

THE BIRTH OF JLG AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONCEPT OF ECUMENICAL- LITURGICAL CO-OPERATION

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There is no doubt at all that the publication in 2001 of the directives on liturgical translation and inculturation, *Liturgiam Authenticam*, threw the Roman Catholic world of liturgical scholarship, design and composition into great confusion. Recently Fr Geoffrey Gros, on the staff of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has said 'The text itself was not especially transparent as to how it was to be harmonised with other and more authoritative directives of the Holy See'.¹

But if Roman Catholics were confused, think how perplexed and bewildered the rest of us were! Fr Gros makes the point that other, what he terms, 'more authoritative directives' had:

encouraged ecumenical collaboration in biblical and liturgical translation and promoted a vision of shared prayer and worship texts among the Christian Churches.

Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Gros said that discussion was:

'further complexified by an expectation on the part of some that the Catholic Church had a well-thought, coordinated and consistent approach to the implementation of Vatican II'.²

Well had it? We certainly did think so, as this history of the development of ecumenical-liturgical co-operation will, I trust, show. It does indeed all go back to Vatican II - and a little before.

Until the 1960s, the Liturgical Movement in the Roman Catholic Church, the Parish and People movement in the Church of England, the Church Service Society in the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, and other stirrings in the protestant churches in Scandinavia, the United States, Canada and elsewhere, were seeds growing secretly - and independently -

within their own churches. True, the leaders of these organisations usually knew of each others' work, but there was little awareness in the Church as a whole of the fact that a great change was coming over the worship of the Western Church, that participation and accessibility were the order of the day, and that all churches were agreed about the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian worship.

The Faith and Order movement was one of the first points of exchange. After the Edinburgh conference in 1937, one of the international commissions it appointed was asked to prepare a report on *Ways of Worship*. The 1939-45 war inevitably slowed the process of its preparation considerably, but it was published in time for the Lund Conference of Faith and Order in 1952. This was a descriptive book - what the various churches themselves believed about their worship. It contained no call for liturgical co-operation.³

Ronald Jasper, later to be Chairman of the Church of England Liturgical Commission, was one of the founding fathers of ecumenical liturgical co-operation. In 1960 he moved from being Succentor of Exeter to a lectureship in liturgy at King's College, London.

The move from Exeter to King's was a catalyst. Jasper found that within London University he was not just teaching Anglicans, and that he came into contact with clergy and scholars from other churches who had similar interests. For instance at Richmond College, a Methodist establishment, he came to know Marcus Ward who had been involved in the creation of the South India Rite; Norman Goldhawk, a hymnologist; and later Raymond George, who was to be a companion and colleague in many ecumenical liturgical adventures. From New College he was in contact with Congregationalists like John Huxtable and Geoffrey Nuttall; while from mainly student contacts he came to know the Baptists Neville Clark and Stephen Winward. However, the initial inspiration was a paper read to the Edinburgh Theological Society by Dr John Lamb in March 1960 and published in *The Annual of the Church Service Society* later that year. Jasper wrote of the article that it 'first suggested to me that talking together about liturgy was not enough: creating liturgy together would be more productive; and he [Lamb] firmly believed that this offered more opportunity for progress towards Christian unity than any other activity'.⁴

The Joint Liturgical Group

The suggestion that there might be some kind of co-operation in the field of liturgy was first mooted by Jasper in a conversation with Archbishop Donald Coggan in December that year. He pleaded that it was high time for the possibilities of an interdenominational exercise, despite all the difficulties, to be explored. During the next year or so, he continued to try out the idea on individuals and small groups. He did not always get support. Geoffrey Willis, secretary of the Liturgical Commission, poured typically very cold (and Church of England) water on the suggestion: 'I do not think that your suggestion of co-operation with outsiders is at all practical. A seminar such as this might be useful as an informal affair for the exchange of views among scholars, but as a practical proposition it is quite unworkable. You know that it is bad enough to get a pure C of E body to agree on anything; how much more impossible to secure agreement if you broaden the theological and doctrinal basis still further'. In the face of such clear opposition, it needs a real commitment to a principle to persevere. Jasper had that. These convictions were held by one who, at the time, was just an ordinary member of the Commission. There was no special reason why he should be listened to by the church authorities. Early in 1962 Jasper returned to the matter in a letter to Archbishop Coggan, at that time chairman of the Liturgical Commission. He had a most encouraging reply: 'I see the importance ... but I am wondering what you think would be the best way forward. Do you feel that we ought to have a non-Anglican liturgical expert serving regularly on the Commission, or do you think ... that your point would best be met by a sub-committee which co-opts liturgical scholars of persuasions other than Anglican?'⁵

In a long response, Jasper thanked the Archbishop for the encouragement he has given him by not dismissing his suggestion out of hand. He says that he realizes that his idea will be anathema to many members of the Commission, but he goes on, 'I've always felt that one of our weaknesses in the past has been our failure to face realities: too often we have become a liturgical seminar - to our cost'. He then made the point that if worship is the fundamental work and function of the Church, we ought to recognize the fact in our ecumenical work - or at least to recognize the principle.

Jasper also tells the Archbishop that he realizes that there are no precedents for what he proposes, 'so we can only feel our way and proceed by means of trial and error'. The idea of observers does not appeal; he wants a small body of two, three or four to investigate the possibility, but he literally underlines that they must be *officially appointed*. It must be formal or official, rather than informal. 'Informal work just gets forgotten. History can give us scores of instances of this. Only in the rarest of cases does the work of private individuals receive serious attention'.

As his letter to the Archbishop continues, Jasper warms to his subject. He argues that ecumenical co-operation would enable those involved to achieve a valuable insight into worship as a whole - comparative liturgy. 'Time, labour and energy might well be saved if only we would all stop doing our work in splendid isolation. To put it at its very crudest, if we worried a little more about what Scotland is actually doing and a little less about what we think Hippolytus did, we might get somewhere. If needs be, we can study Hippolytus together'.

Just a year later Jasper was sufficiently encouraged to convene a two-day meeting during the Easter vacation at King's College Hostel, now Wellington Hall, in Vincent Square, to which a dozen handpicked Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Anglican liturgical scholars from England and Scotland were invited. Most were there with the full knowledge and consent of their own church authorities. John Huxtable expressed the feelings of them all when he said, 'This is what we have been waiting for'. By the end of the second day it was agreed that a Joint Liturgical Group (JLG) should be formed, and that the Archbishop of Canterbury should be asked to help bring it into being. Jasper reported this to the Archbishop of York who in turn told Lambeth. The result was that Jasper received a letter from Michael Ramsey which was somewhat cautious, but in which the Archbishop said he was willing to talk to him on the subject. They met and Jasper's arguments must have been persuasive, because the Archbishop of Canterbury agreed to issue invitations to an inaugural meeting of the Joint Liturgical Group in October 1963.

At this meeting Douglas Harrison, the Dean of Bristol, was elected chairman, and Jasper as secretary – a position which he held until his retirement from the Group in 1980. The work of the JLG in the next seventeen years, during which Jasper edited and contributed to all of the nine publications the

Group produced in that time, proved to be a source of enormous personal satisfaction. Looking back just twelve months before his death, he spoke of the Group's work and his part in it with a warmth that never particularly permeated his remarks about the Church of England Commission. It was *his* creation, it was the first such body in the world – the important North American Consultation on Common Texts (CCT) was not formed until 1964. JLG's work blazed a trail which others followed. Jasper was rightly proud that he refused to be discouraged, and that it justified his persistence. 'I must confess that working with this Group was exhilarating: members were keen and worked tremendously hard; there were no ecclesiastical politics to bother about; and members were stimulated by the fresh insights which the representatives of other Churches provided. We were all conscious of the lack of any Roman Catholic contribution; but this was remedied before very long'.

Roman Catholic liturgical evolutions

The invitations to join the JLG had all been to non-Roman Churches. This was realistic in 1963, before the effects of the Second Vatican Council became felt. Such hesitations, it would seem, were not in Jasper's mind. In January 1964 he approached the Archbishop of York once again, this time to explore the possibility of some closer work with Rome. He had been talking to Anglican theologian Eric Mascall, who told him that he had close connections among Roman Catholics, and knew they were considering what might be done about liturgical forms for English Roman Catholics, now that Vatican II had decided that Mass could be said in the vernacular.

Mascall believed that Roman Catholics were anxious 'to keep in step with a number of things which other people do in this country'. Did the Archbishop think, Jasper asked, that he would be cutting across anyone else's territory if he were to talk with Bishop Gordon Wheeler, Roman Catholic Bishop of Leeds, and Eric Mascall and discuss 'unofficially (and *very* tactfully) the lie of the land?'. It is interesting that when the subject of Roman Catholics came up, Jasper was from the first willing to modify his earlier stated antagonism to 'unofficial talks'.

Donald Coggan gave the go-ahead. The Archbishop thought that 'there was everything to be gained by keeping in touch with our Roman brethren on matters liturgical'. This proved to be a piece of encouragement which

was destined to bear fruit. In the event, probably because they were now both working in Yorkshire, Bishop Henry de Candole of Knaresborough (a member of the Liturgical Commission and also an original Church of England representative on JLG) met with Bishop Wheeler in July 1964. Bishop de Candole wrote to Jasper: 'I lunched yesterday with Gordon Wheeler who was *most* friendly and welcoming. He discussed, from his side, their problems of Englishing the Liturgy. This is obviously a matter on which *we* and *they* ought to be in contact (a) in regard to 'common forms' - Creed, Gloria etc. and (b) in regard to the principles of the use of English in worship today. I can't see (and he can't either) why we should not counsel together on this whole matter'. Bishop de Candole also reports that Roman Catholics would be interested to know about the work of the Joint Liturgical Group.

In 1964, to the surprise of many, Ronald Jasper was appointed the first non-episcopal Chairman of the Church of England Liturgical Commission. In his new position as chairman of the Commission, Jasper was able to move forward rapidly the matter of co-operation with Roman Catholics. To his first meeting in the chair, he invited two lay Roman Catholics who were members of the newly-formed Liturgical Translation Committee for the Roman Catholic Church of England: Bernard Dunne, the liturgical director of Burns and Oates, and Professor Herbert Finberg. The following April, Jasper asked the Archbishop of Canterbury if he could open up this whole matter of agreed English texts with both the Roman Catholics and the Free Churches. 'The time is ripe', he informs Dr Ramsey; 'Professor Finberg, who is largely responsible for the Englishing of the Roman texts, did tell us that he hoped collaboration would be possible'. The Archbishop gave permission for Jasper to go ahead, so he contacted Bishop Gordon Wheeler.

Bishop Wheeler replied enthusiastically about the possibility of joint work and accepted the invitation to send an observer to JLG. Then in June he invited Jasper to attend a meeting of the Roman Catholic Liturgical Translation Committee. Reporting to the Archbishop of Canterbury after the meeting, Jasper was most enthusiastic: 'They hope that we shall be able to work harmoniously over as wide a field as possible'. They had asked Jasper if he would attend all their meetings, though 'at the moment they have requested that we do not give any of this undue publicity'. This was carefully observed, and although drafts from Roman Catholic sources were considered by the Liturgical Commission it was done 'in confidence'.

About this time, a certain amount of confusion occurred in Roman Catholic circles in the British Isles. The Scottish and Irish Roman Catholic Churches produced their own ideas on the revised texts, and a meeting was held to bring representatives of each together. Then, to Jasper's disappointment, the Roman Catholics started to make a number of decisions on their own, holding a series of meetings in Rome under the auspices of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. (ICEL).⁶

ICEL had its origins in a meeting held in Rome in October 1963. The organization which emerged consisted of an Episcopal Committee and a more widely representative Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee consisted of liturgical scholars and musicians, such as Frs Frederick McManus and Geoffrey Diekmann, Professor Finberg, and also Canon Harold Winstone – who became a particular partner of Jasper's in ecumenical liturgical work.

It was a meeting of the Advisory Committee about which Professor Finberg wrote to Jasper about in October 1965. It would seem, the Professor told him, that the purely British initiative would be overtaken by these new developments. In the event, this did not happen; the hierarchies of Scotland, Ireland, England and Wales decided to adopt their own version 'to achieve unity within these Islands'. This common text, they decided, would serve until the International Committee produced its text. These texts had an ecumenical flavour – the Archbishop of Birmingham announced this at the time – in that Jasper had been attending the meetings of the Liturgical Translation Committee, and had given its members the comments which derived from the Liturgical Commission.

This early piece of ecumenical textual cooperation gave Jasper a taste of what might be possible in this field. He continued to keep in touch with the Liturgical Translation Committee and was invited to attend as an observer at the meetings of the National Liturgical Commission of England and Wales from 1965, where he received a warm welcome.

Invitation to the Roman Catholic Consilium

In May 1966 came an invitation which would greatly accelerate the work of ecumenical liturgical co-operation. Although at first sight it seemed to be concerned only with Anglican-Roman relations, it did have a significant

impact on wider ecumenical collaboration. The Archbishop of Canterbury (Michael Ramsey) had just returned from his historic visit to Rome.⁷

One of the tangible results of this visit was that Bishop Willebrands of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity approached Lambeth to ask if the Archbishop would appoint two observers from the Anglican Communion to the plenary session of the Council for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The Consilium was charged with the task of working out the practical consequences of the Constitution on the Liturgy. The first meeting at which observers were present was held in Rome from 6-14 October 1966. But in reality, the initiative had been taken earlier – due to Jasper’s contacts.

Jasper attended the Consilium in Rome along with Dr Massey Shepherd, Professor of Liturgy at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Pastor F W Kunneth of the Lutheran World Federation, Brother Max Thurian of Taizé, and the Revd Raymond George (later Chairman of JLG) who had been appointed as an observer by the World Council of Churches. Raymond George has described that first visit:

I well remember the first such journey in 1966. We had as a companion on the plane a veteran Roman Catholic liturgiologist, Canon R Pilkington, who was a *peritus* at the Consilium. As the plane approached Rome he was plainly excited, partly at the sight of the city and partly at the prospect of the reform of the liturgy, which he said would soon be so changed as to be almost entirely acceptable to us all. I think he was envisaging a vernacular in the style of Cranmer. Ronald was not to betray such emotion, but I think we all had a sense of making history.⁸

In the book of essays, *Liturgy in Dialogue*, Raymond George recalled:

The Consilium was a large and impressive body, consisting almost entirely of cardinals and bishops, but with many *periti* in attendance, who could be called to speak but could not vote. We took no part in the discussions, but Archbishop Bugnini records: ‘They were the first to arrive at the meetings, the last to leave the hall. They were always affable, polite, sparing of words, and ready to engage in a friendly way in any conversation that might be requested’.⁹

There was another aspect of liturgical co-operation in which the Roman Catholics were anxious to involve ecumenical scholars. This was the matter of the lectionary.

The matter of lectionary co-operation has limped on over the years. In 1966 the Roman Catholic Consilium hesitated over revising the readings at Mass because those lections were those which they had more or less in common with Anglicans and Lutherans. Assured by the observers that there were already plans for a new two-year lectionary drawn up by the Joint Liturgical Group, the Roman Catholics decided to go ahead, and subsequently provided their own three-year lectionary. The Church of England, and in so far as they use a lectionary, British Free Churches and the Church of Scotland, adopted the JLG lectionary in the 1960s. However, those who met at Rome during the Consilium sessions always had the hope that there would be just one lectionary. It was an ideal which must not be lost sight of, the non-Roman observers declared in 1966. The work on the *Common Lectionary* and the *Revised Common Lectionary* has brought this ideal to partial fruition.¹⁰

International Consultation on English Texts

We must return to the matter of the history of 'Englishing the liturgy' as was the current, not altogether elegant, Roman Catholic phrase. While in Rome, some of the English-speaking (non-Roman Catholic) observers had been attending the meetings of ICEL. Jasper described the atmosphere on these occasions: 'Here, when texts such as those of the Lord's Prayer and the Creeds were being discussed we were treated as collaborators rather than observers, and we soon reached tentative agreement on new translations of the Gloria in Excelsis and the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds'.

The Church of England Liturgical Commission had produced a series of *Modern Liturgical Texts*, and had asked for comments and criticisms both from the provinces of the Anglican Communion and from the Free Churches of this country. But in America, as a result of Lutheran initiative led by Herbert F Lindemann of the Lutheran Missouri Synod Church, three church bodies, the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, the Commission on Worship of the Consultation on Church Union, and the North American representatives on ICEL, had come together to form the Consultation on Common Texts (CCT). Like the JLG this was a well-informed body of officially appointed

representatives, and between 1967 and 1969 they reached agreement on modern texts of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the Gloria in Excelsis, the Preface and Sanctus. Their work, sent to the various Liturgical Commissions on the other side of the Atlantic, had a mixed reception. For instance, the recommended version of the Lord's Prayer was not widely followed. Professor Massey Shepherd confessed in 1968, 'I suspect we shall have to do much more work at the international level before we can come up with a solution that will be acceptable'.

By now there was considerable overlapping of membership of ICEL, CCT, JLG and the Consilium observers, Largely as a result of the energy of Dr Gerald A Sigler, the Roman Catholic secretary of ICEL, a meeting was held in London from 19-21 April 1969, at which members of all four groups met and formed themselves into the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET) - yet another gathering of highly skilled and officially appointed representatives. They met for five years, until 1974, and ICEL generously provided the secretariat and made all the arrangements. Jasper said of that,

It was an untidy group, with a hard core of about twenty members. With no funds of our own, meetings had to be geared to meetings of ICEL, but it all worked effectively and the representation was wide. Members came from England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, USA, Canada, and Australia, representing Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Church of Christ. Harold Winstone and I were elected joint chairmen, and we chaired alternate meetings. In addition we had to do a great deal of work by correspondence, collecting and reviewing a great deal of work done by smaller widely-scattered groups, e.g. South Africa and Australia, but also trying to resolve issues by quite a complicated system of postal voting - there was one particular case of four optional votes on 21 different points. It needed tact, patience and good humour and Harold (Winstone) had all three, far more than I had.

The result of all their labours emerged in three editions of a booklet, *Prayers We Have In Common* - which appeared in English and American editions.¹¹ Once again, as with JLG material, Jasper and his co-workers had to sell their wares to their various constituents, and it was not always easy. 'Often we had to contend with rival texts produced by individual churches: there was resentment, too, on the part of Church authorities. In the Church of

England, for example, the General Synod refused to have texts imposed on it, but reserved the right to revise them, despite pleas that allowance should be made for ecumenical considerations'. But at the end of the day what emerged was a set of texts for congregational use in the Offices and Eucharist which came into use in the main English-speaking churches throughout the world. Of the texts Jasper could rightly say, 'Whatever the imperfections, you can cross oceans and continents and church barriers and pray to God in texts which are common property. That is something to be proud of and thankful for'.

It is a sad fact that it is a unanimity we seem to be in danger of losing, as details of the proposed revision of the Roman Missal emerge.¹²

Of course it is not all doom and gloom. That is the problem; we have mixed messages, as Fr Gros complained. We have the fact that the production of common texts is specifically commended in the 1993 Ecumenical Directory where it is stated that 'Church and ecclesiastical Communities whose members live within culturally homogeneous areas should draw up together, where possible, a text of the most important Christian Prayers'. It goes on to list the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, as well as a Trinitarian doxology, and the Glory to God in the Highest. These would be both for regular use by all the churches or at least on ecumenical occasions.¹³ More recently John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* said:

Love is the great undercurrent which gives life and adds vigour to the movement towards unity. This love finds its more complete expression in common prayer ... Along the ecumenical path to unity, pride of place certainly belongs to common prayer, and prayerful union of those who gather together around Christ himself.¹⁴

In the collection of essays edited by Fr James Puglisi, Director of the Centro Pro Unione in Rome, *Liturgical Renewal as a way of Christian Unity*, published earlier this year, it is clear that ecumenical-liturgical renewal has set us on a path from which we cannot turn back and upon which all authentic liturgy depends so that 'all may be one'. Professor Keith Pecklers, of the Gregorian University, sees the essays as reviving 'our hope in the spirit of the Council'.

But the most remarkable contribution in the book is from perhaps the most erudite and distinguished liturgical scholar writing in English at the present time, the Jesuit Robert Taft. He strongly affirms the concept of ecumenical scholarship:

All scholarship worthy of the name is historico-critical, objective, fair, and representatively comprehensive. But *ecumenical* scholarship is not content with these purely natural virtues of honesty and fairness that one should be able to expect from any true scholar. Ecumenical scholarship takes things a long step further. I consider ecumenical scholarship a new and specifically Christian way of studying Christian tradition in order to reconcile and unite, rather than to confute and dominate. Its deliberate intention is to emphasize the common tradition underlying differences, which, though real, may be the accidental product of history, culture, language, rather than essential differences in the doctrine of the apostolic faith. Of course, to remain scholarly, this effort must be carried out realistically, without in any way glossing over real differences. But even in recognizing differences, ecumenical scholarship seeks to describe the beliefs, traditions, and usages of other confessions in a way their own objective spokespersons would recognize as reliable and fair.

So ecumenical scholarship seeks not confrontation but agreement and understanding. It strives to enter into the other's point of view, to understand insofar as possible with sympathy and agreement. It is a contest in reverse, a contest of love, one in which the parties seek to understand and justify, not their own point of view, but that of their interlocutor. Such an effort and method, far from being baseless romanticism, is rooted in generally accepted evangelical and Catholic theological principles.¹⁵

That is the path on which the Joint Liturgical Group set foot forty-two years ago. Surely there can be no question now of turning back?

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1 Jeffrey Gros, FSC, review of James Puglisi, ed. *Liturgical Renewal as a Way to Christian Unity*, Collegeville, MN, 2005, in *Worship*, 79, July 2005, 380

2 *Ibid.*

- 3 Peter Edwall, Eric Hayman, William D Maxwell, eds., *Ways of Worship: The Report of a Theological Commission of Faith and Order*, London, 1951. A recent update of this type of information is contained in Thomas F Best and Dagmar Heller, *Worship Today, Understanding, Practice and Ecumenical Implications*, Faith and Order Paper no. 194, WCC Publications, Geneva
- 4 R C D Jasper, *The Development of the Anglican Liturgy, 1662-1980*, London 1989, 227
- 5 Donald Gray, *Ronald Jasper, His Life, His Work and the ASB*, London, 1997, 75 (for the details of subsequent events see this work pp 74-91)
- 6 Peter C Finn and James F Schellman, eds., *Shaping English Liturgy*, Washington, 1990, 450 & *passim*
- 7 Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey – A Life*, Oxford, 1990, 318
- 8 Paul Bradshaw and Brian Spinks, *Liturgy in Dialogue: Essays in Memory of Ronald Jasper*, London, 1993, 4
- 9 *Ibid.*, 5 (cf. Annibale Bugnini [tr. Matthew J O'Connor], *The Reforming of the Liturgy*, Collegeville, MN, 1990, 200)
- 10 *Common Lectionary: The Lectionary Proposed by the Consultation on Common Texts*, New York, 1983; *The Revised Common Lectionary: The Consultation on Common Texts*, Norwich, 1992
- 11 *Prayers we have in Common: Agreed Texts proposed by the International Consultation on English Texts*, London, 1970. Succeeded by *Praying Together: A Revision of 'Prayers we have in Common'*, English Language Liturgical Consultation, Norwich, 1988
- 12 Horace T Allen, Jr., 'Common Lectionary and Protestant Hymnody: Unity at the Table of the Word – Liturgical and Ecumenical Bookends' in Puglisi, *op. cit.*, 68
- 13 Pontificium Consilium Ad Christian Unitatem Fovendam, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, Vatican City, 1993, 187
- 14 John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint: Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father on Commitment to Ecumenism*, Vatican City, 1995, 21
- 15 Robert Taft SJ, 'Mass Without Consecration? The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001', in Puglisi, *op. cit.*, 203-4