the Catholic, Oriental Orthodox and Assyrian Church traditions.

In all the Syriac Churches the marriage service has the same basic structure. For the sanctification of marriage in all the Syriac traditions, the presence of the priest and the commitment to lifelong love, and to procreation is essential. Of central importance, too, is the couple's mutual covenantal exchange of consent. Implicit in all the traditions there is to be seen an underlying concern for the welfare of the family. All the Syriac Churches teach the indissolubility of marriage. In common with the other Eastern Churches, the Syriac Churches do not lay stress on the concept of marriage as a contract. The Syriac Churches have never made any clear distinction in language between divorce and annulment<sup>34</sup>

The Dialogue turned its attention also to the listing of marriage among the seven *raze* of the Churches. In the Assyrian Church, from the 13<sup>th</sup> c. onwards marriage is not found among the seven *raze*. But in the liturgical tradition, their teaching is identical with the other churches of the Syriac tradition. The absence of marriage in the 13<sup>th</sup> c. list of Abdiso of Soba and Armenia does not mean that the sacramental character of marriage is denied in the Church of the East. The listing of seven *raze* may sometimes be helpful in a certain theological and catechetical context, but it is inappropriate in the context of the Syriac Churches, since the Syriac tradition does not make a distinction between sacraments and the sacramentals<sup>35</sup>. We have to understand this in order to understand the inclusion of *Malka* (holy leaven) and Sign of the Cross as two *raze* of the Church of the East in the list of Abdiso. Both *Malka* and Sign of the Cross are *raze* of Christ himself. So Abdiso gave preference to them over marriage in order to complete the number seven. This shows that the listing of seven *raze* does not have particular consequence in the Syriac tradition. What matters is the substance of what each particular *raza* conveys<sup>36</sup>.

In all the Syriac Churches there is the anointing of the sick. It takes place in a variety of ways in the various traditions. There is a liturgical action whereby priest conveys divine grace of healing and forgiveness of sins to a sick person. But in the Assyrian Church this is not seen among the listing of Abdiso of the seven *raze*.

Abdiso has Holy Leaven (*Malka*) and Sign of the Cross among his listing of the seven *raze*. We have to understand the theological sense and function of

<sup>34</sup> *Syriac Dialogue V*, from the *Joint communiqué*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

the rites rather than its sacramentality. Holy Leaven<sup>37</sup> is a symbol to link with the Last Supper and the death on the Cross-with the present celebration of the Eucharist. So it is a *raza* of unity: 1. unbroken continuity of the rite and indicates apostolicity. 2. indicating ecclesial communion or legitimacy as the Western church puts it. It is a symbol of unity between the bishop and the local churches.

The Papers on the Sign of the Cross clearly indicated that all the Syriac Churches share in an extremely rich and profound soteriological theology of the Cross. The Sign of the Cross with its Trinitarian dimension, itself is seen as the perfecter and seal of all the *raze* and without it no liturgical rite would be complete.

The joint communiqué gave definition of *raza*: „*Raza* in a liturgical context, is a symbolic action, founded on the economy of salvation in Christ, which is performed by the Church as a salvific action with eschatological dimension through the ministry of a bishop or a priest. Through a *raza*, life-giving grace is effectively communicated by the power of the Holy Spirit to a believer who receives this grace through faith and prayer”<sup>38</sup>.

The sixth Dialogue (*Sacramental theology in the Syriac Churches-Part III*) is to be held in 2003 in Vienna. The topics to be discussed are: *Eucharist, Penance, and Priesthood*. The three volumes (vols. 4, 5, 6) together would be a good introduction to the Sacramental theology of the Syriac Churches and a model for further development along this line.

## 6. Unity among the Assyrians

The two non-Catholic branches of the Church of the East are trying to get united. Although the division is of recent origin (1968), there are a lot of tribal and parochial elements underlying the division. The two groups in Kerala suc-

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<sup>37</sup> Holy Leaven (*Malka*): There is a legendary tradition in the East Syrian Church regarding the origin of Malka. After the Last Supper St. John took a loaf and he placed it under the crucified Lord and when blood poured from his side, John took the blood upon the loaf. John also kept with him a jar of water from John the Baptist. And the water from the crucified Lord mingled with this water from John the Baptist. Our Lord commanded them to take the same bread for the sacrament of His Body and the water for the sacrament of Baptism. When the disciples went forth to convert the nations, they divided this leaven amongst themselves, and they took oil of unction and mixed it with the water, which was kept in the vessel and they divided this also amongst themselves to be a leaven for Baptism. This loaf of John they bruised into powder, then mixed it with flower and salt and divided it among them, each portion being put into a separate vessel to serve as leaven for the Body and Blood of Christ in the Church. In the preparation of the Eucharistic bread, they used to put a tiny portion of it. Eventually there was a ceremony of preparing this holy leaven: they mix wheat flour, salt, olive oil and a few drops of water and a portion of the old holy leaven and then dried it for the use. Obviously there was no actual leavening agent.

<sup>38</sup> *Syriac Dialogue IV, Joint communiqué.*

ceeded in getting united in 1995. The two groups in Kerala together accepted Mar Dinkha as the head of the Church of the East. As a consequence, this group in Kerala adopted the Gregorian calendar. This was a great ecumenical achievement as far as Kerala, India is concerned, where the two groups were engaged civil litigations for a long time. We hope that slowly this type of understanding may be arrived at also in the other parts of the world among the Assyrians<sup>39</sup>

## 7. Unity between the Assyrian and Chaldean Churches

Since there is unity in Christology, the Roman Catholic Church encourages unity of action between the Chaldean Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. These two branches of the Church of the East had a common and united life for 16 centuries. During the Third Dialogue the Assyrian delegates announced their decision to seek ways and means for the full communion with the Chaldean Church. As a result both the churches together have set up a joint commission for unity and they have a plan for action<sup>40</sup>.

## 8. Catholic-Assyrian Theological Commission

As a follow up of the joint declaration between the Pope and the Patriarch in 1994, a joint theological commission was constituted. The purpose of the commission is to study the still existing real or apparent differences between the two Churches. The joint commission studied the sacramental life of the Church of the East. One of the important results of the study is the acceptance of the anaphora of Addai and Mari as it is in its original form. In the oldest manuscripts of the above anaphora one does not find the institution narrative. Second achievement is the permission for Eucharistic inter-communion for the faithful of the Chaldean and the Assyrian Churches. There also emerged an understanding regarding the varying lists of the sacraments in both traditions<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. „The Harp”, vol. XI-XII (1998-99), 97.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*; *Syriac Dialogue IV*, 143-144.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 98; „Information Service” 107 (2001) 2-3, 86; „Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East”, in: „Christian Orient”, vol. 22/4 (2001), 152-154. It was published in Rome on July, 20th, 2001; *Syriac Dialogue IV*, 141-143.

## Dialog syryjski na forum *Pro Oriente*

### Streszczenie

Autor artykułu podejmuje problematykę dialogu pomiędzy Kościołami tradycji syryjskiej, prezentując przebieg i osiągnięcia prac powstałej w 1994 r. tzw. Komisji syryjskiej, zrzeszającej przedstawicieli wszystkich Kościołów tej tradycji.

Dzisiejsze Kościoły tradycji syryjskiej stanowiły w pierwszych wiekach swego istnienia jeden Kościół. Papież Jan Paweł II określił go pierwszym Kościołem, po którym powstały dopiero Kościoły grecki i łaciński. Od czasów apostoelskich Kościół ten rozprzestrzenił się we Wschodnim Cesarstwie Rzymskim, Imperium Perskim oraz w Indiach. Po soborach w Efezie (431) i Chalcedonie (451) jeden Kościół syryjski uległ podziałowi na kilka grup. Obecnie do Kościołów syryjskich zaliczamy Kościoły, które przynależą do zachodniosyryjskiej i wschodniosyryjskiej (chalcedońskiej) tradycji liturgicznej. Niektóre z nich pozostają w pełnej kanonicznej jedności z Kościołem rzymskokatolickim.

Do tzw. Komisji syryjskiej przynależy po jednym przedstawicielu z każdego Kościoła tradycji syryjskiej oraz reprezentanci fundacji *Pro Oriente*. Głównym celem Komisji jest doprowadzenie do połączenia wszystkich Kościołów tradycji syryjskiej w pełnej komunii. Od chwili powstania aż do tej pory Komisja odbyła 12 spotkań. Główna tematyka spotkań dotyczyła chrystologii Kościoła Asyryjskiego. Komisja zwołała dotychczas także pięć „Konsultacji syryjskich”, zwanych także „Dialogami syryjskimi”, które zajmowały się historycznymi i doktrynalnymi zagadnieniami dotyczącymi Kościołów Wschodu. Podjęto także kwestię nestorianizmu. Wyjaśniono wówczas, że należy rozróżnić pomiędzy herezją nestoriańską, nauczaniem Nestoriusza i chrystologią Kościoła Asyryjskiego. Zwrócono także uwagę, że dopuszczalne jest istnienie różnych, wzajemnie niewykluczających się, ujęć chrystologicznych w ramach jednego Kościoła. Postulowano równocześnie podjęcie próby nowego określenia tajemnicy wiary przy użyciu terminów współczesnej filozofii i teologii oraz dzisiejszego języka.

Autor artykułu omawia także podjęte przez Komisję wyjaśnienia starożytnych chrystologicznych terminów, które przyczyniły się do podziału Kościoła w V w. Szczegółowo podejmuje historyczno-dogmatyczną refleksję nad trzema kluczowymi pojęciami, określającymi relację ludzkiej i boskiej natury w osobie Jezusa Chrystusa: *kyana*, *qnoma* i *parsopa*, przedstawiając uwarunkowania i przyczyny nieporozumień, które doprowadziły do oskarżenia o herezję nestorianizmu i monofizytyzmu. Komisja syryjska wypracowała ostatecznie stanowisko, w którym stwierdzono potrzebę rewizji anatem nałożonych na Teodora

z Mopsuestii oraz wyraźnego odróżnienia osoby Nestoriusza, jego wiary i pastoralnych intencji, od herezji, zwanej nestorianizmem.

Na dwóch ostatnich posiedzeniach Komisji (w 2000 r. i 2002 r.) zajęto się sakramentologią i sakramentalnym życiem Kościołów syryjskich. Syryjskim odpowiednikiem pojęć *sacramentum* i *mysterion* jest *raza*. Syryjska teologia pod wpływem teologii zachodniej przyjęła także symboliczną liczbę siedem, przy czym nigdy wyraźnie nie określono listy siedmiu sakramentów. Nie odróżnia się bowiem tak jednoznacznie pomiędzy sakramentami i sakramentaliami. Natomiast sama teologia sakramentów tradycji syryjskiej nie odbiega w istocie od sakramentologii Kościoła Zachodniego. Różnica istnieje w odniesieniu do sakramentów inicjacji, które tradycja syryjska ujmuje jako jedną czynność.

W końcowej części artykułu Autor syntetycznie omawia podjęte już w łonie Kościoła syryjskiego i zakończone powodzeniem wysiłki zjednoczeniowe. Pierwszy przypadek dotyczy zjednoczenia dwu różnych grup Kościoła Asyryjskiego w Kerali. Drugi – otwarcia możliwości interkomunii między wiernymi Chaldejskiego Kościoła Katolickiego i Kościoła Asyryjskiego.

R. Porada