

Salaw ‘alai: Syro-Maronite Concelebration as a Diachronic Case Study of Liturgical Fluidity and Ambiguity¹

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Introduction

A priest was ordained in December for the Eparchy of Los Angeles, where I serve as the Director of Liturgy. Following his ordination we had a large and festive banquet of at least 400 persons. Before the bishop blessed the food, the newly ordained priest got up from the dais to give his perfunctory thanks and well-wishes. Upon reaching my name, he said “I would also like to thank Fr. Michael Shami, the Eparchy’s Director of Liturgy. I enjoyed him being around when he was in residence at the cathedral. I would always ask him a question about the liturgy, how to do something, and he would always respond, ‘Do you want to know how it’s done commonly or done properly?’”²

To the newly ordained’s chagrin, I appeared in church the next day for his first liturgy that he was to offer. The new Director of Married Seminarians and I, dressed in outer-cassocks and stoles, found our place on the north-end of the sanctuary. We were there simply to attend the liturgy. Of course, we understood that we would bolster the singing, especially in Syriac, of the newly ordained. Before the Anaphora began, the other priest informed me that there had been an oversight in the liturgical training of married seminarians. It was an unspoken understanding that we would remain at the lower level of the sanctuary at our seats – until we understood the necessity in liturgically propping up the new priest. We joined him for the prayers at the foot of the altar before ascending before the Anaphora, and flanked him on opposing sides, directing him with quiet instruction, discrete gestures, and not offering any verbal prayers ourselves apart from those sung in Syriac to assist him, such as the Institution Narrative.

Our intention was always to “celebrate” the liturgy with the new priest and those others present. But did we decide to “sacramentally” co-consecrate with the new priest? We made no

¹ Special thanks to the Sorin Fellows Program at the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture and the Theology Department of the University of Notre Dame whose grants made possible the writing of this paper and my travel to Rome to present it.

² This anecdote introduces a commonly remarked upon tension in Liturgical Studies: whether a source is descriptive or prescriptive. Similarly, when someone is asked what is representative of a liturgical tradition there is always an implicit judgment being made in balancing the two in any given account.

propositions on the usual sacramental or ecclesiological debates that surround a contemporary discussion on concelebration – the only decision was a functional one, namely, a new priest evidently needed assistance. On an inadvertent but intuitive level, we fulfilled the prescription mandated in the episcopal admonition to the newly ordained in the oldest extant recension of Syro-Maronite ordinals: “He is not to have relations with his wife for seven days, but in these days he is to exercise the priestly office (ܥܡܘܢܐ) each day with a learned priest until he is learned in the liturgy himself.”³ Sexual abstinence is relevant because it has long formed a constitutive element of the Eucharistic fast in the East, for both offering and receiving the Eucharist.⁴ What that means is the newly ordained is intended to be an agent effecting the sacrifice and in the presence of at least one experienced priest to functionally assist their execution of the priestly office. Whether that experienced priest is considered a “co-consecrator” of the Eucharistic elements will be discussed within the course of this paper, but his concelebration seems to serve an instructive, rather than collegial function. The other priest and myself did not ascend the altar with the new priest with any intention of manifesting a collegial spirit in the offering of the liturgy – we simply wanted to assure the liturgy was actually offered, and offered properly.

Considering Concelebration Broadly

As I have already alluded, the functional nature of concelebration is not often discussed, but the main conceits in academic discussions are usually about the exercise of priestly sacramental office, collegial ecclesiology, and their fruits. But it should come as no surprise that these are concerns following the paradigm of the concelebration in West, with its current form evolving out of the Liturgical Movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is often a pitfall of discussion to equivocate the use of a term across time and traditions: concelebration is no exception. I am not original in suggesting a delineation of different types of concelebration – Fr. Uwe Michael Lang, for instance, identifies in his insightful article “Sacramental Concelebration” three categories: general concelebration of beings that worship the Lord in the liturgy, a

³ cf. Vat. Sir. 47, 97r; Paris Syriac 120, 52v. For more information on these pontificals, see the unpublished study of Michel Rajji, *DU PONTIFICAL MARONITE: ÉTUDE HISTORIQUE ET CRITIQUE* (Bkerke 1944).

⁴ cf. Gregory Bar Hebraeus, *Nomocanon of Bar Hebraeus* (Holland: Bar Hebraeus Verlag, 1986), 22, 24. Bar Hebraeus was a 13th century Syriac Catholicos who assembled a nomocanon and remains a historic and monumental authority in the study of Syriac canons and liturgical prescriptions. The canons found within this section of the nomocanon prohibit priests and bishops who have not properly fasted from offering the Eucharistic sacrifice, as well as mandate the married to abstinence citing 1 Cor 7:5.

ceremonial concelebration of present clerics in the sanctuary, and a sacramental concelebration of priests co-consecrating the Eucharistic elements.⁵ Even before the Roman missal reforms of the 20th century that popularized Western concelebration, Fr. Alphonse Raes of the Pontifical Oriental Institute (PIO) distinguished between an older “broad sense” and a “new sense” of Eastern concelebration that presents itself in the 18th century.⁶ A multiplicity of concelebrations exist, and it is incumbent upon any discussion to specify not only custom dictated by historical and cultural context but also by the intention of the agents. This demands great care, especially when considering concelebration beyond just the Roman praxis to the diversity of Eastern liturgies, which also differ from each other to varying degrees.

If one examines the Ruthenian Divine Liturgy of the Byzantine Tradition, for instance, there are even analogous uses of concelebration within the same few preparatory prayers. Before the Anaphora begins, the priest bids the deacon “Remember me, brother and concelebrant.”⁷ This presents the common conception that the deacon concelebrates the Byzantine liturgy. In the same dialogue, the priest prays “May the Spirit himself concelebrate with us all the days of our lives.”⁸ Clearly the Byzantine liturgy does not conceive of the agency of the consecratory Holy Spirit, the mediating priest, and the serving deacon to be all univocal senses of celebration. The Orthodox theologian Fr. Alexander Schmemmann extends the sense of concelebration even further in the Byzantine Tradition to suggest a sort of clericalism in precluding the co-serving of the faithful in the liturgy as a con-celebration, knowing that their participation is not co-consecratory.⁹

To exhaustively examine all the possible uses and meanings of concelebration in the East would be a project more ambitious than anyone has yet undertaken. Rather I will content myself with the curious microcosm that is Syro-Maronite liturgy, and the extant sources we have. Apart from being a Maronite myself, the tradition is interesting for a novel case study because it shows the fluidity and ambiguity of liturgical concelebration in a single Church, where concurrent

⁵ Uwe Michael Lang, “Sacramental Concelebration: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Contemporary Practice” in *Antiphons* 27, 1 (2023): 56.

⁶ Alphonse Raes, “La concelebration eucharistique dans les rites orientaux” in *La Maison-Dieu* 35 (1953): 24-47.

⁷ *The Divine Liturgy of Our Holy Father John Chrysostom* (Pittsburgh: Byzantine Seminary Press, 2006), 66.

⁸ *ibid.* 67.

⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Yonkers: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2003), 14-5.

forms are employed throughout time, with varying levels of conformity to rubrical prescription, and with little reflection as to why. I entreat you with the eponymous interjection that titles this paper scattered throughout Syriac liturgies when the priest bids fellow priests, clerics and/or the faithful in their concelebrant: *salaw alai* (prayer for me).¹⁰

Methodology: Limitations

Relatively little has been written on concelebration in the Syro-Maronite Tradition. While sparse treatment of concelebration is not quite to Maronites, what has been written is brief, secondary commentary in broader works, and mostly paraphrases the few older publications, none of which actually examine any primary sources.¹¹ More problematically, the current state of Maronite liturgical studies is limited by three major issues:

- (1) **Evidence for study in general is fragmentary and scarce**; the commonly-accepted oldest extant Maronite complete Eucharistic ordo contained within Paris Syriaque 71 only dates from 1453/4.¹² There are methodological issues and assumptions that limit a discernibly Maronite text to such a late date, but much of the issue is simply a scarcity of extant manuscripts. Those relatively few that exist are still in need of serious study. A notable and simple constraint that exists is linguistic accessibility, as these texts are primarily in Syriac and secondarily Arabic, whereas most contemporary liturgical studies faculties focus on Western languages. When the monolithic category of “Eastern” liturgy is invoked, it generally means Byzantine; an example of this is in Robert Taft’s chapter “Ex Oriente Lux? Some Reflections on Eucharistic Concelebration” and its successor article “Eucharistic Concelebration Revisited: Problems of History, Practice, and

¹⁰ cf. ܠܫܘܢܐ ܕܠܝܬܘܪܝܐ [Text of the Liturgy] (Kottayam: SEERI Publications, 2014), 81; *The Book of Offering* (Brooklyn: St Maron Press, 2011). The first is the Syriac Orthodox (Malankara) Eucharistic service, and the second text is the contemporary Maronite liturgy, both of which contain this rubricized request “ܠܫܘܢܐ ܕܠܝܬܘܪܝܐ.”

¹¹ Four publications essentially exhaust a bibliography of Maronite concelebration: Pierre Daou, Notes sur la concelebration maronite,” OCP 6 (1940); the aforementioned Alphonse Raes, “La concélébration eucharistique dans les rites orientaux” in *La Maison-Dieu* 35 (1953); Archdale King, *Concelebration in the Christian Church* (AR Mowbray and Co, 1966); Robert Taft, “Ex Oriente Lux? Some Reflections on Eucharistic Concelebration” in *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Rome: PIO, 1997).

¹² Pierre Gemayel, *AVANT-MESSE MARONITE: HISTOIRE ET STRUCTURE*, OCA 174 (1965): xii, 48.

Theology in East and West Part II” that deal overwhelmingly with Byzantine usage despite their broad scope.¹³

- (2) **Liturgical studies are often at the service of historical agenda.** This exists as mostly an internally self-imposed limit. While that can be claimed in any ecclesiastical setting, much of Maronite liturgical and historical literature produced in the last 4 centuries has been concerned with defining Syro-Maronites as distinct from their supposedly Monophysite Syriac neighbors and vindicating their claim that they have been in perpetual communion with Rome. This is fervently defended in spite of little historical evidence, close ritual parallels with their neighbors, and a period of almost half a millennium of no communication with Rome. In the aforementioned Paris Syriaque 71, during the Maronite Church’s post-conciliar reforms, it was heavily appealed to for inspiration yet the Anaphora of Sharrar, contained in only 38/146 folios of the entire manuscript, is nominally invoked as a distinctly Maronite tradition – likely this 15th century text commemorates the Pope and St. Maron.¹⁴ And despite the invoking of the manuscript and specific Anaphora of Sharrar as a rediscovery of authentic Maronite tradition, it was neither used in the reform nor included in the reformed missal.¹⁵
- (3) **Latinization is often the easy explanation for unfamiliar or difficult-to-explain elements.** Whether from within or without the Maronite Church, the accusation of “Latinization” is an expedient mechanism of dismissing a practice, whether customary or textual. Even when there is little or no evidence that something truly is a Latinization, it is usually considered such an axiomatic vice among Eastern Catholic Churches that demonstration is often not required to effect a stigma. Pertinent to the topic of concelebration is Taft claims that Maronites “probably owe their practice of verbal co-consecration to scholastic theology” without argument, and then in a footnote claims someone who previously wrote to the contrary is a perfect example of Latin Eucharistic

¹³ Robert Taft, “Eucharistic Concelebration Revisited: Problems of History, Practice, and Theology in East and West Part II” OCP 77 (2011): 25-80.

¹⁴ cf. Pierre Dib’s *Étude sur la liturgie* (1919), Michel Hayek’s *Liturgie maronite* (1964), and Pierre Gemayel’s *Avant-messe Maronite* (1965).

¹⁵ cf. Pierre-Edmond Gemayel, “The Book of Offering: General Introduction and Explanation” (Bkerke: 1992). <https://www.stmaron.org/qurbono>.

theology in the Maronite Church.¹⁶ Perhaps that is true, but the dismissal and claim that Maronites had concelebration without “verbal co-consecration” before the seventeenth century is unsupported; we have one single non-exhaustive diary of a sixteenth-century Italian Jesuit, Girolamo Dandini, who did not read or understand Syriac upon whom Taft is likely relying to make the claim that the concelebrants did not “verbally co-consecrate,” ie join in chanting the Institution Narrative. This idea of the supposed scholastic origins of any possible emphasis given to the Institution Narrative is unfortunately widespread and intimately-linked with the ability to hastily invoke the accusation of Latinization. An example of this is found in *Introduction to Eastern Liturgies*, where its authors claim, “an example of the Latinization that the Maronite Rite has undergone is the emphasis on the words of the institution as the moment of consecration,” specifically naming “the manual acts of the priest” as evidence.¹⁷ The “manual acts” to which they refer, namely three signs of the cross, and, in the case of the chalice, a cruciform tilting, exist identically in the Syriac Orthodox and Catholic liturgies. While a sign of the cross was present in the Roman Rite at the Institution Narrative before 1970, the other manual acts have no Roman equivalent. The Byzantine liturgy also has a sign of the cross over the Eucharistic elements. Either one must accept the possibility, then, that all those liturgies are Latinized or perhaps it is simply a commonly Christian element to have reverence for the Institution of the sacrament.¹⁸

Methodology: Solutions

Accounting for a relative dearth of both primary and secondary sources, agenda of Maronite liturgical research, and the pitfall of assuming Latinization, one must assess what is possible for someone interested in speaking about Maronite praxis. There are certain sources accessible to us that can be divided into different periods. As mentioned, scholarship accepts

¹⁶ Taft, “Ex Oriente Lux? Some Reflections on Eucharistic Concelebration,” 80-1, 90.

¹⁷ Maxwell Johnson and Stefanos Alexopoulos, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgies* (Collegeville 2021), 71.

¹⁸ It seems like an easily intuitive element that one would give the gesture of blessing if the Institution Narrative narrates “he blessed.” In fact, examining the Institution Narratives of Paris Syriac 71, as they differ in the Syriac tradition between Anaphorae, one sees in the Anaphora of Sharrar where Christ blessing is not mentioned there is no sign of the cross over the chalice (cf. 27r), whereas in the Anaphora of Gregory Bar Hebraeus, there are three signs of the cross over the chalice because it mentions Christ blessing it (47v). That seems to speak to an attentiveness to words, rather than necessitating a scholastic influence.

1454 as the oldest verifiable Maronite Eucharistic ordo, and that create the start date of our inquiry because that is where our textual evidence begins. We have already made note of Paris Syriac 71 from the 15th century which provides us with some interesting insights. We also have a few 15th century pontifical, namely Paris Syriac 120 and Vaticano Siriaco 47, that provide us with other glimpses of concelebration practices, though they themselves are witnesses to older texts.¹⁹ In the following century, we have the useful personal account of the aforementioned Jesuit, Girolamo Dandini, who acted as Papal Legate and visitor to the Maronite Church at the end of the 16th century. With the advent of the Maronite College in Rome and the expanding popularization of modern print in the 17th century, we have printed books of the offices that contain rubrical forewords, as well as the writings of the most famous Maronite College alumnus, the polymath Patriarch and liturgical reformer, Estephan Ad-Duwayhi.²⁰ In the 18th century, we have certain Maronite missal additions at the hand of a Dominican by the name of Tommaso Terracina, as well as a standardization effort in Lebanon led by the Papal Legate Joseph Assemani known as the Synod of Mt. Lebanon (1736). Which brings us to the reforms of the present era in the Maronite Church, and the liturgical texts it has produced.

While examining each of these sources, it is important to be attentive to the fact that they only contain suggestions as to what the actual praxis was. Until the printing of books in Rome and legislative councils, Syriac custom, while constituting a cohesive tradition, was very localized, and in some sense remains even so until today. Even after the advent of standardized printed text, the event of legislating liturgical rubrics does not mean they were followed, as we know even well today. That is why the particularly the current praxis will be supplemented by my personal ethnographic account.

Before delving into the sources, it is incumbent to contextualize them with a brief historical outline, as this is likely the first time many of us consider the Maronite Church and its liturgical evolution.

A Brief Modern History of the Maronite Church

¹⁹ Bishop Stephen Doueïhi writes that there exists no major change, for instance, between Paris Syriac 120 and Vaticano Siriaco 309, which is dated to 1296. See Stephen Doueïhi, *The Maronite Pontifical* (Brooklyn: St Maron Publications, 2008), 7.

²⁰ I purposely leave his first name in Arabic with an alternative spelling of the surname so as to not confuse him with the 20th/21st century American Maronite bishop with the same name, Stephen Doueïhi.

Treating early Maronite history is a field riddled with methodological landmines in and of itself, and well beyond the scope of this project. It should suffice to quote Bryan Spinks who pointedly wrote, “Current agendas often color how a liturgical past is imagined.”²¹ How earlier Maronite history is written is often conditioned by the conceits we now seek to defend. I am content to briefly sketch the history concurrent with the extant sources we will examine.

Maronite and Roman contact became interestingly frequent in the early modern period, with Maronites even attending the Fifth Lateran Council and various delegations coming to Lebanon throughout the 16th century.²² Prior to this period, sparse textual evidence exists, and even those extant manuscripts that do survive lack context, hence an ongoing dialectic in liturgical reform is the excising of so-called Jacobite elements that entered before the current textual witnesses of Maronite liturgy, and before whose supposed introduction we are not certain what was the praxis. Especially in the Maronite reforms of the late 20th century, many of the so-called accretions were removed under the auspice of being Jacobite, rather than Latin.

The most notable delegations to Lebanon were those of Giovanni Battista Eliano and Girolamo Dandini, remembered with varying degrees of antipathy for their censuring and accusations against the Maronites.²³ Between their visits, the first printed Maronite missal was published in Rome in 1592. Eliano and Dandini separately accused Maronites of many similar errors. Following Eliano’s accusations regarding sacramental discipline and Christological doctrine,²⁴ the Maronite College was founded in Rome in 1584 to educate its students, and prepare and print liturgical books.²⁵ The foremost Anglophone Maronite scholar, Chorbishop Seely Beggiani, places at least some blame of Latinization upon the students of the College, who

²¹ Bryan Spinks, “Imagining the Past: Historical Methodologies and Liturgical Study,” in Bryan Spinks and Theresa BERGER, ed., *Liturgy’s Imagined Past/s: Methodologies and Materials in the Writing of Liturgical History Today* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), 10-1.

²² Pierre Dib, *History of the Maronite Church*, 98.

²³ Matti Moosa, *The Maronites in History*, 255.

²⁴ Moosa *The Maronites in History*, 250.

²⁵ Moosa *The Maronites in History*, 255. A brief history of the college can be found in Aurelien Girard, and Giovanni Pizzorusso. “The Maronite College in Early Modern Rome: Between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Letters” in *College Communities Abroad*, 174 (Manchester University Press, 2017).

accepted the editing and Romanization of the 1592 missal.²⁶ The same Counter Reformation fervor that was employed in Europe²⁷ was also exported to the Maronites.

Dandini's journal from his visit to Lebanon beginning in 1596 deserves some note as an interesting account of what he perceives Maronites believed and practiced. His accusations mostly fall into the categories of doctrinal and sacramental discipline. He accuses Maronites of believing «che in Christo [sic] fosse una sola volontà, e questa la Divina» (that in Christ there is only one will, which is divine), «che lo Spirito Sa[n]to procedesse solame[n]te dal Padre» (that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father), «non ci sia peccato Originale» (there is no Original Sin), and «aggiugono al Trisagio della Santissima Trinità...*Qui Natus pro nobis, Qui Crucifixus pro nobis, Qui resurrexisti, & ascendisti in Caelum pro nobis, miserere nobis*»²⁸ (They add to the Trisagion of the Most Holy Trinity... Who were born for us, Who were crucified for us, Who resurrected and ascended to heaven for us, have mercy on us). Sacramentally, he writes «consagrassero in pane fermentato» (they consecrated leavened bread), «che nell'ultima unzione non usassero olio consagrato da Vescovo il Giovedì Santo, ma benedetto in quel punto da semplice Prete» (for extreme unction they were not using consecrated by the Bishop on Holy Thursday, but [instead oil] blessed at that moment by a simple priest), and «che dessero l'Eucharistia [sic] a piccioli fanciulli» (they were giving the Eucharist to small children).²⁹ His account has varied utility: though he has the unsympathetic judgment against Maronites, he is also a potential primary source for attesting to ancient liturgical practices.

The 17th century saw the reign of Patriarch Stephen Al Doueihi, known as one of the most prolific Maronite writers, an eminent Maronite liturgist and historian, and an opponent

²⁶ Seely Beggiani, *The Divine Liturgy of the Maronite Church*, 18.

²⁷ A. Pettegree – A. der Weduwen, *The Library*, New York 2021, 102-21.

²⁸ G. Dandini, *La missione apostolica in Libano*, 90-92. As Moosa commented in *The Maronites in History*, 244, «If one depends solely on the doctrines contained in their books, the Maronites were Syrian Orthodox» as all these accusations are commonalities with the other West Syrians. Much of the historical narrative amongst Maronites seeks to explain this similarity observed in this period as a late 'Jacobite' intrusion. One of these accusations, the Maronite Church continues to use the supposedly Theopaschite Trisagion, understanding correctly, like the rest of the Oriental Christians, that they intend it as Christological and not Trinitarian. Maronites now add «*ܩܘܝ ܢܐܬܘܫ ܡܝܢ ܢܘܒܝܫ, ܩܘܝ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܝܢ ܡܝܢ ܢܘܒܝܫ, ܩܘܝ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܝܢ ܡܝܢ ܥܠܡܝܢ ܡܝܢ ܢܘܒܝܫ*» (Christ) before the seasonal variation of the Trisagion to make this Christological intent explicit. Dionysius Bar Salibi provides a witty retort to the accusation of making the Trisagion allegedly Theopaschite in his tract *Against the Melkites*.

²⁹ Dandini, *La missione apostolica in Libano*, 91-92.

of Latinization.³⁰ Unfortunately, soon after his death, the 1736 Synod of Mount Lebanon imposed further Latinizations by enforcing the practices codified at Trent among the Maronites.³¹ The Maronite Church survived the Ottoman Empire, and entered the 20th century. France, a long-time ally of the Maronites, created Greater Lebanon in 1926 from the French Mandate in the Levant, and granted it independence in 1943. Being Maronite has almost come to be synonymous with being Lebanese in common thought because of the close union between the Maronite Church and Lebanese Republic. As such, much of its ancient features underwent a “streamlining associated with twentieth century Western liturgical reform.”³²

Diachronic Study of Concelebration

With a brief sketch of the trajectory of modern Maronite history, one can proceed to examine the previously mentioned sources that allude to elements of concelebration. The project itself is, of course, speculative in that it will seek to both interpolate context and intention from text. But the novel examination of these sources will give insight into Maronite praxis that has never been previously examined.

15th Century

Paris Syriac 71 is an ideal starting point as the oldest extant Maronite Eucharistic ordo. While liturgical texts of the Syriac tradition in general do not provide extensive rubrics, this text explicitly assumes at least the potential presence of other priests at the liturgy. At the opening doxology, it says “[the priest] bows to the altar and to the priests, and says ‘Glory be to the Father...’”³³ While a seemingly mundane observation, it means that the attendance of multiple priests at the same liturgy is historically founded among Syriacs.³⁴ This is further reinforced by

³⁰ Moosa, *The Maronites in History*, 269.

³¹ Moosa, *The Maronites in History*, 271.

³² Bryan Spinks, *Do This in Memory of Me*, 168. This might also be included in what Pierre Gemayel euphemistically refers to as “change deemed necessary” for the sake of “pastoral requirements” in the introduction to the 1992 missal where he explains some of the reform principles.

³³ Paris Syriac 71, 5v.

³⁴ There have been some who have attempted to argue that presbyteral (ie without a bishop) concelebration in the East is innovative. Here, of course, concelebration is being used broadly and not in the sense of co-consecration, but to assume that is even the intention of multiple fully vested priests in any given Eastern Church is already leaps and bounds of assumptions.

the fact that the priest is instructed to say at the beginning of the preparatory rites of the oblation in the very beginning of the text and at the beginning of the Anaphora ,ܐܘܪܘܢܐ (bless, my lord). This phrase is employed in West Syriac liturgy, analogous to the Latin *jube domne benedicere* and the Greek εὐλόγησον δέσποτα, as a sign of deference to a [generally more senior] priest or bishop, and as a cue in both prayers and chanting.³⁵ The text in no way makes evident it is any special instruction for the offering of a liturgy in the presence of a bishop, and suggests that there is no bishop present by the celebrant priest giving all the blessings and imposing incense himself, which would be reserved to the bishop. It would seem, then, it is a courtesy deference given to present peer priests in the vicinity of the altar to whom the celebrant bows.

The most interesting evidence of a potential idea of concelebration is found in the frame narrative of the first Anaphora of the manuscript. The Anaphora is known as *Sharrar*, as that is the incipit of the first prayer, is surrounded by a mystique of antiquity and mystery.³⁶ However, in the margin it is entitled “The Anaphora of the Disciples at the Assumption of the Mother of God [When] the Apostles Gathered and Each of Them Said a Prayer Aloud.”³⁷ In the margin next to the first prayer beginning with *Sharrar*, one finds “St. Peter, Head of the Apostles, said.”³⁸ Then, adjacent to the next prayer aloud, is “John,” then the next is “James, Brother of Our Lord,” then “Andrew,” and so on.³⁹ The unusual suggestion here is that the Apostles, in the context of the death of the Virgin Mary, orally composed this 12-part Anaphora by each adding a prayer. At least to George, the copyist of Paris Syriac 71 who interjects his name repeatedly throughout the manuscript to make sure we remember him, the idea of the Apostles concelebrating the

³⁵ Pierre Sfeir, *La messa siro-maronita*, 14-6.

³⁶ cf. *Anaphorae Syriacae* II.3, 276-82 for introduction. Edited Syriac/Latin text follows, based primarily on Paris Syriac 71.

³⁷ Paris Syriac 71, 14r.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.* 15r-17v.

Anaphora is not unpalatable.⁴⁰ The manuscript text itself attests to the possibility of multiple priests present at a liturgy; could it also be the case, in the likeness of the Apostles, that George is familiar with a form of concelebration in which more than one priest says prayers of the Anaphora? Paris Syriac 120, another 15th century manuscript that witnesses to hymnody in the rite for the consecration of a church with a *terminus ante quem* of the 13th century, uses a similar image:

Greatly exult and be glad,
 O Holy, Faithful Church,
 for, behold! A banquet is set in you:
 the body and blood of Christ.
 Behold! The chief priest [=bishop] stands in you
 in the likeness of Peter and Paul,
 the priests, in the likeness of the angels,
 surround the holy altar,
 and the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete,
 dwells in you and hallows you.⁴¹

The image in the hymn invokes the presence of the bishop, in this case like Peter, and the priests surrounding the altar. While this could be a symbolic gathering of ecclesial communion with the bishop at the head of that communion, corroborating evidence in Dandini's journal will demonstrate that it is literally true during the Eucharistic liturgy in the 16th century. Being mindful of the risk of an anachronistic retrojection, it would seem plausible to entertain the serious possibility that there was some form of concelebration in which priests shared prayers.

Returning to the example in my introductory anecdote with the evidence present in the similarly 15th century Vat. Sir. 47, the new priest is not admonished to simply observe but

⁴⁰ George makes himself known not only in the colophon (146r), but repeatedly and almost comically inserts himself into the text of the liturgy. There are twelve commemorations in Sharrar – presumably for the 12 Apostles – George adds a thirteenth, following the same format as the others: “Remember, Lord God, at this time your weak and sinful servant George, who wrote [this manuscript]; forgive and remit him his debts and sins, and forgive his parents. Amen.” (32r). Then, in the Anaphora of Jacob of Edessa, he replaces the standard prayer of the epiclesis with “Answer me, O Lord. Answer me, O Lord. Remember, O Lord, your servant George and forgive his debts. Amen.” (72v). It is not uncommon for copyists to request prayers; the visibility of George, however, inserting this request into the body of proper prayers multiple times is risible.

⁴¹ Paris Syriac 120, 119v.

exercise his priestly office (ܥܡܪܘܢ) with a more experienced priest, and must observe the necessary abstinence prerequisite. The Syriac tradition has never had a concept of “transitional” deacons, so the newly ordained could have been a deacon observing the liturgy from the sanctuary for many years. It would only make sense that the practical concelebration experience a new priest could receive is chanting some prayers at the altar, whether with or by himself, with the more experienced priest present. Though Taft dismisses a “verbal co-consecration” among Maronites as a 17th century development, he admits it as a possibly older practice among the Copts.⁴² From my own knowledge of Coptic monks, it is not unheard of that a bishop ordains a man who has no previous training to be a priest with little anticipation, and he must then learn the liturgy by means of concelebration with an experienced priest. Given that seminaries were a development of the Council of Trent, and did not enter into mandate in the Maronite Church until the Synod of Mt. Lebanon in 1736, it is conceivable some analogous situation existed among Maronites. While a conceivable situation does not necessitate it, it would seem to be a more certain argument than just denouncing a practice as scholastic by personal intuition.

Paris Syriac 120 provides evidence elsewhere for what attending clergy may have worn. Though the manuscript is a pontifical that describes non-Eucharistic liturgies, it describes the vesting and entrance of clergy with the bishop. In the rite for the consecration of a *tablitho*, roughly equivalent to an altar stone, the priests and deacons are to “vest as they are able and stand around the table [altar], while one of the priests carries the cross standing on the East [side], one of the presbyters carries the Gospel and stands on the West side, and another presbyter similarly carries the vessel, in which there is holy chrism, and the deacons carry fans surrounding them, and others candles, and [others] carry whatever they can.”⁴³ Here it is envisioned that priests stand around the altar fulfilling a particular function of service to the bishop with instruments of the liturgy at hand – the Gospel is conferred at the ordination of a priest in the same pontifical, and chrism to the *periodeut*, another medial rank above priest but below bishop; likewise the fans are given to deacons in certain ordinals, and candles to subdeacons. Each order in this case is fulfilling its role in con-celebrating the liturgy. What is opaque is the phrase that they “vest as they are able” – is it ability according to order? Ability

⁴² Taft, “Ex Oriente Lux? Some Reflections on Eucharistic Concelebration,” 81.

⁴³ Paris Syriac 107v-108r.

according to scarcity of vestments? In any case, the evidence revealed in this brief survey of 15th century sources presents a more active involvement than idle attendance, and that certainly does not seem to be sourced in a Latinization.

16th Century

Girolamo Dandini SJ's diary, *Missione Apostolica al Patriarca e Maroniti del Monte Libano* (The Apostolic Mission to the Patriarch and Maronites of Mount Lebanon), at the end of the 16th century is the most useful resource of the century for an inadvertent liturgical account. As mentioned above, much of what he records is in condemnatory terms in his chapters on "the Abuses Found" and "The Errors Imposed by Some on That [Maronite] Nation." What Dandini observes is nothing extraordinary for an Easterner, and corroborates a Maronite praxis in continuity with neighboring ritual traditions.

Dandini only mentions the celebrant vesting and unvesting.⁴⁴ He does mention, however, that as many priests as one finds, they all assist the celebrant and lean against the altar during the liturgy, even bishops. He also refers to the great involvement of everyone in singing, whether clergy or "all the people."⁴⁵ Does he mean to suggest bishops are concelebrating with priests? They are likely attending with a priest celebrant, as remains a common custom among many Churches, including various Syriac Churches. There existed no necessity to be offer the liturgy with an interval, and, as Dandini himself observes, according to the standard Eastern custom only one liturgy was allowed in one place a day.⁴⁶ It makes sense, then, that everyone would gather when the liturgy is being offered, since there was absolutely no sense of offering the liturgy privately. As for their singing, it is too uncertain to make any inferences – likely Dandini himself could not understand if they were chanting prayers of the Anaphora or a simple hymn. He also mentions at the end of his description of the Eucharistic liturgy, either those attending clergy or the celebrant if he is alone "do not stop reciting other prayers" while he unvests.⁴⁷ Another teasing description – specific enough to pique the imagination but vague enough to risk liturgical eisegesis.

⁴⁴ cf. Girolamo Dandini, *Missione Apostolica al Patriarca e Maroniti del Monte Libano*, 82.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* 80.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* 86.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* 82.

Whether the attending clergy share in prayers proper to the Anaphora at this point in history or not remains a mystery. Dandini does intimate evidence for another sort of celebrated sacrament: anointing of the sick. He mentions that the oil of extreme union is not blessed by the bishop on Holy Thursday, but by a simple priest.⁴⁸ That is, of course, the common custom in the East; but when there are multiple priests, there is a special blessing of the oil of the sick called the Rite of the Lamp, conceptually common among Eastern Churches but differing in form. Among Maronites, it had seven offices, ideally offered by seven individual priests but prayed together over the oil in the presence of the one in need inspired by James 5:14.⁴⁹ Later, in the 17th century, pontificals such as Vat. Sir. 311 and 313 will make it into a pontifical rite, likely following the Latin apprehension akin to the condemnations of Eliano and Dandini. But before that modification, the rite was presbyteral and involved the sharing of prayers in a sort of “co-consecratory” fashion. This does not necessitate a sharing of prayers in the Eucharistic liturgy, but as has already been seen in the 15th century, it is not precluded from the action of the Apostles. Especially given no articulated theology of *in persona Christi* among Syriacs and their ability to collaborate in confecting other sacraments (in this case, the oil for anointing), it is at least reasonable to entertain a possibility that there was also a verbal Eucharistic concelebration of some sort.

17th Century

Patriarch ad-Duwayhy writes his massive liturgical instruction at this time called the منارت الآفداس (The Light of the Holy Things). With ad-Duwayhy comes the first standardization of clerical concelebration. But it is worth asking whether he is being prescriptive or descriptive with his chapter entitled “Is it permitted for two or three priests to hallow [offer Mass] together?”⁵⁰ While many of the chapter titles might provoke a reader to think they are asking permission, ad-Duwayhy uses these chapters to give theological exposition to certain practices. In the course of this chapter, he cites another hymn from the consecration of a church almost identical to what is quoted above.⁵¹ Throughout the chapter, it remains clear that there is a celebrant and his fully

⁴⁸ *ibid.* 91-2.

⁴⁹ cf. mentioned also by Archdale King, *Concelebration in the Christian Church*, 123; see Denzinger’s *Ritus Orientalium*.

⁵⁰ منارت الآفداس, I, 252.

⁵¹ *ibid.* 253-4.

vested concelebrants must follow his lead, not being distracting and not preceding him in the silent pronouncement of words. Those who do not wish to say the Institution Narrative and commune withdraw at that time. Though the intuitive response may be to identify that with a Latinate mentality of co-consecration, even Taft alludes to the fact that he encounters a Greek Orthodox priest with the same expectation of concelebrants.⁵² That is not to suggest the Greeks themselves cannot have been affected by Latin influence; only to suggest it might not be as obvious as a singular Latin influence upon Maronites as may be easily explained. Daou suggests the instructive regulation of concelebration comes at a time of its waning frequency; in fact, it will be in the coming century at the Synod of Mt. Lebanon when concelebration will be further limited in terms of occasion.⁵³ Rather than regularizing a movement towards sacramental concelebration, perhaps the Latinizing influence that should be considered is the individuating and delineating a prescribed type of concelebration.

The 17th century also sees the further production of printed books in Rome that codify and record older custom. There are many kinds of deferential phrases that develop in Syriac liturgy. In the 1624 ܐܘܨܬܐܘܪܐ (the hebdomadal office), in addition to all different types of the aforementioned ܕܘܚܒܐ (bless, my lord) for all different prelatical ranks, certain phrases are prescribed before a central rite that is present in every liturgy in the Maronite tradition, whether an office, sacrament or otherwise. This climactic offering of incense is accompanied by a long prayer called the ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܘܢܐ (Prayer of Forgiveness), subdivided into several parts. After the introductory prayer and before the main body, the offering priest is instructed, based on how many priests and what they rank is, to deferentially say “By the command of God, and by your command, our father(s).” Here presents another example of where the Syriac liturgy instructs the celebrant to defer to another – perhaps, a priest who is even more junior.

18th Century

The Synod of Mt. Lebanon quickly followed, solidifying praxis that had been already articulated by ad-Duwayhy; namely, concelebrants must be fully vested, omit nothing, and say all the words “morosely, distinctly and attentively.”⁵⁴ This was preceded by a new Roman edition

⁵² Taft, “Eucharistic Concelebration Revisited: Problems of History, Practice, and Theology in East and West Part II.”

⁵³ Daou, “Notes sur la concelebration maronite,” 237.

⁵⁴ Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 126.

of the Maronite missal in 1716 that mandated concelebrant priests could wear their outer cassock and stole, and concelebrants had to say: the entrance prayers, the incense hymn, the Prayer of Forgiveness, Trisagion, second verse of the antiphon before the readings, Alleluia versicle, the hymn before the Anaphora, the Institution Narrative, and the post-communion hymns.⁵⁵ It also rubricized how to greet a priest or bishop during the peace and to invoke “*salaw alai metul moran*” (pray for me to our Lord) to the other priests before communion.⁵⁶ Those prayers held to be done in common go well beyond just an “emphasis” on the Institution Narrative. Some of the prayers mandated might even correspond to what Dandini described, such as the post-communion hymns and what he perceived as incessant chant between all the people. Here we also see that a priest concelebrant is allowed to wear an outer cassock and stole, whereas the Synod of Mt. Lebanon states they must be vested; the missal remains with its instruction until the reform in the 20th century. Does that mean outer cassock and stole is considered fully vested? It seems not. Were contradictory practices legislated at the same time? That seems likely, which is why great caution must be taken when reading any liturgical text and falsely assuming it was followed absolutely to the letter because it existed in writing. Michel Rajji writes in the case of Mt. Lebanon that the bishops present signed only the Arabic acts, and later the Papal Legate created and added his own hybridized rites to the Latin acts of the Synod, which were in turn the version approved by the Holy See.⁵⁷

Contemporary Reform of the 20th/21st Century

A certain liturgical stability was maintained after the Synod of Mt. Lebanon, with varying degrees of Latinization depending on where one found themselves. The Maronite Church began a liturgical reform in the 1940s headed by Michel Rajji, primarily to remove Latin elements and restore its tradition, and was supported by Rome.⁵⁸ While it was initially faithful to its mission, the reform went into a hiatus and then the Lebanese Civil War that spanned three decades (70s-90s) prevented any serious liturgical reform at large. Then in 1992, at the end of the Civil

⁵⁵ *Maronite Missal* (1908 reprint), 58.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* 59.

⁵⁷ Rajji, *Du pontifical maronite*, 33-4.

⁵⁸ Rajji, “de la liturgie maronite,” 80. Rajji acerbically writes in the article, “nous sommes loin, on le voit, des dispositions romaines aux XIII et XVI siècles!”

War, the patriarchate promulgated a new missal on the 400th anniversary of the Roman printing of the Maronite missal introduced as a reclamation of Maronite tradition.

The reform including the removal of any of the prayers prayed by the deacon on behalf of the priest. The epiclesis, which formerly paraphrased 1 Kings 18 when Elijah invoked God to “Answer me, O Lord” was pluralized for an inclusion of the faithful. Likewise, several prayers prayed by the priest previously, such as two part of the fraction and another part of the pre-communion rite, were made popular prayers. Effectively, it made the faithful co-offerers in certain instances with the ordained priest(s).

The rubrics for concelebrating priests have still not been agreed upon. In 2022, an ad experimentem rubrical book was published by the patriarchate. It proposed concelebrants be fully vested, never extend their hands and say every prayer with the celebrant from the post-Sanctus to the epiclesis. I have never witnessed anyone follow those rubrics because they are untenable and contradict the logic operative in the contemporary liturgy. On a functional level, it is un navigable to recite in unison prayers meant to be chanted for 10 minutes. What has been prescribed is certainly not what is being done.

Conclusion

This paper presented an extensive survey of Maronite concelebration across the textual evidence that we have. What we can say is definitively less than we would like. However, in this small microcosmic case study of a Church that you perhaps have not heard of before, one cannot make many expansive generalizations about enduring hallmarks and intentions of concelebration over only a few centuries. Apart from the historical particularities studied here for the first time, it should cause us to reflect on the monolithic use of the term “concelebration,” whether across time or traditions, and consider whether there really is a singular concelebration; certainly it seems even when a standardization was attempted in the Maronite Church, it did not clarify praxis once-and-for-all. And this even all precludes the question “what does the concelebrant think he is doing?”