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From the Bishop's Desk The Chaldean Language and Culture

The Chaldean vernacular language, which is the major living dialect of Aramaic, has been and remains the main vehicle through which the historic culture of Mesopotamia was transmitted, establishing linguistic continuity in Mesopotamia from 1000 B.C. to the present time. Though the Chaldean Church is not restricted to the Chaldean people, the majority of her people are of Chaldean heritage.

It is a matter of fact that present-day Chaldeans, in great majority, use the Chaldean language as the main tool of communication among themselves all over the world: in their homes, clubs, gatherings, songs, radio and television programs, newsletters, etc. It is also the very language that they try to transmit to their children living in the different countries of their immigration. If the Chaldean language is lost, the civil identity of Chaldeans will be dangerously compromised.

Many Assyrians, speaking the Assyrian language, belong also to the Chaldean Church. The modern-day vernacular Assyrian language is an important dialect of Aramaic as well. The Assyrian language plays, in regard to the Assyrian people's life, similar role that the Chaldean language plays in regard to Chaldean people.

Chaldean and Assyrian vernacular languages, both being but variant dialects of the same Aramaic language, and which are close to each other in most aspects, could continue their life either by remaining distinct or by merging into one *lingua franca* for both segments. This kind of decision should be made by valid and qualified representatives of both sides. The fact remains that for Chaldeans and Assyrians, dispersed today in the five continents, their vernacular language is the cultural belt that binds them together. Loosing it will result drastically in loosing the feeling of common belonging to one cultural and social community.

The Chaldean Church, evidently, has a mandate that is much larger than cultural and social considerations, and should use all linguistic tools to educate her people in the Faith, and to perform her worship in the Liturgy. Other languages, such as Arabic, English, French, etc. may certainly be used as auxiliaries to the Classical Syriac and vernacular Chaldean or Assyrian. But, preserving a central core of Aramaic, especially in the liturgy, is an absolute must, in order to insure the particularity and the historic continuity of the Assyro-Chaldean Church of the East.

**CHALDEAN AND ASSYRIAN 2-DAY YOUTH
CONVENTION OF ST. PETER CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF THE USA**

**THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, JULY 1ST AND 2ND OF THE
YEAR 2004**

By Fr. Michael Bazzi



During their official diocesan meeting, the Bishop and priests of St. Peter Diocese decided to have the first Convention for young Chaldean and Assyrian Catholics to gather in unity. Therefore, we are trying to accomplish the wish of the Bishop and priests of our Diocese. We are looking for good Chaldeans and Assyrians who have leadership qualities and are committed, are willing to sacrifice, serve, dedicate their time, and share their talents to make this dream come true. The Convention is an event that brings together young Chaldean and Assyrian Catholics from all over California and Arizona. Our Convention will take place at St. Peter Chaldean Catholic Cathedral. Young people will gather for Bible teaching, perpetual adoration, confession, and the Eucharist. Participants our youth between the ages 15 and 30 are not required to pay any specified fee for this convention. The young Chaldean and Assyrian Catholics are simply invited to come and participate.

The purpose of this convention is to achieve unity between the members of St. Peter Diocese by providing a mutual understanding and deep appreciation for the traditions and spirituality of our church. Young Chaldean and Assyrian Catholics will gather from all seven parishes and three missions to celebrate Mass, listen to the word of God, receive his forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation (which can be done at Mass or at any time throughout the convention), pray together, meditate, and meet Jesus through adoration before the blessed Sacrament.

Through this gathering, young people will gain a positive presentation of the central doctrines of our faith that are shared between the churches, including believing in one God, the Holy Trinity, the sacraments, the liturgy, and the national history of Chaldeans and Assyrians. We are all joining to build up love and appreciation of each other without criticism of anyone or debate of any controversy, but to learn that Jesus loves them and desires them to respond with love.

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ماهي الباعوثا؟

الباعوثا كلمة كلدانية تعني: طلبة، إلتماس، تضرع. طقسياً: هي زمن ليتورجي/ طقسى، تستمر مدة ثلاثة ايام، من الاثنين الى الاربعاء، يسودها طابع التوبة والصوم والندم على ما يقترفه الانسان من زلات وأخطاء ضد الله والناس. تقع الباعوثا كل سنة في الاسبوع الخامس من موسم الدنح، وبالتحديد قبل ثلاثة اسابيع من مجيء الصوم الكبير. في اليوم الثالث والاخير يحتفل بقداس رازي كبير وذلك لمناسبة انتهاء فترة الحداد والصوم وبدء حياة جديدة.

1- الباعوثا كتابياً

بمجرد مطالعة سفر يونان النبي ذي الفصول الاربعة، فاننا سنقف على اساس الباعوثا كتابياً (اي من الكتاب المقدس). الله يرغب بخلص شعب نينوى، ويونان يرفض ان يكون وسيطاً في هذا لاعتقاده بان شعب نينوى هو شعب غير مؤمن، فيعاقب الله يونان اذ يلقيه في جوف الحوت ثلاثة ايام وثلاث ليال. هنا يشبهه يونان اعماق البحار وجوف الحوت وكأنهما "مثنوى الاموات"، واذ يسمع الله تضرعه، يأمر الحوت بأن يبصق بيونان الى اليس ثانية¹، انذاك يتوجه يونان الى انذار نينوى فيتوب اهلها اجمعين ويصومون هم ومواشيهم على الفور ومن دون معارضة او مُساءلة .

2- الباعوثا تاريخياً

يمكننا القول بأننا هنا نواجه معضلة تحديد وقت البدء او دخول صلاة الباعوثا في تقليدنا الكنسي الكلداني المشرقي. لذا سحاول هنا ان اقف على بعض العوامل اليسيرة التي منها نستطيع ان نستشف الزمن التقريبي للباعوثا:
أ- الطقس الكلداني: من البديهي ان الطقس الكلداني قد رُتب ونُظم في حوالي (ق 7). كتاب الصلاة الطقسية: "حوذرة سهيذ" يضع دياجة لصلاة الباعوثا ناسباً اياها الى سببين اولهما قصة يونان التي اتينا على ذكرها اعلاه، وثانيهما قصة وباء الطاعون الذي فتك بعشرات الالاف، وكان هذا في منتصف (ق 6) جدير بالذكر ان هناك كنائس شرقية اخرى تحتفظ في طقسها بصلاة الباعوثا ومنها: الكنيسة السريانية، والكنيسة القبطية (التي تحتفظ بالصوم ايضا)، والكنيسة المارونية (اوقفتها منذ القرن 19)، وربما هناك كنائس اخرى !

ب- مؤلفو الصلوات: ان معظم صلوات الباعوثا الكلدانية يعود وضعها وتاليفها الى الكاتين القديسين العظمين مار افرام (307-373) ومار نرساي (399-503)، اي في القرنين 4 و5. فالسؤال الذي يطرح نفسه هو: هل كانت الباعوثا موجودة كنوع من ممارسة طقسية للتوبة منذ ذلك الوقت المبكر؟ واذا ما كان الجواب نفياً، فكيف يعقل ان يكتب هذان الجهذان صلواتاً واشعاراً عن باعوثا اهل نينوى وهم لا يعرفونها وخاصة نرساي؟ ومن الجدير بالذكر أن نرساي ولد في قرية تقع شمالي شرق مدينة الموصل الحالية²، فلا بد والحال هذه ان تكون ذكرى توبة اهل نينوى موجودة ومُمارسة في ايامه، هذا ان لم تكن سابقة لوقته بسبب اشعار مار افرام حول توبة اهل نينوى التي سبقته بمدة ليست بالهينة.

1 - عندما يسأل السيد المسيح عن آية يعطي لهم اية يونان النبي، لماذا؟ لان الحوت لم يقدر ان يتلع يونان وهو نبي الله، هكذا فان "مثنوى الاموات" لم يقدر ان يتلع يسوع عند موته، فبرده عند قيامته.

2- *Dizionario Enciclopedico Dell'Oriente Cristiano*, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma 2000.

ج- قصة الطاعون "شرعوطا": يُروى في تاريخ كنيسةنا المشرقية بان وباء الطاعون ضرب منطقة الشرق الاوسط عموماً، وبلاد ما بين النهرين على وجه الخصوص واستمر الوباء مدى 4 سنين و (50 سنة حسب رأى البعض). بدأ الوباء يفتك بالفقراء اولاً ثم ما لبث ان لحق بالاغنياء ايضاً، ولم يتوقف الملاك من حصد النفوس الا بعدما انذر الناس بوجوب التوبة. من المؤكد بان الوباء توقف في عهد الجاثاليق حزقيال (570-581) ويقول صاحب كتاب المجدل "ان مطران بيت كرمي³ واسقف نينوى اتفقا على اقامة صلاة وصوم مدة ثلاثة ايام لكي يرفع الله عنهم هذا الوباء، وأطلعوا الجاثاليق على نواياهما فاستحسن الامر، ودُعي: صوم نينوى او باعوثا نينوى، على غرار توبة اهل نينوى. واستجاب الله ادعيتهم وقبل صومهم وابطل الوباء وراح الانام"⁴.

د- باعوثا دبثولاثا/ باعوثة العذارى: قصة اخرى من تاريخنا الكنسي في حدود (ق 8) زمن الدولة الاموية، اذ هدد الوليد الاول المعروف بعدائه للمسيحيين، بنهب وسلب بلاد ما بين النهرين العليا، واسر اهلها وجعل راهباتها جواري له ولحاشيته. هكذا قامت الراهبات العذارى بتلاوة صلاة الباعوثا والتضرع الى الله بقلب مشتعل، كي ينجيهن من بلاياهن، فيأخذ الله روح الملك المعتدي، وتنتهي محنتهن.

هـ - باعوثات اخرى: ما ان يبدأ المرء بالبحث عن موضوع الباعوثا حتى يجد نفسه امام باعوثات اخرى يجهلها، فعلى سبيل المثال هناك باعوثا دمار زيا، وهو قديس مشرقي من (ق 5)، تبدأ باعوثته من الاثنيين الاول بعد الميلاد وتستمر حتى الاربعاء. تعمل له الباعوثا لانه قديس بار وصانع معجزات. كما وهناك باعوثا دمار ايليا ... وربما هناك اخرى غيرها. اما اليوم فبالتركيز قد حل محل باعوثا القديسين في الكنيسة الكاثوليكية انواع اخرى من نظم الصوم والصلاة واشهر هذه النظم واكثرها ممارسة الان هو نظام التسامحية، كتساعية القديسة ريتا او تساعية مار انطونيوس اوغيرهم من الشفعاء.

خاتمة:

نستشف مما سبق بان الباعوثا هي ارث اصيل في تراثنا الكنسي المشرقي، وهي ليست صلاة حصرية على الكلدان فقط، بل انها صلاة وممارسة دينية وتقوية الفتها شعوب المشرق عموماً. لذا لايمكننا ان نُجزم بان اصل الباعوثا هو من عندنا، الا ان قصة يونان المرتبطة بنينوى تشجعنا على الالتزام بهذه الفكرة، إضافة الى الظروف والعوامل التاريخية من نكبات وكوارث، كلها ساهمت في جعل هذه الصلاة مظهرة تقوية سنوية للتوبة الحقيقية النابعة من القلب.

Fr. Felix Bar Shabi

3 - بيت كرمي كانت ابرشية واسعة تمتد من كركوك شمالاً ونزولا حتى مشارف بغداد من الجنوب.

4 - البير ابونا، تاريخ الكنيسة السريانية الشرقية، ج1، ط4، بيروت 1999، ص 117-118.

“Mawtwa Qadhmaya”

From Wednesday of Ba’utha
A Masterpiece of Anthropology



By Andy Younan

Introduction

February second through fourth this year marks, in the liturgical calendar of our Church, the Memorial of the legendary visit of Jonah to Nineveh. As a glance at our prayer books will show, these three days are among the richest periods of the entire liturgical year – there are about 160 pages of prayers for this Memorial in the *Hudhra*, the official book of prayer of the Church.

Among these pages is a sermon on the understanding of human nature, or anthropology, by Mar Narsai, who lived from around 400 to 503 AD, and was the head and co-founder of the School of Nisibis. This sermon, or “Memra,” was divided into eleven sections called “Madrasha” and “Qiryane,” and is sung on Wednesday of Ba’utha. It is a masterpiece of literature. This will be a short commentary on the first “Qiryana.”

Initial Themes

The Memra begins with a prayer to God for the enlightenment and strength needed to discuss the difficult subject of human nature. In fact, the entire Memra is composed as a single prayer – every verse is addressed to God, even those which are part of the exposition. At any rate, this initial prayer for strength and enlightenment makes up the first Madrasha. The first Qiryana, or “Reading,” which our liturgical fathers selected, begins with three parallel verses:

- O Painter of the world in undulling spiritual paint:
Scour the filth of ignorance from our mind.
- O Constructor of bodies and Breather of the soul into its members:
Tighten our inclinations, that we may not slacken before enticements.
- O Honorer of man as surpassing all else due to his love,
Have pity on the image of your Honor that it may not be shamed.

The three verses each have a similar structure: they begin with a vocative address to God (“O Painter,” “O Constructor,” etc.), and end with a request (“scour,” “tighten,” etc.). The first verse establishes a sophisticated cosmology: the world is a work of art painted by God in colors that somehow share in his own eternity. The three verses introduce three of the main themes that Narsai will deal with throughout the work: the human being is intellectual and capable of love, is made up of a body and a soul, and is the image of God. While the third verse compares human nature to the nature of God, the fourth contrasts them:

- You have named our composition in the name of your Essence that is without composition.
May your honored name not be dulled in our dullness.

While the human being is composed of body and soul, God’s Essence does not have any such “parts.” The second part of this verse shows a concern that human action is capable of not “living up” to the nobility of its creation.

The following three verses are similar to the first three of this Qiryana, since they follow a parallel form, each beginning with the phrase “in us:”

- In us you have made manifest your great love to your works,
Do not manifest in us a sign of wrath against the work of your hands.
- In us you have concluded the great expansion of your workmanship,
And in our constitution you have contained the earthly and the heavenly.
- In us you have constituted the height and depth as one body:
Mute in our body, intellectual in our soul – a great marvel!

The themes of the first three verses are here repeated, in reverse order: we are the sign of God’s love, we have both body and soul (“the earthly and the heavenly”), and we have a mind.

Greatness and Lowliness in Human Nature

Following this, there are eight verses which ask God for help, making a “contract” with him for aid in understanding the subject matter. Then, once the theme is taken up again, Narsai begins:

- In the configuration of our figure I saw tied the whole creation,
And I called to man to “come, and see all in our nature.”
- Our nature leads me to examine the natures that are tied to it:
How and how much this frail thing was worthy to contain!
- In our nature, I saw the sciences of your Divinity,
And I reflected that there is hope for man, sinner though he is.
- I saw the Name of your Essence dwelling in him as in a temple,
And a wondering seized me – how can the contemptible suffice for the Unseen?
- It is indeed contemptible, yet you honor it without measure,
And who would not marvel at this worthlessness which you have selected as above all?

The central paradox for Narsai is the combination of the weakness and sinfulness of our race with its sublime dignity: though the human being is contemptible in his sinfulness, he is still the temple of God, and is above all creatures.

Morality, Nature and Christ

As a moralist, then, Narsai sees sin as obviously belonging to the lower part of human nature, and redemption as being tied to an awareness of the higher part. In other words, if a human being is to act well, he must first realize the marvelous dignity that is within him, and that is brought out in his loving acceptance of his vocation:

- If your Lordship has made him lord over all that is,
Who would not join himself to the yoke of his life’s work?
- If your Knowledge has called and appointed him to an exalted position,
Who would not confess that his appointment is true and his authority great?
- If your Obscurity uncovers itself to your servant by his manifestation,
Who would not gather his perceptions from all else for the sake of his composition?
- If the universal artistry is completed in him,
Who would not labor in his artistry without interruption?

Finally, it is not simply the case that the human being is created in God’s image, or is given lordship over creation, or even that the whole creation is *completed* in him. Human nature is even beyond these honors. The highest instance of human nature, and the ultimate fulfillment of every human nature, for Narsai, is in the person of Jesus Christ:

- If that Word begotten of you unites with him,
Who would not call him emperor of height and depth?
- If you will judge the earth in him at the end of time,
Who would not fear the trial that is in his hands?
- If he is the one with power over this world and that to come,
Who would not believe that he is truly the Son of God?

Not only must we accept our call to be the completion and fulfillment of God’s creation if we are to be moral and follow God’s commands: we must live in Christ and share his life. This realization, that human nature is so noble as to be, in the instance of Christ, truly the Son of God, concludes the introduction to the sermon. The final verses are another supplication, or Ba’utha, for help in continuing this work.