Directing Our Hearts' Gaze Toward the Altar:
Eucharistic Adoration and the Spirituality of the Church of the East
By: Father Rodney Abasso

Besides God and our Lady, two things that I love are the spirituality of our Church and being Catholic.

I am a Chaldean Catholic priest, and my Church is one branch of an ancient tradition: the Church of the East, planted in the Persian Empire by the saints Thomas, Addai, and Mari. That one ancient Church has several descendants today — the Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, and the Syro-Malabar Church. Some of us are in communion with Rome and some are not. But the tradition we inherited is the same tradition, and we still pray the same prayers, including the ancient anaphora of Addai and Mari, although in different ways.

Our tradition beautifully tells us how to stand in the presence of the Holy Mysteries. On the feasts of our Lord the celebrant sings: "Awesome are You, Most High God, in Your holy sanctuary forever and ever! Blessed be the glory of the Lord, from His holy dwelling place!" And the people answer: "The Coal which the prophet saw, the angel held with tongs. But now in the sanctuary, the priests bear it in their hands! Come, let us draw near to Him with holiness in body and soul. This is indeed the Mystery which was hidden and is given for our sake for the remission of sins."[1] In the Mass itself, just before he breaks the Body, the priest lifts the host and kisses it, taking care that his lips do not touch it — honoring the Lord before he receives Him.[2] Centuries before anyone among us had seen a monstrance, our liturgy was teaching our people where to look, and how to reverentially and piously tremble before our loving God.

One of the most life-transforming and real gifts of my life as a Catholic is Eucharistic adoration. To sit in front of the Lord face to face and converse with Him, as Moses did on Sinai, and to let my soul be made radiant by the glory of God — something words cannot describe. When Moses came down from that mountain his face was shining and he did not even know it. That is what adoration has done in me. Adoration is the place where I found healing for wounds I carried for years, and where I came to know myself. Which is why it thrills me that so many of our churches in our diocese now have adoration chapels, and that our people can have that experience too.

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[1] Hymn "Awesome Are You" (d-Hilat), Feast of the Nativity (Yalda), 25 December, in *Liturgical Propers (Naqpayatha) for Sundays, Feast Days, and Memorials of the Chaldean Catholic Church of the East*, the eparchy's own English text, published at https://chaldeanchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/Sunday-Propers-Naqpayatha-English.pdf. The d-Hilat is sung antiphonally, the celebrant beginning and the people and servers answering. The rubric directs that it be said on the Feasts of our Lord, and the hymn recurs at Epiphany, the Resurrection, the Ascension and Pentecost. The propers are drawn from the Hudra.

[2] *The Eucharistic Liturgy: The Mass of the Apostles Mar Addai and Mar Mari*, in four languages, organized and printed by Fr. Sabri Kejbo and Fr. Frank Kalabat (Mother of God Church, 1998), 48, in the rubric for the elevation of the host before the fraction: "The priest then symbolically kisses the host but making sure that his lips do not touch the host." The gesture is old. The hermits' rite of the Quddashta has it at the same point, just before the fraction: "kiss it in the form of the cross, without bringing it near the lips" (Mingana Syr. 564, fol. 190b; Atto, 98; see n. 20); Atto places the rite's use between the tenth and twelfth centuries (79). He also records that the faithful, before receiving, place the host upon their eyes and kiss it (76).

The spreading of adoration chapels is the reason that I chose to write this article. I hear it often: we should not have Eucharistic adoration, because it is not part of the spirituality and history of our Church. This statement hurts me — and I should be honest that I am not a neutral party here. I have received too much from this practice to pretend I am weighing it coldly, and you should read what follows knowing that. But being pained by a question is not the same as answering it. So it does leave me wondering: are they right?

As far as I can see, there are only three possible answers. One: adoration is irreconcilable with our tradition, and we should do away with it. Two: it is not part of our tradition but is reconcilable, and so we keep it anyway and give credit where it is due — this is something borrowed from a sister Church, received with gratitude and named for what it is. Churches have always learned from one another, and there is no shame in admitting where something came from. Three: Eucharistic adoration is not only reconcilable with the history and spirituality of the Church of the East — not something foreign that we tolerate — but something our own tradition can account for, and can shape. I want to argue for the third.

To be honest, the first option is the hardest for me to consider fairly. I have watched people walk into that chapel carrying things they had carried for years, and walk out having set them down. That is not proof. A practice can bear fruit and still not belong to us, and I know it. But this is why I will not reach for the first option. Plus, setting a devotion aside because it came to us late is a much harder reach. Everything in every tradition was once new — the Hudra was new once, the churches we pray in were new at some point, and even the prayer *Qadisha Alaha*, "Holy God," was most likely added from the Greek tradition by Mar Aba.[3] Lateness makes a thing young; it does not make it foreign. So the first option needs a stronger claim than the one usually made for it: not that adoration is unlike our tradition, but that it works against it. That is the claim I want to test.

One thing has to be said before we begin, or the question gets asked unfairly. We tend to measure ourselves against our Latin brothers and sisters, and whatever we have received from them we are quick to call an imposition. But we forget that the Latin Church did not receive its own prayers and practices all at once either. It developed them over time, very often to meet the pastoral needs of its people, and Eucharistic adoration is one of them. Pope Pius XII said so himself: "the cult of adoring the Eucharist was founded and gradually developed as something distinct from the sacrifice of the Mass. The reservation of the sacred species for the sick and those in danger of death introduced the praiseworthy custom of adoring the blessed Sacrament which is reserved in our churches."[4] For most of the Church's history there was no single way of

[3] On the *Qadisha Alaha* (the Trisagion), see Mar Awa III (Royel), "The Memra of Patriarch Mar ʿĪšōʿyahb I of Arzōn (581–595): The Cause of the 'Holy God,'" *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 25.1 (2022), 85–136, at 109: "All evidence points to Mar Ābā I as the one who imported the Trisagion from Constantinople into the liturgy of the Church of the East," most likely during his stay there with Thomas of Edessa between 525 and 533. The attribution rests on the circumstances rather than on an early statement. Within a few decades Patriarch Ishoʿyahb I had written a whole memra explaining the hymn in the terms of our own theology, and drawing on it to refute the theopaschite addition "who was crucified for us."

[4] Pius XII, *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947), §131. The same sequence is stated in a current Roman liturgical book: *De Sacra Communione et de Cultu Mysterii Eucharistici extra Missam* (1973), §5 — viaticum is "the primary and original reason" for reserving the Eucharist outside Mass, with communion and adoration as secondary ends, and "the reservation of the sacrament for the sick led to the praiseworthy practice of adoring this heavenly food."

keeping the Sacrament — a room off the sanctuary, the sacristy, a dove hanging above the altar, a cupboard set into the wall, a tower standing beside it, a locked chest resting on the altar itself. A fixed tabernacle at the center of the main altar, which most of us assume is simply what a Catholic church looks like, was made the rule by two Italian bishops in the sixteenth century, and even then it took hold slowly; a German synod in 1688 was still telling its pastors they might put the tabernacle in the wall beside the altar instead.[5]

So to answer the adoration question, we have to look at two things that are related but not the same. The first is what our Church did with the Holy Mysteries once the liturgy was over: whether it kept them at all, and if it did, in what place and under what conditions. The second — and this is the real question — is whether people in our Church who were not receiving the Holy Mysteries ever directed worship toward them. That second question is the heart of adoration. Keeping the Mysteries only makes adoration possible. It is the looking and the honoring that make it adoration.

Let us begin with the first.

Where the Holy Mysteries Were Kept

This is a difficult question to answer, because scholars have not come to a settled conclusion about how far the Church of the East allowed the reservation of the Eucharist, or under what conditions.[6] But one thing is not in dispute. From the beginning, our Church has believed that the bread and wine are changed, by the invocation of the Holy Spirit, into the Body and Blood of Jesus.[7] In the fifth century Narsai, the great teacher of the School of Nisibis, put these words in

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[5] Cassian Folsom, O.S.B., "Bene et Firmiter: A Short History of Reservation of the Eucharist," *Sacred Architecture* 22 (2012), 14–17, and "Bene et Firmiter: Liturgical Norms Regarding the Reservation of the Eucharist," *Sacred Architecture* 23 (2013), 16–27. For the five competing medieval arrangements and the judgment that "there is no standard practice for the universal Church," Folsom follows M. Righetti, *Storia Liturgica* i, 546–52. The two bishops are Gian Matteo Giberti of Verona († 1543), who ordered the tabernacle set on the main altar "bene et firmiter," and Charles Borromeo, whose *Instructionum Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae* (1577) carried the custom through the Latin Church. The *Rituale Romanum* of 1614 took up the practice, and it became known as "the Roman custom." But the *Rituale*, unlike the Tridentine Missal and Breviary, was recommended rather than imposed: "Paul V did not abolish all other collections of the same kind, nor command every one to use only his book" (A. Fortescue, "Ritual," *Catholic Encyclopedia* 13, New York, 1912). The custom therefore spread only gradually. In 1609 the Synod of Constance allowed the Sacrament either on the altar itself "*secundum morem romanum*" or at the left side of the choir near the altar, and as late as 1688 the Synod of Paderborn still allowed the tabernacle in the wall beside the altar.

[6] The disagreement is real. P. Bedjan pointed to the passage of Dadishoʿ discussed below as "ce qui prouve l'usage de la Ste. Réserve" (preface to *Mar Isaacus Ninivita, De Perfectione Religiosa*, Leipzig, 1909, xvii); Th. J. Lamy gathered the material "in his way to show that the practice of these churches was practically the same as the practice of the R.C. church"; and Mgr I. E. Rahmani held that "tous les anciens documents attestent que les syriens, les grecs, et les coptes conservaient le saint sacrement" (*Les liturgies orientales et occidentales*, Beyrouth, 1929, 61–62). W. C. van Unnik takes the contrary view and judges Rahmani's statement "based totally upon Jacobite evidence" and in need of "some rectification" (*Nestorian Questions on the Administration of the Eucharist by Isho'yabh IV*, Haarlem, 1937, 209, 211, 242). The judgments of Bedjan, Lamy and Rahmani are given as van Unnik reports them. W. de Vries, writing a decade later, finds that among us reservation is "in general rejected in principle, and permitted only in exceptional cases and to a restricted extent," and against van Unnik he holds that "the permission for reservation is maintained later as well" (*Sakramententheologie bei den Nestorianern*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 133, Rome, 1947, 245, 247 n. 4; trans. from the German).

[7] What is in question among scholars is how our theologians explained this, not whether they confessed it. De Vries argues that they did not teach a change of substance, that many placed the real Body of Christ in heaven and

the mouth of Christ Himself: "Body and Blood do I make the bread and wine through the brooding and operation of the Holy Spirit." And he adds that Christ "did not style them a type or a similitude, but Body in reality and Blood in verity."[8] Eight centuries later, ʿAbdishoʿ says the same in his *Book of the Pearl*:

> Through this divine institution the bread is changed into His Holy Body, and the wine into His Precious Blood, and they impart, to all who receive them in faith and without doubting, the forgiveness of sins, purification, enlightenment, pardon, the great hope of the resurrection from the dead, the inheritance of heaven, and the new life. Whenever we approach these Sacraments we meet with Christ Himself, and His very Self we take into our hands and kiss, and thereby we are joined to and with Christ, His holy Body mixing with our bodies, and His pure Blood mingling with our blood, and by faith we know Him that is in heaven and Him that is in the Church, to be but one Body.[9]

We do not, though, have to take only the word of our own Church Fathers for that belief. In the 1840s an Anglican missionary named George Percy Badger lived among our people. He was no friend of Rome: among other things, he meant to show how far those of us who had united with Rome had altered our ancient books. He read our books carefully, and he concluded that we believe our Eucharist to be "a real partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, and not a bare sign of Christian discipleship" — the sign, he wrote, "not of an absent thing, but of the real Presence of the Saviour."[10]

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explained the presence as the union of the bread with that Body, after the pattern of their Christology, and that some — Babai the Great and the Anonymous Author among them — write as though they denied it (*Sakramententheologie*, 206–14). Yet his conclusion is that "it would be mistaken to draw from the texts adduced the conclusion that according to the Nestorians bread and wine are a mere image of the Body and Blood of the Lord, to which no reality whatever corresponds," and that by their own testimony "we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist in a true sense" (213–14; trans. from the German). He cites the passage of Narsai quoted in the text (n. 8). ʿAbdishoʿ uses both languages: "the bread was changed and became the Body of Christ," and "we represent through the bread the mystery of his Body" (*Ordo iudiciorum ecclesiasticorum*, Vosté's Latin, Vatican, 1940, 100–101, as cited by De Vries, 205–07). De Vries also finds that our fathers forbade reservation not because the elements lost their consecration but out of reverence (n. 14).

[8] Narsai, Homily XVII, in R. H. Connolly, *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, Texts and Studies 8.1 (Cambridge, 1909), 17; Connolly's gloss after "reality" (lit. "in exactness") is omitted. Narsai († c. 502) headed the School of Nisibis, and his liturgical homilies are among the earliest witnesses to the East Syriac Mass. A few lines later: "Wherefore the bread is strictly (or accurately) the Body of our Lord, and the wine is His Blood properly and truly."

[9] ʿAbdishoʿ bar Brikha, *Marganitha* (The Book of the Pearl) iv.5, "Of the Oblation," in G. P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals* (London, 1852), ii, 408–09. ʿAbdishoʿ, metropolitan of Nisibis († 1318), is among the last of our systematic theologians; the *Marganitha* treats God, creation, the dispensation, the sacraments and the things that prefigure the world to come. The passage stands in the chapter on the Oblation, immediately before the chapter on the Holy Leaven — it concerns the consecrated species, not the *malka*.

[10] Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, ii, 169. The weight of the admission lies in who makes it. Badger heads each chapter of the work with an Article of Religion and states in his preface that he means to show how far the Chaldeans "have altered their ancient formularies" since "their submission to the See of Rome." He qualifies the concession at ii, 171 with a gloss of his own — that the change is one "of use, virtue, and efficacy" — which sits awkwardly against the *Marganitha* he himself translates in his appendix. At ii, 172 he goes further: De Vries observes that Badger "wants to find the Protestant doctrine expressed in liturgical texts of the Nestorians, that the bread is taken as the Body through faith," and answers that the texts he cites show only that faith is a condition for fruitful reception (*Sakramententheologie*, 114 n. 3). That a witness looking for the Protestant reading still had to write "not a bare sign" is what gives his admission its weight. Badger also asserts at ii, 172 that there is no elevation of the elements among us, inferring it from the single liturgy he prints. Our own books and our own practice say otherwise: the Chaldean Mass has the priest elevate the host before the fraction (n. 2), and the West Syriac

So what did we do with that Body when the liturgy ended? The typical answer is nothing. The priest celebrated, the people received, and what remained was consumed. While in the early Western Church there are attestations to the faithful freely carrying the Sacrament home, that practice is one thing our Church would not allow. Instead our people came to the church. In fact, there is a beautiful story in the *Book of Governors* about an old solitary who could no longer walk, and who was carried on his disciple's back so that he could receive the Eucharist.[11] That is one of several stories. Another old man managed the journey once a week and no more. A third lived in a cave and came when he could. In a long book full of miracles, no one ever brings the Mysteries out to a monk in his cell. Men who could not walk were carried to where the Body of Christ was. Going to church is an important reality of our tradition, on which more will be said.

Does this mean that the sick and the imprisoned went without the Eucharist, then? No. That was the exception, and our fathers thought about it with great care. If a man was ill or dying, the priest was to take a particle, dip it in the chalice, and carry it to him before dawn while it was still dark — saying psalms in his heart the whole way, and not sitting down once until he had returned to the church and taken up his service again. Other rules add lights and incense, and readers walking in front, and forbid anyone carrying or attending the Eucharist to sit on the ground until they return to the church. The way the Eucharist is carried indicates a procession with our Lord. Later rules narrowed this to a prisoner or a man dangerously ill, at Easter, at night, and only with the bishop's permission.[12] The strictest ruling came later still, from Patriarch Ishoʿyahb IV, who allowed that in necessity the Mysteries might be brought as far as the outer door of the church, with lights and incense, but forbade going past that door.[13]

The reason our fathers were strict was that they feared the elements might decay or be desecrated.[14] One cannot be afraid that the Body of Christ will rot in a cupboard unless one is

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commentator Dionysius bar Salibi († 1171) likewise has the priest "elevate and extol" the mysteries before the people's eyes, and raise and show them to the whole people as a testimony (*The Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi on the Eucharist*, trans. Baby Varghese, Moran Etho 10, Piscataway, NJ, 2011, 9, 86).

[11] Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, ed. and trans. E. A. W. Budge (London, 1893), ii, 268. The other two episodes are at 408 and 634; see also Budge's note at 406 on anchorites in outlying cells coming down to the monastery church on Sundays. van Unnik (241) cites the same material to show that "dangerously ill" in Canon xviii is not an idle phrase.

[12] The dossier is assembled in van Unnik, commentary, 241–42: Ishoʿyahb I (published by Assemani, *B.O.* iii.1, 244); the Arabic Nomocanon in Riedel's translation, which adds the lights, the incense and the readers; Ishoʿ bar Nun, *ad Macarium* q. 42, permitting it to a sick man or a prisoner who is a true believer; Canon xviii of John bar Abgare, restricting it to Easter, at night, by the bishop's command; and George of Arbela, who combines the two.

[13] Ishoʿyahb IV, *Questions*, q. 51 (van Unnik, 171). van Unnik's comment at 242: "In contravention of these rules our Q. prefers to take the certain for the uncertain and forbids it." At 243 he traces the sequence: carrying a particle to the sick and to prisoners was itself a "limitation of the older practices," which "was even forbidden later and confined to the highest service of the whole year at Easter"; and "It is interesting to see the development among the Nestorians to a stricter observance. Our Q. is the strictest of all."

[14] van Unnik, 209: "The reason of it was that one was anxious that the elements should become corrupted; as is apparent from the parallel with the Lamb and the Manna." He then quotes Elias of Nisibis († 1046) rebuking the other Christian churches: "They keep it (the Eucharist) for a long time, and expose it to moths, to worms, to rot, to mice, and to other corruption; thus they give the lie to the word of Scripture when it says: no change and no decay shall touch his body" (Ps. 16:10, applied to the Resurrection at Acts 2:27, 31). Elias writes in Arabic apologetic rather than in Syriac canon law, and van Unnik quotes him from a German version (*Beweis*, 99), from which the English here is translated; the Arabic should be consulted before the wording is pressed. From the same evidence De Vries draws the conclusion argued in the text: "The rejection of reservation therefore does not rest on the view that the consecrated elements did not permanently retain their consecration. Rather, reservation is not permitted out of

certain that it is the Body of Christ. The strictness is reverence with its teeth showing. It is the same instinct as the deacon who is not permitted to sit down while he carries Him through the dark. One must protect the Eucharist at all costs, because of who He is. This is why many of our fathers would not allow reservation. In fact, the scholar who edited Ishoʿyahb IV's questions about the Eucharist concluded, though this is debated, that the later canonists of our Church knew of no permission to keep the consecrated Bread, and that the Western practices — a liturgy of the Presanctified, a standing reserve for the sick, the Eucharist kept for the consecration of altars — are not found among us.[15] How do we respond to this?

Well, the canons of Patriarch John bar Abgare record the exceptions, Ishoʿyahb's own questions assume them, and so do other bishops. When more had been consecrated than the priest could consume, or when there was no one left to consume it, the Mysteries could remain overnight. Sometimes they were kept in the place our books call the Beth Gazza, the House of the Treasury. Sometimes the Eucharist was on the altar itself. But never carelessly. The chalice had to be consumed. A lamp had to be kept burning, and a man had to stand watch through the night, and was not to leave without a substitute.[16] The next day, when there was no consecrated chalice, the priest signed the chalice with that same particle from the Treasury, showing that what had been left overnight was still the same Lord.[17] Additionally, Dadishoʿ Qaṭraya, whom we will meet

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reverence" (*Sakramententheologie*, 246–47). On desecration see van Unnik, 242, on q. 51: Ishoʿyahb IV "does not want to take the risk that the sacrament should be defiled being put in unclean places," probably in the ritual sense, and "was very much afraid of desecration by taking it outside the church" — citing the rule that a Bukhra defiled by spilt wine "may under no circumstance be taken outside the church."

[15] van Unnik, commentary, 207–11. His three statements are that the regulations "are directed against the old Christian use of the reservation of the Sacrament"; that the Western practices "do not seem to have occurred in the Nestorian church"; and that "the later Nestorian Canonists emphasized this point and did not know anything of a permission to reserve the bread." He concedes in the same pages that "the allowance made for urgent cases was really the more ancient practice," dating the stricter rule to about the middle of the eighth century, and that "the teaching of the Nest. about this point is clear though it is not always the same from the beginning."

[16] Canon xxii of John bar Abgare (catholicos 900–905), quoted in full at van Unnik, 208–09: if urgent circumstances leave the Sacrament overnight on the altar, the chalice is to be consumed — by a believer, "male or female," if the priest is not able — while "because of its abundance the Eucharistic bread may stay over night on the altar, if sufficient care is displayed towards it through the burning of the lamps and the service of the night." If no one can consume it, "the man who is in charge of them shall stand on his feet, till the moment they order it, be it night or day; and he should never leave this service without a substitute." A written order for the following morning survives: H. W. Codrington, "The Syrian Liturgies of the Presanctified III: East Syrian or Persian," *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1904), 535–45, attributed to Israel, bishop of Kashkar; its rubric directs that the Treasure should not stay the night except from necessity, and when it does, "a light not departing from before it" (van Unnik, 210–11). On the Beth Gazza itself, Payne Smith's Dictionary (s.v.) and A. J. Maclean explain it as "a recess in the north wall of the Sanctuary," while the rubric for the consecration of the altar with oil ascribed to Ishoʿyahb III speaks of "a small altar, that is to say a Beth-Gazza." van Unnik notes that the first explanation is given without stated evidence and probably reflects the practice Maclean saw at the end of the nineteenth century; he leaves the question open (211–12).

[17] The rubric of Israel of Kashkar's formulary (n. 16) calls it "the order of the signing of the Chalice or of the Treasure, that is, when the Treasure remains in the night"; van Unnik, who otherwise denies reservation among us, reads it not as a liturgy of the Presanctified but as "the sequence of the 'ordering' in the morning of the next day" (210–11). Baumstark had already read it the same way: "a formulary for the consecration of the chalice outside the Mass," and not "the liturgy of the Presanctified," since such a liturgy, "in the technical sense of the word, is foreign to the Nestorian rite" (A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, Bonn, 1922, 334 n. 6, quoted by van Unnik, 210; trans. from the German). Cf. Ishoʿyahb IV, *Questions*, q. 16 (van Unnik, 162–63), where Paghra left "in the House of the Treasury from the previous day" does not oblige the altar to be reconsecrated, "because it is not something foreign to it," though "it is not right that two Kings should sit on one Throne." The strongest text on the

below, allows a hermit who is not keeping complete solitude to come out of his cell on the night of the Sabbath and receive the Mysteries consecrated on Friday.[18] Some scholars suggest that the Church allowed communion services at funerals,[19] and that hermits without a priest had their own rite for receiving the consecrated bread.[20] These were not regular services but exceptions, and each one meant keeping the Mysteries after the Mass.

Our tradition, then, makes room for reservation of the Eucharist through practicality and pastoral charity. The strict rejection of reservation was for the protection of the Eucharist, but when a pastoral need arose, the Church responded by leaning toward pastoral mercy and not strict legalism. The same ancient Church that sends the priest out to the sick without pause, and that requires an abiding presence before the remaining Eucharist, also allows the faithful who are in need of the Eucharist to come and receive healing. As so many of our prayers say, sin makes us

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other side is Timothy I, q. xvii: asked whether the Qudasha may be left on the altar till the next day, he answers, "It is in no wise right to leave it. It must be taken on the day itself," on the type of the Manna and the Paschal Lamb (E. Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher* ii, Berlin, 1908, 70–71, quoted by van Unnik, 207–08). The provisions above do not contradict that rule; they govern what was to be done when it could not be obeyed.

[18] Dadishoʿ Qaṭraya, *On the Stillness of the Weeks* §27, ed. and trans. A. Mingana, *Early Christian Mystics*, Woodbrooke Studies vii (Cambridge, 1934), Syriac text, 62; English, 90. The recluse keeping complete stillness does not go out to communion until his seven weeks are ended; but "if, however, you converse with others, and thus do not live in complete solitude, go out of your cell on the night of Saturday, a little before the bell of the Night Service, and receive the Communion from the Sacrament that has been consecrated on Friday" (Mingana's translation, as quoted by van Unnik, 209; the Syriac has him take the *raze* from the *qudsha* hallowed on Friday). Here the Mysteries are kept in the church, and the hermit goes to them. (For a later report of hermits carrying communion back to their cells, see n. 20.) Bedjan printed the work incomplete as a letter of Isaac of Nineveh (n. 6), which is why older studies cite it under Isaac's name, De Vries among them (*Sakramententheologie*, 246, where it is likewise reservation "from Friday to Saturday"). Mingana re-edited the work complete as Dadishoʿ's. van Unnik grants that "in monks' circles the sacraments were reserved from Friday on which mass was said, to Saturday" — the Church of the East did not consecrate on Saturday — and that "Dadisho' lived before the time of the rules against the reservation" (209–10).

[19] De Vries, *Sakramententheologie*, 246, citing the ninth-century Anonymous Author of the *Expositio officiorum ecclesiae* (R. H. Connolly's Latin version, CSCO, Scriptores Syri, ser. II, t. 92, ii, 131–32): at the office for the dead the liturgy is not to be celebrated, since it is not fitting there to represent the resurrection of the Lord mystically, but the priest is to take the Mysteries already consecrated, which signify neither death nor resurrection. De Vries reads the passage as presupposing reservation.

[20] Rayan P. Atto, *Spiritualità liturgica dei eremiti nella tradizione caldea* [Liturgical Spirituality of the Hermits in the Chaldean Tradition] (licentiate thesis, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, 2006; page references are to the Italian original). For the hermits, Atto translates the rite of the Quddashta (Mingana Syr. 564, foll. 170b–192b), "administered by the diligent brethren who live in holy stillness" (fol. 170b; Atto, 80), and judges it valid "for the hermits who receive the communion already consecrated, out of necessity, when the minister — that is, the priest — is lacking" (126). He notes that Jammo and P. Yousif call it a rite of the presanctified, while the text calls itself a "commemoration of the holy mysteries" (78). He adds that hermits came down for the Sunday Mass and returned to their cells carrying communion for the rest of the week, receiving it each day by the Quddashta (78–79); for this too he cites no primary text. Atto also reports, following J.-M. Fiey ("Cénobitisme féminin ancien dans les Églises syriennes orientale et occidentale," *L'Orient Syrien* 10, 1965, 281–306), that in communities of women the superior, a deaconess, gave communion from bread the priest had left in a niche (9). He cites no primary text, and Fiey's study covers both Syriac traditions; until the source is shown to be East Syriac, the report is not relied on here. Neither the funeral office nor the Quddashta is a liturgy of the Presanctified in that technical sense (n. 17): a fixed public service in the calendar, like the Byzantine Lenten weekdays or the Latin Good Friday, at which communion is given from gifts consecrated at an earlier Mass. They are occasions on which Mysteries already consecrated were received outside the Mass, which is reservation, and that is why they bear on van Unnik's verdict above (n. 15). Even on Jammo and Yousif's reading of the Quddashta as a rite of the presanctified, it is a private rite for a solitary, not a public liturgy.

sick and we are in need of the Divine Physician.[21] This Divine Physician is the one whom our Church has found for centuries in the burning coal — the coal Isaiah saw, which the angel could touch only with tongs, and which now rests in the hands of our priests.

But the man with the lamp came to guard, not to gaze. Whether anyone in our tradition ever came simply to look at Him is the second question, and the one that matters.

Gazing on the Eucharist

So let us go back to the books. Not to a canon or a scholar this time, but to the hymns we sing on an ordinary Sunday. Our Church did produce systematic theology — ʿAbdishoʿ's *Marganitha* is one of the few examples — but most of her theology is carried in poetic verse: in the homilies of Narsai, or in the hymns of the Hudra, to name a couple. While the Latin Church produced statues and paintings, and the Byzantine Churches their icons, we produced hymns. Our theology is sung before it is written down. So listen to what the deacon chants while the Mysteries are on the altar.

Hear, for example, what we sing on the Third Sunday of the Apostles, at the Hymn of the Holy of Holies: "at the time when the priest enters the sanctuary, the choirs of Seraphim above him stand in reverence and watch as he breaks and shares the Body of Christ for the remission of sins." Or on the Sixth Sunday of the Apostles, at Communion: "see how the angels stand in awe before Him as they tremble to gaze upon the splendour of His Light." The same hymn continues: "But Christ gives it to us through His abundant mercy … Come, approach the Son of the King Who grants us His Mysteries and sing Halleluiah." At Pentecost we pray: "choirs of angels now surround the blessed table, the altar, and sing." On the Sixth Sunday of Epiphany: "the Table is prepared, and the angels above and the priests in the Church reverently praise it." And on the First Sunday after the Nativity: "these glorious Mysteries which the angels longed to see."[22]

The angels do not receive. They stand, they watch, they tremble, they praise. They are in awe of the reality before them. And notice what the hymn does next. It sets them beside us to tell us how much we have been given: they can only look, but Christ gives Himself to us. Our books are not shy about it: to receive Christ truly and substantially is greater than to gaze upon Him. So if anyone fears that a chapel will empty the altar, our own hymns answer him. The hymn, though, also establishes that the seraphim are not idle. You cannot tell a man that the angels can do no more than gaze unless gazing is worth doing. Their gaze is itself worship. This is all adoration

[21] E.g. the Communion Hymn (ʿOnytha d-Wem) for the Second Sunday of the Resurrection — "This is the Physician Who descended into Sheol to heal those effected [sic] by sin" — and the Hymn of the Holy of Holies (ʿOnytha d-Qanke) for the Third Sunday of Lent, which calls Christ "the wise and loving Physician Who can heal all our wounds" (*Liturgical Propers (Naqpayatha)*, as above, n. 1). The image is old among us: ʿAbdishoʿ sends the sinner to "the Christian Dispensary" and to "the spiritual Physicians," quoting "the eminent doctor," in a passage Badger traces to the Hudra for the first day of the Fast of the Ninevites: let him come and show his wounds to the disciples of the Wise Physician (*Marganitha* iv.7; Badger, ii, 411).

[22] *Liturgical Propers (Naqpayatha)*, as above, n. 1. The five hymns are identified in the text by season, Sunday and genre: the Hymn of the Holy of Holies (ʿOnytha d-Qanke) for the Third Sunday of the Apostles; the Communion Hymn (ʿOnytha d-Wem) for the Sixth Sunday of the Apostles, for Pentecost, and for the Sixth Sunday of Epiphany; and the Hymn of the Mysteries (ʿOnytha d-Raze) for the First Sunday after the Nativity. The same motif is attested well before any modern translation: Badger renders a stanza of the Hudra for the seventh Sunday in Lent as "Angels and men worship Thee, O Thou High-Priest, who in the sacrifice of the altar hast established [the truth of] Thy incarnation" (ii, 170).

asks for. Not the greater gift, but the one the angels have. The answer is in our own books, and it is not hidden, but sung.

There is even a story in the *Book of Governors* about Mar Narses, Bishop of Shenna, who describes how, whenever he attended the liturgy, the hidden spiritual mysteries were revealed to him. He says:

> Every time I am in the church during the service of the Mysteries, my mind is lifted up above the sight of these things which are done during the service, and above the church and its congregation, to the things which are in heaven; and these things which are before my eyes are explained [mystically] by the things which are secret and hidden from every man. The church which is depicted before me [represents] that of Jerusalem which is upon earth … the Book of the Gospels [represent] the New Covenant and the throne of Christ at the time of His dispensation here.[23]

For the sake of brevity I have not quoted the whole passage. But notice where his mind is drawn: not away from the altar, but past the liturgy to what the liturgy carries — above the sight of these things which are done during the service, and above the church and its congregation. Here is a man attending to the hidden reality rather than to the rite, in the middle of the liturgy, and our books kept the story as a mark of holiness rather than a fault. He goes on to read the whole church in the same way: the bema as Zion, the altar as the throne of the Deity, the priests as the nine choirs of angels, and the two facing choirs as the seraphim who cry Holy — the very seraphim our hymns place above the priest. And of the veils that hang before the Mysteries he says that they show us that the Godhead is hidden even from the angels. That is the hidden reality we are speaking of: not something withheld from us, but something too great to be looked at — hidden from the angels themselves, and given to us under bread. We see here the mystery that we are called to be lifted to.

Yet an objection can be raised here: our liturgy speaks of gazing upon the Mysteries only during the Holy Mass. So how can we respond to this? Well, let us see how our spiritual fathers approached the Eucharist. This mystery, it turns out, can be experienced outside the liturgy itself. In the Hudra, for Holy Thursday, we sing: "Come, all ye who believe, and whilst beholding the Lamb of God upon the altar who is sacramentally sacrificed every day, let us with renewed hearts confess Him without doubtfulness … Let us, therefore, in fear and awe cry out and say: Holy, Holy, Holy, art Thou, O God, who fillest heaven and earth with Thy glory."[24] This is sung

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[23] Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, ii, 541–46 (as above, n. 11). The bracketed words are Budge's. Mar Narses of Shenna is not to be confused with Narsai the poet, quoted earlier. Narses goes on to read the whole church: the bema as Zion, the altar as the ark of the Old Covenant and then as the throne of the Deity, the priests as the nine choirs of angels, and the two facing choirs as the seraphim who cry Holy; the veils, he says, indicate that the Godhead is hidden even from the angels. At 546 he describes himself as abstracting by the mental faculty from these typical objects to the prototype.

[24] "From the service appointed in the Khudhra for Holy Thursday," in Badger, ii, 176 (his ch. XXXV §3). The chapter is headed by Article XXXI, against the sacrifices of Masses as "blasphemous fables": Badger prints the extract to prove a commemorative rather than a repeated sacrifice, and his Remarks discuss only that point. He does not notice the beholding, the fear and awe, or the Sanctus. On the two days following, van Unnik, 240–41: it was strictly forbidden to consecrate on Good Friday, by the rubric at the end of the formulary for the Consecration of the altar with oil ascribed to Ishoʿyahb III, and, he adds, unlike the other churches ours had no Liturgy of the Presanctified either (the Latin Church kept one on Good Friday; the Byzantine rite has no liturgy at all that day); for

on Holy Thursday, on the eve of the two days on which our Church celebrated no Mass at all, Good Friday and Holy Saturday — not even the Presanctified liturgy that the Latin Church kept on Good Friday. Our people went into those days with the Lamb on the altar before their eyes, and with the altar empty until Easter, they could carry that beholding only in their hearts.

Even more, ʿAbdishoʿ states: "We worship Christ's humanity because of the Godhead in Him; so, through the Cross, we worship God our Saviour. … When, therefore, we look upon this emblem of our salvation, we conceive as though we were beholding our Saviour outstretched upon it for the remission of our sins, and for the renewal of all creation. Hence we offer a fervent and eucharistic worship, not to the fashioned matter of the Cross; but to Him whom we figure as upon it."[25] "We conceive" helps us to understand the drawing of our hearts and minds to that which we cannot see. And notice what he settles in his first clause: to worship Christ's humanity is not to worship a creature, because of the Godhead in Him. If, then, worship may rightly pass through wood to Him whom we only figure upon it, how much more may it rest upon Him where there is no figure at all, but His very Self. But centuries before ʿAbdishoʿ, a solitary monk invites us to reflect and gaze upon the hidden reality.

Dadishoʿ Qaṭraya invites the solitary monk who is living in a silent cell to meditate upon the holy mysteries, even when he is not present at the liturgy. He states, "And every time the remembrance of the holy mysteries passes over your mind, direct the gaze of your mind toward the altar, and cry out in affliction mingled with love, and thus say: My soul thirsts for You, O living God."[26] He puts it even more powerfully:

> For although you are restrained from their fellowship the whole of your week, because of the canon that stillness requires — yet from their beloved and awesome remembrance let not your mind cease, and more especially on the days of the Sundays. And if you keep and do these things — all the days of your week your sitting will be in affliction and contrition, and in wakefulness and love of labors. And at the end of the week, when you go out to the assembly to receive the holy mysteries with the saints of our Lord, there surges within your soul a divine joy from the reception of His Body and Blood, which has no comparison among created things, and there is no taste in creation that is like its taste.[27]

The whole reason he wants the solitary to do this is "for the honor of the holy mysteries."[28] And he does not expect the solitary to find this honor on his own; he sends him to learn it from those who went before him: "When, then, you understand, O my beloved, and know what love and fear

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Holy Saturday see Ishoʿ bar Nun, *ad Macarium* q. 21 (van Unnik, 132), "on Saturday of the Holy Week mass is not said."

[25] ʿAbdishoʿ, *Marganitha* v.2, "On the Worship of the Lord's Cross"; Badger, ii, 414. "Eucharistic" there renders a word for thanksgiving and does not refer to the Sacrament. The chapter belongs to Part V of the *Marganitha*, headed "On the Theory of Those Things Which Prefigure the World to Come" — that is, on *theoria*; its first chapter treats worship offered toward the East for what it signifies, and its third describes the world to come as being "engaged in the contemplation of His unutterable mysteries" (413, 415). ʿAbdishoʿ himself treats the Eucharist in Part IV, among the Sacraments, and does not apply this mode to the Mysteries; that step is mine.

[26] Dadishoʿ, *On the Stillness of the Weeks* §36 (Mingana, 68; see n. 18). Dadishoʿ, an East Syriac solitary of the later seventh century, is writing for monks keeping the seven weeks of stillness. Translations of Dadishoʿ in the text are the author's own from the Syriac, and page references are to Mingana's Syriac text.

[27] Dadishoʿ, *On the Stillness of the Weeks* §37 (Mingana, 68).

[28] Dadishoʿ, *On the Stillness of the Weeks* §37 (Mingana, 68).

and honor the anchorites and the confined acquired toward the Body and Blood of our Lord — you too, be like them, especially in meditation such as this, the whole night and day of the holy Sunday."[29] If the solitary must learn from the masters, so must we. God does not call all of us to be solitaries and hermits, but He does call all of us to holiness and to a living relationship with Him, and we learn that from those who have attained it.

Our Church Fathers show us what it means to gaze. So let us be like the man who for forty years was far from the Mysteries in body, and went to the altar in thought. Dadishoʿ states:

> And be diligent and strive to acquire within your soul that perfect love, full of wonder, toward the holy mysteries — which that anchorite acquired in his soul, the one worthy of all blessings, who used to eat the pith of reeds for forty years. After forty years, in which he ate no bread nor even saw it, it happened that after all this time he saw bread with certain people crossing the wilderness. From the boundless love he had in his soul toward the holy mysteries — when every Sunday he ran in his thought and entered the altar, and **gazed longingly, in the vision of his soul, upon the Body and Blood of our Lord Christ placed upon the altar, and in them delighted spiritually like the angels in heaven** — because all this love and honor and fear he distributed to the holy mysteries while he was far from them in body — as soon as he saw the bread that is by nature like that holy bread placed upon the altar, from his great joy his soul rejoiced in the remembrance of the Body and Blood of our Lord, and he cried out with a loud voice and thus said: "Glory to You, O Lord Jesus Christ, who for forty years have made me worthy to see bread that is by nature like that bread which the priests offer up upon Your holy altar — and through the prayers and priestly blessings, and through the descent of Your Spirit upon it, it becomes truly Your body, and gives forgiveness and grants eternal life to those who receive it."[30]

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article I offered three possible answers, and said I would argue for the third. I do. But first, the truth: the monstrance, the chapel, and exposition are borrowed. What is not borrowed is everything they are made of. Adoration brings no new object among us — the Body and Blood of our Lord, which our books have always said are truly changed. It brings no new place — the church, before the altar, which is exactly where our canons insisted the Mysteries remain. And it brings no new act — the reverential gaze, which can take place outside the Holy Mass, as our Fathers showed us for centuries in the stories of holy people. What adoration adds is duration and ceremony.

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[29] Dadishoʿ, *On the Stillness of the Weeks* §32 (Mingana, 65). Two limits should be stated. Dadishoʿ gives the Mysteries love, honor, fear and the gaze, but never the word for adoration (*sgidta*), which he uses twice in this work and both times of the Cross. And the same triad of honor, love and fear is owed elsewhere in the work to the guardian angel, so the vocabulary alone establishes reverence toward a holy superior rather than worship due to God. What is not shared is the direction of the gaze toward the altar.

[30] Dadishoʿ, *On the Stillness of the Weeks* §30 (Mingana, 64); emphasis added. Note that the anchorite is said to delight in the Mysteries "like the angels in heaven" — the same comparison the propers make — and that his own prayer ends by affirming that the Mysteries give forgiveness and eternal life "to those who receive it," so that even our tradition's greatest gazer keeps reception as the greater gift.

The reverential guard who protected the Mysteries has his counterpart in the man who ran to gaze at them. The guard stayed beside the Body of Christ all night, with a lamp burning, but he did not come to look at Him. The anchorite looked at Him with love every Sunday, but he was far away in the wilderness and never came near. In an adoration chapel we are asked to do both at once: to keep watch beside Him like the guard, and to gaze on Him like the anchorite.

To those who say that adoration is not part of our spirituality, I would say that they are half right, and it is the half that matters most to them. The form is borrowed, and their instinct to protect what is ours is a good one. But the substance is not borrowed. It has been an invitation from our own theologians and poets for centuries: to gaze upon the hidden reality that is present before us, and to be drawn into the mysteries.

At the beginning I admitted honestly that I am not a neutral party. I still am not. But I am now convinced that what I found in that chapel was not foreign to our Church. Eucharistic adoration can be more than reconciled with our Church. It is not a foreign imposition, but something our own tradition can account for, receive, and shape — something that allows the faithful to be drawn into the hidden depths of our merciful and loving God, and to experience now the eternal joy that is promised. We can and should embrace Eucharistic adoration as a form given to us by a sister Church, whose substance has been present among us for centuries.