



ST. EPHREM'S VISION OF THE MEDICINE OF LIFE

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Abstract: *This academic paper deals with the Ephremian vision of the imagery of the medicine of life. The imagery of the 'Medicine of Life' is one of the critical imageries in the works of St. Ephrem. This imagery is the key by which St. Ephrem attempted to unlock the mystery of salvation through Eucharistic theology. Therefore, a detailed search in the work of St. Ephrem is required to find out how and in what sense the imagery the 'Medicine of Life' is used. The main focus of this academic paper is to study how St. Ephrem has used the imagery to denote the different dimensions of the Eucharist. Therefore, this academic paper also gives special attention to reading each significant event in the Holy Scripture to find out the Eucharistic theology of St. Ephrem.*

Key Words: St Ephrem, Medicine of Life, Eucharistic Imagery, Scripture

1. INTRODUCTION

St. Ephrem has defined the transcendental and transubstantial nature of the Holy Eucharist by using various symbols. The world view of his time might have influenced him a lot in composing poems on divine mysteries by using the full potential of imageries. These epithets were taken from the Scripture and the culture. Human Ascent, the Robe of Glory, the Medicine of Life, the coal of fire, the pearl, the bridal chamber of the heart, and so on are some of the prominent imageries used frequently by St. Ephrem in his hymns, biblical interpretations, and sermons.¹ Among these imageries, the 'Medicine of Life' is vital because he has repeatedly used this imagery to signify the Holy Eucharist. This academic paper focuses on extracting the different dimensions of the Eucharistic imagery of the Medicine of Life used by St. Ephrem in his works. First of all, we will analyze the influences that inspired St. Ephrem to use this imagery and then the different dimensions of it proposed by St. Ephrem to understand the Ephremian vision of the Holy

Eucharist. It will help us to analyze the TL of the imagery in the third academic paper.

2. INFLUENCES ON USE OF THE IMAGERY OF MEDICINE OF LIFE

The use of the imageries is constructive in associating abstract ideas. Since imageries are the subject of human senses and imagination, transferring the transcendental meaning becomes effective. That may be the reason why St. Ephrem has chosen images to interpret the divine realities. He wants to communicate that Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, died, and resurrected is the Medicine of Life. And this Medicine of Life is presented in the Holy Eucharist.² St. Ephrem was very good at handling the imageries in his works. To prove that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies in the Old Testament, he brilliantly uses many incidents from the Old Testament. He uses them as imageries to represent the Holy Eucharist. He says that

¹ Cf. S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye the Spiritual Vision of St Ephrem*, 12.

² "The Grape of mercy was pressed and gave the Medicine of Life to the peoples (Virginity 31:3)." "Our Lord baptized human kind

with the Holy Spirit, He nourished it with the Medicine of Life (Nisibis 46:8)." Cf. Aprem, *Mar Aprem, Theologian & Poet*, 86-87.



Moses had hidden the symbol of Christ as Medicine of Life in the ‘Unleavened Bread (18:15).’³The same concept of the hidden Medicine of Life is also recurring in many of his works, such as ‘Hymns on Nativity’, ‘Virginity’, ‘Paradise’ etc. Now let us see how the culture influenced him to use this imagery.

2.1. CULTURAL INFLUENCE

The search for immortality is there in the minds of all people on earth. Every culture brings its own stories of elixirs that provide immortality. Here we are going to see how the concept of Medicine of Life existed in the culture where St. Ephrem lived. As I stated, medicine is part of the human community. Various types of medicinal practices have existed across the world. There are physical, psychological, and spiritual therapies. These branches have different sub-branches and multiple dimensions by their use. Here, the discussion is on the imagery of Medicine of Life that existed in the Semitic, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian cultures. The reason for focusing on the Middle East terrain is that St. Ephrem was exposed to these three cultures. Among the said cultures, the concept of Medicine of Life is taken from Mesopotamian Culture.

Mesopotamian culture is predominantly based on supernatural concepts, although rudimentary traces of medicine are discernible, whereas, in Greek culture, systematic medical practices existed. It is written in Hammurabi’s Code that if a healer causes a highborn person blindness or death, both hands of the healer will be cut off.⁴ It is to show the concern that was given to medicine and its uses. To be specific, medicine should grant Life and health. It means that even at the time of Babylonian exile, the practice of medicine was there in the Middle East. At the time of St. Ephrem, the medical techniques might have improved. St. Ephrem might have used this medicine concept to present the Eucharistic reality with the imagery of ‘the Medicine of Life.’ That means he made use of the said imagery to expand the meaning of the Eucharist. St. Ephrem has taken the healing aspect of medicine to interpret

the Holy Eucharist. Now we will see the biblical dimensions of the said imagery.

2.2. BIBLICAL INFLUENCE

The hymns and sermons of St. Ephrem were filled with Biblical imageries and symbols. Here we would be analyzing the imageries of Medicine of Life in the light of the Holy Bible. It is helpful to know how the meaning of the cultural product changes with the application of the divine revelation. The Bible is indeed written by using the symbols and imageries of the cultures to which the People of God were exposed. In other words, the human authors of the Sacred Scriptures might have interpreted the divine revelation within the limitations of the human language. Therefore, the gradation of revelation is very evident in the Bible. All the events in the Old Testament are perfected in the New Testament because the New Testament authors have interpreted Old Testament from the Resurrection experience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The imagery of ‘Medicine of Life’ has been directed towards two meanings in the Bible; a) Medicine that gives life and b) Medicine is Life (here the Life is personified). It means that here both ‘medicine’ and ‘Life’ stand for Jesus Christ. The imagery of Medicine of Life is present in the Holy Bible from Genesis to Revelation directly or indirectly. The concept of Medicine of Life is visible in many of the incidents in the Old Testament. Those indirect indications are given below.

- a. **Creation (Gen 1):** Creation is the result of the love of the Triune God. God created the human being in His image and likeness and gave Life, and thereby man participated in the divine Life. St. Ephrem explains it with the imagery of ‘the robe of Glory’ in his ‘Hymn on Paradise’. The story of creation is the recollection of the writer of the Sacred Scripture about the glorious

³ □A. ∴ χ≅ □_≅ Ak□}N □χO} μγ

□≅AX P□ωθ □. ∴ δ} ≅□□≅ □ Cf. J. E. Walters, *Ephrem the Syrian’s Hymns on the Unleavened Bread* (USA: Gorgias Press, 2012) 81.

⁴ Cf. F.P. Retief, and L. Cilliers. “Mesopotamian Medicine,” 3.



state of man. The story of creation conveys the message that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the result of God's Love towards humanity. The relation between the creator and the creation was a matter of discussion in the 4th century Christian circles. St. Ephrem has used the creation narrative to arrive at the significance of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Medicine of Life.⁵ Here the aspect of divine love is incorporated in the imagery.

- b. Sin and Promise (Gen 3):** The fall of man resulted in the loss of the divine Life. Here, God reveals the economy of salvation to humankind that He will send the savior to redeem man from the clutches of the consequences of his great fall and ensure divine life. The aspect of mercy is obvious.⁶
- c. The Great Flood (Gen 7):** The story of the great flood also deals with a new creation and a level of new life. Here the 'great flood' can broadly be considered 'Medicine of Life' because it purified the society. The concept of purification adds meaning to the imagery.
- d. Aaron's Miraculous Rod (Ex 7:8):** Aaron's miraculous staff turned into a snake and swallowed all other snakes of the Pharaoh's sorcerers. It also symbolizes Jesus Christ. The miraculous nature of the imagery is emphasized.
- e. Bread from Heaven (Ex 16):** The Israelites were given bread from heaven, nourishing them with the same. It revitalized them to continue their Exodus. Here also, we can see the indications of the imagery 'the Medicine of Life.' The imagery gets the meaning of the elixir of life.

- f. Bitter water made sweet (Ex 15):** The people were thirsty, and they were on the verge of death. At this time, the bitter water turned to sweet became an elixir of Life for them. In the physical sense medicine remains bitter when it is received but grants sweetness to life by proving good health and in a spiritual sense it is difficult to follow Christ who is the medicine of life, but He grants eternal joy.
- g. Water from the Rock (Ex 17):** This was similar to the above-mentioned incident. In this case, also water became a medicine of Life.
- h. The Decalogue (Ex 20):** The Decalogue was also the Medicine of Life. It consists of the commandment of God. Therefore, the Decalogue is also the Medicine of Life. It stands for the disciplined life in Christ as if a patient arranges his life while in medical treatment. Since Christ is to be received every day, it demands a decorum of life.
- i. The Blood of the Covenant (Ex 24):** With the blood of the covenant, the Lord made the covenant with Moses. It symbolizes the blood of Jesus upon which the new covenant is established. Therefore, it also stands for the Medicine of Life.
- j. The Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25:10-22):** The Ark also symbolizes the Medicine of Life, because it stands for the presence of God. It is an archetype of the Church which is the sacrament of Christ.⁷

Here the said incidents from the Bible turned to imageries in the prayers of the people of God later. We will explain how these indirect indications of Medicine of Life are used in St. Ephrem in the succeeding paragraphs. We can see quotes on medicine in Prov 17:22, Jer 30:17, Jer 46:11, Tob

⁵ Aprem, *Mar Aprem, Theologian & Poet*, 35.

⁶ Cf. G. Mathew Kuttilyil, *Eucharist (Qurbana): The Celebration of the Economy of Salvation (Madabranutha)* (Kottayam: OIRSI, 1999) 50-51.

⁷ Cf. A. Nariculam, *Church Liturgy: Towards an Understanding of Catholic Worship* (Aluva: St. Thomas Academy for Research, 2014) 44.



6:5, Sir 6:16. The biblical usages above show that the bible writers have hardly used the primary meaning of ‘medicine,’ whereas its symbolic meanings are prioritized. For example, “Faithful friends are life-saving medicine (Sir 6:16).” Here the ‘faithful friends’ are identified with the ‘life-saving medicine.’ Therefore, the use of the symbolic dimension of a word was prevalent when the Old Testament books were written down.

St. Ephrem uses many Old Testament incidents to substantiate the fact that Jesus Christ fulfills all the prophecies of the Old Testament. His comparative study is not merely confined within the prophecies alone. He takes each incident from the Old Testament and proves logically how Old Testament is perfected in Jesus Christ. He says in “The Hymns on the Unleavened Bread” that those who have eaten from the unleavened bread have demised, whereas the people who received bread from the life-giver attained eternal Life.⁸ He again says that the Church gives the living bread instead of the unleavened given by Egypt. He compared Mary to Eve. According to him, Mary gave humanity the life-giving Bread rather than Eve’s deadly bread. He compares Adam and Jesus as follows:

Let the sixth day praise the one who created Adam on Friday. The evil one deceived him by mixing poison in his food. Whereas Jesus, through His incarnation, dispensed The Medicine of Life to both of them, and thereby man became alive.⁹

The careful analysis of the hymn given above proves that St. Ephrem has made use of all his poetic skills in synthesizing the fall of Adam to justify the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Like this, he makes use of many Old Testament references in his poetical works. He makes it very clear that Jesus is the New Adam who brought salvation to all. Like this, we can see many such references from the Old Testament in the works of St. Ephrem.

⁸ Cf. T. Paniker. “St Ephrem and the Eucharist,” 6.

⁹ G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Manushyavathara Geethangal*, Hymn no 26:9 (Kottaym: OIRSI, 2001) 159.

¹⁰ Cf. J. Maniparambil, *The Gospel According to the Beloved Disciple* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2011) 201.

¹¹ “In Him was life [*zoe*], and the life [*zoe*] was the light of men” (Jn 1:4). John wants to prove that eternal Life resides in the Triune God. We, the humans, become eligible for the divine Life only if

It does not mean that he has not been influenced from the New Testament. His theology is more influenced with the Gospel of St. John. The significance of the Gospel is very vital in understanding the concept of ‘life’ in the imagery of ‘The Medicine of Life.’ St. John has made use of the idea of ‘life’ theologically to present the concept of eternal life, that is, Jesus Christ himself. According to him, Jesus is the resurrection and the Life. “Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11:25). It is clear from the quotes that the purpose of the incarnation of Jesus and his death on the Cross is to give Life (Jn 10:11). Life is not a static reality, whereas it is always active in its very nature because the creator of Life is dynamic and active. Life is a ‘language’ through which God speaks. The evangelist’s purpose in writing the Gospel is to give ‘Life’ to the world. (Jn 20:30) This theme is recurring in the works of St. Ephrem. Therefore, the better analysis of the word ‘Life’ in the imagery of the Medicine of Life becomes obvious with the interpretation of *Psuche*, *Bios*, and *Zoe* in St John. All these Greek words are used for denoting ‘Life,’ but with different meanings. For example, *Zoe* means ‘divine life,’ whereas ‘*Psuche*’ means ‘natural life.’¹⁰ Luke also used the word *Bios* for “Life.” (Lk 8:14) The term *Bios* refers to the physical body, whereas Matthew has made use of the word *Psuche* (Mt 16.25). Here Matthew has gone a little ahead of Luke, and we can see a transition of meaning from the body to soul of the humans. When we come to John, it is evident that he has gone to the depth to perfect the concept of “Life” by using the word “*Zoe*” (Jn 1:4). Here he explains how the divine Life was dispensed to the entire humanity through the incarnation and the paschal mysteries of Jesus Christ. He wants to prove that humans get participation in the divine Life in and through Jesus Christ. John has changed the meaning of Life by using the word *Zoe* as ‘life with which God lives¹¹’, ‘life that Father and Son share¹²’, ‘the Son

God wills for the same. Therefore, whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (Jn 3:15)

¹² John again says that eternal Life is shared among the persons in the Trinity. He indirectly proves “*Perichoresis*.” Therefore, God, the Father, willed to send His Son to have eternal Life for humanity who believes in Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life [*zoen*]” (Jn 3:16).



Himself is the Life¹³, 'Life gained through faith¹⁴', and 'Life surpasses death¹⁵',

Like St. John, Ephrem tries to prove that only God can impart eternal life to humans. He says that one who believes in Jesus Christ takes part in the divine Life. Therefore, there should take place a kenotic transition to attain eternal life. It is possible only through Jesus Christ. That is why the Eucharistic presence of Jesus Christ is symbolized with the imagery of the Medicine of Life. It means that one has to make a deliberate leap from "Bios" to "Zoe." It happens only when one surrenders one's physical and psychological lives before Jesus by admitting willfully that He is the LIFE. St. Ephrem uses the said imagery in the same line as that of St John. It is clear from the above description that St. Ephrem is highly influenced by the Holy Scripture. His attempt is not to give any refined definition to salvific action of God, but to elevate the minds of the people of God to take part in the mystery of salvation.

2.3. INFLUENCE FROM THE NATURE

Ephrem uses many imageries from nature. He makes use of the name of the objects, animals, plants from nature and composes new imageries. He also quotes all those imageries from the Bible itself. For example, Unleavened Bread, Fountain, Medicine, Fragrance, Goat, Fruit, etc. Here St. Ephrem has brilliantly used these images from nature and provided a shift in the meaning.

¹³ After proving that God and Jesus Christ share the same Life, John teaches the people that "whoever believes in the Son has eternal life [zoen] and whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life [zoen], but the wrath of God remains on him" (Jn 3:36). Then John gives the account of the Samaritan Woman. There Jesus reveals himself to the Samaritan woman that He is the source and summit of eternal life. (Jn 4:14) This account also indicates that salvation is not merely for the Israelites but all the nations.

¹⁴ Then John says that the one who believes in Jesus Christ gains the Life through steady Faith. (Jn 5:24) That is, Peter promises Jesus that he is ready to give his Life for eternal Life. (Jn 6:68) It means that through Jesus, only one can enter into eternal life. (Jn 14:6) Here the encounter with Jesus inspired or, better to say, transformed Peter to lay down his will or soul ('*psuche*') to Jesus.

2. Different Dimensions of the Imagery of Medicine of Life

It is very clear from the previous discussion that Ephrem is highly influenced by the Holy Scripture. Now let us see how St. Ephrem has used the imagery. Here we will discuss the different dimensions of the imagery. This discussion will provide a firm ground to the third academic paper in which the reasons behind the TL of the imagery to the Eucharist are discussed.

3.1. MERCY

St. Ephrem uses the imagery of the Medicine of Life to portray the aspect of Divine Mercy. He says that the fountain of Life was hidden in Jesus, and it was given to all those who search for him.¹⁶ Jesus gave his own body to the people to make them alive eternally.¹⁷ St. Ephrem proves that the Medicine of Life is Jesus Christ himself. The fallen man cannot attain the lost grace by his effort. Therefore, the Second Person in the Trinity incarnated to bring the mercy of the Father to the entire people. It means that the Medicine of Life included the incarnation, passion, death, resurrection, and the second coming of Christ. It means that the eschatological aspect is also included in the term 'Medicine of Life.' Apart from this, the imagery conveys the fact that God is merciful. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the expression of the Divine Mercy because through Jesus all the people are healed.

3.2. PURIFICATION

St. Ephrem uses the imagery of The Medicine of Life mainly for the Eucharist. But, apart from the same, the said imagery suggests many other meanings related to the

(Jn 15:13) Here, Jesus teaches that the real friend of Jesus will submit the physical Life and the will (soul).

¹⁵ The eternal Life imparted to humans with the power of the Holy Spirit will transcend death. "So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life [zoen] in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal Life [zoen], and We will raise him on the last day'" (Jn 6:53-54).

¹⁶ "He became thirsty and asked for water. But the fountain of Life that gives life to all was hidden in him. (Translation: Own)" Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Pesaha Geethangal*, 26.

¹⁷ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Pesaha Geethangal*, 28.



Eucharistic effects. One is purification. Medicine purifies the body; likewise, the Medicine of Life sanctifies the soul.¹⁸ Therefore St. Ephrem teaches that the incarnation of Jesus is our purification. His Baptism is the absolution of our sins and His death is our Life.

3.3. TREE OF EDEN

Ephrem makes use of the ‘Tree of Eden’ to bring meaning to the Medicine of Life. He says that man was given a second chance to eat from the ‘Tree of Life’ through the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ.¹⁹ He also says that the dove that Noah sent took a rest in the ‘Tree of Life’ and rejuvenated with new Life.²⁰ He also says that the fruit of the ‘Tree of Life’ symbolizes the Body of Christ (Eucharist), which imparts life to those who eat from it. It means that St. Ephrem uses the ‘Tree of Life’ as the symbol of the Eucharist (or Jesus Christ Himself).²¹ That is why he says that the ‘Tree of Life’ brought hope to the mortals.

3.4. CRUCIFIXION

Medicine of Life and the crucifixion of Jesus are presented interconnected in the poetical works of St. Ephrem. According to him, “Jesus has hidden the eternal life. Therefore, the lifeless death could swallow the One with Life. The fragrance of his life filled in the hades and therefore the hades vomited him.”²² Here Ephrem has presented the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Ephrem says that the Cross in which Jesus was crucified is life-giving, and therefore he continues and says, “The head of the Child upon which the life-giving sign of the cross is marked is blessed!”²³ It indicates Baptism and Confirmation. Through this sacrament, one becomes eligible to receive the Eucharist, the Medicine of Life.

In the ‘Hymns on the Incarnation,’ he explains symbolically how Jesus Christ, the Medicine of Life, was resurrected. He says that in the hades, the death opened its mouth widely and swallowed the body of Jesus, but the

Medicine of Life hidden within the body was sprouted.²⁴ In the Nissibian Hymns, he continues his teachings and explains that the Medicine of Life gave Life to the dead in the hades.²⁵ Therefore, he proves that it is Jesus who gives eternal life.

3.5. BREAD OF LIFE

It is evident in the Gospel of John that the Bread of Life directly indicates Eucharist. Though Ephrem used this Eucharistic imagery separately in his works, he made a brilliant blend of the imageries of the Bread of Life and Medicine of Life. Here the imagery of The Medicine of Life is incorporated in the imagery of the Bread of Life. To explain the same, he takes various incidents from the Old Testament and the New Testament. He makes a symbolic blending to incorporate the said imagery with the imagery of the Bread of Life. And he instructs the faithful how to receive the Eucharist. He says that all those who have eaten from the unleavened bread provided in Egypt died, whereas the life-giving bread, the Medicine of Life, brings Life to everyone who receives it faithfully. And thereby, those people will be rewarded with eternal life.²⁶ Ephrem also warns the people to receive the Bread of Life with the proper disposition of the heart. Otherwise, it will cause eternal separation as if in the case of Judas.²⁷ Here he points out two facts: 1). the unleavened bread received with the proper disposition of the heart in the Holy *Qurbano* is the Medicine of Life and 2). when one receives the Eucharist while being in mortal sin, it becomes a deadly poison to that person.²⁸

Ephrem wants to say that the Eucharist nourishes the body as well as the soul. He also explains the significance of this nourishment. He says that those who are nourished from the bread of life will be taken to heaven and they will see the resurrected Christ.²⁹ Here it is very clear that he gives a kind of eschatological dimension to the Eucharistic Imagery. Since the Eucharist is the medicine for

¹⁸ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Pesaha Geethangal*, 77.

¹⁹ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Kanyathva Geethangal*, Karthrupratheekangal, Hymn no 8:5(Kottaym: OIRSI, 2001) 51.

²⁰ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Kanyathva Geethangal*, 61.

²¹ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Kanyathva Geethangal*, 10.

²² Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Pesaha Geethangal*, 33. (Own Translation)

²³ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Kanyathva Geethangal*, 100.

²⁴ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Manushyavathara Geethangal* (Kottaym: OIRSI, 2001) 41.

²⁵ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Nissibian Geethangal* (Kottaym: OIRSI, 2009) 110.

²⁶ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Pesaha Geethangal*, 36.

²⁷ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Pesaha Geethangal*, 38.

²⁸ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Pesaha Geethangal*, 40.

²⁹ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Pesaha Geethangal*, 36.



eternity, all those who received it with the proper disposition of the heart will be granted participation in the divine life.³⁰

4. CONCLUSION

The tri-cultural influence leads St. Ephrem to use the imagery of the Medicine of Life to bring out the theology of the Eucharist. Since he was moving around biblical imageries, it was easy for the people to comprehend the theology of his writings, particularly that of the Eucharist. He conveys the message that all the revelations of God were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and the abiding presence of Jesus Christ is continued through the Eucharist.

The imagery of the Medicine of Life is not simple imagery that deals with the physical Life, but rather it goes far beyond its meaning through the poetical works of St. Ephrem. The imagery has been interpreted with existing meaning to elucidate the Eucharist's mystery. He wants to convey that the Eucharist is the actual Medicine of Life and that is Jesus Christ. The application of the imagery of the Medicine of Life has another Eucharistic dimension. That is, the source and means of 'Life' are the same. It means that Christ is the source and Christ is the means. He vividly presents Jesus as the healer and the medicine by which one is granted 'life.' Therefore, the imagery of the Medicine of Life is personified with the Person Jesus Christ.

St. Ephrem makes a lot of comparisons with the Old testament incidents and imageries to convey the message that the people must have widened their thinking horizon in the light of faith to incorporate the mysteries of salvation. He uses all these comparisons to substantiate the fact that participating in the Holy Eucharist is the prefiguration of the *Parousia*. To convey this message, he says, "Whoever has eaten the life-giving bread of the Son will be taken to the heavens to welcome Him."³¹ St. Ephrem brings the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist by using the imagery of the Medicine of Life. He says that when Jesus consecrated the bread and the wine, it became the Medicine of Life to those who receive them with faith.³²

The fall of the first parents caused the forfeiture of the robe of glory. Humanity lost the divine life with this fall, and no one could gain it with one's merit. Therefore, God sends Jesus Christ to this world to grant humanity the participation in the divine life through His salvific action. And whenever we take part in the Holy Eucharist with the proper disposition of the heart, we take part in the divine Life by being in this world that continues after death. St. Paul, therefore, reminds us that all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason, many are weak and ill and some have died (1Cor 11:30-32). If the Eucharist is Christ, then we are partaking in the divine Life through Him, and therefore He is the Medicine of Life. When we live in the grace of God, even after our death, we continue the same. Thus, the Eucharistic interpretation of the particular Judgement reveals that we can partake in the divine life through Jesus Christ. Again, in the universal judgment, we receive the enlightenment that all those who witnessed Jesus Christ directly or indirectly are saved through Him. If the loss of divine Life is death, then gaining Life is nothing but being in Christ. Thus, St. Ephrem wants to convey the same message through the Eucharistic imagery of the Medicine of Life.

This academic paper mainly focused on the different traits of the Eucharistic imagery, the Medicine of Life expressed in the works of St. Ephrem such as mercy, purification, source of Life, and so on. We also analyzed how the culture and the Scripture influenced him in bringing out the Eucharistic theology with the said imagery. In other words, this academic paper explained how the shift of meaning occurs through imageries and symbols. It means that imageries and symbols bring a kind of semantic shift (Transcendental Leap) to liturgical and theological language. This semantic shift is conveyed and appropriately understood only within the context of the text. It means that without getting into the context of the text, it becomes difficult to extract the intended meaning. Here it is very evident from the works of St. Ephrem that the Johannine theology of 'Life' has influenced the theological thinking

³⁰ Cf. B. J. Groeschel – J. Monti, *In the Presence of Our Lord: the History, Theology, and Psychology of Eucharistic Devotion* (Hunting: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1996) 63.

³¹ Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Pesaha Geethangal*, 36. (own translation)

³² Cf. G. Chediath, *Mar Aprem: Pesaha Geethangal*, 28.



and writings of St. Ephrem a lot. When the poetical works of St. Ephrem are analyzed within the Johannine spectrum, it becomes evident that the meaning of the said Eucharistic imagery becomes an indicator of the mystery of the economy of salvation too. All the possible semantic shifts of the imagery of the Medicine of Life are analyzed in the next academic paper. It will facilitate to get more qualification of the Eucharist conveyed with the said epithet. The next academic paper will help us to understand the expansion of the transcendental leap.

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