

SPIRITUAL DYNAMISM OF SYRIAC MONASTICISM

The long history of the Church, both in the East and in the West, loudly proclaims the important role of monasticism in the building up of an Individual Church. Monasticism in its wider dimension is beyond any strict definition; only different kinds of descriptions are possible. Centuries before Christ, we see monks, especially in the East, who sought union with the supreme reality / who lived alone or in-groups / who led a celibate life / who obeyed their masters / who observed many ascetical practices, including strict fasting. The concept of monasticism mainly marks a tendency to develop a parallel lifestyle to seek liberation from the hurries and worries of this world or to purify oneself or to attain union with God.

PART I

MONASTICISM: GENERAL FACTS

1. Monk: Etymology

Monk derives from Greek $\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\varsigma$ (Monos).

Three shades of meaning:

1. **unus**: it means ‘one’ – in this sense monk is one who has only one objective in mind – he follows that objective with undivided attention – renouncing everything else. Monk is a man of God.

2. **solus**: Monk is single; unmarried or free of matrimonial bond; he is a Solitary

3. **totus**: whole / integral / total

Monk is a person who is succeeded in becoming an integrated person.

- **Profane sense**: In Greek background the term used in secular sense to denote Greek philosophers who lived alone for seeking truth, for study and research
- **Religious sense**: From 4th C onwards the term started to apply for those who were living in solitude to attain union with God (hermits or anchorites)
- Later on the term was applied to all those who ‘**left the world**’ no matter whether they lived alone or in a community.
- Gradually the term *monk* was used to all orders of monks and friars. For example: the Augustinian Basilians, Benedictines, Cistercians, Carthusians, Studites and so on.

2. Monasticism: A human vocation

Every human being experiences a craving for ultimate goodness or ultimate beauty or ultimate end. Hence he experiences an inward journey or an urge to withdraw from exterior multiplicity and distractions to attain an interior unity. For religious people since this ultimate goodness is God, this inward journey can be described as an absolute detachment from all that is unworthy of God. It is also true that God draws man to Himself. Hence there is a Monk in everyone; everyone is potentially a monk. Human nature has a monastic dimension (*homo monasticus / femina monastica*) that finds its expression in one way or another in every culture, every religion at every period of history. **To be a monk is a human vocation.**

Hence Monasticism cannot be considered as a **Christian phenomenon**.

2.1 In India

India is blessed with a profound monastic tradition. We call India *Arsha Bharatha*. Years before Christ there have been monks (*sanyasies or yogies*) in India, dedicating their life for profound prayer and meditation. They lived in total poverty and detachment, seeking Brahman (Truth, Eternity and Light). India has a very ancient monastic tradition, which is at the heart of her culture and civilization. There was a time when there were thousands of Buddhist and Jainist monks, all over India.

2.2 In Greek Culture

We could see several philosophers who totally dedicated to the “search for truth” or the “contemplation of truth” led ascetic life. For example, the *Stoics*. A large number of Christian monastic vocabularies have been received from these philosophic circles. For example: *Anchorensis, Monos, Koinonia, Theoria, Praxis* etc.

2.3 In Judaism (Egypt, Syria, Palestine)

We cannot deny the Jewish roots of Christian asceticism. From the Apostolic period itself the Ascetical ideals were at the heart of Christianity. They were rooted in OT and existed among pious Jews. They practiced Fasting, abstinence, temporary withdrawal from sexual life, etc. Such ascetical tendencies can be seen in every religion which may or may not develop into monasticism as a systematic institution.

- Wandering in the desert like people of God, Moses, Elijah
- Tradition of Nazarite vow – some Jewish parents devoted their children to pious circles such as priests, prophets
- John the Baptist from desert
- Jesus went to desert after baptism –fasted for 40 days and 40 nights
- Little Samuel was dedicated to God and grown up in temple Samson
- We know also about the Essene monks and the Therapeuts, wholly devoted to the service of God. (we have knowledge about them from Qumran Scrolls)

In Brief- A monk sleeps in every person

Monasticism is not a Christian phenomenon- but it embraces all world religions and cultures.

3. Uniqueness of Christian Monasticism

Christian Monasticism is **unique**. It is not an individual effort to attain private salvation. It is the fruit of ardent desire among the children of the Church to **imitate Christ** who is ‘the Perfect’ and who is present in this world through his mystical body, the Church. Hence for them it is a war like effort to live in the Church, for the Church and as the Church. **The monasteries must be the perfect Church in its micro form that act as leaven to foster the macro Church.** Hence, Christian Monasticism should be the continuation of the Holy tradition of the Jerusalem community, the first Church.

3.1 The First Christian Community: The Role Model of Monasticism

We read a beautiful description of the primitive Church of the Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles. The whole community had one heart and one soul. They did not enjoy any private ownership. Their possessions were held in common. Their fidelity to the teachings of

the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers was their identity marks as the Disciples of Christ (Acts 2, 42-46: 4, 32-36).

In Acts 5,1-10 – **EPISODE of Ananias and Shapira** – they pretended to join the ascetical group as if offering everything they had. But being the part of apostolic ascetic community was a matter of one's choice. Each one has the right to remain as an ordinary Christian. It is explicit in Simon Peter's question:

Was it not your own before you sold it? And after it was sold? ...

Renunciation of personal property was not a demand to receive baptism to become Christians. Ananias and his wife were already Christians. Being Christians they wanted to join the inner circle of more ascetically oriented believers, i.e., in apostolic ascetic community.

Again in the election of deacons:

Acts 6,1-2: we saw the withdrawal of apostles from external ministries. They appointed deacons so that they could dedicate themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Here a text is notable:

“And in those days, the number of **disciples** had increased, the Hellenist converts murmured against the Hebrew converts, because their **widows** were discriminated against in the daily distribution”.

According to Koonamackal these disciples and widows were not Christians in general, but particular ascetic groups.

Thus in ascetic and monastic movements of Christianity we can't see anything new. The seeds of all later ascetic movements are already present in the apostolic community.

This communitarian life was inspired by the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 16, 24-27 and Mt. 19, 16-29) which enumerate the blessings that spring out from the spirit of renunciation which later reincarnated into monasticism.

The roots of Christian monasticism should not be searched for in other religions. It is not an extension of an already existing universal phenomenon with the covering of the new dress of Christianity. It is unique and its roots are in the primitive Church as described in the Acts of the Apostles. It was, it is and it should be an attempt to live the Gospel in its Spirit.

3.2 The Monastic Vocation: The Perfection of the Baptismal Vocation

From the very beginning of the Church, there were men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty and imitate him more closely, practising the evangelical counsels. **'Imitation of Christ'** was considered as the way to perfection or divinization. But it is not a mere imitation of one historical man who lived in Galilee. For all those who receive Baptism and become the members of the Church, imitation of Christ has an ecclesial dimension. Now He is glorified and is living 'among us' and 'in us', as the Church. Hence, imitation of Christ is 'living in the Church' and 'as the Church', i.e., to lead a profound ecclesial life. This was the mind of the Fathers, too. Pope John Paul II invites the faithful to re-realize the truth that the monastic vocation is inherent to the baptismal vocation itself in his Apostolic Letter of 1995 *Orientalis Lumen*

In the East, monasticism was not seen merely as a separate condition, proper to a precise category of Christians, but rather as a reference point for all the baptized, according to the gifts offered to each by the Lord; it was presented as a symbolic synthesis of Christianity.

JOHN Paul II, *Orientalis Lumen*, 9

Both the Church and Monasticism originated in Jerusalem. Here lies the significance of referring to the **Eastern Churches as monastic Churches**. It was only later that monasticism

gradually spread to the West and continues to be a rich and unique heritage to the Universal Church. Pope John Paul II makes the Eastern Churches mindful of their venerable heritage.

Monasticism has always been the **very soul of the Eastern Churches**: the first Christian monks were born in the East and the monastic life was an integral part of the Eastern lumen passed on to the West by the great fathers of the undivided Church.

JOHN Paul II, *Oriental Lumen*, 9

The ascetical practices and renunciations practised by the monks should not be considered as the goal of their life. They are only the means to lead a perfect ecclesial life. Hence, monasticism is not a parallel track, but a “movement among the baptized believers who try to respond to Christ’s call for perfection”.

4. Historical background of emergence of Christian monasticism as an institution

As mentioned above, there was a fervent attempt from the major part of the believing community to imitate Christ *i.e.* to lead an ecclesial life in its perfection. It was not easy for them. The Church was severely persecuted in the first centuries. Hence the Early Church emphasised the role of martyrdom for achieving this goal. In baptism one dies with Christ. **Martyrdom was considered as a second baptism / baptism of blood.** Many catechumens, who had not received baptism, were put to death because of their Christian faith, and Church considered them as baptized, on account of their martyrdom. And thus **Martyrdom is a heroic witness to ones baptismal Commitment.** The Christians were ready to proclaim and celebrate their faith at the cost of their life. For them, martyrdom was considered as the supreme manner of imitating their Lord. Zealous faithful were eager to be counted worthy of martyrdom.

The **cessation of persecution** against the Christians in the Roman Empire gave an impetus, perhaps indirectly, to the monastic movement. The last persecution was that of Diocletian from A.D. 304. When the Church started to enjoy freedom there arose two main reasons for the development of monasticism in its developed form as a separate lifestyle.

1. When persecution came to an end, religious enthusiasm began to fade. Heroic Christians were disappointed that there was no more opportunity to realize a supreme sacrifice of laying down their life for Christ to become a martyr. By this time spiritual fathers and authors were already considering a substitute for martyrdom, which would have the same value before God. New theology of martyrdom was developed – new evolutions happened in Christian way of living – They said, those **who are taking their cross seriously and strive for perfection, or earnestly following Christ, are martyrs.** St. Cyprian qualifies asceticism as **white martyrdom or non-bloody martyrdom.** Thus, a devotion to ascetic life began to develop. In ascetical life one is bearing Jesus’ suffering and death in one’s own body.

2. In the Western Roman Empire after the Edict of Milan which gave the Church freedom, the community of the faithful tended to grow **lax in the observance of Gospel values.** A smaller group wanted to live discipleship to its perfection and separated itself from the mainstream to lead a more radical Christian life. This resulted in the evolution of institutionalized monasticism. Monastic life emerged in the Church as a reaction and a **corrective measure to preserve intact the ideals of Christian life by living the gospel values radically** in the altered circumstances.

In effect, the **martyr was replaced by the ascetic**, whose rigorous life was often regarded as martyrdom. In the case of an ascetic, the human persecutor was replaced by a spiritual one *i.e.* the demon. If we consider ascetics as the heirs of martyrs, we can make sense of their austere life. They simply tried to carry out the norms of the Christian life of the

pre-Constantine period, during which time, to be a Christian was a very serious matter. Hence, **the ascetical life was in reality, not a parallel track, but an attempt to be firm on the right way of living in the Church and to keep fidelity to Gospel values.**

4.1 From Asceticism to Monasticism

Gradually Ascetics because of their radical life of poverty and virginity received high esteem in the Christian communities. According to St. Cyprian, it was through the “ascetics” that the spirit of martyrdom continued to survive. They were given the titles like “Elect of the elect” (Clement of Alexandria), “the more magnificent part of Christ’s heard”; the “flower of the Mother church” (Cyprian), and “Bride of Christ” (Tertullian), etc. There were ascetics of both sexes with different functions in the society. These ascetics had great influence in the society.

The number of the Ascetics and their social influence increased. The original spirit began to decline. Many started to use their social status for personal motives. On the one hand the corruption – on the other hand the call for separating themselves from the society to lead solitary. This led to a new way of living – MONASTICISM - But in reality when monasticism developed into institutionalized forms and the monks sought isolated locations for devotional practice, we lost the great tradition of true monasticism as the genuine ecclesial life.

Thus the “Christian asceticism that has its essential roots in Christendom itself, which was a necessary institution for those who wanted to realize radically the authentic **ideals of Christ** himself, **a life perfectly according to the Gospel**, has prepared the rise of Monasticism. Finally, this movement paved the way for new forms of life, namely ANCHORETISM (Solitary life) and COENOBITISM (Community life).

5. Various Church Documents on Monasticism

1. Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium. (CCEO.) = Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches: canons 410-503 (monasteries): 410 (definition of religious state), and 481-485 (hermits).

2. Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC) =The Code of Canon Law. (Canon law of the Latin Church.). This document does not have a particular section, which deals with monasticism alone. It has included it under the title religious life (C.C. 563, 607).

3. Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). It describes what eremitical life is, in nos 920 and 921.

920: Without always professing the three evangelical counsels publicly, the hermits devote their life to the praise of God and salvation of the world through a stricter separation from the world, the silence of solitude and assiduous prayer and penance.

921: They manifest to every one the interior mystery of the Church, that is, personal intimacy with Christ. Hidden from the eyes of men, the life of a hermit is a silent preaching of the Lord, to whom he has surrendered his life simply because he is everything to him. Here is a particular call to find in the desert in the thick of spiritual battle, the glory of the crucified one.

4. Orientale Lumen (*Light of the East*), *Pop John Paul II*, nos. 9-16.

In the East, spirituality finds its expression in the contemplative **monastic ideals**, which is **the core of Eastern spirituality** (*Orientale Lumen*, 9).

5. Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Vita Consecrata (Consecrated life), John Paul II, no. 6.

This document presents a very clear picture of monasticism. Christian Monasticism appeared right at the dawn of Christianity itself. It flourishes even today in its proper territories, especially in the Orthodox Churches. Close living of the evangelical values is the immediate goal of monasticism Mt (19, 21). In living these evangelical values, the inspiration is the **imitation of Christ**, who took the form of a **servant**.

In practicing imitation of Christ, they took to a **radical way of living**, characterized by the participation of Pascal mystery. They became bearers of the cross (*staurofori-staurophori*), and thus they became bearers of the Spirit (*pneumatofori-numatophori*). This would mean that they, by means of their **strenuous ascetical practices, participated in the paschal mysteries**, especially the **suffering and death of Jesus Christ**. And it became for them a source of participation in the life giving power of the Holy Spirit, which is the fruit of the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. His **death** on the cross was the path **to resurrection** and the giving of the Spirit. “When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said it is finished; and he bowed his head and gave up his Spirit”(Jo.20, 30).

Vita Consecrata praises monastic life, saying that the monks were authentically **spiritual men** and women capable of **endowing history with hidden fruitfulness** by their increasing prayer and intercession. Ultimately, monasticism **desires to transfigure the world and life itself, in expectation of the definite vision of God’s countenance**, i.e. perfect **union with Him**. To attain this end (perfect union with the Father), eastern monasticism **gives pride of place to: conversion, self renunciation, oblation of self, compunction of heart, quest for interior peace, ceaseless prayer fasting, vigil, silence, spiritual combat, paschal joy in the presence of the Lord**. And they lived in the *Holy Communion* of the monastery or the cloister.

PART II

EGYPTIAN MONASTICISM

The history witnessed a flow of ascetics leaving their ecclesial communities in search of lonely places, deserts and mountains. These ascetics were known as “**anchorites**” or “**hermits**”. St Anthony was the most outstanding figure among the Egyptian anchorites in the fourth century. Though he is not the founder of monasticism, he is known as the “**Father of monasticism**” because he is considered the perfect model eremitic life in Egypt. His worldwide fame and influence was caused by the spiritual classic *Vita Sancti Anthonii, Life of St. Anthony*, by St. Athanasius, written just an year after the death of St. Anthony. This is not a biography as such in the strict sense of the word. It demonstrates the **basic principles of monastic life, its ideals and models of Christian perfection**. It brought East and West in touch with Egyptian monasticism.

St. Anthony was a hermit - a man of intense prayer, a preacher and a healer - has the glorious titles as “Star of the desert” and “Father of the monks.” During the time of St. Anthony, there were hundreds and thousands of anchorites living in the Egyptian deserts trying to attain salvation, to achieve greater union with God. To achieve this goal they engaged themselves in asceticism / “*askēsis*” (hard and austere life), prayer and contemplation. For them asceticism was not an end in itself but only a means.

It is a borrowed term from Greek sport world which means “practice”. Asceticism a goal oriented activity. It can be considered as the effort that Christians make to conform their lives to the faith they profess. Asceticism received two dimensions a) therapeutic b) punitive. According to the therapeutic concern of asceticism the fundamental human drives like eating, sleeping, and possessions should be transformed to the instruments of attentiveness to God and neighbor

through fasting, vigils and almsgiving. In its punitive aspects asceticism is considered as punishment, the means for reparation of sins. Among the spiritual writers we could see a tendency to consider ascetical practices as means of self development. They exhorted the readers to shift the attention from external physical practices to the inner working of the mind and will. Ascetical practices are also understood as means for uniting individuals to Christ in his self offering for the world, in other words as participation in paschal mystery of Christ.

1. St. Antony the Egypt : A Perfect Anchorite

St. Antony the Egypt, born in a Christian family in central Egypt - He lost his parents at the age of 20 – he had to look after his sister - Moved by the Gospel ideal, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess, give to the poor and you will have treasures in heaven; and come, follow me.” (Mt 19,21) He sold all his possessions and distributed it among the poor. He entrusted his only sister to the care of the “house of virgins” and devoted himself to the ascetical way of life.

There were no monasteries at that time. However, there was an old man living like a monk in a village. The young Anthony came to know about this old man, and came to him. Attracted by his life style Anthony tried to imitate his life very closely. During this period he had many kind of temptations. At the age of thirty-five, he began a new style of life: a solitary life in a mountain with very little outside contact. This continued for about a period of twenty years. Then he received the gift of **spiritual fatherhood**. He persuaded many to solitary life, making the desert “a city of monks”. During the time of Maximus III (311A.D.) he came to Alexandria to console Christian prisoners and those who were sentenced to death. Again searching for greater solitude, he retired to a desert near Read Sea. During this period he was forced to come down and receive many visitors and disciples. Around 355 AD, he was invited to Alexandria by St. Athanasius to preach against Aryanism. He died at the age of 105 and is buried in an unknown place.

There were several hermits in Egyptian deserts. Fasting, vigils, meditation, life of poverty, and privation of all things were, for them, means of attaining perfection. It was an exercise of, disengagement and liberation from the bondage of “the flesh” and “the world”. Again, it helped the ascetics in the awakening of the spirit. This produced in them fruits of receptivity to the word of God and readiness to follow Christ. Prayer became a habit in their life. It was essentially a continuation of meditation and rumination of the Sacred Scripture, which they had by hearted.

The monks left the world not for the sake of selfish isolation. In the East, desert always has been considered the domain of Satan. The ascetics recognized that they were fighting the Satan in favour of their own brethren, living in the world. These monks were considered “shock troopers” (militants) in the struggle against the power of darkness. They lived in solitude. However, they insisted upon the need of having an experienced spiritual father for discerning the will of God.

2. ABBA a way to Coenobitism

As the number of hermits increased, the communication among them also increased. They started to gather around a spiritual father for guidance. The disciples resided in separate cells. The Abbot (spiritual father) communicated to his disciples all the inspirations that he received in his solitude. The spiritual father was much respected by his disciples. He was **called an ABBA / Abbot**. He had no official power or authority, but a simple moral power, over the individual monk. He was also called “**father of many brethren**”. This was a way between anchoritism and coenobitism called semi- anchoritism.

3. St. Pachomius (287-346): Founder of Coenobitism in Egypt

He was a pagan soldier – while he was in a prison neighbouring Christians helped him by bringing food and other helps. Moved by their charity, after his release from Jail he received baptism at the age of 17 in 307. He started his ascetic life as an anchorite with a hermit called Palamon. He spent about seven years in the hermitage. Then he received a call to dedicate himself to the service of other monks. He understood the limitations and defects of solitary life. So he left Palmon and settled in the eastern bank of the Nile at Tabennesi, north of Thebes about 320 AD and gradually developed the coenobitic style of monastic life in the Coptic Church of Africa. **Thus Pachomios became the founder of Coenobitism.**

He built a small enclosure with his own hands, where he could gather his companions. Being a born community builder he attracted many to this new way of life. He started to impose monastic rules and organized them into a community under a Superior. However his attempt did not succeed. Many of the first members were mainly concerned with the material advantage of the new system. Therefore, they treated him as a domestic servant. To make them more disciplined, he set them new rules. Finding all his efforts in vain, he was forced to expel all undisciplined monks, out of the enclosure.

Few years later providentially a small group of men who were willing to become monks approached him. He welcomed them and gave them monastic habit. He also gave them exact rules and strict directives. He trained them in ascetical life. Gradually the first monastery was thus established at Tabennesi and known as KOINONIA.

3.1 Basic characteristics of Pachomian Koinonia

The most important aspects of Pachomian Koinonia are: commonness of living space, common table, common liturgy, common work, uniformity of life, life bound to rule, life of obedience, simple life- life of renunciation, ascetical practices, mutual love and concern. Further we consider each of this aspect in detail.

a) Commonness of living space

In its perfect form Pachomian monastery included a number of houses enclosed by a great wall. He divided the monks into different houses, each containing brothers who engaged in the same type of work. For example: There were weavers, tailors, carpenters, shoe makers and so on. Each house had its superior, aided by a second in command. But all were subject to the supreme authority.

The boundary wall was a significant symbol

a) it served as a means to realize effective sticking together of the monks and also helped them to become a real community.

b) It provided seclusion (cloister or enclosure). There was only one gateway by which the whole passage from and to the monastery had to take place. The gate-keeper had to be a most trustworthy monk, who was also in charge of the guesthouse. Life inside the wall was obligatory for the monks. This is his living space and only with permission he could go out of the enclosure.

c) It signified separation from the world; but not as the case of hermits. Relatives, some times even women, were allowed to visit the monks and the monks were allowed to go to their relatives in the world. When somebody goes out he is given a companion. Those who go out are not allowed to sleep in the houses of lay people. They have to sleep either in a church or in a monastery of the same tradition.

The wall protected the monk from the dangers of contact with the world. It was explicitly prohibited to talk about things one had done outside the monastery. Stories must not pass from one monastery to another. Thus through seclusion, despite the great number of monks,

he tried to create a spirit of communion, which penetrated the life of all the members of the community.

All the monasteries of the congregation formed one family. To deepen the bond among monks and between the monasteries they gathered together in the central monastery of PHBOW twice a year.

1. The first one, at Easter, was to celebrate the Passover together.

On this occasion the catechumens were given baptism.

2. During the other meeting, in the month of Mesore (August), the superiors and other officials had to present the reports and accounts of the material administration of the monasteries. New nominations to offices, wherever it was necessary, was done during this gathering. This was an occasion for forgiveness of offences and of reconciliation among the quarrelling brethren.

b) Common table

Another important aspect that Pachomios wanted to stress was common table. The monks were allowed to eat only in the refectory. Even the monks who were working outside the monastery ate from the meal that was cooked in the kitchen of the monastery. If the brethren had to go out of the monastery on any mission, they took food and water with them. No body was allowed to cook food for him. The cooks and ministers were forbidden to prepare special food for them. All the customary courtesies were very strictly followed on the dining table. For example: they ate with extreme decency and modesty. Speaking and laughing were considered unbecoming on the dining table. One comes to the refectory in devout meditation and returns to one's cell the same manner. High value was set on self-control in the matter of eating and drinking. They abstained from several kind of food, as fish, meat and wine except on occasion of sickness. These regulations show the basic value of common table in the formation and maintenance of common life. The idea of common table was set up practically on the same level of liturgy.

c) Common Liturgy

Prayer in common included their daily meetings in the morning, at mid-day and in the evening. During these prayer meetings (synaxis) scripture was read at length, interspersed with Psalms and prayers. Attendance of the brothers in the synaxis was considered an important rule. Regarding the nature and the spiritual meaning of the synaxis, it is not only a meeting for prayer. It is an assembly during which the brethren communed in different aspects of their life. It was also in the synaxis that the brethren listened to the instruction of the superior and confessed their faults. Synaxis was exactly the communion of the brothers in prayer. Pachomios was very clear in teaching that such common prayer had no real value unless a monk really strove to acquire other virtues related to common living.

d) Common Work

The fourth element of Pachomian community life was common work. It was the duty of the monk to work for the common good of the community. The work was well organized, and distributed. Among the brethren there were weavers, tailors, carpenters, shoemakers, bakers, cooks, herds men, cultivators, gardeners, infirmarians and so on. Part of the income from their work, they utilized for charitable activities. Work acquired an ethical and religious dimension in monastic life.

e) Uniformity of Life

Another very important aspect of monastic life was uniformity. As against the anchoritical way of life, Pachomian monasteries insisted upon uniformity in clothing.

Everybody in the monastery had to wear only that cloth which was prescribed by the rule of the monastery. All the brothers received the same amount of small things, especially clothe, food and other articles, which they were permitted to posses. The superiors of the houses had the order to confiscate every thing that was found extra.

Through uniformity Pachomius wanted to foster unity and equality. The feeling of unity and equality helped in building up the mutual love between the brothers. The superiors were asked to give equal care to all. The superior must not enjoy any special privilege or make use of his office for personal advantages. Pachomius himself refused any special treatment even during his illness. Equality did not mean that individual needs were not taken into account of. Special needs were meted out and there was deep and tender concern for the sick. Through the regulations of uniformity, Pachomius wanted to safeguard common life and avert the danger of egoism.

f) Life Bound to Rule

The real contribution of Pachomius to the monastic system was his Rule. There is a legend, according to which these rules have been written by angels. This points to the divine inspiration that led to the formation of these rules. Pachomian rule (“Rules of our Father”, as the monks named it), was the standard of truth. The rule was impregnated (filled with) with the spirit of the Sacred Scripture.

g) Obedience

Obedience became the characteristic virtue of the cenobite monk. Obedience in anchoritism was towards a spiritual master, towards an elder, whom the monk had freely selected. However, in cenobitism obedience was towards the superior, the officially recognized head of the community, and to a set of regulations. For the monk obedience become the expression of the virtue of humility. The direct object of obedience is the spiritual good of the person, which is something interior. It is obedience that assures good order, cooperation and harmony in such a big community of monks. Superiors are not exempt from obeying the rule. He is the same time its interpreter and servant. The superiors are severely admonished not overcharge their subjects. The subjects are no way left to the discretion of the superior. They are not condemned to be mute slaves.

h) Simple life, Renunciation and Poverty

Simplicity of life is the consequence of renunciation. Pachomian monasticism considered Renunciation so essential for a life of simplicity. Therefore, to enter the monastery simply meant, “to renounce”. The monk is man who has renounced everything. He renounces his family, all honors and worldly titles, also his job and whatever material possessions he has.

The natural consequence of total renunciation of self was a life of poverty. No one was allowed to receive any gift from outside, without the permission of the superior. Since the individual monk gave up all forms of private ownership it was the responsibility of the superior to provide him with what was necessary for his sustenance. The aim of poverty was to attain the state of liberty. Monastic poverty was considered as expression of the monk’s solidarity with the poor and suffering brethren in the world.

i) Ascetical Practices

Asceticism found its meaning and purpose by being in solidarity with the suffering of Christ and with the suffering fellow human beings. Asceticism was an act of penance, a means of purification of heart and a guard against the attack of the devil. However, he warned the monk against all kind of excess. Though ascetical practices were held in great esteem Pachomius made it clear that bodily mortifications are of no value if they are not

accompanied by virtues like humility, obedience, chastity etc. Pachomius preferred a moderate asceticism in contrast to the excessive asceticism of the anchorites.

j) Mutual Love and Concern

Daily life was organized in the form of mutual service, imitating the model of the primitive Jerusalem church. They were a community of brethren, close knit by the bond of charity. They accepted the fact that all are sinners. Therefore, they were always ready to forgive each other and ready to beg pardon for their shortcomings and sins.

Pachomius was very prudent regarding the rules imposed in the community. He warned the community against every kind of practices of excess mortification. Punishment was given after long reflections. Care and concern for the sick was notable.

Low living standard - even ordinary people should follow this way of life.

3.2 Growth and expansion

As the number of monks increased, the size of the community also became great and unwieldy. Now it became necessary to found other monasteries. The unity of the koinonia depended greatly on the personal charism of Pachomius and shortly after the death of Pachomius a serious crisis arose in the community. This was due to reasons as personality conflict, and clash between early disciples and disciples of later generation. However this did not hinder the growth of the koinonia. Thus it grew even beyond the boundaries of the original territory. Petronius was the immediate successor of Pachomius. Orsiesi who wrote a treatise on "Institution of monks", then succeeded Petronius. Theodorus followed Orsiesi. In the first half of fourth century, Shenudi, the second Abbot of the famous "White monastery" revised and adapted the Pachomian rules for his communities. At this time monasticism spread through the length and breadth of Egypt and there were thousands of monks.

Egyptian monasticism had very strong influence over other forms of monasticism both in the east in the west. The works like "life of St. Anthony" by Athanasius, "Lausiac history" of Palladius, "*Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*" and "Life of Pachomios", influenced very much in spreading Egyptian monasticism well beyond the borders of Egypt.

PART III

MONASTICISM IN SYRIAC ORIENT

We have seen the historical reasons behind the development of Monasticism as an institution in Egyptian tradition. When Church became free and started to enjoy royal protection, persecution stopped and there existed no more chances to receive the crown of martyrdom. Gradually martyrdom was substituted by asceticism or in other words by monasticism (**White Martyrdom**). It became a parallel way of life in the Church. In effect the ecclesial dimension of monasticism diminished.

This was not the case of Syriac Christianity. The Church in the Syriac Orient had an independent growth, without being influenced by Rome or Greece till the fifth century. They never enjoyed such an acceptance from the surrounding community. Hence it is natural that the Syriac monasticism has an indigenous nature quite different from that of Egyptian monasticism.

1. Uniqueness of Syrian Monasticism

The Syriac monasticism emerged out of the unique spiritual genius of the Syriac Christianity. Historically it is not true to connect its origin to St Anthony and Pachomius of Egypt. Monasticism in Mesopotamia sprang up before it came to know of Anthony and Pachomius and their monastic adventures. The beginning of the Syriac monasticism seems to reach back at least to the end of the third century. The fact shines through all the early sources that the earliest monasticism in Mesopotamia shows no connection with Egypt. At that time monasticism must have existed not only in Roman area of Mesopotamia but also in the Persian territory.

2. Syrian Monasticism: A Forgotten Strand

Since Egypt is generally considered as the cradle and inspirational source of Monasticism in the whole Church, the indigenous Syrian Proto-Monasticism which preserved the genuine spirit, never got the position or attention it deserves. The immense prestige that was gained by Egyptian monasticism gave the impression that it was the ultimate source of inspiration for the ideal of the ascetic and even became synonymous with monastic life. But this is not true. From its very beginning **Syriac Christianity was intrinsically ascetic**. The Syrian Christians considered practising their faith as a radical dedication and sacrifice. They took our Lord's exhortation 'whoever wants to save his life will lose it' as a challenge. Hence, the community of faithful, i.e., the Church itself was monastic. They were united under their head, our Lord, Jesus Christ and took the Gospel as their Typikon.

While Egyptian monks felt the need to escape from the pressures of the world in order to imitate Christ in the deserts, the Syrian ascetics never felt the need to do likewise. They refused to flee from the culture in which they were born and brought up and considered it their duty to serve and transform it (Rom 12:1). They considered themselves **strangers to the world**. But this did not mean they were isolated and removed from it. Rather, they assumed a special responsibility for it. Unlike the monks of Egypt, the Syrian monks had a different image of the desert. **The desert for them was the land where men and beasts had once lived together**. So they tried to make a desert in the midst of the city. They never tried to avoid ordinary people and the daily situations of life. They accepted food and protection from their lay brethren. They remained active participants in the ecclesial life and embrace the culture around them. They remained a prominent part of the local congregations in their own town or village.

We are informed of the emergence of monasticism in the Syriac Orient from *Acts of Thomas*, *Doctrine of Addai*, *Syriac Book of Steps*, and from the writings of Tatian the Syrian (ca. A.D.110-172), Aphrahat the Persian Sage (ca. 280- 345), Mar Aprem (ca.306-373), and some other later authors.

3. Syrian Proto-Monasticism

Before the dawn of proper institutionalized monasticism, many Syriac Churches would consist of an ascetic community called **بنى قیام / bnay qyāmā** literally 'sons of the covenant' who had committed themselves to sexual abstinence and the service of the Church. This indigenous and distinctive tradition of the consecrated lifestyle is called **"proto-monasticism"**. The *bnay qyāmā* devoted themselves to the service of the community of believers under the direction of priests or bishops. The forgotten ecclesial dimension of monasticism was very evident in Eastern Mesopotamian "proto- monasticism", especially in the life of the *Sons of the Covenant* (**بنى قیام / bnay qyāmā**). Their life style was unique when compared to Greek monks. By their own choice they stayed in the larger community.

They held a wholesome view of spirituality. These eastern ascetics saw their spiritually disciplined life as community on a journey of steps, adopting the notion that all are equal in God's eyes, each finding him or herself on a stairway to godliness that leads ultimately towards eternity with God. Each one had an equal regard for those at different stages of the journey and remained committed to them by giving other believers opportunities to grow and assist them in their path to perfection.

The *Bnay qyāmā* acted as missionaries to their own community. They taught the children, showed hospitality to the strangers, served the poor, and stood for social justice. **For them, following our Lord meant awareness of His presence through their active participation as His representatives.** They never considered their lifestyle as radically unobtainable for the average Christian. They viewed discipleship as a journey. They considered it their duty to guide the faithful to the next step in their faith, hoping to see those on earlier steps to grow as well. They never lived the Christian life for themselves. They usually lived together or with their family members. Each of them **took the vow of chastity to become a member of the convent.** But they stayed at the core of the married Christian communities. This ancient Syriac institution of covenanters was at the heart of the church and it was **their voice that brought the ascetic message to the married house holders.** The Church itself was monastic and the fervent faithful who led the perfect ecclesial life were honoured as an elite group. They never considered themselves as superior to the Church and never tried to lead a parallel life within the Church. Their monastic vision was perfect. The monastic dimension of the ecclesial life was the real beauty of ancient East Syriac Church. The background of this original vision is nothing but the result of the distinct origin of Christianity in Mesopotamia. Let us see the characteristics of *Sons of the Covenant* (*بنای قیامہ* / *bnay qyāmā*).

3.1. *Sons of the Covenant* (*بنای قیامہ* / *bnay qyāmā*)

One of the most important texts on *bnay qyāmā* is Aphrahat's Sixth Demonstration 'On the *bnay qyāmā* (*بنای قیامہ*) literally 'On the children of the *qyāmā*, that is to say 'members of the *qyāmā*, or Covenant'. A male member of the *qyāmā* was called 'son of the covenant' (*بنای قیامہ* / *bar qyāmā*) and a female member 'daughter of the covenant' (*بنای قیامہ* / *bat qyāmā*). The key term *qyāmā* needs our special attention and has a wide range of significance.

3.1.1. *Qyāmā* / *Qyāmā*

The meaning of the term *qyāmā* became popular in connection, with the oath and vow as this practiced in the Church and in monasticism. The essence of monasticism is defined as *qyāmā*. The term *Qyāmā* is abundantly used by Aphrahat, the Persian sage (ca. 280- 345 AD) in his Demonstrations. Let us analyze its different shades of meaning:

1. pact / contract / treaties

Generally *qyāmā* is any religious covenant in the salvation history. It designates the covenant established by God with the Patriarchs or people of Israel/ with the new Israel or the Church of the Gentiles. In Old Testament *Peshitta* Hebrew 'brith' is translated as *Qyāmā*. According to this view *bnay qyāmā* had their roots in Qumran community (they themselves call Covenant community). But we have no firm evidence.

2. Resurrection

Some suggested that *qyāmā* can have the meaning of 'resurrection', and hence *bnay qyāmā* anticipate the resurrection life (this explanation is not much acceptable. The term for resurrection is *qyāmtā* not *qyāmā*)

3. Stance

Some others opine that *qyāmā* can have the meaning ‘stance’; the stance of angels who do not sleep. This argument also lacks sufficient support.

Aphrahat in his Demonstrations use the term metaphorically as follows:

4. Christ is *qyāmā* (PS I, 780:23-781:21)
5. Church is called *qyāmā* of God (PS I, 323: 7,9; 345:8; 348:2)
6. Old Testament priesthood is called *qyāmā* (PS I, 641:19)
7. Circumcision is called *qyāmā* (PS I, 488:22)
8. *Qyāmā* is used to designate proto-monastic institution of *qyāmā*.

In Aphrahat it never occurs as a synonym of the **entire people of God**. For him the ‘Holy Covenant’ (*qyāmā qaddīšā*) is a distinct entity in the Church. If the Church is a *qyāmā* there is a *qyāmā* within that *qyāmā*. This inner circle seems to represent the elite of the Church. Thus the term *bnay / bnat qyāmā* became a collective name of the Church’s core elite, who are considered to be the only full pledged Christians. They were always placed after the bishops, presbyters and deacons.

3.2. Epithets applied to Covenanters

In addition to *qyāmā* there are three main terms in Syriac which are used to refer to different forms of consecrated life:

3.2.1. ܐܝܗܕܝܝܐ / *ihīdāyā*

Ihīdāyā (*Yīhīdāyā*) derives from the root ܐܝܕܝܐ. It means ‘unique’, ‘one’, ‘solitary’, ‘separate’, ‘individual’, ‘singular’, the ‘only-begotten’, ‘alone’, ‘hermit’ *etc.*

- In **Syriac New Testament** *Ihīdāyā* is the **title of Christ** translating Greek μονογενής (monogenes) the ‘only begotten of God’ the Father (John 1:14.18; 3:16.18). In Wis 10:1 *ihīdāyā* refers to Adam.
- In **Ephrem** *ihīdāyā* refers both to ‘Christ’ and to ‘His imitators’. The imitation of Christ is presented as the aim of all the Christians. But for the consecrated *ihīdāyē*, Christ the *ihīdāyā* par excellence, is the model. The relation of the *ihīdāyā* to the *ihīdāyē* is described by Ephrem as a gift of Baptism. He describes the relation of the *Ihīdāyā* to the *ihīdāyē* in the context of baptism in *Hymns on Epiphany*:

They are baptized and they become virgins and holy ones / they step down, are baptized and they put on the One *Ihīdāyā* / ... for whoever is baptized and puts on the *Ihīdāyā*, the Lord of the many / has come to fill for him the place of the many / and the Christ becomes for him the great treasure.

HEpiph VIII, 16⁵⁻⁶.17¹⁻⁴

At the time of baptism, the ascetics put on Christ the *Ihīdāyā* and become *ihīdāyē*.

→ The same idea can be seen in **Aphrahat**. According to him The *Ihīdāyā* from the bosom of the Father gives joy to all the *ihīdāyē*:

For those that take not wives shall be ministered to by the Watchers of heaven (ܘܫܘܪܝܢܐ, ܘܫܘܪܝܢܐ). Those that preserve chastity shall rest in the sanctuary of the Most High. The Only Begotten who is from the bosom of His Father (ܘܫܘܪܝܢܐ ܘܫܘܪܝܢܐ ܘܫܘܪܝܢܐ) shall cause all the solitaries (ܘܫܘܪܝܢܐ) to rejoice.

PS 1, 268²⁶-269⁴

The *ihīdāyā* about whom Aphrahat speaks of in his 6th Demonstration are those who choose celibacy in preference to marriage. To stay single without entering into marriage is

not to remain in solitude like hermits. Aphrahat never intended a physical solitude when he used the term *ihīdāyā*. But he wants to describe a person not to be in a married state. Aphrahat even says that *ihīdāyā* should live in company through his exhortation “It is good for a woman to live with a woman, and a man ought to live with a man” (PS 1, 260²⁰⁻²². Dem. 6/4).

Therefore, my brethren, if any man who is a *bar qyāmā* (ܒܪ ܩܝܡܐ) or a *qaddīšā* (ܩܕܝܫܐ), who loves the *ihīdāyūtā* (ܐܝܗܝܕܝܘܬܐ), yet desires that a woman, bound by monastic vow like himself, should dwell with him, it would be better for him in that case to take (to wife) a woman openly and not be made want on by lust. So also again the woman, if she be not separated from the *ihīdāyā*, it is better for her to marry openly. Woman then ought to dwell with woman, and man to dwell with man. And also whatever man desires to continue in *qaddīšūtā* (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ), let not his spouse dwell with him, lest he turn back to his former condition, and so be esteemed an adulterer. Therefore this counsel is becoming and right and good, that I give to myself and you, my beloved *ihīdāyē* (ܐܝܗܝܕܝܝܐ), who do not take wives, and to the virgins who do not marry, and to those who have loved holiness. It is just and right and becoming, that even if a man should be distressed, he should continue alone. And thus it becomes him to dwell, as it is written in the Prophet Jeremiah:— Blessed is the man who shall take up Your yoke in his youth, and sit alone and be silent, because he has taken upon him Your yoke. For thus, my beloved, it becomes him who takes up the yoke of Christ, to preserve his yoke in purity.

PS 1, 260¹³⁻²⁶¹¹⁴. Dem. 6/4.

Some scholars find three elements in the meaning and doctrine of *ihīdāyā*.

- μοναχός (*Monachos*), or single from wife or family;
- μονότροπος (*Monotropos*) single in heart, not double-minded;
- μονογενής (*Monogenes*) only-begotten, as well as united to the Only-Begotten; Putting on the *ihīdāyā*, Christ and thus standing up for him as a sort of representative, and thereby joining the *qyāmā*, the heart of the Church

An *ihīdāyā* is a follower and imitator of Christ the *Ihīdāyā* par excellence, he is single minded for Christ, his heart is single and not divided, he is single as Adam was single when he was created, he is single in the sense of celibate. Thus *Ihīdāyūtā* is the ‘consecrated singleness’.

3.2.2. ܩܕܝܫܐ/ *qaddīšā*

The verb «ܩܕܫ» means «to be pure, to hallow sanctify, consecrate, to set apart for a holy use». A ܩܕܝܫܐ/ *qaddīšā* is a married person who abstains from sexual intercourse and *qaddīšūtā* is the abstinence from marital intercourse with an intention to follow Our Lord more closely. It can be a temporary or a permanent state. The meaning of this term is evident in the episode of on Mount Sinai. In Ex. 19:10 God tells Moses, “Go to the people and sanctify (ܩܕܫ) them. As an explanation in verse 15 Moses exhorted the people “do not approach your wives”. Since Mar Aprem knows this Jewish traditional belief that in the Ark, during the period of flood, Noah, his family and the animals preserved the *qaddīšūtā* he commented on Gen 6:12 as follows:

And God said to Noah, “go out, you and wife, your sons and your sons’ wives” (Gen 8:16). Those whom God had caused to come in singly, to preserve *qaddīšūtā* in the ark, He caused to leave in couples, in order to multiply and be fruitful in creation. He also said concerning the animals which had preserved *qaddīšūtā* in the Ark. “take out with you every animal that was with you...and let them give birth on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on it” (Gen 8:17-18).

Commentary on Genesis 6:12

In short *qaddīšē* designated a distinct group of believer, viz. those who did not bring their natural virginity to Christian life, but they were married persons, had abandoned married life and started to observe sexual purity.

3.2.3. ܒܬܘܠܐ / *btulā*, ܒܬܘܠܬܐ / *btūltā*

The terms ܒܬܘܠܐ / *btulā* (masculine), ܒܬܘܠܬܐ / *btūltā* (feminine) are primarily used of those who have ‘chosen for themselves’ a consecrated life of singleness / celibacy and the single-minded following of Mesiha the *Ihidaya*; their choice will probably have received its public expression of adult baptism, combined with their baptismal vow. The abstract form ‘ܒܬܘܠܘܬܐ’ / *baṭūlūtā* refers to virginity.

3.3 *Virginity / Celibacy of the Covenanters*

All the above mentioned titles have one common factor, *i.e.*, emphasis on celibacy. Etymologically all these terms have different meanings. But in Proto Monastic period they were practically synonymous in intent: One who took the vow of celibacy to follow Christ. From all these epithets we can understand that these ascetics who lived in the midst of the community differed from their ordinary brethren mainly because of their decision to keep themselves celibate. What was their motivating force when they stood for virginity and sexual abstinence? Were they considered flesh as evil? Or were they influenced by Manichaeism or Marcionitism? According to famous Syriac professor Brock the ascetic ideal of Syrian proto monasticism were motivated by mainly three positive conceptual models:

1. The model of Christ as the bridegroom to whom individual Christians are betrothed at baptism
2. The model of Baptism as a return to paradise (in the Genesis narrative Adam and Eve did not cohabit until after the fall and their expulsion from Paradise).
3. The model of the baptismal life as the marriageless life of the angels (Luke 20: 35-6)

These covenanters ardently desired to keep themselves away from sexual relations. But it was not because they hated marriage. They never considered body as evil. But for them, since they considered themselves as betrothed to heavenly groom, it was not possible to have an earthly partner. So they were happy to serve Him, their groom, wholeheartedly. They also possessed the **luminous eye** to see His presence as the Church. These covenanters therefore worked hard to serve the Church without running away from the normal life of the Church. They were always the core of the Church. The ideal ‘**Flight from the World**’ of Egyptian Monasticism was strange to them.

The concept of virginity can receive a broad meaning wider than a mere sexual continence. It intends a perfect purity in Christ that applies to all Christians married and single. It is an integral disposition of a person to achieve the unity, *i.e.* *iḥīdāyūtā* with God. According to ancient Syriac tradition even the holy marriage blessed by God did not abolish the purity of virginity, but rather preserve it as long as it was not an excuse for lust or exploitation. The separation from marital relations in itself is nothing. But the distractions involved in them separate one from the perfect unity with God. It is very clear in Aphrahat:

When man has not yet taken a wife he loves and honours God his father and the Holy Spirit his mother, and he has no other love; and when man takes a wife he abandons his father and his mother, those previously mentioned, and his mind is captured by this world, and his mind and his heart and his thought are dragged from God into the world:

PS I, 840¹⁰⁻¹⁸(XVIII,10)

A similar thought is there in the *Syriac Book of Steps*:

This is the Perfect road: A virgin who does not marry a man and a man who does not take a wife are pleasing to Our Lord in body and in spirit, while those who do marry please one another.

PS III, 476²⁴-477³(19,15)

For Aphrahat virginity is the original state of creation, which contains the power of God to bring out life without external assistance. Aphrahat says that «before the seed was sown in the earth, it produced that which had not been cast into it. Before it had conceived, it bore in its virginity... Adam however, unsown sprang up; unconceived he was born» (PS I, 372^{7-10.15-17}(VIII,6). He says in a different instance, «When the earth was virgin it was not rendered unclean... Adam in his virginity was beloved and good» (PS I, 837^{12.14-15}(XVIII,9). Hence according to Aphrahat, not the marriage which was established by God at the beginning of creation, but the lust of Eve destroyed virginity; later Noah re-established the purity of marriage. (PS I, 821²⁻¹³(XVIII,2).

We have plenty of primitive Christian writings which praise asceticism headed by virginity.

A. *Odes of Solomon*

However the perfect virgin (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) stood / who was preaching and calling and saying / O you sons of men return/and you their daughters come / And leave the ways of that corruptor/and approach me. And I will enter into you / and bring you forth from destruction / and make you wise in the ways of truth /... And they who have put me on shall not be falsely accused/but they shall possess incorruption in the new world.

Ode XXXIII, 5-8.12

Here we can see the personification of virginity who exhorts the sons and daughters of men to put it on for achieving incorruption in the new world.

B. *Acts of Thomas*

There is an episode narrated in the Act I, where Jesus advises the bride and groom, while sitting with them in the bridal chamber (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) to keep themselves away from the filthy intercourse (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) to become pure temples (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܐܘܪܝܢܐ). Hearing Our Lord's advice, they were ready to leave intercourse.

C. *Two ascetical letters attributed to Clement of Rome (†99 AD), On Virginity*

He speak about the virgins of both the sexes and addresses them as blessed brother virgins (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) and holy sister virgins (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) and say that they preserve “virginity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” and it depicts the virgins as a “beautiful image to believers and those who shall believe”. In order to be saved, it exhorts virgins to do work appropriate to their virginity. If not, such virginity (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) is foolish and impure. True virginity “stands constantly at all seasons before God, and does not withdraw from His service and is anxious how it may please its Lord with a holy body and with its spirit”. It is noteworthy that the virginity is described as a great and noble profession. The ‘noble task of virginity’ is compared to a ‘war’ (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) and those who strive in the might of the Holy Spirit will be ‘crowned with a crown of light’ and will be led to ‘Jerusalem above’. The crown of virginity demands great toil, but the ‘glory of virginity’ (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) is ‘great, exalted and excellent’. Virginity is presented as a must to be a Christian. If you want to be a Christian, you have to put on Christ, who put on (flesh) from a holy virgin.

D. A Syriac homily attributed to Isaac of Antioch (5th cent.)

Before you become needy and you say the word of a penitent: Who is the one who can pull me down and rebuild me, and make me a virgin again? The person who comes to baptism to be associated with the Holy Spirit keeps away his limbs from dirt, for you have made them white for the wedding feast. Here is Christ who pulls you down and rebuilds you again, and He makes you a virgin once again. Hold on to the mark in honour and your renewal is in faith.

Homiliae S. Isaaci Syri Antiocheni, P. BEDJAN, ed., 684⁶⁻¹¹

The relationship between baptism and virginity is narrated in a way to throw lights on the significance of virginity in Syriac spirituality. It explains that the original virginity of man which has been lost can be restored by Baptism.

It is clear that the practice of virginity is to bring back the mind and heart from being caught by the world to have total purity in Christ. Hence, physical virginity got a place in asceticism **not as the imitation of the celibacy of Christ, but as the best weapon to fight against the sin of Adam**, which aims at the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven promised at the baptism.

3.4. Relationship between Baptism and *Qyāmā*

From certain passages in the *Demonstration VII* of Aphrahat it seems that in his day baptism was reserved for those who consecrated themselves to Christ in virginity (*bnay qyāmā*). The non-celibates remained as a second level without enjoying the participation in sacraments.

I speak also to you who hold the trumpets: priests, scribes, and sages. Call out and say to all the people, 'Let he who is afraid turn back from the struggle, lest he cause his brother to become as disheartened as he is. And whoever has planted a vineyard let him return to cultivate it, lest he thinks of it in the war and suffers defeat. And whoever is betrothed to a woman and wishes to marry her, let him return and rejoice with his woman. And let the one who is building a house return to it, lest he calls it to mind and not fight [with] full [attention]. It is the single ones (*iḥīdāyē*) who are ready for the struggle, since they set their faces toward what is before them and do not call to mind what is behind them, for their treasures are before them, and whatever they plunder is for themselves; they will receive their reward abundantly.

PS I, 341¹²-344²(VII,18)

But it was not the case. Scholars re-studied this problematic exhortation of Aphrahat and suggested it as a sort of Midrash on Deut 20:1-9 and on Gideon's test (Judg 7:4-8) which prefigures baptism. The technical use of the Gospel traditions (specially usage of Matt 10:34 fused with Luke 12:49-53) in connection with the Deuteronomic 'Call to Holy War' underline the ascetic life in the early Syriac Church. Following Jesus is associated with Joshua's Holy war. The call '**to abandon family, home and labour**' should be responded positively to have the bliss of messianic banquet. Baptism was the occasion for becoming virgins and consecrated ones' *i.e.* the occasion to joining the *Qyāmā*, the group of covenanters and to becoming *iḥīdāyā*. The *bnay qyāmā* "were in harmony with the spirituality of their Church and did not constitute a body independent from the rest of Christian society". They took their vows when they were baptized and they saw baptism as a means of their self-consecration. Hence, in their case baptism and virginity got a close association.

It seems that the candidates for the *Qyāmā* were many. But the admission to the life of virginity and holiness was given by the Church to those who were genuinely ready for this

fight. For them, Baptism was the ‘waters of trial’ (ܡܘܬܝܐ ܕܡܝܐ), and the initiation ceremony took place during the baptismal liturgy before the assembly. Aphrahat says that “every one who is strong, the water proves him; and those who are lazy are separated from there”. Almost all our Syriac literature is from the ascetical circles. They write about what concerns them to their disciples and they never speak much about holiness in a sexually active marriage. It does not mean that only celibates constitutes the Church. From Aphrahat himself, we have the proof of the existence of common lay Christians and he calls them «children of faith (ܒܢܝ ܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ / *bnay haymānuṭā*)»

3.5 An asceticism headed by Virginity

From the very beginning, among the Syriac Christians, certainly there existed people who took an individual commitment to celibacy. But they were not the only baptized Christians in the Syriac Church. In clear words celibacy was never a requirement for baptism. Till the 4th cent. AD there were no organized predecessors of the monastic way of life to which celibates could belong. Hence in the early Syriac Church devout celibacy was not yet a central tenet. From the fourth century onwards, when asceticism paved its way to monasticism, the physical aspect of virginity started to receive a higher place. Emphasis on virginity resulted in the emergence of dualistic tendencies in the believing community. Asceticism in the Syriac Orient expanded quickly in several ways and an asceticism headed by virginity in its literal sense ruled many groups.

Among the primitive Syriac Christian communities, a strong current of thought emerging, for which marriage and procreation, which were at the heart of the human condition at that time, were not contemplated in the original, divine plan of humanity, although they were later granted by the one God, Creator and Saviour. The determinant cause of these activities was the sin of the first humans; therefore, they were seen as later, secondary realities within humanity’s condition and a sign of humanity’s painful fall and loss of angelic, original perfection and integrity.

This thought is very explicit in the Syriac Book of Steps (ܟܬܒܐ ܕܡܫܩܘܬܐ / *Ktābā d-Massqāṭā* a treasury of thirty ܡܝܡܪܐ / *mēmre* probably from the late 4th or beginning of the 5th cent. AD of Syriac milieu. It is well known by the name *Liber Graduum* which is the title given to its Latin translation.)

For its anonymous author, sexual reproduction is man’s choice which later got approval of God, but if he did not choose that way, it would be God’s responsibility to provide humanity an appropriate way to multiply and to keep the generations. See PS III, 602¹⁷⁻¹⁹(21,7): “if he had wanted he could have made children by the hairs of their heads or by their finger nails, and the people would have become the images of angels (ܟܘܢܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܐܗܘܐ)». From his explanation we feel about his suggestion as somewhat similar to cloning or grafting. In short, according to our author, God originally intended an «asexual way of reproduction”. Here Eve’s birth from the side of Adam is put forward as an example of such a possibility. Eve is presented as Adam’s daughter. See PS III, 740¹⁻²(25,3): “If all people desire to become holy, I would create for them children just as I made a daughter for Adam from himself, without marriage and without lust”

The influence of Mani, Marcion, Tatian, Valentinians and several other encratic groups formed a radical group who considered total abstinence to be an unavoidable precept for every Christian; some others took a moderate position to consider celibacy as a requirement to become the perfect Christian or to have full membership in the Church. The persons who did not have enough courage to make this radical choice but were still interested in the Christian message were to remain as a subordinate group in the Church. Gradually a tendency to place the community of faithful on two levels emerged in Syriac Christianity.

Because of the historical and geographical context of the Church of the Syrian Orient, the communities developed were not homogeneous in character. Due to their radical ascetical approaches, some formed certain sects and moved parallel to the Great Church. But we cannot neglect the echoes of their thoughts that resounded within the Church for several centuries. Since the mid-fourth century, Syrian Christian asceticism shared the milieu of many such dualistic groups.

4. The Ecclesial dimension of the institution of *Bnay Qyāmā*

The covenanters lived in the midst of the faithful and considered themselves as the mystical body of Christ, the Church. They tried their best to lead a responsible ecclesial life. The ecclesial mind of the Syrian Church in its Proto Monastic period is clear in the profound Ecclesiology of ܟܬܒܐ ܕܡܫܩܬܐ (the *Ktābā d-Massqātā*) specially in its twelfth *mēmra* ‘On the Hidden and Visible Ministry of the Church’ ܟܬܒܐ ܕܡܫܩܬܐ ܕܡܫܩܬܐ ܕܡܫܩܬܐ. This ancient ascetic work speaks about the wonderful effects of the visible ministry of the Church. Through the visible ministry of the Church these ascetics experienced that their body became the Church sanctuary, their heart the altar and their tears the incense offered upon the altar. Here each person acts as a priest, and his life becomes a living sacrifice. Then that heart, in the author’s language ‘the Church of the heart’ becomes a venue of revelation of the heavenly Church in its glory. The person could see the heavenly Church while on earth and he realized the fact that it is the mystery which is presented as image in the visible Church. But if one skips training in the visible Church one will not get this bliss, because the visible ministry of the Church was instituted by Christ Himself and was affirmed by his Apostles. Thus, this excellent discourse describes the personal spiritual life in terms of Church which was the mind of *bnay qyāmā*.

- **They were addressed as the sons of the Church** (ܟܬܒܐ ܕܡܫܩܬܐ)

In the canons of famous Edessian Bishop Rabbula for *bnay qyāmā* and priests (Bishop of Edessa (411/2-435/6 AD). He converted to Christianity as an adult, leaving his mother, wife, and children for the monastic life. He was renowned for his work among poor, for regulating clergy, monastics and *bnay qyāmā* *Bnay Qyāmā* were called ‘the sons of the church’ (ܟܬܒܐ ܕܡܫܩܬܐ). (Rabbula’s Rule for *Qyāmā* no. 1 and 11)

- **They were ministers of the Church**

Bnay Qyāmā had an active involvement in the life of the Church. Here are certain explicit rules that speak about their ecclesial duties:

- Rabbula’s Rule for *Qyāmā*’ no. 1: “They should know the true faith of the holy church”
- Rabbula’s Rule for *Qyāmā* no. 27: “They were obliged to be continually in the worship service of the church (ܟܬܒܐ ܕܡܫܩܬܐ) and shall not neglect the times of prayer and psalmody night and day.
- Rabbula’s Rule for *Qyāmā*’ no. 42: “It is recommended to *bnay qyāmā* that if possible they should stay in the church, like priests and deacons”.
- From the Canons of *Marūtā* it is clear that from the ranks of *bnay qyāmā* the pastors or clergy were drawn by the Chorepiscopus:

He shall see whether there are villages that are lacking and need priests, he shall make among them, and he shall not allow these villages to be lead into the habit of unseemliness; and are there villages where there are no *bnay qyāmā* of whom he shall make priests, (in this case) he shall bring out brothers from the monasteries or churches which are under his authority, and shall make them.

So-Called canons of Marūtā XXV/7: A. VÖÖBUS, Syriac and Arabic Documents, 120.
 → **Deaconesses for the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism were chosen from the *bnat qyāmā*.**

It is the will of the general synod that: From these sisters shall be elected those, who are blameless since their youth – particularly if she applies herself to that repentance at the age of 60 years, as the blessed Paul commands his disciple. These shall be made deaconesses, in order to perform the service of the rite of baptism alone.

So-Called canons of Marūtā XLI/3: A. VÖÖBUS, Syriac and Arabic Documents, 125-126.

These deaconesses were committed for social services. They visited and instructed female catechumens and women who were ill. They assisted at the baptism of women and hence their ministry was clearly marked as one by women for women.

- **They enjoyed the protection and care of the Ecclesial hierarchy**

The *bnay qyāmā* were kept under the protection of the ecclesial hierarchy.

→ It was the duty of the Chorepiscopus to initiate the candidates into the *Qyāmā*. He took the responsibility to instruct them in Christian faith and doctrines.

Everyone of them who has sons and daughters – the chorepiscopus shall persuade them to set some of their sons and daughters apart. He shall make them through prayer, and shall lay his hand on them and bless them, and these shall become the *bnay qyāmā*. They shall be instructed and given to the churches and monasteries and shall order them that they shall be educated in doctrine and instruction that they shall become inheritors, and the churches and monasteries will be established (or will have their existence) through them.

Canons of Marūtā XXVI/2-4, A. VÖÖBUS, Syriac and Arabic Documents, 122.

→ The *bnay qyāmā* remained very close to their Bishops and celebrated Eucharist with them when they have opportunities.

It is the will of the general synod that the Chorepiscopus shall gather the entire *qyāmā* of the villages two times a year equally for the honor of the bishop; and they shall participate with him in the mysteries (of the Eucharist) and also shall receive *būrktā* (blessing) in the presence of him, one at the time when the winter enters and the other after the feast of resurrection.

Canons of Marūtā XXVII/1, A. VÖÖBUS, Syriac and Arabic Documents, 121-122.

→ Rabbula's Rule for *Qyāmā*' no. 19: If any one of the *bnay qyāmā* were in want, the priests or the deacons of their villages should take care of them

But the service offered to them should be without any selfish motiff. The rule strictly warned against such human tendencies of exploitation.

→ Many of the *bnay qyāmā* could receive the crown of martyrdom

The early fourth century *Acts of the Edessan Martyrs* and *Acts of the Persian Martyrs* note that the *bnay qyāmā* were being specially targeted during the persecution under Diocletian and Shapur II. Among those who were persecuted Martha the daughter of Posi, Tarbo and her maidservant, Thekla, Danaq, Taton, Mama, Mezakhya and Anna of Karka dBeth Slokh, Abyat, Hathay and Mezakhya from Beth Garmay, Thekla, Mary, Martha and Emmi of Bekhashaz *et.al.* are identified by name as *Daughters of Covenant*.

- **The *bnay qyāmā* were members of the liturgical choir:**

The *bnay qyāmā* performed a significant role in the liturgical Choir. The Holy Spirit bubbled up within them in the chanting of the Psalms and the self-composed hymns that are the glory of Syriac Church. It is a known fact that *Daughters of the Covenant* were charged with the task of singing psalms and various kinds of hymns in certain liturgical celebrations under the training of Ephrem.

→ Rabbula's Rule for *Qyāmā*' no. 20: "The *bnay qyāmā* should learn psalms and the *bnat qyāmā* the doctrinal hymns (*madrāšē*) also".

→ According to the Canons ascribed to Maruta no. 41 we could see the ordering of women's ministry. "It is the will of the general synod that the town churches shall not be without the order of sisters"

→ Ephrem in his *Hymns on Nativity* refers to Choirs of women:

May the chant of chaste women please You, my Lord,
May the chant of the chaste women dispose You, my Lord
To keep their bodies in chastity.

HNat, IV, 62b-63

→ In the *Syriac Vita tradition of Ephrem the Syrian* we have a detailed narration of *Daughters of the Covenant*, whom Ephrem convened for the morning and evening services in the Church of the Edessa:

Seeing that all the people were attracted to singing and that (human) nature was drawn to it, blessed Ephrem summoned his strength which was in weakness to conquer the opposing strength of the enemy. This blessed one [called up and deployed forces in opposition to the silly songs of children. He assembled and organized the *Daughters of the Covenant* and taught them hymns and songs and antiphons and intercessions. He arranged songs and verses in rhythmic measures and transmitted his wisdom to all the learned and wise women. And he mixed in the hymns and chants sweet melodies which were pleasing and delightful to their hearers... everyday the *Daughters of the Covenant* would gather in the churches on the feasts of the Lord and on Sundays and for the commemoration of the martyrs. And he like a father, would stand among them as the harpist of the Spirit, arranging various songs for them and demonstrating and teaching and alternating melodies until the entire city gathered around him. And he shamed the opposition and did away with them.

Syriac Vita Tradition of Ephrem, tr. J.P. Amar, 79-80.

- **The *bnay qyāmā* were teachers of the ecclesial community**

→ They instructed the congregation through hymns. In his *Homily on Ephrem*, Jacob of Serug says in stanza no. 40 to 43:

Our sisters were strengthened by you (O Ephrem) to give praise
For women were not allowed to speak in church
Your instruction opened the closed mouths of the daughters of the Eve
And behold, the gatherings of the glorious (church) resound with their melodies
A new sight of women uttering the proclamation (*karozutha*)
And behold, they are called teachers (*malpanyatha*) among the congregations
Your teaching signifies an entirely new world
For yonder in the kingdom of heaven, men and women are equal.

- **The *bnay qyāmā* were Social workers**

- The *bnay qyāmā* were involved in missionary works. When famine broke out in Eddessa in the winter of 372/373, Ephrem *bar qyāmā* par excellence cared many sick and he himself died as a victim of plague.
- Caring the poor was an important activity for the Syrian hermits. The *Didascalia* saw this as one of the most important activity of the bishop. In the early Syrian Church looking after the poor was closely associated with hospitality. (*Didascalia*, XVII)
- Many of the *bnay qyāmā* were gifted with healing power. God Himself performed the healing, using the hermit as his representative.
- It is recorded that hospitals were built from the efforts of one congregation's Covenant Group.
- Through their hospitality, their work with poor, their priestly life ascetic life, their acts of healing and holiness of life they pursued a mission of preaching and conversion in the whole of the Syriac Orient. They witnessed and preached the kingdom of God to everybody. They became instruments of the Holy Spirit.

5. Development of Syriac Monasticism

The primordial form of 'Proto-Monasticism' later developed as anchorites and which further developed into coenobitism. The details of how the Syrian Monasticism was transformed from Anchoritism (*Ihīdāyūtā*) to Coenobitism (*Dayrāyūtā*) are not much easy to describe. According to Theodoret, the first generation of monks were anchorites, while their disciples were more inclined to the coenobium.

5.1 *Ihīdāyūtā* (Anchoritism)

The earliest form of Syrian monasticism was Anchoritism. Anchorites often practiced their withdrawal from the world in an eccentric manner. The terms used to denote a hermit were, *iḥīdāyā* (solitary) and *Abilā* (mourner). These monks preferred complete isolation, a life in loneliness. There were many primitive monks living in complete silence and solitude in the mountains and deserts. Gradually the solitary life is started to be considered as the perfection of monasticism. The fellowship of a community was only a preparatory stage for becoming an anchorite. The anchorite could be a **warrior of God** fighting the demons and the devil. There was a widespread conviction, that the solitary monks had a special relation to angels. They guide the anchorites, inspire them and furnish them with mystical knowledge. Each solitary considered his personal strength and following the charism suggested by his conscience, he behaved himself in accordance with its duties.

5.1.1 Some Early Hermits :

- a) Mar Jacob of Nisibis (ca 255-338 AD)
- b) Juliana Saba (ca.294-367 AD)
- c) Abraham Quidunaia (+367 AD)
- d) Ephrem the Syrian (ca.306-373 AD)

5.2 *Hīrtā* (ܚܝܪܬܐ)

This transition from anchoritism to coenobitism passed through the stages of *hīrtā* which has its resemblance with Palestinian *laura* or semicoenobitic settlements of Egyptian monasticism with a radical difference. There are several cells arranged in an irregular fashion around the head of the community. They had a common place of assembly for prayer and with a storehouse for food. The Syrian way of *hīrtā* was actually coenobitic. There the monks met every day for common prayers. While in *laurae* the community met only for the weekend prayers. During the regular weekdays the monks prayed in their dwelling places.

5.3 *Coenobitism* (*Dayrāyūtā* ܕܝܪܝܘܬܐ)

At the end of third quarter of 4th C, in Syrian Monasticism we can see an increasing tendency toward communal life. When solitaries grew to numerous, some felt the need for a common life which could offer support to them in their spiritual and material needs. This paved the way to a coenobitic form of life, i.e., *Dayrāyūtā*. A coenobium is called in Syriac *Dayrā* or *ūmrā*. Coenobitism began on the day an anchorite first accepted one or more disciples who wished to imitate his way of life. According to Theodore there are thousands of monasteries not only in Syria but in all the Orient. There are tremendous growths of the net work of the monasteries. Primitive and simple gave way to the more complex establishments ample to house the growing number of monks attracted to coenobitism. Thus in place of tiny buildings, magnificent monasteries comparable places were erected, with the gardens, orchards, plantations, fields and herds necessary for their maintenance. These monks were much involved in the matters of the Church and ecclesiastical life. They influenced the religious, social, cultural and literary field of the churches with which they concerned. The reputation of Syrian monasticism spread throughout the Christian world during the 5th century. But the later history of Syrian monasticism was characterized by periods of crisis, persecution and decadence which led to reorganizations and restorations that appeared in different forms and under different leaderships.

5.3.1 Some of the shining examples of Dyrāyē:

- a) Alexander Akoimetos (+430)
- b) Bar Sauma (+ c. 458)
- c) Symeon Estonaia (+459)

5.3.2 Monastic Rules:

Along with the development of *Dayrāyūtā* there arose the necessity to have rules to guide the community with rules. These **rules** were evolved through a gradual process:

1. At first the founder communicated these rules orally to his disciples.
2. Later they were written down

We could not see any highly influential legislator such as Basil or Pachomius in Syrian Monasticism which clearly manifest its individualistic nature. However we got several collections of monastic regulations such as:

1. Rules attributed to Ephrem
2. The rules of Rabbula for monks (*dyrāyē*)
3. The rules of Rabbula for clergy and *bnay qyāmā*
4. Canons of Marutha, etc.

5.3.3 Hierarchical Organization

From these rules it is clear that the monasteries enjoyed a well defined hierarchical organization. Passage from one rank to another within the class was a matter of seniority. The

allocation of duties among the monks was done in a special ceremony including a vigil and the Eucharist once a year in the month of Elul (September) at the full moon, *i.e.*, in the middle of the Month.

1. *Rešdayrā*

He is the head of the monastery and subordinate to the Bishop, Archdeacon and Chorepiscopa. His appointment should be confirmed by the Bishop. *Rešdayrā* has the responsibility to take care of all the needs of the monastery. He has the responsibility to appoint the persons subordinate to him to do various services in the monastery.

2. *Mparnsānē*

One rank below the *Rešdayrā* were the three monks (*thalāthā*, *'ahē*, *dbātreh*) whose task was to manage the daily affairs of the monastery. Hence they were called *mparnsānē*.

3. *Rabbaytā*

He was the supervisor over the work and the cellarer. He was responsible for each monk's property as well as for caring of the sick, charge of provisions of goods in the monastery and was forbidden to waste them. *Sā'rūtā* : he deals with the external affairs of the monastery. Chorepiscopa has the duty to appoint *Sā'rūtā* for ensuring that the monk should be loyal to the Church establishment.

4. *Sābē – the elders*

This group formed a separate class, and divided into several ranks *mparnsānē*, *Rabbaytā* etc belongs to this class.

5. *Qšīše and Mšamšānē*

The priests (*qšīše*) and deacons (*mšamšānē*) constituted a separate class.

5.3.4 Routine of life

The routine of life in the monastery was divided into three parts; services and reading; work; eating and rest. The number of meals was determined according to the occupation of the monks. In the monastery of workers there were 2 meals per day; at the 6th hour and in the evening. If monks did not work one meal was sufficient; at the 9th hour or in the evening. *Dayrāyūtā* spread on a large scale, however we could not see any single system. Different ways of life were practised in different monasteries. Some had high regard for manual work as an essential source of monk's livelihood. Some others put their trust in divine providence. Some expressed extreme emphasis on the ideal of poverty. As for the coenobites, periods of time were designated for prayer in common, for solitary prayer, and for spiritual reading. Each monastery regulated the duration of the prayer, and some sung the psalms five times a day and others sang them seven.

Reputation of Syrian monasticism spread throughout the Christian world during the 5th century. But the later history of Syrian monasticism was characterized by periods of crisis, persecution and decadence which led to reorganizations and restorations that appeared in different forms and under different leaderships.

5.3.5 Important Monasteries

There are number of monasteries in Syria. Usually a monastery was founded through the joint efforts of a group of monks or by the initiative of a monk.

a) Upper Monastery (Daira 'Ellaita)

The Upper monastery was situated on the bank of the Tigris River at the northwest part of Mosul. It was located just outside or even inside the city walls of Mosul. Today the Church called Tehra is found in its place. This monastery of Mar Gabriel (+738/9) and Mar Abraham (+9th century), the first superiors of it, played an important role in the liturgical reformation of the East Syrian Church through centuries. For it was there that Catholicos Išō' Yabhb III (+657/58) resided in the seventh century. It was there that he determined what would become quasi- definitive norms for the reform of the East Syrian liturgy.

The Upper Monastery is reported by the Syrian as well as the Islamic authors as one of the most eminent convents in the spiritual history of the East Syrians. It is called the **Monastery of Gabriel**, later also known under the name of Abraham owing to the activities of this famous teacher in the school of this monastery. Regarding the founder of the Upper Monastery, the diptychs of the East Syrian Church has preserved the information that this was the celebrated Mar Gabriel of Kaskar. He is reported to have made a name for himself by founding several monasteries in *Bēt Garmai* and *Bēt Aramaie*. The school of the monastery, called 'the mother of the virtues', according to the tradition in the diptychs claims, was founded by Mār Gabri'ēl. This monastery became important in the area of literary culture and the instruction in preparing outstanding men for the Church. A later reform in the liturgical and ritual books, carried out in the Nestorian Church, was initiated here. The 'Upper Monastery had an impact upon the textual traditions of the New Testament in the East Syrian Church.

b) The Monastery of Beth 'Abhe

The name of the monastery, Beth 'Abhe, means 'house of the forest'. The monastery was situated in a forest upon a mountain peak to the North East of Mosul, between two valleys on the right bank of the Great Zab River. It was founded by Rabban Jacob, a monk of the monastery of Mount Isla who lived in the middle of the sixth century. The Catholicos Isho 'Yabhb III was also a monk of Beth 'Abhe monastery'. The East Syrian lectionary manuscripts ascribe to a monastic lectionary usage called the Beth 'Abhe System.

5.3.6 Liturgical Life of the Monks

Perfect continence, together with voluntary poverty, obedience to the superior and austerity of life were the constitutive elements of the life- style of the monks. The monastic life of the Syrian Monks was centered on prayer. The prayer life consisted in:

a) Reading and studying of the Scriptures

The reading from the Sacred Scriptures was held in great esteem in the Syrian monastic system. The monks take the gospel seriously, as the paramount vision of their life, and live this out in daily practice and observances. In Scripture God reveals himself most intimately. *Lectio Divina* was a process of lection, meditation, oration and contemplation. It is the heart of monastic way. The word of God aims at giving the monks an awareness of God's presence, a consciousness of the immersion of their personal lives in the mystery of God's activity as revealed in sacred history. Psalmody occupied the central place in the Syrian monastic life-style, "the whole of the monastic activity could be defined by the term psalmody". Psalmody with its various hours is a Christian tradition of great antiquity, and was derived from Judaism.

b) Celebration of the Qurbana and the liturgy of the Hours

Syrian monks celebrated Qurbana once each week, on Sundays. Frequent and daily communion, although not then a general practice, was however not unknown in the orient.

As the monastic system developed, the structure of the day was determined on the basis of the hours of prayer. In substance prayer consists of meditation, or recitation of psalms, which is distributed according to the day of the week or the hours of the each day. From this evolved the 'divine office' as we now have. In the fifth century Syrian monasteries it was almost the universal practice to pray seven times a day, since the psalmist himself had written: "seven times a day I will praise you for you your just judgments" (Ps 119,164). Prayer ordinarily was offered while standing, this posture being understood to be effective in mastering sleep.

c) Spiritual reading (lectio divina)

It was intrinsically related to meditation. Among the Orientals, meditation consists of the repetition of a Bible verse or of an ejaculation, generally spoken aloud while the body, a process which helped the monk to "ruminate" on the word of God for long periods of time, plumbing into its deeper meanings and significance.

5.3.7 Activities of the Syrian Monks

a) Manual Labour

In the contemplative outlook of the Syriac monasticism, manual labour had lost its importance as compared to Egyptian Monasticism. But in the wake of the development of cenobitism, manual labour became necessary for their daily sustenance. Also it became a guard against idleness and temptations and it provided necessary relaxation in the solitude. They were very cautious that manual labour does not impede the spirit of contemplation in their personal as well as community life.

b) Pastoral Works

Syrian monks were defenders of Christian orthodoxy. As they involved in pastoral activities they became real shepherds of souls. Their sanctity, good example and pneumatic gifts attracted many. With their blessings the monks imparted the pneumatic gifts. The huts of the anchorites and the monasteries became pilgrim centers where people flocked to take counsel on matters relating to their inner life. They could even read the secret thoughts of their hearts. People requested their blessings for material as well as spiritual benefits. They welcomed the arrival of these monks and solicited their presence in their houses. The monks distributed consecrated oil to people, which was helpful in healing many kind of illness. The monks later took up clerical responsibilities and there were many bishops among them.

c) Missionary Activities

Their missionary zeal was the unfolding of the spiritual strength, they acquired through asceticism and prayer. Like a magnet, **the very presence of monk in a pagan territory attracted many to Christian faith.** Their missionary endeavor did not limit to the confines of Syria, Mesopotamia or Persia. It extended to far away countries like India and China. The Hsianfu monument in China erected in 781 AD, bears witness to the extend of their missionary enterprises. This stone monument casually unearthed in 1625 AD speaks of their missionary activities in China in the seventh and the eight centuries. It states that during

the persecution of Emperor Wu Sung (845 AD) foreign missionaries numbering 3000 from Tachin and Muhpo were expelled from the country: “As for the foreign bozes (monks) who came here to make known the law which is current in their kingdom, there are about three thousand of them, both from Tachin and Muhupo. My command is that they also returne to the world so that in the customs of our Empire, there is no mixture”. (Tachin denotes Syria or Persia, and Muhupo according to some scholars is Mabar or Malabar Cost or Molepattan. Because of the close relationship between the Persian Church and the Church in India, monks from these two Churches could have been working jointly.)

d) Social Activities

Syrian monasticism very skillfully blended contemplative and active life together. The virtue of hospitality was given primary importance. They identified Christ in the strangers whom they received in the guesthouse. They showed full respect and honour and great sympathy to them. They saw God himself in the poor standing at the door and believed that in the disguise of the poor God appeared to test their loyalty. Monasteries were referred to as refuge for the poor and the needy. During times of calamities the monks organized self-sacrificing services. They also conducted hospitals and engaged in visiting the sick.

The monks made use of their influence and authority to awaken social consciousness and sense of justice among the public. Thus they became protectors of the afflicted, the exploited, and the oppressed. Because of their activities among the afflicted they earned reputation as “the merciful”.

e) Literary pursuits

The Syrian monks had made deep impacts on the spiritual life of the contemporary people, with their contributions in the literary field. In their solitude they read many books, wrote many books and copied the manuscripts. They appreciated study as a weapon for strengthening spiritual life. Manuscripts were the most valuable possessions of a monastery. They took great interest in the education of children.

CONCLUSION

Monasteries are the powerhouses of the Church. Here the real life of the Church is protected in the midst of the fast moving world. The monks and the monasteries are responsible for bringing up the faithful in the spirit of the Church. Monks proclaim their faith through their fidelity to the liturgy and by living the spirit of the liturgy. All the monks should consider the Divine Liturgy as their primary duty. The composition, development and reformation of the liturgy of the hours are the primary contribution of the monasteries in all eastern and western Churches. Through their deliberate efforts, the contemporary religious are obliged to learn from the venerable proto-monastic tradition of Covenanters how to lead monastic life through genuine ecclesial life.

Part III

MONASTICISM IN ASIA MINOR

The monastic way of life in Asia Minor is historically linked to Eustatios from Sebaste who led an exceptionally rigorous ascetical life. He accepted the primitive Syriac way of asceticism. He defended an extreme form of asceticism, despised marriage and advocated fasting even on Sundays. We could see his name in the *Acts of the Synod of Gangra*. The group under him generated schism. Later St. Basil the Great could integrate Greek Monasticism into the Great Church.

1. Basil the Great (329 -79).

- a great mystic - called the “**legislator of eastern monasticism**” and “**Father of Eastern monasticism**”.
- visited many important centers of monasticism in the east
- tried to give an organized set up to monasticism in Asia minor
- wanted to establish a middle way of life between anchoritism and cenobitism, combining the excellence of both the ways (of Anchoritism and Cenobitism).
- Coined perfect code of rules - provided “*Greater Monastic Rules*” and “*Lesser Monastic Rules*”. All the rules had a strong scriptural foundation - gave a human touch to monastic rules
- stood for community life.
- brought monasticism to the service of the church.

*1.1 Monastic ideals of St. Basil***a) Separation from the world**

For Basil monastic life is the crowning of Christian commitment. It begins at baptism. A monk seeks Christian perfection under special conditions, in total separation from the world. He separates himself from the cares and distractions of the world. The habit worn by the monk was a sign of this separation.

b) Renunciation

Basil demanded renunciation of all affections towards world, its pleasures, glory, and its ideals. One had to abandon all social connections and even his family ties as the sign of complete renunciation. It is the disposition of the heart and submission of one’s will to that of God. Basil taught that no one ever reaches the state of total renunciation during his lifetime, but grows in it until his death.

c) Temperance or Mastery over self

This virtue is a development and completion of renunciation and it brings body and its passions under control.

d) Community life

Love of brothers finds its fulfillment in community life. Though separated from the world the monk is not away from the brethren. According to him nobody is self-sufficient even in bodily matters, all the more in matters spiritual. In solitary life there is no one to correct or to reprove. Encouragement also is received only in a community. He says that no man is given the whole Spirit. Holy Spirit is the collective possession of the community. In a community, different individuals share different gifts and they enrich mutually. Different offices are assigned to different monks so that each one contributes his gifts for the enrichment of the community. The superior's role is the ordering of all the graces and gifts for the good of the community. He is the "eye" of the community. He ought to rule by his example than by his words. He must be a model of all virtues, especially of humility and kindness.

e) Monastic Profession

Chastity - all the disordered affections and carnal pleasures are renounced.

Obedience - total submission of one's will, desires and aspirations to the will of God.

In exercising the authority the superior is to be the faithful interpreter and guardian of the scriptural precepts. He has to use moderation in using his authority. Perfect obedience does not mean the paralyzing of individual gifts.

Poverty - While entering a monastery one should distribute all his possessions to the poor. One will be provided with whatever is necessary and whatever is necessary only. This is called the "Rule of necessity".

f) Humility, Charity, Hospitality

Humility – it teaches him to accept his destitution (nothingness) and to acknowledge the glory and grandeur of God. Humility is an exclusive search of the glory of God in everything.

Charity - St. Basil very strongly insisted that in the midst of the caring for the material welfare of the poor and the sick the monk should not forget to look after their spiritual needs and to preach gospel message to them.

Hospitality - Outflow of charity from one's own community to outside is hospitality - the monk shall show maximum hospitality to guests - Care for the poor and the sick are the greatest acts of hospitality. The poor are the altars of the church.

g) Service to the sick

Caring the sick should be done in such away that he should feel confidence in the healing power of Christ.

h) Manual labour

An act mortification - practice of asceticism - St. Basil reconciled the command to pray unceasingly and the monastic obligation of responsible work by urging his monks to transform work into prayer.

i) The Life of Prayer

Prayer is a spontaneous, constant, and continuous act of the heart - the perpetual "memory of God". According to him the human soul, which is the abode of Holy Trinity and always under its action, should ascend into constant contemplation of God. The idea of spirit praying in man was much developed by St. Basil.

PART IV

EARLY FEMININE MONASTICISM

In the very early period of Christianity there were already “the **order of virgins**” and “the **order of widows**”, groups of religious women living a type of ascetical life, founded on prayer, fasting, alms giving and other good works. Tradition says that St Anthony sent his sister to a house virgins (celibate women’s community).

- The *Apophthegmata Patrum* (saying of the desert Fathers) and *Paradise of the Fathers* indicate that many a devotee *AMMA* (Syriac word for a woman ascetic) lived an ascetic life as strenuous as that of *ABBA* (male ascetic).
- of the sixty histories recorded in the Syriac version of the book of Paradise, nineteen are devoted to prominent women ascetics.
- Palladius mentions that along with the monastic community, which Pachomius established for men on the banks of Nile at Tabbenesi, there were monastic communities for women on the opposite bank of the river, who followed the same rule of life.
- It is also mentioned in the life of St Basil that he helped his sister and mother to established a monastic community for women.
- common characteristics –
 - communal life in smaller groups under the leadership of some influential women
 - The daily life was centered on prayer, fasting, good works and study of scriptures and Church fathers.
 - There were often a common style and color of dresses.
 - The members of the community frequently assisted in the maintenance of hostels and hospitals.
 - ideal of consecrated virginity resulted in powerful Christian women’s movement, which attracted the noble souls of the time.
 - These women were concerned with the fulfillment of womanhood through intellectual and spiritual pursuit.

All these indicate that women were active participants in developing early Christian forms of asceticism. They were regarded equals with men in their pursuit of perfection

PART V

MONASTICISM IN THE WEST

While monastic life spread very fast in the East, in the West, its growth and development was gradual.

- **St. Athanasius** the Bishop of Alexandria was the first one who brought monasticism to the West.
- The first monk to become famous in the West was **St Martin** (+ 397). He was the son of a Roman military officer and a disciple of **St Hilary** at Poitiers. After some years of eremitic life he was elected Bishop of Tours. He formed a number of monasteries and hermitages. From there, monastic life spread to the Celtic regions of British Isles, Ireland etc. Also in Italy monasteries and hermitages were multiplying during that time.

The monks in the West were using the Latin translation of the rule of Pachomius, the rules of St. Basil and the two great works of Cassian (*Institutes* and *Conferences*). Also the lives of monastic heroes and holy men of the desert, and their teaching were written, or translated into Latin and were circulated in the West. This flow of monastic literature had a great impact on asceticism in the Western Church.

St. Athanasius wrote the life of St Anthony, **Vita Sancti Antonii**, in 357, for the use of the western ascetics - **Apotegmata Patrum**, the saying of the (desert) Fathers - the history of the monks of Egypt, **Historia monachorum in Egypto** - **Historia Lausiaca**, written by Palladius about monastic life in Egypt Palestine and Asia minor - *Life of Pachomius* written by his disciples with title **Vita prima Pachomi** - regulations, and instructions of Pachomian monasteries was translated into Latin by St. Jerome, divided under the following headings: **Precepta, Precepta et Instituta, Precepta atq; Judicia, and Precepta ac Leges.**

As Alexandria, Antioch and Egypt were part of the Roman Empire they had close association and interaction with Rome in social political and religious spheres.

Several of the theological and ascetic works of Basil, Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa were available in Latin translations that also contributed to the development of monasticism in the West.

ST. BENEDICT OF NURSIA (480-547)

- St. Benedict is known as **the father and legislator of monasticism in the West.**
- He was born around A.D.480 and was educated in Rome.
- While still young he retired to a mountain near **Subiaco** around forty miles east of Rome and lived an austere life for a few years as a solitary.
- Later Benedict abandoned his original plan of eremitic life and established a coenobitic fraternity, living in common with his followers.
- he divided the disciples into groups of twelve and established twelve monasteries similar to the Pachomian communities
- Later he came to **Monte Casino**, some thirty miles from Subiaco and established a new monastery about the year 529. He lived the rest of his life in Monte Casino where he died about 547
- **Rule of St Benedict** - two main sections:
 - I. the prologue and the **first seven chapters** dealing with the spiritual doctrine and the acquisition of basic virtues like obedience and humility.
 - II. **Chapters 8-73**, is devoted to the life and discipline in the monastery, where detailed regulations are given for proper conduct of monastic life. **Several chapters are devoted to the manner of celebration of the liturgical functions, the divine office and the vigils.**
- the monks should engage in three activities: Liturgical prayer, *lectio divina* (prayerful reading of the Sacred Scriptures, commentaries of the Fathers and mental prayer) and manual labour.
- The rule of St. Benedict in no way was fully his own work. Abundant literature on the Coptic monastic spirituality and rules, regulations of the Pachomian model, ascetic writings of the Capadocian Fathers, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa were also at his disposal. Benedict drew heavily from these sources.
- Revitalization of Benedictine monasticism during the Middle Ages
 1. Cluniac Reforms of 10th C
 2. Cistercian Reforms of 11th C

- Monasteries were primary locus of education for boys and girls until later Middle Ages
- Monastic orders continue to live a life of Christian witness
 1. Benedictines
 2. Cistercians
 3. Trappists

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