

The Sacrament of the holy leaven  
In the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East  
By Fr. George Toma

Introduction

The Sacrament of the Holy Leaven “Malka” is counted as one of the seven sacraments in the sacramental list of the Assyrian Church of the East. This Sacrament not found in any other apostolic churches nor recognized, except in the Church of the East. “George P Badger, an Anglican Priest of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in his book “the Nestorians and their Rituals”, says: “*it is a poor selection to include the Holy Leaven in the list of the seven Sacraments. Since it is not mentioned in the Rituals of the early centuries according to the authority, it should be treated as a later introduction. Badger thinks it is of the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century.*”<sup>1</sup>

One of the oldest and the most reliable reference in regard to the origin of the “Holy Leaven” available in our hands is the book of “Marganitha” written at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Mar Abdisho, Metropolitan of Suwa (Nisibis) and Armenia. Mar Abdisho counts the Holy Leaven as one of the seven Sacraments of the Church of the East saying: “*The Sacraments of the Church, according to the Divine Scriptures, are seven in number: 1. The Priesthood which is the ministry of all the others. 2. Holy Baptism. 3. The Oil of Unction. 4. The Oblation of the body and Blood of Christ. 5. Absolution. 6. The Holy Leaven, ‘The holy leaven is usually referred to as Malka “the King”. And 7. The Holy Cross. “These are necessary because of the wants of man in this carnal world”.*”<sup>2</sup>

Not having enough literature available in our hands written before and after the 13<sup>th</sup> century makes it too difficult to prove the initiation, development and practice of this religious performance in the holy Church. Mar Abdisho in his book

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<sup>1</sup> The Most Rev. Dr. Mar Aprim, Metropolitan of the Church of the East, of India, *Sacraments of the Church of the East*, PP 38-39, Mar Narsai Press, Trichure: Kerala India, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> The book of Marganitha “the pearl” on the truth of Christianity written by Mar Abdisho Metropolitan of Suwa and Armenia, Translated from the Aramaic original by His Holiness Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII Catholicos Patriarch of the East. P 45. And published with His sanction and authority, 1965, Mar Themothues Memorial Printing & Publishing, House limited, Ernakkulam, Kerala, India.

“Marganitha” part IV, Chapter I “on the number of the Church Sacraments” states, “*But some Christians who possess not the Holy Leaven reckon marriage, which is according to Christ’s ordinance, the seventh Sacrament.*” 3

### **The tradition of the Holy Leaven:**

It has been a tradition for two thousand years in the Church of the East that the Sacrament of the Holy Leaven was initiated by our Lord Jesus Christ, practiced by the Holy Apostles and maintained by the fathers of the Church. The Church strongly believes that “*The Holy and blessed Apostles, Thomas and Bartholomew of the twelve, and Mar Addai and Mar Mari of the seventy, who discipled the East, committed to all the churches in the East the Holy Leaven, to be kept for perfection of the administration of the Sacrament of our Lord’s body until His coming again.*”4

Regarding the preservation of the holy leaven Mar Abdisho in the book of Marganitha says: “*the Easterners from the day of their discipleship, up to this day, have kept their faith as a sacred trust, and have observed, without change, the Apostolic Canons, and notwithstanding all the persecutions which they have suffered from many kings, and their subjection to the sever yoke of a foreign power, they have never altered their creed nor changed their canons, such as are well versed in such matters know full well the labor and care required on the part of Christians to observe these canons, and more especially preserve this Leaven, in a difficult country, where there is no Christian sovereign to support them, nor any commander to back them, and where they are continually persecuted, vexed, and troubled. Have this leaven not been of the Apostolic transmission they would not, most assuredly, have endured all these afflictions and trials to keep it together with orthodox faith. Then, as to their argument drawn from Peter and the great Apostles who discipled the West, we have this to oppose them, that those Apostles did transmit the same to the Westerners but that with their alteration of the faith, the canons also were corrupted by their (Western) subjection to the will of heretical kings. And, in proof of this statement, we urge that if they all held the tradition of the Apostles, the Franks would not offer an unleavened, and the Romans (Greeks) a leavened oblation: since the Apostles did not transmit it in two*

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3 Ibid PP 46-47

4 Ibid p. 58.

*different ways. Therefore, the Westerners have changed the faith and the canons, and not the Easterners.” 5*

### **The historical development of the Sacrament of the Holy Leaven:**

How did Jesus Christ establish the Sacrament of the Holy Leaven?

Mar Youkhanan Bar Zoobi in his account written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century concerning the origin and the establishment of the Sacrament of the Holy Leaven says: this Sacrament sprouts (stems) from the gathering of the Lord with his disciples when He (the Lord) celebrated the first Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (Matthew 26:26).

*“After our Lord was baptized and began his economy, he called John the son of Zebedee, and made him the ‘beloved Disciple.’ When he completed his dispensation, and drew near to the passion and death, on the night of the Friday of the passion, he handed over the Passover to his disciples. For, as he handed over the mystery of his passion in the bread and wine as it is written. “To each he gave a single ‘coal’ [i.e. Particle of the Eucharist], but to John he gave two. He made John to eat one and to keep the other as a leaven, which be preserved, and to be placed in the Church for a memorial. But when the Jews arrested our Lord in order to condemn him, the disciples were afraid and hid, and John remained by himself. But when they crucified him on the wood, along with the malefactors in order to deride him; John was there also, to see what would be his (Jesus’) end; for the chief priests ordered to bring down the crosses and to also break their legs, that if they were alive they should die. The soldiers came and broke the legs of the malefactors, and as they came to our Lord, they saw that he was dead and they did not break his legs, rather, one of the soldiers struck his side with a lance, and at that moment there came forth water and blood, and John saw them. For the blood is the symbol of the [Eucharistic] mysteries of the body and Blood, which exist in the Church. And the water is a sign of the rebirth of the faithful. It was John alone who saw them, the separation of the water and blood. And he testified in truth (even) as he said that we might believe his witness [cf. John 19:35] He saw the separation which he declared, for they were not taken together, rather each one of them was taken by itself. He took the (drop of) blood by the particle, which was kept from the Passover. And he took the water in a vessel, that which John the Baptist had handed down to him. The blood of his body was mixed, with that bread*

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5 Ibid p. 59

which he (Jesus) called his Body; and the water from his side was mingled with the water from his baptism. .

*After he rose from the grave, and ascended in glory to his Father, and send the grace of the Spirit upon his disciples and made them wise. And he commanded his disciples, to place in the Churches the leaven which they took from his body that it may be for the (Eucharistic) mysteries and for baptism. But when his disciples gathered, in order to go out for the discipling of nations; they took this leaven and divided it in portions amongst them. They took pure olive oil and mixed it with the water of baptism in the vessel, and they distributed in horns according to their measure, that it may be for the Leaven of baptism. They ground the particle which was soaked with the blood from the side of our Lord, and they mixed it with flour and salt, and they divided it in vessels amongst them; that it might be in the Church for a leaven of the Body and Blood of Christ. This account which I have narrated, in which is placed the sign of peter, and I copied it even as it is, for the benefit of those who come upon our writing. Giving testimony to this account. (is) the priest-monk Shimoun (Simon), who recounted it to me and showed its text as well." 6*

The history and account of the origin of the Holy leaven as narrated by Mar Yohannan bar Zo'bi in essence stems from the memra of Sem'on Kepa on the mysteries of the Eucharist and baptism, documented by Raban Sem'on of Shanqalabad. In fact, mentions this at the very outset of the account he writes in this treatise quoted above, the Zaqora Mlakhma, or 'Harmonious Textile.' 7

Mar Awa Royel says: *"This enigmatic (mysterious) Sem'on Kepa has a pertinent (relevant) work attributed to him: The Questions of Mar Sem'on Kepa on the Divine Mysteries and Baptism, as to where they Originate From. J Assemani states that this Sem'on Kepa and Sem'on who was the master of Yohannan bar Zo'bi are one and the same, and it is to him whom he refers in his chapter 'On Baptism and Eucharist' found in the Harmonious Textile. The select passages of the Questions and Answers of Sem'on Kepa are found in the manuscript Mingana 604 (ff. 74v-82r). At the beginning of this treatise, Sem'on Kepa makes this statement:"* 8

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6 See the modern Assyrian translation made by the late Rev. Isaac Rehana, printed in Chicago, 1990; Pp. 85-88. For the English translation see: *Mysteries of the Kingdom, the Sacraments of the Assyrian Church of the East* by Bishop Mar Awa Royel PP 306 -308. Edessa Publication Modesto, California. 2011.

7 Mar Awa Royel, *The Sacrament of the Holy Leaven (Malka) in the Assyrian Church of the East*. October 2011, p. 370.

8 Ibid. page 370

Mar Sem'on Kepa states how the Apostle Mar Addai received the Malka:

*“But when the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, came upon the disciples and made them wise with the gift and he commanded them that they should proclaim the Good News of our Lord, just as he had commanded them: ‘Go and make disciples and baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; behold I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world (Amen)’ [Matthew 28:19-20]...then Mar Addai, who was called Thaddeus one of the Twelve, by the permission of the Spirit was given [charge over] Edessa (which is the same Urhai). And when each one of the blessed apostles took of these divine mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Lord, the Holy leaven from the fragment [literally, ‘coal’] of John the Evangelist, and from the horn of the water which gushed forth from the side of our Lord, holy baptism which confirms unto true life. These divine mysteries which were handed down for the absolution of our debts and sins, were [then] handed down by the very hands of the blessed apostles unto the ends of the earth, by the power of the Holy Spirit.....” 9*

With regard to the transmission of the Holy leaven by the apostles to the Church in the East (i.e., the Persian Empire), Mar Sem'on Kepa states the following:

*“But we the children of the land of the East have received the Holy Leaven and Holy baptism from the hands of one of the twelve apostles, and Addai handed down the divine mysteries to Mar Mari the apostle, and the same Mar Mari gave them to all the limits of the East. And behold they are preserved and administered unto the age of ages by the might of our Lord Jesus Christ; amen. And know also, that there are those who say [concerning] the horn of anointing, the leaven and the anaphora of the apostles: that after the apostles gathered at Antioch, they baptized and consecrated the Eucharist, and from there they dispersed to the four corners. And, there are those who say that, Addai, after he had taken it from Daniel, was sent by our Lord and broke [the Eucharist] and baptized, and he gave it to Mari, and Mari handed it down to the East. The Holy thing is not consecrated at the hands of its recipients, and if it were consecrated at the hands of the recipients, what need would there be for the priest to consecrate the Holy Oblation. As a demonstration, as our Lord gave his Body to his disciples, he blessed [it], and by that blessing with which He blessed, the bread is consecrated.” 10*

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9 Ibid. page 371

10 Ibid 371-372

There is another account of the holy leaven recorded by Mar Shleemon (around the same time as Mar Yohannan bar Zo'bi) the metropolitan of the city of Prath Maishan (modern day Basrah) which is located in the southern part of Iraq, commenting on the Feast of Pentecost writes an explanation of the tradition of the Holy Malka "the holy Leaven" in his book called "the Book of the Bee, chapter 47 saying: *"Concerning the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in the upper room, Ten days after the Ascension of our Lord, while the holy apostles were gathered in the upper Room and awaiting the promise of our Lord, all a sadden at the third hour [i.e. 9:00 am] of Sunday of the Pentecost, a mighty sound was heard, so much so that all men trembled and were amazed at the strength of that sound. The Upper Room was filled with a strong light which is unspeakable, and upon the head of each one of them the likeness of tongues of fire were seen. And a pleasant scent wafted from that place, which surpasses every fragrance that exists in this world, and the eyes of their heart were opened, and they began to interpret new things and to speak wonders or marvels in the languages of all nations.*

*And when the Jews saw them, they thought to themselves that they had drunk new wine, and were drunk and out of their minds. And in that very day they participated in the mystery (Sacrament) of the body and blood of our Lord and they consecrated the leaven of the signing (roshma) and the Oil of Baptism.*

*For [some] people hand down that when our Lord broke his Body for His disciples in the Upper Room, John the son of Zabedee hid [some] from his portion until our Lord rose from among the dead. And when our Lord was seen to his disciples and to Thomas, with them, and He said to Thomas 'Bring your finger and put it in my side, and do not be without faith, but believer' [John 20; 26-27], and Thomas touched our Lord's side with his finger and it fell upon the place of the [wound] of the spear, and the disciples saw the blood from the wounds of the spear and the nails, [then] John took that portion from the 'coal' [portion from the Body given at the Last Supper] and he wiped that Blood with that portion . And the Easterners, Mar Addai and Mar Mari took that portion and consecrated by it this Leaven which has been handed down to us. But the other apostles did not take from it, for they said that ' they will consecrate for ourselves whenever we wish'. But [regarding] the Oil of Baptism, there are those who have said that it had come from the oil with which Kings were anointed, this, our Oil of baptism. And still others have said that [it comes from] the embalming ointments with which they embalmed our Lord, and many agree with this. Still others have said that when John took that portion of the Passover in his hand, it burst into flames and burned*

*in his palm, and his palm sweated, and he took that sweat and kept it for the signing of baptism. And we have heard this saying from mouth to ear, from a monk and visitor [i.e. cor-bishop], and we have not received it in writing... ” 11*

Thus this particular piece of the consecrated loaf of bread (Body of Christ) became the Holy Leaven for the Holy Apostles of the Lord. The first time when the Apostles celebrated the first Holy oblation, Saint Luke says: “and they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the Holy Apostles and they took part in the breaking of the bread.” (Acts 2: 42) they entrusted pieces of this Holy Leaven to the entire Christian world. To this day, this Holy Leaven has been kept and renewed annually on the Holy Thursday in the Church of the East.

### **Holy Malka in the Liturgical Canons of the Church of the East:**

The most ancient documents of the Church, written about the Holy Leaven ‘Malka’ available at our hands are the Liturgical canons of Patriarch Mar Yohannan (John) V, bar Abgare (900-905) Canon 15 of this patriarch’s Liturgical directives decrees:

*“For it pleased the Holy Spirit, and He commanded: that those who make the dough of the Qsatha [i.e. hosts to be baked] preserve two leavenings, the one consecrated and the other ordinary. But the consecrated one is the one that is necessary for the hosts, and these things are so by the word of our Lord. 12*

Mar Awa bishop of California of the Church of the East says: “*The first reference to the Malka exists in this Canon, which refers to it simply as the Holy (i.e. consecrated) Leaven, ‘Now, this does not mean that the sacrament of the Holy Leaven did not exist before the year 900 AD; however it simply is not mentioned or recorded in any document before that year.’*”<sup>13</sup>

The use of the term Malka in reference to the Eucharistic Loaves is also mentioned in Canon 9 of the same Patriarch Mar Yohannan (John) V, bar Abgare (900-905) Liturgical directives decrees. It is written:

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11 Ernest A. Budge (English translation and editor), the Book of the Bee. The Syriac text Edited from the Manuscript in London, Oxford and Munich, with English Translation (Oxford, 1886, chapter 47, P 102-103. For the original see Pp 115-117.

12 (The English translation is that of Mar Awa Royel bishop of California, Assyrian Church of the East. For the original Syriac, see: J.E.Y. Kelaita (ed), The Liturgy of the Church of the East. Mousl 1928; reprinted in Chicago 2002, 213. According to J.S Assemani, this is number as ‘Canon 12;’ see Assemani, Bibliotheca Orientalis 111/1, 241.

*“For has pleased the Holy Spirit, and commanded: that no one from among the presbyters and deacons who minister the altar are to make the dough loaves of flour – while it is the King (Malka) –of dark wheat, and neither is it befitting that they should make the King (Malka) [to be] an enslaved Ethiopian servant, but rather a ‘white’ [i.e. Caucasian] Roman; and these things are so by the word of our Lord.”<sup>14</sup>*

Mar Giwargis Metropolitan of Athor (Arbel) from 938 to 960 AD., in his canon laws mentioning the Holy Leaven says:

*“I have seen sacristans who knead the dough (Qsatha) with the profane Leavening in the eventide, and at the nocturnal (night time) service they take half of the dough and bake the hosts in a profane manner [i.e. without the Holy Leaven], and the other half they sign with the holy Leaven [Malka] and bake it (and bring it) up to the altar. They put forth the pretext (excuse) that they give from the profane hosts to the pagans and to children, who are negligent in regards to keeping them and the crumbs which fall from them, and there are times that they are consumed after having taken food and drink.”<sup>15</sup>*

### **The office for the renewal of the Holy Leaven:**

The office for the renewal of the Holy Leaven (Malka) is found in the Takhsa (Liturgy, PP. 180-192, printed by Rev. Joseph Qellaita, in Mousel in 1928. The renewal service of the Holy Leaven (Malka) is done on the Holy Thursday while the priest and deacons are fasting as it is a norm in the Church of the East. These clergies should fast while they are performing any one of the seven Sacraments. The Clergy wear the official vestments during this service which is done in the Beth d Yaqon, i.e. vestry.

The rubric printed in the read in the “Takhsa” of the renewal of the Holy Leaven explains the ingredients, procedures of mixing and the performing of this Holy service. *“First, on the day of Passover Thursday they bring pure, fine flour, that is,*

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<sup>14</sup> J.E.Y. Kelaita (ed), The Liturgy of the Church of the East. Mousl 1928, 211. According to J.S Assemani, this is is ‘Canon 10;’ see Assemani, Bibliotheca Orientalis 111/1, 241

<sup>15</sup> Assemani , Bibliotheca Orientalis 111/1,242; W.C. van Unnik, Nestorian Questions on the administration of the Eucharist by Isho Yabb 1v. A contribution to the history of the eucharist in the Eastern Church, Haarlem 1937(reprinted Amsterdam 1970, 1719the English translation is that of the present writer, although van unnik has already excuted the English translation0. His question belongs to the collection of Liturgical questions 7 answers which are ascribed to George of Arbel, Cf. A. Baumstarkthe following Liturgical setting is brought forward in which there is a mention of the Holy Leaven:



*of the finest wheat two thirds, and another third of pure pounded and sifted salt and they sprinkle on it a little of pure reserved olive oil and three drops of water. And they mix them together well upon the stone for the preparation of the Host. Then the Sacristan and another Priest, or more, and the Deacons with them, place the Cross and Gospel with the Censer and lights in the place of the preparation of the Host.” 16*

The Psalms are read while ingredients are carefully mixed together. Just as all the spiritual services of the church begin with the prayer of the “our Father”, in the same manner, the priest who presides the performance of the renewal of the Holy Leaven, starts with “our Father” then continues to the end of the prescribed liturgy. Mar Aprem Mokaan metropolitan of India says:

“The service “of the renewal of the holy leaven” mainly consists of prayers and psalms. It is observed with great solemnity on the Maundy Thursday before the service of the washing of the feet ceremony. Several priests and deacons participate in this annual service.” 17

The Holy Church, in its prayers, refers to the Holy Leaven as king (Christ) because it is the piece of the consecrated bread “Body of Christ”, the king of kings.

“Unto you O king of Kings the assembling and multitude of angles and archangels worship in great fear and tremble standing before you and minister and celebrate the greatness of your worshipful honor. We are bound to confess, worship and glorify at all times O Lord of all, Father and son and Holy Spirit.” Amen 18

The Liturgy of the renewal of the Holy leaven in a prayer of Gehantha (bending), which the priest prays silently in his heart, confirms that this sacrament was

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16 The Liturgy of the Church of the East. Printed and published by the Reverend Joseph E.Y De Kelaita, in Mousel in March 15, 1928. The office for the renewal of the Holy Leaven (Malka), P 180.

17 Sacraments of the Church of the East by Mar Aprem Mokaan metropolitan of India, p. 39, Mar Narsai Press, Trichur: Kerala, India, 1978)

18 The Liturgy (Takhsa) of the Church of the East. Printed and published by the Reverend Joseph E.Y De Kelaita, in Mousel in March 15, 1928. The office for the renewal of the Holy Leaven (Malka), the priestly prayer Pp. 180-181.

entrusted to the Church by the Holy Apostles and kept alive in the Church through the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

“O Lord God of Hosts, *repeat*, Holy and incomprehensible, you who appointed in your holy Church spiritual stewards, the blessed Apostles, to feed your flocks in tranquil meadows of doctrine, saying to them, Make disciples of every nation, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and when you have baptized them, give them communion in the life-giving Mysteries in holy Church; and the Apostles gave this symbol, delivering it to the priests and leaders of the flock of Christ, and on the strength of authority we too, your weak, miserable, and wretched servants, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, are perfecting and renewing this holy Leaven, that it may impart holiness to the mingling of the holy and life-giving Mysteries, and may pardon and heal from the scars of sin and from the filth of wickedness, for the assistance of all the community, and for the honor and worship of the glorious Trinity, now, always, *and he signs over himself and raises his voice*, and forever and ever. *Response: Amen*”  
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The prayer of the canon is a visible sign that the Holy Leaven is a Sacrament. “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God, the father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now, always and forever and ever.*” *Amen* 20

Upon the descending of the Holy Spirit on the Mixture through the priestly invitation of the Holy Spirit, this earthly mixture obtains a Divine power. This is a visible sign that this religious performance is no less, in anyway, than any other Sacraments.

The priest recites this Gehantha softly in his heart saying: “*In Your name, O Lord God, compassionate Father, repeat, and in the Name of Your Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Merciful One, and in The Name of Your living and Holy Spirit, we call upon You and beseech You to send the power of Your grace, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, to bless the Leaven and sanctify it, that Your Godhead may dwell in it and Your Lordship be honored in it, so that the life-giving Mysteries, which on the Throne of your Lordship are offered, may be filled with it and perfected by it for the pardon and forgiveness of sin: Amen.*” 21

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19 Ibid. Pp. 185-186.

20 Ibid. 186

21 Ibid. PP. 187-188

While the priest signs the mixture with the old consecrated Holy leaven recites the following prayer.

*“Then he signs over the material, then takes some of the old Leaven from the Altar and with it signs the new flour, saying, “This flour is signed, hallowed, mingled, renewed, and made one with this holy and ancient Leaven of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was handed down to us from our spiritual fathers, Mar Mari, Mar Addai, and St. Thomas, the blessed Apostles who discipled this eastern region, that it may be taken from place to place, and from one land to another, for the completion and mingling of the living Host of the life-giving Mysteries, as often as a reason of necessity calls, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”*<sup>22</sup>

At the end of the Liturgy of the renewal of the Holy Leaven, the consecrated Leaven (Malka) will be put in a precious container and the priest recites Psalms carrying it highly above his head, as the deacons are carrying the incense and reciting the psalms with the priest and proceeding towards the sacristy and places it down in the tabernacle which is fixed on the altar. The Candles will always be enlightened as the sign of the presence of the Lord. No clergy can ever enter the altar without fasting or with his ordinary shoes and clothes because of the presence of the Lord on the altar through the Sacrament of the Holy Leaven. God told Moses, *“Moses remove your shoes for the place you stand is a Holy place.”*

### **The Theological significance of the Holy Leaven**

The Church of the East strongly believes that the Sacrament of the Holy Leaven, and the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until His second coming from heaven. The Church also believes that the Sacrament of the Holy Leaven is the only materialistic and visible sign that maintains the connection of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist with that of the last supper. Without this essential principle (the holy Leaven/Malka) it would seem that every time we celebrate the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, we are repeating the Sacrifice of the Cross and what Jesus established in the last supper. With the presence of Malka (The holy Leaven) the Church fathers, strongly believed that the celebration of the Holy Eucharist is the continuation of what Jesus did on the last Supper. In other words the fathers of the Church believed that any

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<sup>22</sup> The Liturgy (Takhsa) of the Church of the East. Printed and published by the Reverend Joseph E.Y De Kelaita, in Mousel in March 15, 1928. The office for the renewal of the Holy Leaven (Malka), the priestly prayer P. 188.

time the Holy Eucharist is celebrated in the Church, it brings the sacrifice of the Cross and the celebration of the last Supper into the present time. Mar Aprem metropolitan of India says:

*“Continuity of Qurbana “Oblation” is kept by the mixing of the dough of the previous baking as well as the addition of a small portion of Malka “Holy leaven”.<sup>23</sup>*

Mar Awa Royel Bishop of the Assyrian Church of the East, diocese of California regarding the importance of Malka the holy Leaven as a materialistic and visible sign that maintains the connection of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist with that of the last supper says:

*“The Malka is made use of in two very important liturgies of the Church of the East that are closely connected to the Eucharist. It is, this understanding that will give us a correct perspective concerning the Sacrament of Malka, namely its liturgical and sacramental function as an extension of the Eucharist. The first usage of the Malka proves to be a link between the Eucharist that the Church celebrates and offers today, in accord with and in faithfulness to the command of Christ to ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ (Luke 22:19), and the Eucharist which Jesus himself first celebrated after he observed the Mosaic prescription of the Passover meal. The Malka is the link between the Church’s Eucharist today and the first Eucharist of the Lord Jesus himself, and where does that link come from to us? Again, from the apostles who are the authentic witnesses of Jesus Christ, his holy doctrine and his suffering, death and resurrection. The presence of the Sacrament of the Malka as a ‘leavening’ for the Holy Eucharist takes us back to the first Eucharist, so that we truly believe and hold that we are observing the same Eucharistic celebration which Christ and his holy apostles observed first, and handed down to the generations of believers in the Church.”<sup>24</sup>*

Regarding that Jesus Christ offered himself on the Cross on behalf of the sins of all mankind once and for all, Saint Paul in his Epistle to Hebrews says: “And who needs, not daily, as do those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for their own

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<sup>23</sup> Sacraments of the Church of the East by Mar Aprem Mokaan metropolitan of India, p. 41, Mar Narsai Press, Trichur: Kerala, India, 1978.

<sup>24</sup> Mysteries of the Kingdom, the Sacraments of the Assyrian Church of the East by Bishop Mar Awa Royel PP 313-314. Edessa Publication Modesto, California. 2011.

sins and then for the people's; for this did once when He offered up Himself.”  
(Hebrews 7:27)

The Church of the East, as all other Catholic and Orthodox sister Churches, believes that the paschal mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ is a unique event of history which does not pass away as all other historical events do. All events that Jesus Christ did cannot just stay in the past but rather transcend time and participate in Divine eternity.

The Sacrament of the Holy Leaven is an explicit and a visible Sacramental instrument through which the Church of the East reveals its solemn belief in the eternity of paschal mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through the Sacrament of the Holy Leaven the Church of the East manifests that the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrifice of the Cross and the last supper are one and the same Sacrifice which makes it possible for the people of all generations to be united with His offering the “Sacrifice of the Cross” and obtain spiritual benefits related to their Salvation.

The Sacrament of the Holy Leaven of the Church of the East is equivalent to the preservation of the consecrated species in the tabernacle in some Apostolic Churches such as the Roman Catholic Church as a sign of the eternal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Church. It is written: “And, Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world.” Amen (Matthew 28:20)

When the members of these apostolic Churches stand at the presence of the consecrated species, show due respect by means of blessing themselves with the sign of the Cross, genuflecting and bowing as a sign of adoration to the Lord Jesus Christ. The same respect the members of the Church of the East express when they enter the church knowing that the Sacrament of the Holy Leaven has been preserved in the tabernacle on the altar.

### **Malka as the symbol of unity and intercommunion:**

In the Roman Catholic Church during the early centuries there was a practice of a liturgical performance similar to “Malka” which was called “Fermentum.” The particle of the Eucharistic Bread was sent by the Bishop of Rome to the bishops of other churches as a symbol of unity and intercommunion. According to Eusebius, the custom was already known to Irenaeus as a longstanding tradition (Hist. I eccl. 5. 24-16; GCS 9, 1:497). In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the council of Laeoicea forbade sending Eucharist abroad. In Rome, however, at the time of innocent 1 (402-417),

acolytes brought the Fermentum to the priests of the churches every Sunday. This, too, was a symbol of the unity between the bishop and his priests. For the same reason, the officiating priest, who represents the Pope of the stationary Mass, also received the Fermentum. When this custom finally fell into disuse, every priest nonetheless, but the host was the one consecrated in the same Mass. (New Catholic Encyclopedia vol. 5, p. 889)

Mar Aprim, Metropolitan of India, writes in his paper prepared for the meeting of the mixed committee of the Assyrian and Catholic dialogue, October 1996 in Adma Lebanon, in regard to the renewal of the Holy Leaven is saying:

“The renewal service of the Malka is done in the afternoon on Maundy Thursday before washing of the feet and evening Qurbana (Offering). The Priests and deacons assist the Metropolitan in his renewal service which is done in Beth d’ Yaqon, i.e., vestry. The renewed Holy Leaven is put inside the container and taken to the altar. This is done only in Cathedral church. Parish churches take this Holy Leaven in small bottles to be kept inside the altar of the respective churches.”  
25

Mar Aawa Royel in his book the Mysteries of the kingdom says: *“The practice of the Church of the East in India (Kerala, South India) is that the metropolitan renews the “Malka” together with all of his priests on the Holy Thursday, and then each priest takes a portion of the new Sacrament “Holy Leaven” to his parish. Then, the metropolitan celebrates the Qurbana of the Passover (i.e. Holy Thursday) with all of the priests concelebrating.”* 26

If then the renewal of the Holy Leaven is done only in Cathedral churches and from there is brought to the local parishes, it is self-evidence that Malka in the Church of the East as Fermentum in the Roman Catholic Church is a symbol of unity and intercommunion.

In Conclusion: While Jesus was observing the Passover with His disciples, He took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to His disciples, and said; “Take eat, this is My body.” (Matthew 26:26) Jesus gave each one of His disciples one piece of the consecrated bread (His body) except to St. John, the son of Zebedee, He

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25 Sacraments of the Church of the East by Mar Aprem Mokaan metropolitan of India, p. 39, Mar Narsai Press, Trichur: Kerala, India, 1978

26 Mysteries of the Kingdom, the Sacraments of the Assyrian Church of the East by Bishop Mar Awa Royel P316. Foot note 104, Edessa Publication Modesto, California. 2011.

gave two pieces. Jesus asked John eat a piece and carefully keep the other one. When Jesus Christ was on the Cross, “one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear and immediately blood and water came out.” (John 19:34-36) St. John then went and moistened (dipped) the piece of the consecrated bread (the Body of Christ) in the blood that proceeded from Jesus’ side. When the Lord commissioned the holy apostles to go and preach the gospel of salvation to all the nations in the four corners of the world, *they ground the particle which was soaked with the blood from the side of our Lord, and they mixed it with flour and salt, and they divided it in vessels amongst them; that it might be in the Church for a leaven of the Body and Blood of Christ. This leaven has been maintained in the Church of the East from generation to generation by renewing it every year on the Passover Thursday. Thus through the Holy leaven, they have kept the link between the present celebration of the Eucharist and the one Jesus celebrated on the Holy Thursday.*