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AN ANAPHORA PRAYER COMPOSED BY  
THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA

BY

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One of the three anaphoras still used by the Christians who celebrate the Chaldean rite is ascribed to their great doctor, the Interpreter of Scripture, Theodore of Mopsuestia (1). However, even though some of his theology is clearly incorporated into its text, it is not altogether certain that Theodore was himself its author, even in its original form (2).

Nonetheless, we do know of at least one anaphoric prayer put in the mouth of Christ, that occurred in the genuine writings of the Bishop of Mopsuestia, and we can still form a reasonably accurate picture of parts of its exact text. It was a eucharistic prayer, that is, the prayer that is devoted in the Mass to the praise of God, his work of creation and redemption and extends from the initial dialogue to the Narration of the Institution of the Eucharist by Christ or to the epiclesis that in some rites precedes the Narration.

The prayer is recorded in two sources, the *Homily on the Mysteries*, that is attributed to Narsai (3), and the *Explanation of the Pasch*, by Cyrus of

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(1) No critical edition of the Syriac text has ever been published. The best editions available are those in J.E.Y. KELAITA, *The Liturgy of the Church of the East* (Mosul, 1928), and in the missal published by the Anglican mission, *Liturgia sanctorum Apostolorum Adaei et Maris* (Urmia, 1890). The oldest known manuscript is the 10th or 11th century Mar Eša'ya Ĥudhra; cf. W.F. MACOMBER, *The Oldest Known Text of the Anaphora of the Apostles Adaei and Mari*, in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 32 (1966), 340, 349-354. I have my own handwritten copy of its text and hope to edit it some day.

(2) Cf. the study of F.E. BRIGHTMAN, *The Anaphora of Theodore*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1930), 160-164.

(3) Edited by A. MINGANA, *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina*, vol. I (Mosul, 1905), 284 f., and translated into English by R.H. CONNOLLY, *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai* (= *Texts and Studies*, vol. VIII, fasc. 1, Cambridge, 1909).

Edessa (4). Cyrus fails to mention the fact that the prayer was originally composed by Theodore and not by himself. Narsai, on the other hand, who repeats what clearly can only have been in origin the same prayer, says explicitly that the Bishop of Mopsuestia was its author: "That (Christ) gave thanks and blessed is written in the saving Gospel; what he said, the chosen Apostles have not made known to us. The master of teachers and interpreters, Theodore, has handed on (to us) that our Lord spoke thus when he took bread."

Narsai does not identify the precise work of Theodore in which the prayer was found. However, since the Interpreter was commenting on the phrase, "he gave thanks," found in the accounts that both Matthew and Mark give of what Christ said at the Last Supper over the chalice, and since the prayer is absent from Theodore's commentary on the Mass in his *Catechetical Homilies* (5), it seems to me most probable that it occurred in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. It would appear that Theodore considered the thanks that Christ gave as the model of the eucharistic prayer that we ought to say every time that we perform the Mysteries in memory of Christ and thought it important, therefore, to give concrete expression to his idea of what Christ's prayer of thanksgiving would have been like. Cyrus puts it this way: "It being clear by (the phrase,) "he gave thanks," that he is teaching us about the thanksgiving due to God the Lord of all, that he offered up on behalf of the entire race, speaking, for example, thus: 'Worthy of all glory... all sin.' And he made use of words like these in their presence, as though to teach them that they, too, should make use of words of thanksgiving when drawing near to celebrate these Mysteries" (6).

Neither Narsai nor Cyrus of Edessa gives the exact words of the Interpreter's prayer. Narsai, even though he means to quote the words of Theo-

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(4) Edited and translated into English by W.F. MACOMBER, *Six Explanations of the Liturgical Feasts by Cyrus of Edessa* (= *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 355, 356/scriptores syri 155, 156, Louvain, 1974), text pp. 57 f./transl., pp. 49 f.

(5) R. TONNEAU and R. DEVRESSE, *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste* (= *Studi e Testi* 145, Vatican City, 1949), pp. 549-551.

(6) *Loc. cit.*

dore, is obliged by the exigencies of the meter in which he expresses himself to adapt them. Cyrus, on the other hand, does not purport to be quoting someone else's words and has, consequently, freedom to modify them according to his own taste or whim. Nonetheless, the agreement between the two versions of the prayer is at certain points quite striking and extends not merely to the general sense, but even to the exact words. From two other passages it is known that Cyrus does occasionally reproduce the exact words of the Bishop of Mopsuestia, even without any acknowledgment of the fact (7), and I think that we may safely presume that he has done the same here, too, wherever there is a substantial agreement between the two versions in the wording. In other places where there is only a much vaguer agreement of sense, on the other hand, I would suspect that it is Narsai who adheres the more closely to the original text of Theodore, for he does claim to be quoting him.

I give below both text and English translation of the two versions of the prayer. In the case of Cyrus, I make use of my own critical edition of the text and of my published translation with minor modifications. As regards Narsai, on the other hand, I have at my disposal only the printed edition of the text by Mingana (= M), which is by no means critical, but I do also have a handwritten copy, made by the Reverend Douglas Webb of Wilburton, England, of Cambridge University, Pembroke College MS. 311 (1896 A.D.) (= P), as a check; the translation is my own. The words of the texts that are underlined are those that are common to the two versions, and the corresponding words of the translations are printed in italics.

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(7) *Explanation of the Pasch I*, 3 and 4 (text, pp. 44 and 45/transl., pp. 38 and 39).





As can be readily seen, the beginning of both versions is substantially identical, and there can be little doubt that Cyrus has here preserved the translation of the Interpreter's exact words. As the prayer progresses, however, the agreement becomes steadily less until, at the end, there is little more than a vague community of ideas. One may ask, therefore, which version is closest to the original in the latter parts. This is indeed a difficult, if not impossible, question to answer. The ideas found in Narsai that are lacking in Cyrus' version, the renewal of all things, the fulfilment of ancient promises, the eradication of sin from human nature and the conferring on it of bodily resurrection, are all thoroughly consonant with the theology of the Bishop of Mopsuestia, but the same can be said for the ideas found in Cyrus that are lacking in Narsai, the signs of redemption proposed to men, the sealing of the former dispensation, the revelation of redemption and the conferring of sinlessness. One would be tempted to try a skillful harmony of the two versions, but we could have no assurance that the result would be any closer to the original composition of Theodore and should doubtlessly abandon the attempt as futile.

It may be more important, however, to note the absence of the Sanctus in both versions, which is a strongly presumptive indication that it was also lacking in the original. Theodore, of course, was well acquainted with the Sanctus, as is clear from his *Catechetical Homilies* (15). Apparently, therefore, he did not consider the Sanctus to be a necessary element in an anaphora. One may also note the absence of any reference to creation such as is usually found in Antiochene anaphoras of classic form (16).

Theologically, the prayer is typically Mopsuestenian, and in a way that is not so true of the anaphora that tradition has ascribed to him. Here we glimpse God's entire economy of salvation, man's fall, the divine pedagogy by types, the supreme revelation of salvation in the death and resurrection of Christ and the granting of sinlessness and immortality to all. We even have a fairly characteristic bit of Mopsuestenian christology

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(15) TONNEAU, pp. 543-549.

(16) Especially the anaphora of the Missa Clementina and that of James; cf. F.E. BRIGHTMAN, *Liturgies Eastern and Western* (Oxford, 1896), pp. 15 f. and 50 f.

implied by this prayer which Christ directs to God (the Word), who had assumed him and joined him to himself.

One may speculate whether Theodore continued this model anaphora with Christ's mandate of repetition, an anamnesis and an epiclesis. My opinion is that he did not, seeing that his primary purpose in composing the prayer was to illustrate the words of thanksgiving that Christ used at the Last Supper, which the Gospel narrative mentions, but does not express. Indeed, he may well have terminated the prayer with the formula of institution over the bread, as Cyrus does. If this be so, we may conclude from this prayer only to Theodore's ideas on the contents of an ideal eucharistic prayer and on its relationship to the Narration of the Institution.