

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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Mar Thoma Margam

The Ecclesial Heritage of the St Thomas Christians

Introduction

Announcing the Year of Faith (October 2012-November 2013) the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has invited the Catholics all around the world “to go to the well, like the Samaritan woman... in order to rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed”¹. This is an invitation to revisit the sources of our Christian existence as the first step towards New Evangelization. Already in his first Encyclical Letter Pope Benedict XVI had defined the Church in terms of three inseparable constituting elements that presuppose each other: “...of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*)”². The proclamation of the Word of God or the Kerygma is the *raison d'être* of the Church. The liturgical celebrations accompany the faithful in his/her life of pilgrimage of faith. It is through the celebration of the sacraments, sacramentals and divine praises that a Christian is nourished in “the new existence in Christ”. Kerygma and Liturgy take concrete expression in the life of Charity. The service to the one in need and to the marginalized had always been the distinguishing

mark of Christianity (Acts 2,42-47; 4,34-35). The Church to be authentic has to address also the social issues of the people of today especially of those on the periphery of the society. Alienation from these real and solid sources of faith is the root cause of all deviant teachings resulting in the proliferation of “sects” and a culture having no reference to God. In the contemporary scenario of the post modern world, the best possible solution for this faith crisis consists in having recourse to “the well” of true faith.

The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ manifests itself through different Individual Churches³ of the East and the West. In understanding the Word of God or the Mysteries of Revelation, both of them have their own methods and approaches. While commenting on the uniqueness of the Eastern and the Western theological understanding, Vatican II teaches: “... these various theological formulations are often to be considered complementary rather than conflicting...”⁴. Continuing this spirit of Vatican II, Pope John Paul II, wrote on the occasion of the promulgation of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*: “The Church by God’s providence, gathered in the one

Spirit, breathes as though with two lungs, of the East and of the West, and burns with the love of Christ in one heart, having two ventricles”⁵. Now certain scholars have begun to highlight the importance of a third stream of Christian tradition, i.e., the Syriac Orient together with the Greek East and the Latin West⁶. It is this consciousness about the beauty of the Church in its plurality of theological expressions that inspired us to undertake this concerted investigation into the Ecclesial Heritage of St Thomas Christians of India which is an integral part of the patrimony of the one Church of Christ.

1. The One Gospel of Christ in Four Gospels

The Church is the fruit of the Kerygma or the apostolic proclamation of the Christ event. The birth of the Church and the formation of Gospels are similar in many respects. There is only one Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Son of God and the Messiah. But it has come down to us in four different narratives which are mutually complimentary. In the same way, the one Church of Christ exists in different Individual Churches. The diversity in the apostolic Christ experience is at the basis of this plurality. The Four distinct versions of the Gospel and different Individual Churches grew out of the diversity in the apostolic Christ experience. Each apostle had his own experience of Jesus Christ which he transmitted to the community to which he was sent. As a result, different apostolic ecclesial communities or Individual Churches came into existence. An individual Church is the Gospel incarnated in a particular culture in a particular period of time⁷. In all such apostolic communities there were in circulation accounts about the life, teachings and activities of Jesus. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit four such apostolic Kerygma got fixed in written form, gradually accepted as canonical Gospels by all other Churches.

The written Gospel is properly understood in the background of the sacred Tradition of the Church

in which it was formed. This sacred Tradition includes everything that had been handed on by the Apostles, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established. As the Fathers of Second Vatican Council write, “in this way the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes”⁸. “Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal”⁹. The authentic interpretation of this single sacred deposit of the Word of God, enshrined in the sacred Scripture and in the sacred Tradition is the task of the living teaching office of the Church¹⁰. Pope Benedict XVI demands that the People of God be properly taught and trained to approach the sacred Scriptures in relation to Church’s living Tradition and to recognize in both of them the Word of God¹¹.

This book *Mar Thoma Margam: The Ecclesial Heritage of St Thomas Christians* is a fresh look at the sacred Tradition of the apostolic Church in India. Since this Tradition is a “living and dynamic reality” a growth in insight into these realities is a natural concomitant¹². As part of interpreting the single deposit of the Word of God, extensive research in different aspects of our Tradition has been undertaken by the Mar Thoma Nazaranis¹³. On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, a theological centre for such scientific studies, we thought it opportune to bring together in one volume the results of such researches. It is also providential that this is the 50th year of Vatican II which appealed to the members of the Oriental Churches “to preserve their established way of life”, “to honour all these things with greater fidelity” and “if they have improperly fallen away from them. . . to return to their ancestral ways”¹⁴.

2. Mar Thoma Margam: The Sacred Tradition of St Thomas Christians

From time immemorial, the Christian way of life among St Thomas Christians of India is known as Mar Thoma Margam. Margam¹⁵ (Way) is the most ancient title for the Church used in the New Testament (*Hodos* in Acts 9,2; 18,25; 19,23; 24,22). Faith in Jesus Christ is understood from the very outset as a Margam, a Way to be traversed, a Way of life¹⁶. St Thomas, our Father in faith, brought this Margam to India. He shared his Christ experience with our forefathers and their faith response resulted in a particular life style which they called Mar Thoma Margam.

Christian faith is confessing Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and Son of God. This faith makes one a disciple of Jesus who is the Way (Jn 14,6). He is the Way because he is the Truth that leads to Life eternal. In his capacity as the Word incarnate Jesus reveals God the Father and becomes the Truth. A Christian disciple is one who follows Christ on this Way (Lk 9,51-19,27). A genuine disciple is the one who enters into the Way of Christ. "Baptism initiates the believers to a new way of life of the disciples of Christ, who are attracted to the person of Christ and who follow Him by imitating His life-style"¹⁷. Therefore Church is pilgrim people of God on the way to heaven.

One comes to the faith in Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Apostles specially commissioned by the Risen Lord to preach the Word of God and to bear witness to Him. One becomes a member of the Catholic Church only by becoming a member of an Individual apostolic Church¹⁸. St Thomas who proclaimed the Way of salvation in India in the first century, laid the foundation for an Individual Church, the Church of the Mar Thoma Nazaranis. There are also other Churches founded by St Thomas. As there are several ecclesial communities in the Pauline tradition, there are different

Individual Churches in the Thomistic tradition also. There existed a strong bond of communion among these Churches of St Thomas Tradition from the early centuries onwards. And East Syriac, a developed form of Aramaic, the language spoken by our Lord Himself, played a significant role in uniting these Churches of Thomistic tradition.

The Churches of East Syriac tradition perceive the Christian existence as appropriating and interiorizing the Mystery of Christ. Theology, for them, is interpreting this Mystery of God's plan of salvation revealed by Jesus Christ. This Mystery is re-enacted through signs and symbols, hymns and prayers in Liturgy. Participation in this Mystery, begun in the Liturgy and continued through the life witness is Spirituality. This spiritual outlook is concretely manifested in the life of righteousness and justice, a life according the Christian conscience. This way of life is preserved by the discipline of the Church. Thus in these Churches there developed an Eastern way of explaining the truths of faith (Theology), of celebrating the faith (Liturgy), of living the faith (Spirituality and Moral Life) and of preserving these ecclesial treasures (Discipline). These characteristic features of an Individual Church justify our division of the book into five sections.

2.1. The Doctrinal Approach of St Thomas Christians

The Christ experience of St Thomas, the Apostle is the foundation of the faith of the Mar Thoma Nazaranis. St Thomas' profound love for the Master is reflected in his courageous words: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (Jn 11,16). It was this courage of his conviction about the Messiah that inspired him to travel to a very far country like India in order to bear witness to his Christ experience inviting people to the Way of salvation.

The confession of Apostle Thomas "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20,28) is as significant as the confession of St Peter: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16,16). With this confession

Thomas was acknowledging the risen Lord to be the Yahweh (Lord) and the Elohim (God) of the Old Testament. This faith he communicated to our forefathers through his proclamation and life witness of which his martyrdom was the climax. This faith of St Thomas in the resurrected Lord is succinctly represented by the Church in Mar Thoma Sliba which was discovered from many ancient churches of St Thomas Tradition. The seventh century Cross discovered by the Western missionaries in 1547 on the Mount of St Thomas (Periyamala) in Mylapore has become the unique and unparallel symbol of Mar Thoma Margam. In this symbol, the disciples of St Thomas were giving expression to the quintessence of their faith, they inherited from their Father in Faith. In it, there is Christology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology and Eschatology of the Thomas Christians. A painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary also was discovered in the precincts of the tomb of St Thomas at Maylapore. It was our Father in Faith who initiated our forefathers to a life of profound Marian devotion. Many of our ancient Churches were dedicated to blessed Virgin Mary and the most common name among St Thomas Christian women is Mariam.

2.2. Liturgical Life of St Thomas Christians

For the Easterners, the Rule of Worship is the Rule of Faith (“*Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*”)¹⁹. Liturgy is Faith celebrated. It is in Divine Worship that the life of a Church is perfectly manifested. It is there the Church really becomes the Church - the community ‘called together’ for worship. To facilitate the practice of this life of prayer, the whole year is divided into nine liturgical Seasons according to the mysteries of the life of Jesus and of the Church. Thus the believer is enabled to walk with Jesus, through different phases in His earthy life, with the great hope of sharing in the new life in the heavenly kingdom. The intimate and personal relationship of the believer with Jesus is further strengthened by the Divine Praises seven times a day. This perpetual praising of the Bride addressed

to her Groom enables her to be holy, worthy of the holy Bridegroom. The feast of Nativity-Baptism (Elda-Denha) and the Passion Week celebrations culminating in the Resurrection of our Lord are high points in the Liturgical Year. Dukrana is the commemoration of our Father in Faith. In fact, St Thomas is remembered every day in the Holy Qurbana. It is worth remembering that there is no other Church in the whole world known by the name of an apostle than the one here in India.

The seven Sacraments accompany each Christian on his/her Way: sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Qurbana ‘initiate’ one into the Christian existence; the Sacrament of Reconciliation reconciles the believer with God and the brethren and heals him/her if he/she falls ill or gets injured during the journey; the Sacrament of Matrimony empowers the Christian couples to love and respect each other as the Messiah loved the Church; the Sacrament of Priesthood makes one partake in the one and eternal priesthood of Jesus the High Priest; the Sacrament of Anointing strengthens the sick and elderly preparing him/her for the eschatological bliss.

Holy Qurbana, the heart of Liturgy, with its most solemn form *Raza*, re-enacts and re-presents through signs and symbols the redemptive mystery of our Faith. In it, the heaven and earth meet together; we the humans join the heavenly angels in praising and thanking God the Father for His ineffable gift of Jesus Christ. We approach the heavenly throne in the symbol of the altar in the sanctuary. The celebration of the entry into the sanctuary anticipates our eschatological entry into heaven²⁰. The Eucharistic Communion, which is the foretaste of the heavenly banquet, enables us to transcend the earthy space-time and to participate in the heavenly one²¹. Prayer facing the East symbolizes our journey toward heaven and our turning toward the glorious Lord²². Thus there is an ongoing mystagogical catechesis in the liturgical worship of the Church²³.

2.3. Inculturated Spiritual Life of St Thomas Christians

Spirituality is the extension and continuation of what is celebrated in Liturgy into the rest of the day. The faith celebrated in Liturgy and given concrete expression in day to day life is spirituality. The St Thomas Christians found no chasm between the faith celebrated and the faith lived. The ecclesial and liturgical spirituality in which one unites oneself with the paschal mysteries celebrated, is the identification mark of the Church of St Thomas Christians. The anamnesis in the Holy Qurbana of the salvific obedience of Christ equips the believer to submit himself/herself fully to the divine will of the Father. Liturgical spirituality intimately unites the worshipper with the mystical body of Christ.

We can proudly say that the spirituality of the St Thomas Christians is Biblical to the core. Liturgical homilies and mystagogical catechesis were occasions for introducing people to the world of the Bible. Biblical scenes and characters thus became familiar to the great and small alike. They in turn had recourse to these biblical scenes when confronted by life problems. There were frequent references to the sacred Scripture in their day-to-day life²⁴.

Jewish religious life was characterized by prayer, fasting and almsgiving. But Jesus demands of His disciples “a righteousness that exceeds” the Jewish religiosity (Mt 5,20). He prophetically interpreted the Jewish religious practices for His disciples taking one back to the original meaning (Mt 6,1-18). The spiritual life of the St Thomas Christians was thoroughly permeated by this teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Spontaneously they observed fasting and a specific ascetic form of life throughout the year according to the spirit of the liturgical seasons. The Indian culture, with a well set form of austerity, had definitely influenced the Thomas Christians’ way of life. In every Eucharistic celebration we pray: “By prayer, fasting and penance, let us find favour with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”.

2.4. Moral Life of St Thomas Christians

Each Individual Church lives the ethos of a specific culture. This gives rise to the possibility of diverse understanding of Christian life and manner of living the faith. The Easterners have their own ‘Christian ways of life’ or ‘Ordering of Christian life’²⁵. According to B. Griffiths, “The Eastern Church has preserved a way of life and thought, which finds expression in its liturgy, which is quite different from the traditions of the West... It is steeped in the tradition of the Bible, fathers and the symbolic mode of thought”²⁶. St Thomas Christians of India have a sound and solid moral vision according to the ethos of the Indian culture.

The Liturgy is a primary context and source for the Eastern Christian ethics. The worshipper who takes part in the paschal mystery of Christ has to respond to these salvific acts in actual life situations. The Holy Qurbana itself, though it is predominantly eschatological and heaven-centred, inculcates the mature involvement of the faithful in the world and in the day-to-day life²⁷. The celebration of the kenotic love of Christ in the Eucharist empowers the Christian to become a ransom for many in the service of others (Mk 10,45). In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “In the Eucharist Jesus also makes us witnesses of God’s compassion towards all our brothers and sisters. The eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbour”²⁸. Pope continues: The believers, “formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities. To do so, they need to be adequately prepared through practical education in charity and justice”²⁹.

The very high degree of moral standard of the St Thomas Christians had always been appreciated not only by their non-Christian brethren but also by the foreign visitors³⁰. The protection and maintenance of the poor and widows have always been one of the chief concerns of the Church of St Thomas

Christians³¹. They specially cared for those on the periphery of the society.

2.5. The Law of Thomas

St Thomas Christians had an ecclesiastical discipline of their own from the very beginning which was known as *Thomayude Niyamam*³². By this they understood all the ancient customs and laws they received through tradition from the time of St Thomas onwards. They had no difficulty in accepting laws and customs of the Western missionaries as Law of Peter. *Thomayude Niyamam* stands for the individuality of the Church of St Thomas expressed in its autonomy, the East Syriac liturgy and the Christianized Indian customs. These unwritten customs and practices had legal force in the community. To abandon this age-old heritage for any other *Niyamam* was for them a disgrace. For the Western missionaries, these customs of the land taken over by the St Thomas Christians were pagan. They condemned such usages in the Synod of Diamper in 1599 and tried to conform the Law of Thomas to the Law of Peter³³.

Preserving the pristine elements of the Gospel, adaptations were made in the Church of St Thomas to the cultural situation in India. These adaptations were mainly in socio-political, cultural and religious realms. After the manner of the Indo-Dravidian *Manram* system – the autonomous village system with the heads of the families forming the administrative body – the priests and the adult laymen of the parish constituted the parish assembly or *Yogam* with legislative, administrative and judicial powers. The *Regional Yogam*³⁴ consisting of representatives from at least four parishes mainly looked after the administration of justice. To decide upon matters pertaining to the whole Church, there was the *General Yogam*. *Jatikkukarthavian* or the Archdeacon's leadership kept the community united. Since St Thomas Christians maintained the same socio-cultural life of the people of the land, their Way of life was considered one of the religions of India³⁵.

According to the tradition attested to in *Rampanpattu*, St Thomas ordained Kepha as bishop of Kodunagalloor and Paul for Mylapore³⁶. Later, due to various historical and ecclesiastical reasons, the indigenous lineage of hierarchy was broken and Prelates from Babylon took over the spiritual guidance of the Indian Church. The Vatican *Syriac Codex XXII* written in 1301 at Cranganore in Kerala attests to the See of St Thomas in India and about the relationship of the Indian Church with the Chaldean Church. The Portuguese missionaries suppressed the metropolitan status and all India jurisdiction of the St Thomas Christians, condemned the Law of Thomas as a “manifest error and heresy” in the Synod of Diamper and brought the archdiocese of Cranganore under Latin jurisdiction. In 1886 the archdiocese was fully suppressed and St Thomas Christians were compelled to enroll in the Latin archdiocese of Verapoly. Thus an apostolic Individual Church canonically became extinct!³⁷

St Thomas Christians always expressed their desire for bishops of their own ecclesial tradition and liturgical language. Though in 1887 Pope Leo XIII constituted two Syro-Malabar vicariates apostolic (Trichur and Kottayam) separating Suriani Catholics from Latin archdiocese, the new vicars apostolic were of the Latin rite. Only in 1896 native bishops were appointed. On 21 December 1923 Pope Pius XI established the Syro-Malabar hierarchy. When Pope John Paul II raised the Syro-Malabar Church to the Major Archiepiscopal status on 16 December 1992, new vistas are opened for the restoration and renewal of the Law of Thomas.

3. Conclusion

Placid J Podipara's beautiful coinage “Hindu in culture, Christian in religion, Oriental in worship”³⁸ is an apt description of the Law of Thomas or Mar Thoma Margam. These various aspects of the fundamental content of our faith, inherited from the Apostle Thomas and well adapted to the socio-cultural situation of India are subjected to serious

discussion in this book. We undertake this study not to glory in our past, but to draw inspiration from it in view of the future.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 *Porta Fidei*, 9.
- 2 *Deus Caritas Est*, 25.
- 3 Today Individual Churches are generally known as *Sui Iuris Churches*.
- 4 UR 17; See also *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, January 1996, n. 9.
- 5 John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones*, 18 October 1990, AAS 82, 1990, 1033-1044. This image of two lungs was originally used by the famous Russian poet V. I. Ivanov, 1866-1949. For details see, B. Petrà, "Church with 'Two Lungs': Adventures of a Metaphor", *Ephrem's Theological Journal* 6, 2002, 111-127; N. Gori, "Breathing with Two Lungs: An Interview with Cardinal Leonardo Sandri", *L'Osservatore Romano*, Special Issue, 01 May 2011, 51-52.
- 6 S. P. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, Kalamanzoo MI 1987; "The Syriac Orient: A third Lung for the Church?" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 71, 2005, 5.
- 7 Matthew Vellanickal, *Church: Communion of Individual Churches. Biblico-Theological Perspectives on the Communion Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Mumbai 2009) 120.
- 8 DV 8.
- 9 DV 9.
- 10 DV 10.
- 11 *Verbum Domini*, 18.
- 12 *Verbum Domini*, 17.
- 13 *Mar Thoma Nazaranis* are those who follow Jesus the Nazarene according to the Way shown by St Thomas, the apostle.
- 14 OE 6.
- 15 Mârgam is a Sanskrit word meaning "way of life" or "life style". Mar Thoma Mârgam, according to Varghese Pathikulangara, "is hope incarnate; the Bible is its heart and the Mar Thomma Sliba (St Thomas Cross), its expression", Varghese Pathikulangara, *Mar Thomma Margam* (Kottaym 2004) 19.
- 16 Pathikulangara, *Mar Thomma Margam*, 13.
- 17 Vellanickal, *Church*, 80.
- 18 'Individual Church' results from the sharing of the apostolic Christ-experience in a people, taking a specific form of life, worship, liturgy, spirituality and ecclesiastical discipline integrated into their particular linguistic, racial, cultural and sociological conditions., Vellanickal, *Church*, 52.
- 19 This maxim first proposed by Prosper of Aquitaine (+ 463) means that the manner of prayer and matter of faith are mutually revealing.
- 20 Maniyattu P., "East Syriac Theology of Eucharist", in P. Maniyattu, ed., *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, Satna 2007, 284-285.
- 21 Qatraya Gabriel, "Interpretation of the Offices", Podipara Placid J., trans., in G. Vavanikunnel, ed., *Homilies and Interpretations on the Holy Qurbana*, Changanacherry 1977, 102.
- 22 Ratzinger, J., *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, San Francisco 2000, 69.
- 23 Aerthayil, J., *The Spiritual Heritage of the St Thomas Christians*, Bangalore 2001, 78.
- 24 See Paremmakkal T., *The Varthamanapusthakam*, Rendered into English with an Introduction and Notes by Placid J. Podipara in 1971 (Roma: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1971; see also Mekkattukunnel A.—Puthukulangara J., *Vedapusthakam Varthamanapusthakathil*, Kottayam 2011.
- 25 Cf. LG 23; OE 1-3; UR 14-17; OL 5-6.

- 26 B. Griffiths, *Christ in India: Essays towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, Bangalore 1986, 53.
- 27 Cf. T. Mannoorampampil, "Horizontal Dimension of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana," *Christian Orient* 13 (1992)99.
- 28 *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 88.
- 29 *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 91.
- 30 Day Francis, *The Land of Perumals of Cochin and Its Past and Present*, Madras, 1863, 219; Gouvea A., *Jornada* fol. \$r, col 2.
- 31 Cf. Paremmakkal, *The Varthamanapusthakam*, 86, 88, 287-288; Thomas Koonammakkel, "The Spiritual Vision of Varthamanappusthakam: History of an Unending Pilgrimage from the Desert into the Sea," *Christian Orient* 10/3 (1989) 100-103; Thomas Neendoor, *Communion: An Ecclesiological Analysis of the Concept of Communion of the Thomas Christians in the Light of the Self in Emmanuel Levinas* (Kottayam, India: OIRSI, 1998) 430.
- 32 Thazhath Andrews, *The Law of Thomas*, OIRSI Kottayam 1987, 9.
- 33 See the decree vii of the session III of the Synod of Diamper.
- 34 Paremmakkal, *The Varthamanapusthakam*, 41-44.
- 35 Seventy two privileges granted to them by the kings through Copper Plate Grants reveal the high social status the St Thomas Christians once enjoyed.
- 36 Podipara, *Hierarchy*, 32.
- 37 Pallath P., *The Catholic Church in India*, OIRSI Kottayam 2010, 140.
- 38 Placod J Podipara, "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion and Oriental in Worship", *Ostkirchliche Studien* 4 (1959) 89-104;

I **THEOLOGY**

Editor: Dr James Palackal

1

The Christ-Experience of Mar Thoma Sliha

Dr Vincent Alappat

Introduction

The glorious and all-laudable Apostle Thomas, the fisherman on the lake of Galilee, whom our Lord called to be with Him, is the one who made the greatest confession of faith ever in the history. His name occurs in all the lists of the Synoptics (Mt 10,3; Mk 3,18; Lk 6,14-16; cf. Acts 1,13). In the Gospel of John he plays a distinctive part where through three important and critical scenes we come to know the Christ-experience of Thomas Sliha. In order to delve into the Christ-experience of Apostle Thomas we limit ourselves to the scenes where he appears in the fourth Gospel.

The Christ-experience that the Apostle John describes in his Epistles is something unique: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life... and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1,1-4). Thereby the Apostle John is presenting the collegiality

of the Christ-experience which formed the basis of the reality of the Church. However we cannot deny the personal dimension of it which is a genuine human experience and such an experience of St. Thomas stands as the foundation of the Syro-Malabar Church.

1. Christ-Experience at Various Levels

In the Gospel of John we come across the Christ-Experience of either individuals or groups at different occasions. John the Baptist who came to bear witness recognizes not only who and what he is not (Jn 1, 19-23), but also acknowledges and affirms who Jesus is, namely the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1,29) and also as ‘the Son of God’ (Jn 1,34). Jesus, the Lamb of God is to save mankind by His blood and death at Passover time (Jn 13,1; 19,14.21). The image is particularly apt and sheds light into the symbolic value of Jesus’ death, in view of the biblical figures of the Passover Lamb and the saving power of its blood (Ex 12,7) and the eating of its flesh (Ex 12,8). Implicitly it also alludes

to the Second Isaiah's image of the Suffering Servant who humbly submitted to death for the sake of others (Is 53,7-12). The 'taking away of the sin of the world' suggests an implicit allusion to the scape goat of Lev 9,15 which the priest offered to God as a sacrifice of reparation, offering it up for all their sins. When John the Baptist testified who Jesus is to his own disciples, they followed Him, asking "Rabbi, where are you staying?". Later Andrew, Simon Peter's brother recognizes Him as the Messiah (Jn 1, 35-42) and Nathanael addresses Him as Rabbi, Son of God and King of Israel (Jn 1, 49).

The Samaritan woman sees Jesus at first as a strange Jew, but gradually recognizes him as a prophet and later the Messiah (Jn 4, 1-26) and the Samaritans of the city declared in public 'that this is indeed the Saviour of the world' (Jn 4, 42). After the multiplication of loaves and walking on the Sea of Galilee there was a long discourse on the Bread of Life. At this many of His disciples drew back and no longer went about with Him. "Jesus said to the twelve, Will you also go away? Simon Peter answered Him, Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6, 66-69). The man born blind after having been healed by Jesus openly declares. "If this man were not from God he could do nothing" (Jn 9, 33), that is to say he recognizes Jesus as a man from God.

We have been seeing how variously the people from different strata, including the disciples, experienced Jesus in their life situations. How Thomas, called Didymus, one among the twelve, chosen by God to be with Him, experienced Christ in his life time? Thomas's Christ-experience and the content of his faith are the basis of the Christian community in India. It is this apostolic foundation that makes the Church distinct from other human organizations. Hence we analyse the different scenes in order to understand how deeply and progressively Thomas experienced and realized Christ during his life-time.

2. Christ: The Source and Giver of Life

Thomas is one of the disciples singled out by name in the Johannine Gospel and is mentioned for the first time in the Lazarus episode (Jn 11, 1-16) where, for the Greek reader, his name is translated Didymus (twin). By bringing the dead Lazarus to life Jesus reveals that He is not only the source of life but also the giver of life. Jesus gives life to a dead man (Jn 11, 1-44), for which men condemn Jesus to die (Jn 4, 45-57). Jesus demonstrates this power by raising Lazarus from the dead which leads up to the chief priests' and Pharisees' plot, namely it sets the stage for the Jewish leaders' decision to have Jesus put to death (Jn 11, 44-47).

Jesus is in Bethany beyond the Jordan, the place where John the Baptist at first baptized (Jn 1,28). Lazarus, of whom it is said "Lord, he whom you love is ill" (Jn 11,3), is in Bethany near Jerusalem where he with his sisters Mary and Martha lived. It needs two days journey from Bethany across Jordan to Bethany near Jerusalem where Lazarus lies sick and dying. Even if He wanted to, Jesus could not be there in time. He remains in Bethany for two more days (Jn 11,6). When Jesus decides to go to Judea after two days, the disciples try to prevent him saying, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" (Jn 11,8). Prior to it also there were occasions in which the Jews were provoked. When Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am", immediately the Jews took up stones to throw (Jn 8,59). And in Jn 9, 31 we read: "The Jews took stones again to stone him, accusing him of blasphemy, because you being a man make yourself God".

As soon as Jesus heard that his friend whom he loves is ill, Jesus' spontaneous reaction was "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it" (Jn 11,4). Raising Lazarus from the dead would undoubtedly enable others to see the glory of God in action. However through His statement Jesus reveals that God's glory will be evident only when the Son is

glorified. In other words the miracle will glorify Jesus, not so much in the sense that people will admire it and praise him, but in the sense that it will lead to his death, which is a stage in his glorification (Jn 12, 23-24; 17,1). Earlier Jesus had already said that the Spirit had not yet come because Jesus was not yet glorified, that is to say, because he had not yet died upon the cross. Again when the Greeks came to him, Jesus said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (Jn 12,23). And it was of His cross that he spoke, for he went straight on to speak of the corn of wheat which must fall into the ground and die (Jn 12, 24). It is clear that Jesus regarded the cross both as His supreme glory and as the way to glory. For him there was no other way to glorify than through the cross. Therefore His words that the raising of Lazarus would glorify Him signifies that to go to Bethany and to save Lazarus was to take a step which would end in the cross as indeed it did.¹

When Jesus announced that He was going to Judea, His disciples were shocked and staggered. No need to avoid Judea and its hostile leaders; the hour of night – darkness is approaching, true enough – but it has not yet come (Jn 11, 9-10) and the light is still on earth (Jn 8, 12). As is clear from Jn 13, 30 the night is the time when somebody goes away from Christ. By saying that the light is still there with them and now moving to Judea, Jesus is indirectly inviting the disciples to accompany the path of the cross together with him.

Jesus told them plainly that Lazarus was dead; and that He went on to say that for their sake this was a good thing, because it would produce an event which would buttress them even more firmly in their faith. At that critical moment being perfectly aware of the worst that can happen to them Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (Jn 11, 16). There lies hidden in the saying of Thomas the truth that the way to Bethany will lead ultimately to the death of Jesus.² Thomas looked death in the face and chose death with Jesus rather than life without Him;³ for he realized that to enter Judea as His

disciples was to risk the same fate.⁴ Thomas’ anticipation that the disciples may die with Jesus is not without parallel in the Synoptic tradition, for Mk 8, 34-35 invites the disciples to lose his life for Jesus’ sake. Real discipleship consists not in moving with the master at the glorious moments of his life, just like the signs he performed at Cana (Jn 2, 1-11), or healing the son of the royal official (Jn 4, 46-54), or healing the man at the pool of Bethzatha (Jn 5, 1-9); or the multiplication of the loaves (Jn 6, 1-14) or walking on the sea (Jn 6, 25-34) or healing the man born blind (Jn 9, 1-12); but to be with him during the hard times of life. Thomas was bold enough to do the right thing even at the expense of his own life. This reminds us of the teaching of the master: “Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for others” (Jn 15, 13). Thomas is inviting all others to accompany the master who is on his way to the cross and eventually the resurrection. Thomas is encouraging the fellow-disciples to give a positive response to the invitation of Jesus, to walk in the light, namely to die and rise with him, which is the fundamental character of the Christian baptismal experience (Rom 6, 1-14).⁵

3. Jesus: The Way to the Father

The second scene of Thomas Sliha’s intervention occurs in the context of Jesus’ farewell discourse which is directed to the Apostles, whose mission is to continue the work of Jesus in the world. When the Greeks, namely the whole world, began to seek Jesus, His immediate reaction was, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (Jn 12, 23); and prior to that thrice He has said ‘my hour has not yet come’ (Jn 2, 4; 7, 30; 8, 20). Suffering, crucifixion and death are moments of glorification.

After washing the feet of the disciples and giving the new commandment Jesus starts with the farewell discourse where he teaches that “I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going?”

(Jn 14, 1-4). A little earlier He had said, “I shall be with you a little longer, and then I go to him who sent me” (Jn 7, 33). At this moment the disciples became bewildered and in their confusion Thomas intervenes asking for clarification concerning the way Jesus is about to go and his destination. “Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” (Jn 14, 5). When Thomas expressed his doubt and also by seeing his earnestness Jesus was moved to reveal one of the greatest things He ever said. Jesus said to Thomas, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him” (Jn 14, 6-7). That is a great saying in which Jesus took three of the great basic conceptions of Jewish religion, and made the tremendous claim that in him all three found their full realization.⁶

It is amazingly true that he who seeks will in the end find his way. Thomas was not ready to be satisfied with any vague pious expressions. Rather he wanted to have a clear vision of the personality of his master. Considering the sincerity and determination of Thomas, Jesus gave an answer which is more profound than the question. In other words Jesus reveals much more than what is asked for. He declares himself as the only way to the Father. The emphasis is placed entirely on the statement “I am the way”, for the ensuing dialogue deals primarily with the way. The concept “the way” is an unusual metaphor to apply to a person, but its meaning is made clearer by the additional statement “the truth and the life” that are also incorporated into that person.⁷

The Old Testament speaks much about the way in which mankind must walk and also about the ways of God. “See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his

commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply . . .” (Deut 30, 15-16). For them to follow the way of the Lord is to observe the Mosaic Law. “You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, . . .” (Deut 5, 33). The Psalmist eagerly prays, “Teach me thy way, O, Lord” (Ps 27, 11). Moses said to the people, “For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you” (Deut 31, 29). At the same time there are facts which unfold that it is the Lord who guides and guards the mankind’s way (Ps 37, 23; 91, 11; Prov 2, 8; 16, 9; Jer 10, 23). The way of the Lord, God’s purpose, which the Prophets proclaimed (Is 40, 3; Mal 3, 1) is fulfilled in Christ (Mt 3, 3; Mk 1, 2-3; Lk 3, 4; Jn 1, 23). In brief the Old Testament people knew much about ‘the Way’ of God in which mankind must walk. Jesus is not telling us about the way, but He is the Way. The way to God has been revealed through the person of Jesus Christ. This self-revelatory statement is given a precise and absolute expression in the sentence that follows. “No one comes to the Father, but by me” (Jn 14, 6) is a culminating point. In Jesus Christ the invisible and incomprehensible God has made Himself so tangible and so comprehensible that they are able to reach the goal of their existence along this way, by accepting in faith the truth, that has been revealed to them in Jesus Christ and by sharing in his life.⁸

In the Johannine Passion narrative, Jesus who was led to the Praetorium, was interrogated by Pilate. To him Jesus said: “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” (Jn 18, 37-38). God is the God of truth (Deut 32, 4), which places the emphasis upon God’s being unchangeable and unchanging and thus the determining centre of the universe.⁹ The Psalmist ardently prays, “Teach me thy way, O Lord, that I may walk in thy truth” (Ps 86, 11) and again says, “I have chosen the way of truth” (Ps 119, 30). Jesus calls himself ‘the truth’

not for what He is, but for what He does – namely as one “who has told you the truth which I heard from God” (Jn 8, 40). All that He does originates in the divine truth and makes the latter real in this world. The intimations of God’s saving plan, which were given in the history of Israel, have now become actuality in Jesus. Thus He is the true light (Jn 1, 9), the true vine (Jn 15, 1) the true bread from heaven (Jn 6, 32). Unlike the beings of this world which came into existence and pass away again, Jesus like the Yahweh of Exodus 3, 14 has being in himself. He is the truth; he is the embodiment of truth. In the Greek Philosophical tradition truth was to get to the nature of the real being, the essence of an object. The opposite of this was that which merely ‘seemed’ to be a certain way, only an appearance. Appearances might change, but truth does not.¹⁰

Jesus is ‘the life’. God is the “God of life” (Num 14, 28; Deut 32, 40; Jer 5, 2) and thus He is able to impart it to all the creatures. To those who keep God’s commandments, long life and happiness are promised (Gen 15, 15; Ex 20, 12; Lev 18, 5; Deut 5, 15-16; Ps 91, 16). The writer of the Book of Proverbs says “The commandment is a lamp, and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life” (Prov 10, 17). “Thou dost show me the path of life” says the Psalmist (Ps 16, 11).

St John emphasizes that in Jesus ‘the eternal Word of life’ (1Jn 1, 2) had become man (Jn 1, 14), so that the people who by faith had identified themselves with him would share in his life (Jn 3, 16; 10, 10; 20, 31). When the Evangelist says, “In Him was life, and the light was the life of men” (Jn 1, 4), and by raising Lazarus from the dead, He proved that He is the life so far as he gives us the life of the Father. Therefore Jesus can say “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10, 10).

Hence ‘the truth’ and ‘the life’ stand as the basis of ‘the Way’. He is the truth in so far as in him there is no hypocrisy. His words and deeds reveal who he is. He is the truth of the Father, whom he alone can faithfully reveal. “He reflects the glory of

God and bears the stamp of his nature” (Heb 1,3) and can say “He who sees me sees him who sent me” (Jn 12, 45). Since “He and the Father are one” (Jn 10, 30), like the Father He too is the truth.

Mankind received the life of the Father through Jesus Christ. ‘Come and see, believe, eat and drink’ are the means to relate ourselves with this source of life. He is the truth and the life, hence he is the way. We can reach to the Father only through Jesus, for no one else reveals the Father. To become one with the Father and to live in the house of the Father, He alone is the way. “He has not come to show a “better way to God”. It is not a better way, because there is no other way”.¹¹ Jesus is going to prepare a place for the disciples. They must therefore keep close to Jesus, because only he can take them there. Jesus’ goal is also the goal of the believers and his departure is only meaningful in that it makes it possible for them to reach the goal. From this we can say that the invisible and incomprehensible God has become tangible and so comprehensible in Jesus Christ, namely that we are able to reach the goal of our existence along this way by accepting in faith the truth, that has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ and by sharing in his life.¹²

4. Jesus Christ: My Lord and My God

When the Apostles gathered together to choose one in the place of Judas, one of the conditions was that he must be a witness to his resurrection (Acts 1, 22) for, the authenticity of an Apostle is greatly based on his having seen the Risen Christ (1 Cor 15, 5-11). The third scene in which Thomas Sliha appears is in the context of the appearance of the risen Christ. After the death of Christ, the grief-stricken disciples were behind the closed doors, for fear of the Jews, not knowing what to do. On the evening of the first day of the week the risen Lord came and stood among them and said to the panic-stricken disciples, “Peace be with you” and then he showed them his hands and his side. (Jn 20, 19-20). They realized that the Risen Lord who presents

himself to them after Calvary is not different from the Glorious Lord who was made flesh and worked the signs, who said repeatedly, "I AM".¹³ Seeing the hands and the side wounded for their sake, they could immediately recognize and identify him. Since those were wounds received to give them life, the pierced hands and side revealed to them the magnanimity of their master. Moreover, instead of blaming them, who were highly embarrassed, he wished them peace, for he came to give them life abundantly. It makes it very much clear that the wounds and sufferings we accept for the sake of others will make our life ever shining. Then Jesus gave the disciples the mission to carry out what all he started here on earth either by teaching or by doing, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20,21). He emboldened them by showering the Holy Spirit upon them to make their forward journey very safe and secure.

Thomas, who was designated as 'one of the twelve', was unfortunately not there when Jesus appeared to the rest of the disciples. It makes it clear that we too miss a great deal when we separate ourselves from the fellowship of Christ's Church and try to be alone. Things can happen to us within the fellowship of Christ's Church which will not happen when we keep ourselves away from it. Remember the case of the two disciples who were going to Emmaus by turning their backs on their brethren in Jerusalem. Little wonder, then, that when the Lord himself drew near to them their eyes were kept from recognizing him (Lk 24, 13-16). Yet even to them the Lord manifested his grace by making himself known (Lk 24, 31). The effect was that they rose up the same hour and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven gathered together (Lk 24, 33). For us Christians to be in fellowship with Christ implies that they desire and seek the fellowship of his people.¹⁴ Moreover, as Schnackenburg points out, the addition of the expression "one of the twelve" is to present him as a representative of the entire pre-Easter disciples, who are of weak faith, and to show that even the intimate circle of disciples had doubt about the resurrection.¹⁵

The disciples only say, "We have seen the Lord" and related everything that Jesus had said to them (Jn 20, 25). At once Thomas, who loved his master enough to be willing to go to Jerusalem and die with him when the others were hesitant and afraid, demanded stronger and tangible evidence of the reality and identity of the Risen One as the others experienced. Thomas said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe" (Jn 20, 25). How the figure of his dead master had burnt itself into his soul, is seen from the manner in which his mind dwells on the prints of the nails and the wound in his side. It is by these only, and not by well-known features or peculiarity of form, he will recognize and identify his Lord. The progression from 'seeing' the prints caused by the nails, to 'placing' his finger in them and, over and above that, placing his hand in the wound in Jesus' side, is clear. Thomas' episode is testimony to the fact that the resurrection appearances were not illusions induced by wishful thinking.

Thomas was so certain of the death of Jesus that he would not credit the report of his reappearance and insisted that he would not believe unless he could actually touch the Risen One. That is why he became so obstinate. To yield to the sheer obstinacy of loveless persons is a kind of slavery. Thomas was obstinate because of his love and commitment to the Master. He remained for a whole week in darkness and gloom. As the Evangelist presents, "Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you" (Jn 20, 26). The reappearance of Jesus took place under the same conditions as the previous appearance, which the disciples had described to Thomas. Therefore, he could not charge them with having fabricated their report when Jesus greeted them in the same manner as before.

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing” (Jn 20, 27). Thomas must have been startled to hear Jesus quote his very words. Jesus did not immediately upbraid him for his obstinacy, but challenged Thomas to carry out the test that he had suggested. That is to say Jesus subjected himself to the love-filled obstinacy of Thomas. Thereby Jesus halted Thomas on the road to a despairing unbelief and offered him the positive evidence he could build on an enduring faith.

We are uncertain whether Thomas really placed his finger in the wounds and his hand in the wound in Jesus’ side. To Jesus’ challenge, Thomas reacts with an unconditional high-minded confession of faith, the fullest faith in Christ Jesus. Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20, 28). It marks a leap of faith.¹⁶ The personal tone due to the twice occurring *mou* (my) is not to be ignored. The two possessives ‘my’ flow in almost automatically as the natural expression of faith.¹⁷ Thomas has found his Lord and his God in the risen one, whom he recognizes as the crucified, and to him well-known, earthly Jesus, and yet as another whom he understands belongs wholly to God.¹⁸ For a Jew to call another whom he experienced as a human being ‘my Lord and my God’ would be almost incredible. The Jewish law was strictly monotheistic; so the deification of any person would be regarded as blasphemy (Jn 10, 33). Thomas, in the light of the resurrection, applied to Jesus the titles of Lord (*Kyrios*) and God (*Theos*), both of which were titles of deity. Thomas became the one who gave the strongest and most conclusive testimony to the absolute Deity of the Saviour which ever came from the lips of a man.

In the Hebrew world of the Old Testament the two expressions used to address God are *Yahweh* and *Elohim* for which the words *Kyrios* and *Theos* are found respectively in the LXX (Ps 35, 23). By using these two expressions to address the resurrected Jesus, Thomas publically

proclaims that the resurrected one is God and declares him as the Lord of his life. In other words the Easter faith of Thomas recognizes God in the risen Jesus, and makes clear that one may address Jesus in the same language in which Israel addressed Yahweh.¹⁹ The response of Thomas in his confession of faith recalls Jesus’ words to himself and Philip: “If you have known me, you will know the Father. He who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14, 7.9). This confession is closely linked with the Prologue (Jn 1, 1): What God is, the Word is, for Jesus is the Word who has now returned to the glory he had with the Father before the world began (Jn 17, 5). “Thomas’ confession comes in a whole series of confessions in John’s Gospel (Jn 1, 49; 4, 42; 6, 67; 9, 37f; 11, 27; 16, 30; 20, 16). It becomes their conclusion and climax, in the form of a Christological statement in the light of the Easter confession”.²⁰ Thomas’ confession provides a climatic illustration of the triumph of belief,²¹ for faith is our response to Jesus who discloses himself. In short we can say that the obstinacy of Thomas was in order to become sure; and when he did, his surrender to certainty was complete.²² Thomas’ words ‘My Lord and my God’ stands in the history as the most profound confession of Jesus’ true identity and nothing more profound could be said about Him.

The following words of Jesus to Thomas show that He confirms Thomas confession but that too in the form of a gentle rebuke for he came to believe only after an assurance through seeing. Jesus said to him “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (Jn 20, 29). And the Risen Lord’s accusation becomes a message too for the succeeding generations of believers.²³ Here we have to note one thing, namely what all Thomas experienced in his encounter with the Risen One is summed up in ‘seeing’. The emphasis rests on the sensual perception, yet without stressing ‘touching’. Thomas was fortunate to be the exponent of that experience of Jesus’ appearances, which is denied to us the later believers. Thereby he became a staunch believer eligible to be included among the

others who had seen and believed.²⁴

Unfortunately Thomas Sliha is remembered more for his doubting than for his supreme expression of faith. Jesus' reply simply contrasts two different and valid ways of faith. On the one hand, disciples who had been with Jesus came to 'see' him and believe in him as risen through special faith experiences, that is, appearances. But the later disciples down through history have not experienced the risen Jesus in the same way. Yet, they too have received the gift of faith and they are in this respect equally praised and blessed by God. Schnackenburg points out that the beatitude form of style is used as an appeal to the later believers without the 'seeing' granted to Thomas, in order to come to the same firm faith and high-minded confession as he did. How that can be is not expressly said; but the preaching of the Word and the testimony of the first disciples is presupposed, as is the written testimony which the Evangelists provide with the Gospels.²⁵

5. Believing by Seeing

In the Sacred Scripture we can see how the seeing and the act of believing are closely connected. When Moses saw the burning bush from where God revealed Himself to him saying "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" and when he was called by God to lead the Israelites from the Egyptian slavery to the promised land (Ex 3, 1-22) Moses believed in God and committed himself to rescue them out of Egypt. Later the people of Israel saw the great wonders Yahweh performed for their sake against the Egyptians and as a result they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses (Ex 14, 31). When we come to the New Testament, especially the Fourth Gospel, where what immediately precedes the resurrection appearances of Jesus are also 'signs' because they are miraculous events which reveal the truth about Jesus. After the first sign which Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee, it is stated that his disciples believed in him (Jn 2, 11) and further stated 'many believed in

his name when they saw the signs which he did' (Jn 2, 23). At Capernaum when the official approached Jesus asking a favour to heal his son who was at the point of death Jesus said to him "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe". Later when he experienced that his son was cured, it is stated, "and he himself believed, and his entire household" (Jn 4, 46-54). The born blind man, when he was healed by Jesus, publically proclaimed "Lord, I believe; and he worshipped him (Jn 9, 38). Again we read when Lazarus was raised from the dead, "Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him" (Jn 11, 45). The disciples who saw the empty tomb, for them it became a sign and they believed (Jn 20, 8). Mary Magdalene also believed by seeing and so she said to the disciples "I have seen the Lord" (Jn 20, 18). The other disciples also believed only when he showed them his hands and his side and they were glad when they saw him (Jn 20, 20). Thomas Sliha also believed by seeing and our Lord confirms it by saying, "Have you believed because you have seen me?" (Jn 20, 29). Hence we have the historic apostolic witness by seeing.

6. Believing without Seeing

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn 20,29 b). We have been dealing with a belief that has arisen in the visible presence of Jesus; but with the inauguration of the invisible presence of Jesus in the Spirit (Jn 19, 30.34), a new type of faith emerges. In Jn 20, 21 we have heard of the mission of the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20, 21). Now those who are the fruit of that mission are brought into view. What is to be noted is that one must believe, whether that faith comes from seeing or not. As Raymond E. Brown brings out, here the emphasis falls on those who do not see are equal in God's estimation with those who did see and are even, in a certain way, nobler. God has blessed those who have not seen just as much as He blessed those who did see.²⁶ "But for the fact that Thomas and the other apostles saw the incarnate

Christ there would have been no Christian faith at all”.²⁷ As long as Jesus stood among the humanity, one had to come to faith through the visible. Now this is the era of the Spirit or the invisible presence of Jesus (Jn 14, 17), and the era of signs or appearances is passing away; the latter one leads to the other. Jesus rejects as imperfect that tradition which attempts to overcome doubt by palpable proof of the visible. We the Christians have to preserve and keep faith in the same Risen Lord, not on the strength of what we have seen, but on the word of apostolic witness, which underpins the Church. Jesus has given to the Church the task of bringing people to faith through the faithfully preached message of salvation and the convincing power of the Holy Spirit. St. Peter describes the greatness of such a faith: “Without having seen Him you love Him; though you do not now see Him you believe in Him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet 1,8-9).

7. Conclusion

Our Syro-Malabar Church owes its existence to the Christ-Experience of Thomas Sliha and the content of his faith. At first he experienced the living Christ as the source and giver of life. By raising Lazarus from the dead Jesus proved it visibly. With St Paul he could say, “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1Cor 15,10) and what I ought to be is my gift to God. Seeing his enthusiasm and sense of dedication Christ revealed to him that He is ‘the way’ to the Father. He became flesh and dwelt among the humanity not to show a ‘better’ way to God the Father. It is not a better way because there is no other way; for He alone is the way. We, the believers are able to reach the goal of our existence along this way by accepting in faith the truth that has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ and by sharing in His life. Later when he experienced the Risen Christ, he could easily make a leap of faith proclaiming Him as his Lord and God. In his great confession ‘My Lord and my God’ Thomas recognizes God in the Risen Jesus and makes clear that one may address the

Risen One in the same language in which the Israelites, our forefathers addressed Yahweh. Thereby Thomas Sliha makes the most profound confession of Jesus’ true identity and his confession of faith recalls Jesus’ words to himself and Philip: “If you have known me, you will know the Father. He who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14, 7.9). Thomas Sliha was fortunate to be the exponent of the personal experience of the Risen Christ’s appearances, which is denied to us the later believers. Like the other disciples Thomas Sliha also believed by seeing. Accepting the Risen One as the source and giver of life, and as ‘the way’ to the Father, Thomas Sliha started to proclaim the Risen One as his Lord and God and to give testimony. In this era of the Spirit and the invisible presence of Jesus, it is ours to enlighten the faith handed over to us by the Sliha through living testimony and proclamation. At this time of New Evangelization and when the Syro-Malabar Church celebrates the Mission Year, let us remember that our Church stands in need of genuine restoration and radical renewal in order to continue its unique mission started by Thomas Sliha, the father of our Church.

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Peshitta Bible in the Theological Tradition of St Thomas Christians

Dr Andrews Mekkattukunnel

Introduction

We do not have any original manuscript of the books of the Bible. What we have are the copies of copies. Most of the original manuscripts of the OT were written in Hebrew, the rest being in Aramaic (The Book of Daniel) or in Greek (the Deuterocanonical books). All the books of the NT were written in Greek¹. The first translation of the Bible ever made was the one from Hebrew to Greek (Septuagint, c.3rd century BC). Two other early translations were the Peshitta (meaning 'simple') in Syriac and the Vulgate in Latin. These three translations, the Septuagint, Peshitta and Vulgate became the official translations of the Bible for the Greek, Syriac and Latin speaking Churches respectively. They became the basis for further translations and interpretations of the Bible. In fact, different versions only reveal the richness of the Word of God and thereby add to its beauty. St Ephrem writes: "The facets of His words are more numerous than the faces of those who learn from them. God depicted His words with many beauties, so that each

of those who learn from them can examine that aspect of them which he likes. And God has hidden within His words all sorts of treasures, so that each of us can be enriched by them from whatever aspect we meditate on. For God's Word is the Tree of Life which proffers blessed fruits to you on all sides; it is the Rock which was struck in the Wilderness, which became a spiritual drink for everyone on all sides"². Different versions of the Bible could be compared to the four Gospels of the one Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As the Christian world expanded, translations of the New Testament into various regional languages became a must. Syriac³ speaking Christians have produced the highest number of translations of the Scriptures. The German New Testament scholar Eberhard Nestle rightly observes: "No branch of the Early Church has done more for the translation of the Bible into their vernacular than the Syriac-speaking Christians. In our European libraries we have Syriac Bible manuscripts from Lebanon, Egypt, Sinai, Mesopotamia, Armenia, India (Malabar), even from China"⁴. Of the seven Syriac manuscripts of

the Bible preserved in the Mannanam Library, Kottayam is the best surviving proof for the presence of the Peshitta Bible among the St Thomas Christians of India⁵. They include copies of the books of Tobit to Qohelet in one manuscript, and of Judith to Maccabees and of Ezra to Esther in another manuscript. Other manuscripts include the Epistles of James, John, Paul, the Acts of the Apostles and the Apocalypse. Notes of explanation in Karšūni (Karshon) on some readings from Matthew and Apocalypse also are found in some manuscripts.

From time immemorial Syriac was the liturgical language of the St Thomas Christians. Since the readings from the sacred Scripture form an integral part of any liturgical celebration, together with the East Syriac liturgical texts, manuscripts of the Old and the New Testaments in the Syriac language, especially in Lectionary form, were available in the Indian Church of St Thomas. Peshitta, the official Syriac translation of the Bible read in all other Syriac Churches was used in India as well. The *Vatican Syriac 22*, an epistle lectionary copied in the Church of Mar Kuriakose at Shengala (Kodungalloor?) in Malabar in 1301 by the 14 year old deacon Scaria, is the best proof.⁶ In fact, it was mainly in the Liturgy that the sacred Scripture was read. Since Syriac was the liturgical language, the Bible also continued to be read in Syriac. The need for translating the Bible was not felt at all. Moreover, during the homily, the read text was explained in the mother tongue⁷. Many manuscripts have not survived the climatic conditions of our country. We should not also forget the fact that a large number of Syriac manuscripts were burnt at the Synod of Diamper.

1. Old Testament in Syriac

The oldest Syriac version of the OT which was most influential in the Syriac Churches was the one made directly from the Hebrew original in the second century AD⁸, though there was an earlier version of the third or second century BC, made from the Septuagint. In the sixth century AD, Philoxenos (d.523) bishop of Mabbug, commissioned a

translation of which only a fragmentary manuscript of Isaiah is extant. Afterwards, Paul of Tella made a Syriac translation from Origen's Hexapla which later came to be known as "Syrohexapla" or "Seventy". Jacob of Edessa undertook a partial revision of the Peshitta based on some Greek manuscripts of the Septuagint in the eighth century. These Syriac versions were presumably used in India. The European missionaries were suspicious of these Syriac versions and therefore effected new Syriac translations from the Latin Vulgate in the seventeenth century⁹.

2. New Testament in Syriac

There are five Syriac translations of the NT. They are Old Syriac, Peshitta, Philoxenian, Harklean and Syro-Palestinian.

2.1. Old Syriac Versions

Among the Old Syriac Versions of the New Testament, the manuscripts of *The Gospel of the Separated ones* and *The Gospel of the Mixed ones* have come down to us. The former one contains four Gospels separately¹⁰. The latter one, the harmony of four Gospels made by Tatian in the second century AD, known as *Diatessaron* ("one [Gospel] through four [Gospel]") was most influential in the Syriac speaking world. The detailed commentary of St Ephrem on *Diatessaron* is ample proof for this fact. Realizing the importance of four individual Gospels, *Diatessaron* was gradually discarded.

A revision of this Old Syriac version made in the fourth century became the official translation for all the Syriac Churches. Together with the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline Epistles, James, 1 Peter and 1 John also were translated¹¹. It was only in the sixth century that the rest of the NT books were translated into Syriac. Several apocryphal books also formed part of the Syriac canon of the sacred Scripture.

The Old Syriac Gospels preserve certain very archaic readings, which have been lost in the Greek manuscript tradition. Thus, for example, we see in

Mt 27, 16-17 Pilate offering to release a prisoner gives the crowd a choice between Barabbas and Jesus. The majority of the Greek manuscripts read, “Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?”. Instead of “Barabbas”, the Old Syriac reads, “Jesus Bar Abba”. The choice is between two men with the same name: Jesus. “Bar-Abba” is a typically messianic appellation. The prisoner in question has taken part in an uprising (Mk 15,7) and was thus a messianic figure. Pope Benedict XVI takes up this ambiguity of the name and comments: “Barabbas figures here as a sort of alter ego of Jesus, who makes the same claim but understands it in a completely different way. So the choice is between a Messiah who leads an armed struggle, promises freedom and a kingdom of one’s own, and this mysterious Jesus who proclaims that losing oneself is the way of life”¹². The Pope concludes: “Again and again, mankind will be faced with this same choice: to say yes to the God who works only through the power of truth and love, or to build on something tangible and concrete – on violence”¹³.

2.2. The Peshitta Version of the NT

This version of the NT which is the revision of the Old Syriac, arose in Antioch. It underwent several revisions with the purpose of conforming it to the Koine type of Greek original¹⁴. More than 60 Peshitta NT manuscripts from the fifth and sixth century survive. Separate Lectionary manuscripts are found from ninth century onwards.

2.3. Philoxenian Version

In the beginning of the sixth century AD, at the peak of the Christological controversies, Philoxenos, Bishop of Mabbug, felt the need for a new translation, closer to the original Greek in order to help Syriac theologians to argue their Christological position. He commissioned Chorepiscopus Polycarp for this task. The new version was named the Philoxenian, but its usage was limited amongst the scholars and theologians of

the time. This version did not become popular and as a result not a single manuscript survives¹⁵.

2.4. Harklean Version

At the beginning of the seventh century AD Thomas of Harqel felt that a new literal translation of the NT was needed. He aimed at a word-for-word translation of the Greek into Syriac. This Harklean version was a revision of the lost Philoxenian version. It was widely used and many manuscripts of it survive.

2.5. Syro Palestinian Version

Manuscripts of Syro Palestinian version survive mainly in Lectionary forms patterned upon the Greek Lectionary of the Byzantine Church. Two are the primary witnesses: a Vatican manuscript and two manuscripts from the monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai. The text manifests a considerable degree of Diatessaric influence.

It is interesting to note that the Syrians had a NT canon of twenty two books only. Besides the four Gospels, there are the Acts, fourteen Pauline Epistles (Heb inclusive), James, 1 Peter and 1 John. Ephrem wrote a commentary on the Acts which survives in the Armenian version.

3. Significance of the Syriac Version

For any student of the Bible, Syriac translations are important on many grounds:

- 1 Since the translation of the Bible into Syriac started as early as the first century, Syriac has a large number of very old manuscripts.
- 2 Syriac versions are early versions of the Gospel in the Semitic language. Though the Gospels were written in Greek, it was first proclaimed by Jesus and then by the Apostles in Palestinian Aramaic, of which Syriac is a dialect. The Syriac translation will certainly take us back to the original expressions used by Jesus. The words of Christ were first

- transmitted in his native language, either orally or in a written form such as small collections of sayings, parables, miracles etc.. It is from these Aramaic traditions that the Greek Gospels were derived. The Syriac New Testament as we know it today is an early translation of the Greek text back into Syriac.
- 3 Being the earliest witnesses to the standardized Hebrew text, Syriac translations play an important role in the history of the biblical text. The Peshitta NT translators, in their effort to bring the original to their readers, adapted the OT quotations in the Greek Gospels to the wording of the Syriac OT, familiar to the readers. That is why the wording of certain OT quotations in the Old Syriac Gospels is different from the Greek original. For example, in Lk 3,6 at the end of the quotation from Isaiah 40,3-5 in the Greek text of the Gospel is “and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”, whereas in the Old Syriac manuscripts, we find “and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken”. This wording taken from the Peshitta OT (Isaiah 40,5) is much closer to the Hebrew text in contrast to the Septuagint wording followed by Luke.
- 4 In many instances, the Syriac language offers interesting interpretations of biblical verses. An understanding of Syriac words will help us in clarifying the meaning of certain readings. For example, in Matthew 19:25 (also Mark 10:25 and Luke 128:25), when Jesus tells us how much easier it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, the Syriac word corresponding to camel is *gamlo* which means ‘camel.’ However, *gamlo* has another meaning as well: “a thick rope which is used to bind ships.” Considering that Jesus was speaking to fishermen, this meaning of *gamlo* seems more appropriate.
- 5 The Syriac writers of all periods have been brought up on the Peshitta Bible as is clear from their language and style. The best examples are the writings of St Ephrem and Aphrahat. To fully appreciate their writings, one needs to have some familiarity with the Syriac Bible. To understand the language and terminology of the early liturgical texts and monastic writings one needs to know the Syriac biblical world. Only in the Syriac Bible will one find phrases such as “Pure Prayer” (1 Chronicles 16:42), or “New World, New Age” (Mathew 18:28, translating “rebirth” in the Greek text), or “New Life” (Rom 6:4), rendering “newness of life” in Greek.

4. Syriac Version Reflected in *The Varthamanapusthakam*

The Varthamanapusthakam, the first overseas travelogue by an Indian, is the masterpiece of its kind in the Indian literature.¹⁶ Cathanar Thomman Paremmakkal describes the details of the journey he undertook together with Malpan Mar Joseph Cariattil to the King of Portugal and to the Pope in Rome from 1778 to 1786. The Church of St Thomas Christians sent this delegation mainly for the reunion of the separated brethren after the St Thomas Christian Revolt of 1653 (Koonan Cross Oath). In describing the situation of this apostolic Church and experiences they had during their journey, Paremmakkal makes abundant use of scriptural references and allusions. Not only the author but also the entire community to which it was addressed was profoundly familiar with the Old and New Testaments. The names of the books of the Bible (such as *Thenyan Namosa* - Deuteronomy, *Masmora* - Psalms, *Evangelion* - Gospel, *Praksenna* - Acts), of places (*Mezren* - Egypt, *Apasthos* - Ephesus) and of persons (*Iso Mishiha* - Jesus Christ, *Ouraham* - Abraham, *Ousep* - Joseph, *Peraon* - Pharaoh, *Chavol* - Saul, *Mariam* - Mary, *Sliha* - Apostle, *Patros* - Peter, *Mar Paulose* - St Paul) employed in *The Varthamanapusthakam* alone suffice to prove

that the version referred to is Syriac.¹⁷ These Syriac names still common among all Christians of India attest to the lasting influence of the Syriac Bible on the Indian soil.

5. Malayalam Translations of Syriac Bible

It was the Protestant missionaries who initiated the translation of Bible into Malayalam¹⁸. The British missionary Claudius Buchanan published the Gospels in Malayalam in 1811¹⁹. His translation was highly influenced by the Syriac version he found in Kerala. He writes about this manuscript of high antiquity in India, “containing the Old and the New Testaments, engrossed on strong Vellum in large folio, having three columns in the page, written with beautiful accuracy, in the Estrangela Syriac”²⁰. Translation was done by two of the Syriac scholars, Kayamkulam Philipose Ramban and Pulikottil Ramban of Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, assisted by Subbayya Pillay²¹.

The Malayalam translation of the NT published by the Latin Carmelite missionaries in 1905 was based on the Vulgate, the official version of the Latin Church²². Andumalil Mani Cathanar of the Carmelite monastery at Mannanam translated from the Peshitta the Pentateuch in 1924 and the Gospels in 1935. The complete NT in Malayalam came to light in 1940. Meanwhile, the translation of the book of Psalms from the Peshitta version was published in 1931. Thomas Kayyalaparampil of St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, made a Malayalam translation of the Peshitta NT in 1987. Fr Matthew Uppani CMI published a new translation of the complete Peshitta in 1997 from Kottayam. The complete Malayalam translation now popular among the Catholics of Kerala, published by POC in 1981, follows the Hebrew and the Greek texts.

Conclusion

One of the distinguishing marks of any Individual Church is its own version of the sacred Scripture and lectionary system as part of the liturgical

tradition. Peshitta is the official version of the Syriac Churches. Renewal and restoration in the field of liturgy already half way will be complete when the translation of the Peshitta Bible is made available for use. Basing on the critical edition of Peshitta that is being published by the Peshitta Institute of Leiden a new translation could be made. Such a translation could function as a catalyst for the ecumenical endeavours among Churches of the St Thomas Christian tradition.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Though there is a strong tradition that St Matthew composed “the Sayings of Jesus” (*ta logia*) in Aramaic no manuscript or copy of it has ever been discovered. It is also believed that St Thomas brought the Aramaic Gospel of Matthew to India.
- 2 Ephrem, *Commenrary on the Diatessaron*, I, 18.
- 3 Syriac is the dialect of Eastern Aramaic, the native language of Jesus. Syriac was spoken in the early Christian period in Edessa (modern northern Syria, Iraq and southern Turkey). Modern Aramaic/Syriac is spoken today by various, scattered communities in Iraq.
- 4 Eberhard Nestle, “Syriac Versions,” in Hastings (ed.), *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, Edinburgh, 1902, 645.
- 5 See, W.F. Macomber, “Chaldean Lectionary System of the Cathedral Church of Kokhe”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 38, 1967, 483- 516.
- 6 See, Emmanuel Thelly, “Syriac Manuscripts in the Mannanam Library”, *The Journal of Eastern Studies* 56, 2004, 257-270. See for a survey of the Syriac manuscripts in South India, J.P.M. van der Ploeg, *The Christians of St Thomas in South India and their Syriac Manuscripts*, Bangalore 1983, 46-61.
- 7 P. Francesco Dionisio attests to the expertise of Thomas Christians in sacred Scripture and the Fathers of the Church: “Fra di loro vi sono alcuni catenari che sanno qualcosa, e il loro sapere e la conoscenza della lingua caldea e di quella siriana, come pure il Vecchio e il Nuovo Testamento: vi sono molti Dottori che spiegano la Scrittura: stimano molto san Crisostomo, e fanno molti test apocrifi...”, P. Francesco Dionisio, *Informazione sulla cristianità di san Tomaso che si trova nel Malabar* (Cochin, 4 Gennaio 1578) translated from Portuguese in Mathew Alapattumedayil, “Un’antica chiesa dal volto indiano. I cristiani di San Tomaso”, in Luis Martinez Ferrer – Pier Luigi Guiducci, *Fontes. Documenti fondamentali di Storia della Chiesa* Milano 2005, 387.

- 8 S.P. Brock, "Syriac Versions", *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York 1992, 6, 794-799. See also, K. Luke, "The Old Syriac Version of the Bible", *Bible Bhashyam* 18, 2, 1992, 105-113.
- 9 Sebastian Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, New Jersey 2006, 106.
- 10 K. Luke, "The Old Syriac Version of the Bible", *Bible Bhashyam*, 18, 2, 1992, 114-123. The Gospel of the Separated survives in two fragmentary manuscripts of the fourth/fifth century AD. The first one was discovered from the Syrian monastery in Egypt (Add.14451) containing the four Gospels in the order Matthew, Mark, John and Luke. Since it was published by William Cureton in 1858, it came to be known as *Syrus Curetonianus*. The second one known as *Syrus Sinaiticus* (Sinai Syr. 30) was found in the Library of St Catherine's monastery on Mount Sinai.
- 11 The Letters of James, 1 Peter and 1 John come between the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline epistles in the Peshitta.
- 12 Joseph Ratzinger - Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Part I, New York 2007, 41.
- 13 *Jesus of Nazareth*, Part II, Bangalore 2011, 197.
- 14 For the history of Peshitta version, see, K. Luke "The Syriac Version of the New Testament", *Bible Bhashyam* 19, 1993, 301-314.
- 15 See K. Luke, "The Syriac Version of the New Testament", *Bible Bhashyam* 20, 1994, 124-138.
- 16 There are four editions of *The Varthamanapusthakam*, three in Malayalam and one in English by Placid J Podipara (OCA 190, Roma 1971). See Xavier Koodapuzha, "The Law of Thomas: Its Biblical Background", *Bible Bhashyam* 10,1, 1984, 12-24 and George Kudilil, "Varthamanapusthakavum Marthoma Kristyanikalude Adhyathmika Nilavaravum", *Paurastya Vidyapitham 1984* (Souvenir), Vadavathoor, Kottayam.
- 17 For more details, see A. Mekkattukunnel - J. Puthukulangara, *Vedapusthakam Varthamanapusthakathil*, Kottayam 2011.
- 18 Benjamin Bailey, a protestant missionary, printed and published from Kottayam the NT in 1829 and the OT in 1835. Another protestant missionary Herman Guntert published different books of the Bible from Tellicherry during the period 1842-1868. *The Satya Vedapusthakam*, used by the non-Catholics of Kerala, grew out of these two Malayalam versions.
- 19 A copy of the Syriac Bible given to Buchanan by a Jacobite Metropolitan is preserved in Cambridge Library; cf. ക്രൈസ്തവവിജ്ഞാനലോകം, ആഗസ്റ്റ് 1975, 422.
- 20 Claudius Buchanan, "The Star of The East", 1809, 76.
- 21 N.M.Mathew, *Malankara Mar Thoma Sabha Charitram*, Vol.I, Thiruvalla 2006, 216-226. After returning to England in 1809 he had mentioned about the Bible in Syriac in India: "Another monument of the Christian religion in the east is the state of the Syrian Christians, subsisting for many ages a separate and distinct people, in the midst of the corruption and idolatry of the heathen world. They exist in the very midst of India, like the bush of Moses burning and not consumed; surrounded by the enemies of their faith, and subject to their power, and yet not destroyed. There they exist, having the pure word of God in their hands, and speaking in the churches that same language which our saviour himself spoke in the streets of Jerusalem", Buchanan, "The Star of The East". 1809, 12.
- 22 The complete Bible published by Vadakkal Mathai Cathanar from the Puthenpally Seminary (1924-1948) also was from the Vulgate. There were also other attempts at partial translation of the Bible such as of Antony Puthusserry (1927), L M Thomas (1948), Mayyanat A John (1948), Jacob Naduvathusserry (1962), Fr Abel (1971). Msgr Thomas Moothedan's (1963) complete translation also was from the Vulgate. See for details, George Kudilil, *Bible: Oru Amukha Patanam* (Mal.), Kunnoth, 2007, 74-76.

3

To Be on the Way: Philosophizing on the Mar Thoma Margam

Dr Alex Tharamangalam

Mar Thoma Margam is the designation given to the religious group of Christians who trace their origin from the Apostle of Christ, St Thomas. This term therefore connotes the sum and substance of the faith, practices, traditions, culture, spirituality, etc. of a group of people known as the St Thomas Christians. ‘*Margam*’ is the term etymologically rooted in Sanskrit and used in Malayalam carrying the meaning, way or path. *Mar Thoma* is the name of St Thomas, where ‘*mar*’, coming from Syriac, means ‘holy’¹. Accordingly, any attempt to understand *Mar Thoma Margam* must be a delving into the religious culture of this group of people. Our attempt here is a very humble and seminal reflection on both Philosophy and *Mar Thoma Margam* so as to kindle further studies on these extensive themes.

1. St Thomas and His Personality

St Thomas, the Apostle, was one among the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, who is for the Christians the Son of God, the Word incarnate (Jn 1:14). Thomas’ encounter with Jesus is

challenging and later he became the champion of Jesus’ message to proclaim it in the far distant horizon of the globe, in India. His *love for the master and audacity to stay for His cause* are clearly exhibited in a challenging situation where the other disciples were hesitant to take up a thorny path, he firmly declared, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (Jn 11:16).

Another instance in the life of St Thomas was a special moment (‘*kairos*’) of revelation. As Jesus was revealing about his fate in a manner that was rather incomprehensible, with naïve innocence he asked, “Lord, we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?” Then Jesus answered: “I am the way, and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:5-6). Thus Thomas’ inquisitiveness became, as we learn from the fourth gospel, the ‘*kairos*’, the opportune time for unveiling certain mysteries of faith as regards Jesus Himself, as the way, the truth and the life.

The good news about the resurrection of the Lord was not received with great enthusiasm, for it

was something foreign to the cultural expectation of that society². Hence it is quite true that St Thomas did not believe the narration of other disciples about the post-resurrection appearance of the Lord. Here he can be counted as one of the representatives of unbelieving disciples in general. It may not be out of doubt that he had refused to believe, but, most probably, he was so fond of the Lord and he was extremely sad because of his absence from the group of Apostles at the time of Jesus' appearance. Hence he asked for a sign or tangible evidence from the Lord. The next appearance of the risen Lord (seeing) and His invitation to Thomas (hearing) gave him a profound God-experience. Without any touching or proving but with the very sight of the risen Lord, came his faith declaration. He uttered, "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20: 28). It is this personal experience which is the foundation of the apostolic faith³.

With this faith in the risen Lord, St Thomas came to the distant land of India, preached the gospel and formed communities of the faithful in the southern part, and was speared to death at the hillock near Mylapore. Hence it is said that in the very first century of the Christian era, Christianity was born in the Indian soil. The greatest evidence for that is the living community of the faithful, viz., the *Nazreans* (*Nazrani*), who cherish their faith from St Thomas. In short, the personality unraveled in St Thomas is that he was a man of faith, wisdom, conviction, commitment, fidelity, audacity and integrity.

2. *Raison d'être* of Mar Thoma Margam

Aristotelian-Scholastic metaphysics speaks of the transcendental properties of being, i.e., properties that go beyond the specific differences of being. One of such properties is that of goodness. Accordingly, *every being is ontologically good*, because it is first of all something and not nothing; and secondly, it is an object of attraction, desire, inclination or love of some will⁴. Since *Mar Thoma Margam* is an entity (something that exists) that has attracted and is still attracting many, especially the St. Thomas Christians, it is in itself ontologically good. Hence its *raison d'être*

is its inherent goodness as implied in the way proclaimed by St Thomas. However we have to trace further the implications of this way (*Margam*) in order to comprehend its inner goodness.

The notion of the way, as already noted, is taken from the revelation of Jesus to St Thomas. Since the way is Jesus Himself, *Mar Thoma Margam* refers to St Thomas' listeners or hearers and their successors who are believers in Jesus. They are the *Christians who are on the way*, i.e., the followers of the way living in accordance with the teachings of Jesus and thus they are Jesus' disciples. Again, this way implies more. It is about the religious culture this group as such in course of time developed from the very beginning of the reception of the way, and is also at present following this way. Accordingly, *Mar Thoma Margam* consists of the whole life-pattern of the St. Thomas Christians; it is the sum and substance of their religious life and culture.

Now, where is this way or this form of religious life leading to? Since the way is primarily Jesus Himself, 'to be on the way' takes one to the *knowledge of Jesus* or to everything which is revealed in and through Jesus. Since knowledge in the biblical understanding refers to the intimate union with someone, this way is the way of intimate union with God, revealed in Jesus. It is the *devotion* (*bhakti* or union) of the follower.

This union has a revelatory character. As revelation, it is *truth*. Thus the way is the way to truth. Now, truth is something dis-closed or un-veiled or *a-letheia*. For St Thomas, the way leading to truth is Jesus; and the truth unveiled in and through Jesus is the 'face' of God, the Father whom no one has ever seen, but only the Son, "who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (Jn 1:18). Truth is the incarnate Son who reveals the Father to the world. Since this truth sets man free, *truth and freedom* are conjoined. Jesus, said, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32). The truth and freedom Jesus offers here is not something abstract; it is the *light and life* that the followers of Jesus have to enjoy in their day-to-day life⁵.

It is indeed a gratuitous gift of the Father (Eph 2:5) to the human species and to the whole world. Hence the way leads one to knowledge, truth, freedom and finally life, to life in the fullness, a life which is of God Himself: the *eternal life*. It is the life in the Kingdom of God. The dwellers on this way (*Marga-vasikal*) are cherishing this path of eternal life, a fully goal-oriented life or a way of existence (not an existence carrying the weight of absurdity, as some philosophers say^{6!}). An entity so lovable has every right to exist; it is its reason to be. It is indeed a wise way of living - a task similarly promoted in Philosophy too.

3. Christian Philosophy and *Mar Thoma Margam*

The very term ‘philosophy’ etymologically refers to the ‘love (*philia*) of wisdom (*sophia*)’. Usually philosophy is considered as a contribution of the West and so the ancient Greece is held to be the cradle of philosophical wisdom⁷. For the ancient Greeks, philosophical wisdom consists of the knowledge of the ultimate causes, giving us the ‘why’ of events, and explaining the ‘because’s’. It gives the ‘sense’ or ‘meaning’ to orient one’s life and regulate everything in that order. This is arrived at through contemplation or speculation; it is not a way of taking refuge in any mythological explanation. Thus the adage, ‘philosophy begins with wonder’, refers to this contemplative character. It is a contemplation of that which is real, both the ordinary and the extraordinary that one encounters in day-to-day life⁸.

The wisdom so derived moves to the level of something beyond physics and thus wisdom has a meta-physical character. Aristotle’s *First Philosophy*, the philosophy of being as being, traced the first being or first substance, the unmoved mover, which is God. Thus in Aristotle philosophical and metaphysical wisdom became a theology: the science of god who is the first cause⁹.

However, the coming of Christianity opened a new horizon for philosophical speculation: faith (revelation). The very notion of ‘Christian philosophy’

did not get an easy entry in the philosophical arena¹⁰. Although there were debates as regards the very possibility of absorbing Hellenistic philosophy into the Christian context¹¹, from the time of Tatian (second century theologian and apologist) onwards, the West saw its fantastic inclusion in Christian circles. The coinage of the term ‘Christian Philosophy’ is generally attributed to St. Augustine.

‘Christian Philosophy’ is the philosophy of Christians as Christians¹². It arose from the basic situation of the Christians. The system of thought developed as the Christians began to confront their life-problems, can be said to be the Christian philosophy. It is not simply an appropriation of the Hellenistic thought. Certain insights, which were never present in the Greek thought, but were part of Christian faith, mark the differences with and development from the ancient philosophy. For example, the concept of person, personal freedom, the ascending and linear concept of time, God as transcendent and immanent, the concept of moral evil, the notion of creation¹³, etc. are profound doctrines thrown before the philosophical circles in and through Christianity. Hence, the Christian philosophy has to take into account the existential (i.e., as a Christian) thinking (i.e., by using the method of reflection) of the self, universe and the transcendent and eternal reality revealed in the *Logos*, Jesus. With its metaphysical, ethical and religious thrusts Christian philosophy flourished in the West for a long period, pervading its whole culture. However, after the Enlightenment, instead of metaphysical concerns, the Western philosophy focused more on the human horizons, with positive, existential, linguistic and other concerns.

In the East and especially in India there was another method of thinking and that was mainly in line with the contributions of the ancient sages, who ‘heard’ (*sruti*), ‘recollected’ (*smruti*) and thus appropriated the eternal wisdom concerning the self, deity and universe, and handed it over to the next generation. Those sages were holy people who were also the ‘seers’ (those who see: *der Seher*). Their wisdom was known as *dharsana* (the product of seeing) that led the followers to eternal liberation.

Thus the wisdom delivered through the ancient Indian philosophers was held to be liberative, eternal and goal-oriented. Their starting point was the individual consciousness; the plurality we see is explained through the absolute unity in the Supreme Being¹⁴. This was the cultural heritage of India, where St. Thomas brought the good news of the way, Jesus. Hence *Mar Thoma Margam* imbibes Indian culture and proclaims Christian faith.

Christianity thus thrived both in the West and the East since two millennia. It has the characteristic that it presents a *Weltanschauung* of *faith, hope and love*. It is the faith in God who is one God (monotheism¹⁵) and at the same a God who is with us (Emmanuel) with His providence and guidance in the Holy Spirit. For Karl Rahner, God is the transcendental *a priori* of human knowing. B. Lonergan observes that “God is the unrestricted act of understanding, the eternal rapture glimpsed in every Archimedean cry of Eureka”¹⁶. Faith stems here from the personal encounter and relationship of the faithful with the Divine, as in the case of St. Thomas, the Apostle. With this faith which is not merely other-worldly, the Christians actively engage in the material to find the depth of the spiritual¹⁷. Here reason (Philosophy) and faith (Revelation) go hand in hand. Since God is a mystery and since He is not accessible to direct observation, it is extremely difficult for man to arrive at God through reason alone (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 1,1)¹⁸. ‘Glimpses of the Divine’ would be the subject matter of revelation.

The hope that is promoted in the Christian vision is eschatological and so typical religious practices it encourages cross all the boundaries of space, time and culture. Love that is typically Christian is *agape*, which goes beyond the human horizons and including all in the universe, a love which is kenotic and altruistic; it is a love to build up the Kingdom of God on earth¹⁹.

5. Worship and Wisdom

Mar Thoma Margam is a theo-centric system. The faithful derives their strength in and through the

the human ascends to the Divine and the Divine descends to the humans – a ‘grace-filled’ moment. It is indeed the moment that transcends the human and the divine frontiers. The cosmos is made a paradise, a peaceful and beautiful dwelling place, through the genuine worshippers. Thus prayer, as Peter Schloss observes, is the ‘golden key that opens the door of wisdom’.

Philosophers seek wisdom that is achieved by ‘being on the way’ of reflection and contemplation. This wisdom transcends the diversity of knowledge; it takes us into new horizons. The wise is ever open to truth that is unveiled, open to novelties. According to M. Blondel philosophy has to transcend itself to the heights of further possibilities, which is the wisdom of revelation. It is indeed a transition from the ‘physical’ to the ‘meta-physical’. It is the moment of grace which is showered from above. The wise one is able to move beyond the horizon of time. Accordingly, he penetrates more into the past, so as to soar ahead into the future, i.e., tradition is appropriated into the present in order to mould the future with innovation. Thus ‘to be on the way’ is the common platform for the wise and for the *Marga-vasi*; it is the way to be treaded for meaningful co-existence, a co-existence with the other in and with the Other.

Conclusion

‘*To be on the Way*’ – it is the common path of (St. Thomas) Christians and of the philosopher. For the Christians, it is their Christian living, the living of the *Marga-vasi*, i.e., the dwelling on the Way (Jesus). Their whole religious culture is depicted through the designation *Mar Thoma Margam*. As *Margam*, it leads to knowledge, truth, life and eternity; thus a human person is blessed in wholeness and integrity in this religious culture. This is a divine project or call extended to the whole of humanity.

A philosopher as the seeker of truth and wisdom has also ‘To be on the way’ of reflection and contemplation. He has the same task of raising himself beyond the fragmentary knowledge to the horizon of wisdom, which is the ‘ground’ of all

knowledge, and which sets a goal to existence itself: to live a life of meaning with sound vision and religious conviction. True philosophizing takes one to a path of recollection and relieves him from the alleged autarchy (or self-possession), as the Greeks once claimed. Thus 'to be on the way' is the life-giving way of to be. It is a to be, to be one with the Eternal One. It is the path of wisdom and worship. A true philosopher is like Plato the preparer of the way to Christ (*paidagogos eis Christon*)²⁰. Mar Thoma Margam prepares the faithful for Christ's second coming. 'To be on the Way' is thus a marvelous meeting point for both (St. Thomas) Christians and Philosophers: a conjoining of faith and reason! It is the very condition of the possibility – a transcendental *a priori* - for the effective proclamation of the Good News²¹.

ENDNOTES

1. P. Kochappilly, G. Pallikennel, J.V. Kureethara, eds., *The Way of Life* (Kottayam, 2011) 13-52
2. Kierkegaard alludes to this problem beautifully with his remark on the Philosophers' stone. He writes, "The stone that was rolled before Christ's tomb might appropriately be called the *Philosopher's stone*, because its removal gave not only the Pharisees but, now for 1800 years the philosophers, so much to think about". S. Kierkegaard, *The Journals*, Nov 25, 1834.
3. M. Naickanparampil, *Faith and Life in St. John* (Bangalore, 2011) 148-155
4. G. Panthanmackel, *Coming and Going* (Bangalore, 1999) 283-304; T. Alvira, L. Clavell, T. Melendo, *Metaphysics* (Trans. L. Supan, Manila, 1991) 157-164
5. R.E. Brown, *Giovanni Commento al Vangelo Spirituale* (Assisi, 1979) 1437-1463
6. For example, philosophy of Albert Camus.
7. Traditionally, Pythagoras is held as the first one who described himself as philosopher. Out of his humility he considered himself as a 'lover of wisdom' and not a 'wise man', for wisdom belonged fully to God alone. He was a beggar at the door of wisdom.
8. J. Puthenpurackal, "Philosophy" in *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. II, 1030-1035
9. In the same vein Plato also developed a theology. For him the *idea of Good* is the supreme ontological principle, through which all that which is good traces its to be, its value; that which explains in its ultimate sense the 'why' of all that which is. In this way the idea of Good contains divine features and so in Plato metaphysics eventually becomes 'theology'. Cf. P. Henrici, *Introduzione Alla Metafisica* (Roma, 1986) 31
10. There were debates as regards its possibility. M. Heidegger, Brunschwig and others would see it as a 'contradiction in terms'. Whereas illustrious thinkers like Maritain, Gilson, Blondel, Mounier, Marcel and others would brilliantly justify the possibility of a Christian Philosophy.
11. Tertullian's sarcastic comment is famous: 'what has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' However, later thinkers did not distance Jerusalem from Athens and so the truth of philosophy was considered as a true propaedeutic for the comprehension of the truth of revelation.
12. Cf. K. D'Souza, "Christian Philosophy" in *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, 273-279; L.B. Geiger / Eds., "Christian Philosophy" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, 538-542
13. Aristotle's doctrine of God as the unmoved mover is the 'Thought of Thought'. It is not of the world or the humans that he is thinking, but his thinking is of the 'thinking of Thinking'. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1074 b 34-35. Here God has no relation to the world which is as eternal as God himself! We can see here the huge difference Christianity has brought into the understanding of the universe.
14. Cf. K. Pandikattu, "Philosophy: East-West Approach", in *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, 1035-1037; M. Dhavamony, K.R. Sundararajan, "Indian Philosophy", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, 406-410
15. Cf. A. Tharamangalam, "Monotheism" in *ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, 919-922
16. B.J.F. Lonergan, *Insight* (London, 1983), 684
17. As Karl Rahner states, "There is access to God only in a penetration of the world", *Hearers of the Word* (London, 1969) 174
18. Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, art. 76
19. Cf. A. Tharamangalam, P. Kareden, *Glimpses of the Divine* (Kalamassery, 2009) 163-225
20. D. von Hildebrand, *What is Philosophy?* (London, 1991) 238
21. "An unphilosophical theology would be a bad theology ... and a theology which is bad, cannot render its necessary service to the proclamation of Revelation", writes Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, trans. Karl H. and B. Kruger (London, 1969) 80

4

Theology of Individual Churches

Dr Mathew Vellanickal

Introduction

One of the most outstanding traits of Israel, the people of God, had been the kind of unity in their worship of the true God, in spite of the diversities that did exist among them. This unity-in-diversity has been a constant phenomenon in the religious history of the Israelites. As we come to the New Testament times the Twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ become the heralds and heroes of this unity-in-diversity paradox. One can very well verify this in the relationship between the Universal Church and the Individual Churches of which the Apostles are the foundations.

Here we find the foundation and the crux of the existence of the different ecclesial traditions existing in the Church. These Individual Churches do congenially conjoin and harmoniously blend into a chorus of unity. This unity-in-diversity has never been considered as an obstacle to be overcome by anybody. But unfortunately the theological basis of these Individual Churches, which should maintain their distinctive identities within the catholic unity, has not been amply acknowledged and heartily appreciated. Hence, there is a felt need and a great urgency today

to launch a fresh study of the Individual Churches. And this study should necessarily go beyond mere historical and canonical descriptions, and employ clear cut theological and biblical criteria and methodology.

This presentation of Ecclesiology is guided, in particular, by the ecclesiological perspectives opened up by the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the mystery of the Church, not only in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, but also in the doctrinal presuppositions and consequences that may be deduced from the Council's disciplinary Decrees, such as the Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches and the Decree on Ecumenism. Here we limit ourselves to giving just the Biblico-Theological perspectives.

The Church as Communion, which has been one of the significant concepts of the different Ecclesial denominations in the East, has gained a new vigour in Catholic Ecclesiology. This is certainly because of the ecclesiological reflections during and after the Second Vatican Council. It has its repercussions definitely in the different areas of the life of the Church. The Catholic Church in India has also contributed to

the development of this ‘Communion Ecclesiology’, especially in the context of dialogue on inter-ecclesial relationships.

However, even in the documents of the Vatican II the communion ecclesiology has not emerged fully in its diverse dimensions. It contains two different ecclesiologies. One is the Western, juridical, universalistic ecclesiology which starts with the Universal Church, and considers the other Churches as parts of the one Church of God. The other is the emerging ecclesiology of the Universal Church as Communion of the Churches. The Fathers of the Council do not seem to have succeeded in making a synthesis of the two ecclesiologies. These conflicting ecclesiologies are indeed an internal problem of the ‘Lumen Gentium’¹. Since the majority of the council fathers were from the Latin Church, it was not easy for them to probe into the profundity of the Eastern ecclesiological dimensions. The lack of synthesis and integration between the Western and the Eastern ecclesio- logical perspectives in the different documents has caused hermeneutical problems. In the post conciliar period, divergent and even contradictory interpretations have emerged.

I. Clarification of Terms

1. In the Documents of the Church

The Second Vatican Council did not use a consistent vocabulary in referring to local realizations of the Church. This is especially true about the use of the terms ‘local’ and ‘particular’ Churches. ‘Particular Church’ appears very often and usually designates a diocese. It is also used to refer to the Churches in the same region or culture (AG 22) and to ‘Rites’ or ‘Individual’ Churches (OE 2-4,10,16,19). In UR 14 we see the terms ‘particular’ and ‘local’ applied to the patriarchal Churches. The term ‘Local Church’ is also used of dioceses (AG 19,27). Local congregations gathered for the Eucharist are also said to be Churches (LG 26,28). In UR 14-18, a theology of ‘Sister Churches’ is presented.

In the revised Code of Canon Law, ‘Particular Church’ always refers to a diocese. The terms ‘Local Church’ and ‘Universal Church’ do not appear in it. The Code regularly refers to the ‘Whole Church’ or simply the ‘Church’ and the ‘Particular Church’. It also distinguishes between the “Latin Church” and other Churches, which it calls ‘Ritual Churches with their own law’ (cc 111-112). The Code of Oriental Canon Law refers simply to ‘Churches with their own law’ (*Ecclesiae sui iuris*) and defines a ‘Rite’ as “*the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary heritage, distinguished by the culture and historical circumstances of a people, which is expressed in the way of living the faith proper to each Church with its own law*” (CCEO 28.1).

The inconsistency in the conciliar vocabulary and the usage of the term in the Codes of Canon Law make the choice of a regular terminology difficult and arbitrary. There is an unending controversy and discussion among the theologians regarding the preference of one term to the others. However, for a clear presentation and understanding of the Ecclesiology discussed here we need a consistent usage of terminology in this regard.

2. Local Church

‘Local Church’ is a generic term which can be applied to any realization of the Church at a given place (*locus*) such as in a house, town, region, state, nation or even a continent. Thus we can speak of the Kerala Church, the Indian Church or the Asian Church. The term ‘Local Church’ can thus be applied to both ‘Particular Churches’ and ‘Individual Churches’.

3. Individual Church

‘Individual Church’ results from the verification of the apostolic Christ-experience in a people, taking a specific form of life, worship, liturgy, spirituality and ecclesiastical discipline integrated into their particular linguistic, racial, cultural and sociological conditions. The Decree of the Second Vatican Council on Eastern Churches speaks about it very clearly: “*That Church,*

Holy and Catholic which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments, and combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy, form 'separate Churches' or 'Rites'... It is the mind of the Catholic Church that each 'Individual Church' or 'Rite' retain its conditions whole and entire, while adjusting its way of life to the various needs of time and place" (OE 2).

4. Particular Church

'Particular Church' is the eparchial unit of the 'Individual Church' under the leadership of a hierarchy of its own, who is in communion with the hierarchy of the Individual Churches and the Universal Church. A 'Particular Church' is also called a 'Diocese'. This is indicated in the Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church: "*Bishops govern the 'Particular Churches' entrusted to them as the vicars and the ambassadors of Christ*" (LG 27). Here the Constitution speaks of the power of the Bishops to govern the 'dioceses' entrusted to them.

II. The New Testament Witness to the Individual Churches

1. Existence of Distinct Ecclesial Traditions

The New Testament provides witness to the existence of distinct Ecclesial Traditions which exist in mutual communion. The New Testament Books are the products of the early Christian Communities containing the faith traditions of the different Local Churches at the time of their formation. Thus, they reflect the situation of the different Churches in New Testament times. These Churches are called 'Individual Churches' by Raymond E. Brown.² Though he may not use the designation 'Individual Churches' in the same way as we use it in this presentation, the fact that he uses this term to designate the different Churches in the New Testament times is quite significant. The Churches of the New Testament times, according to him, constitute "theologi-cally" (not locally) different Local

Churches³, namely, they have different theological approaches and emphases depending on their particular faith heritages and ecclesial situations. For example, the Pastoral Epistles reflect a Church situation where the institutional structure of the Church is emphasized which is designed to preserve the apostolic heritage. (Tit 1:9-2:1; 1Tim 9:1-11.) The Epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians reflect an idealistic view of the Church, which is identified with the Body of Christ, having Christ as its head⁴. The Ecclesiology of Luke/Acts emphasizes the continuity of the Church from Israel through Jesus and the Apostles, Peter and Paul. It stresses the intervention of the Holy Spirit at crucial moments as well.⁵ The Church in the Johannine writings emphasizes the importance of discipleship and unity (Jn15:1-17; 17:9-26). Thus, we can distinguish different ecclesial traditions, having an individuality of their own, in the New Testament, belonging to the Pauline, Petrine, Johannine and Matthean heritages. Sometimes the same apostolic heritage can have more than one ecclesial tradition. For example, the ecclesial tradition in the Pastoral Epistles and that in the Epistles to Colossians/ Ephesians and that in Lk/Acts belong to the same Pauline heritage.⁶

It is not so much the geographical or cultural elements that became decisive for this diversity of New Testament ecclesial traditions, but rather the differing sources of their evangelization and traditions⁷. Therefore the different Churches have a basic unity deriving from the same Apostolic Tradition common to all of them tracing back to the originating event of Christ's life, death and resurrection. The diversity of Churches is due to the parallel streams of the same Tradition, taking different concrete forms of traditions: kerygmatic, catechetical and liturgical. Their unity is not to be found so much in some indispensable common denominator, as in the fact of their continuous living of the real communion of their adherents with one another. The fact of so much communication and even disputation in the New Testament is ample evidence that these Churches did not regard themselves as free to diverge on any point

except their Christology in its most rarified form. Rather, they appear to be grappling with the need to be able to recognize the same faith in each other's traditions. Communion implies not only the mutual acceptance but also the mutual evaluation and correction - if not in the formulation of their Christian vision, at least in the manner in which this communion is to be correctly understood. This New Testament pluralistic ecclesial situation is a key to understand the further development of the Church as Communion of Individual Churches after the New Testament times.

2. Gospel and Gospels as a Paradigm

There is only one Gospel of Jesus Christ. But we have four Gospels today. The four Gospels are four concrete expressions of the same Gospel. The Gospel of the '*Kingdom of God*' in Mark 1:14-15 (Petrine heritage) has become the Gospel of the '*Kingdom of Heaven*' in Matthew (4:17) (Matthean heritage). The same Gospel has become the Gospel of '*Salvation*' in Luke (2:10-11; 4:18-19) (Pauline heritage) while it has become the Gospel of '*Life*' in John (10:10; 20:30-31) (Johannine heritage). 'Communion' means sharing the same reality of '*Life*'. John in his first Epistle describes the nature of this communion as follows: "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the Word of Life – the Life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us-that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have Fellowship (Communion- koinonia) with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ*" (1Jn 1:1-3). The '*Life*' which the Father and the Son shared together has been revealed in Jesus Christ and become the Gospel (good news) to the Apostles, and through their preaching, to the faithful. The believers who shared together this Gospel of Life became the Communion - the Church. It is the same Gospel of

Life that was shared by all the four Churches represented by the Gospels, though they experienced and understood it in terms of '*Salvation*' (Lk) '*Kingdom of God*' (Mk) and '*Kingdom of Heaven*' (Mt). Hence there was a wonderful communion among these Individual Churches represented by the four Gospels in so far as they appropriated the same Gospel. The communion among the Individual Churches represented by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John possessing the same Gospel in its four expressions could be a paradigm for the later development of the '*Church of God*' into the present Individual Churches the communion of which we call the Church (Universal).

3. Individual Churches and Liturgical Traditions

The Individual Churches are often known by their liturgical traditions, because the liturgical Rites are one of the most explicit differentiating elements of the Churches. This is quite understandable because the most sublime expression of the faith of the Church is Liturgy.

This is also in accordance with the New Testament data where the Christians identified themselves as "the Church", precisely in their act of coming together. This happened especially when they were praying and celebrating the Eucharist. It is then that they realized that they were not of the world and that they formed one people of God.⁸ St. Paul qualifies the liturgical gathering as the formal gathering of the Church. "*For, in the first place, when you assemble as a Church, I hear that there are divisions among you*" (1Cor11:18).⁹ When Paul refers to the Charismatic gifts in 1 Cor 14:4-12, it is this liturgical assembly that he points to, because it is when the faithful assemble that the charismatic gifts appear. Moreover, the whole section of chapters 11 to 14 of 1 Corinthians is on abuses in the liturgical gatherings.

It is to this Liturgical Assembly that St. Paul refers when he speaks in 1Cor14:23 about "the whole Church". The Christians did not always come together in a full gathering, but formed small groups

which met less officially in particular houses within the same town, which may be called “domestic Churches”.¹⁰ In Rom 16:23 the expression “Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole Church”, may mean that the house of Gaius was the place for the full gathering of the Church of Corinth as distinct from the mere Local Churches such as that of Aquila and Priscilla at Rome or Ephesus.¹¹ The official liturgical gathering had a pre-eminent position in expressing the Church in the New Testament times.

III Church: Community Embodying Christ-Experience

1. The Church and Apostolic Christ-experience

In all the Gospels the missionary commissioning is connected with the living encounter of the Apostles with the Risen Christ and their experience of Him. The Church is to be traced back to the ministry of the unique witness of the Apostles as its origin (Cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4). Therefore, it has to be in permanent harmony with their decisive testimony. It is in this context that we have to understand Paul’s pre-occupation to link his encounter with and experience of the Risen Lord with that of the Twelve. Therefore, every Individual Church, to be authentic, has to be faithful to this apostolic testimony. The apostolic succession belongs to the whole Church and has manifested itself in manifold ways, throughout the centuries and in all countries in the continuous process of baptizing and being baptized, through faith and obedience to the apostolic testimony, through the community of worship and in the Eucharist and in the fellowship and unity of the Churches of the whole world. This inter-relationship through the apostolic succession is of a spiritual as well as a historical character. It is not merely a succession of ‘persons’ but a succession of ‘faith’ and its profession. It is primarily a question of awakening again and again the ‘faith’ that was first awakened through the original testimony of the Apostles, and of making this ‘faith’ known in the Church. Hence, the Apostolic Christ experience is a fundamental constituent of every Individual Church.

2. The Church and the Ministry of the Word

The most decisive element of the Individual Church is, therefore, the sharing of the Christ-experience through the proclamation of the Word made relevant to the concrete situation in the lives, religious needs, aspirations and struggles of the people. As soon as the Holy Spirit filled them, the apostles began to speak (Acts 2:14). Their main role is to continue to be at the service of the Word (Acts 6:2-4). It was those who received the Word, who were baptized and formed the first Church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). Every member of the Church preached the Word when the opportunity arose (Acts 4:34; 8:4). The ministry of the Word is carried out in the Church mainly in four ways:

- a. It is the Word of the apostolic teaching, and thus building up the Church as a ‘Believing Community’ (Acts 2:41-42).
- b. It is also the Word coming to new life in the Spirit-filled activity of the Church, thus building up the Church as a ‘Sharing Community’ (Acts 2:43-45)¹².
- c. It is the Word resounding in joy and praise, and thus building up the Church as a praying and ‘Worshipping Community’ (Acts 2:46-47).
- d. Finally, it is the Word or the Gospel of Christ that is constantly being proclaimed by the Church, exercising its redemptive mission in and to the world, and thus building up the Church as an ‘Evangelizing Community’ (Acts 2:47). Hence the apostolic ministry, the Eucharistic celebration, the Spirit-filled life and activity and proclamation of salvation become elements that are generative and constitutive of an Individual Church.

In whatever form the Word reaches her, the Church lives by the Word and finds her identity in ministering to it. It is practically identical with the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told that the Word ‘grew’ or ‘increased’ or was ‘strengthened’ in places where actually it is a reference to the growth

or increase of the Church¹³. This identification of the Word with the Church can be compared with the identification of the Logos with Christ in Jn 1. Whatever the *Logos* meant and stood for, was present in Christ: *The Logos was made flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14). In the same way, the deepest identity of the Church is to be found in the Word and its power. The Church is always at the service of the Word and is carried forward by the power of the Word.

3. The Diversification of the Individual Churches

The four different ways, in which the ministry of the Word is carried out in the Church, constitute the basis of the diversification of the Individual Churches, namely receiving, living, celebrating and proclaiming the Word.

3.1. Receiving the Word- Kerygma, Catechesis and Theology

The Church is the Assembly of God's people who have believed in the Word and profess their faith in it: *"those who received his word were baptized... and they devoted themselves to the 'Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers"* (Acts 2:41-42). It was not enough that they received the Word once, but had to continue in the Word. Hence the ministry of the Word in the Church took the form of teaching, such as Kerygma, Catechesis and Theology.

The Word, which is received by the community of believers, is the Gospel, which was preached, the acceptance of which resulted in the formation of the Church as the community of believers. The preaching of the Gospel and the response of conversion and faith are on-going processes in the Church. The Apostolic ministry of preaching the Gospel has to be continued in the Community. This is called Kerygma which takes place in various ways in the different Individual Churches adapted to the particular socio-cultural situations of those Churches. The Word or the Gospel, which is accepted in the Church and is being celebrated in its Liturgical tradition, is to be

understood in its details in order to translate it into the daily life of the believers. In the commissioning words of Jesus, he says: *"Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them... and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you"* (Mt 28:19-20). Hence the teaching of the faith has to take place in every Individual Church. This teaching is to be given at different levels and consequently takes the form of Catechesis and Theology. The concrete ways of catechetical methods and theological reflection will differ according to the Individual Ecclesial Traditions, depending on their liturgical and socio-cultural background.

3.2. Living the Word – Spirituality and Discipline

The Church is the Assembly of God's people who also live the Word that they believe and profess. This practically takes on the form of fellowship: *"And all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as they had need"* (Acts 2:44-45). Jesus Christ, the Word of life which the Apostles experienced, when communicated, necessarily resulted in Christian fellowship (1Jn 1:1-3). Hence the Word enters into daily Christian living. Thus the ministry of the Word in the Church takes the concrete form of pastoral ministry guiding the people to live their faith in the different pastoral situations of daily life.

The Word received in faith, studied in Catechesis and Theology and celebrated in the Liturgy when lived, takes concrete ways of living, which is designated as the Spirituality and Discipline of the Church. Each Individual Church develops its own Spirituality and Discipline, again depending on its liturgical and socio-cultural traditions and situations. Hence the Spirituality and Discipline of an Individual Church will also differ from that of another Individual Church.

3.3. Celebrating the Word - Liturgy

The Church is the Assembly of God's people who celebrate the Word that they have received. The

Word resounds in joy and praise in the prayer of the Church: *“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts praising God and having favour with all the people”* (Acts 2:46-47). After the preaching of Paul and Barnabas the response of the people is described: *“And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the Word of God”* (Acts 13:48). The life of the Church is centred around the Liturgical celebration specially that of the Eucharistic Liturgy in which the Members of the Church experience the presence of Christ the living Word through the Liturgy of the Word and the Eucharist.

The Liturgy thus becomes the summit towards which all the activities of the Church are directed, and the fountain from which all her power flows (SC 10). This is the reason why the Individual Churches are known in terms of their distinctive liturgical heritages. But the distinctive forms celebrating the liturgy emerged slowly in the history of the evolution and growth of the Churches. It took three to four centuries for this evolution and the growth of the Church. The Second Vatican Council describes this evolution as an evolution of the Local Churches, established by the apostles and their successors, into originally united groups, which took place in the course of time through divine providence (cf. LG 23). Therefore, the different Liturgical Traditions in the Communion of the Churches contain the Word of God or the Tradition, which has come from the apostles through the Fathers, and which is part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage of the Universal Church (OE 1). Thus, Liturgy becomes one of the constitutive elements, which makes the Church an Individual Church in the Communion of the Churches.

Thus we can see how the Church, which is born out of the proclamation of the Word by the Apostles, develops different forms of Catechetical methods, Theological reflections, Spiritualities, Disciplines and Liturgies which differentiate the Individual Churches from one another.

3.4. Proclaiming the Word

The Church is the Assembly of God’s people who embody the Word of God and is sent by Christ to proclaim and bear witness to the Word of God. The relationship of the proclamation of the Gospel with the Christian Community or the Church is such that there is no evangelization independent of the life of fellowship and love in the Church. This is especially true in the Johannine Writings.

The very aim of the proclamation and witnessing of the ‘Word of life’ is to institute the life of fellowship with the Father and with the Son and among all the members of the community (1 Jn 1:1-3). The commission of the disciples is given as the continuation of Jesus’ mission: *“As you have sent me... so I have sent them”* (Jn 17:18; 20:21-23) and the commission is directly joined to the bestowal of the Spirit. What Jesus has done on earth will be continued by his Spirit in the Church. It is in the realm of this activity of the Spirit in the Church that the disciples find their missionary task in relation to the world.

The work of the disciples is to be linked with that of the exalted Lord himself so that both are seen as one. The existing Church in the world is accomplishing the Lord’s presence in the world. Its main task lies in its right existence as a Church, which is a missionary existence, an existence of communion and fellowship: *“By this all men shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (Jn 13:35).

Since evangelization is essentially related to the ministry of teaching, living and celebrating the Word in the Church, each Individual Church has its own ways of proclaiming the Word. It is the Word that is received, lived and celebrated in the Church, that is to be proclaimed by the Church. Proclamation of the Word or evangelization is the fundamental task of the Church. It is by proclaiming the Word embodied in the Church, that one fulfils his/her task of evangelization. Therefore, it depends mainly on

the life of the Church. Hence the immediate minister of evangelization is the Individual Church.

There is no standardized pattern of evangelization. Each Individual Church has to work out its own pattern. Since the receiving, living, and celebrating the Word has its distinctiveness in each Individual Church, this will reflect also in its pattern of evangelization. Only an authentic living of the ecclesial life will enable the members of the Church to fulfil their task of evangelization. Hence, it is absolutely necessary that all the members of each Individual Church are given the necessary provisions for living fully their distinctive ecclesial heritage, so as to enable them to fulfil their fundamental task of proclaiming the Word¹⁴.

IV. Tradition and Traditions

1. Divine or Apostolic Tradition and Individual Ecclesial Traditions

The Word of God or the Divine Tradition, in the Catholic Church, is enshrined in the Individual Ecclesial Traditions. The Second Vatican Council clearly teaches this. *“The Catholic Church, holds in high esteem the Eastern Churches, their liturgical rite, ecclesiastical traditions and their ordering of Christian life. For, in those Churches, which are distinguished by their venerable antiquity, there is clearly evident the Tradition which has come from the Apostles through the Fathers”* (OE 1). That is why the Eastern Churches are very keenly aware of their apostolic foundation. This explains why they regard themselves as the Churches of the Fathers, for the Fathers just follow the Apostles, in as much as the post-apostolic times are in unbroken continuity with the apostolic times. The central importance given to the Fathers is owing to the fact that they were exceptional witnesses to the whole apostolic faith.

The Church is apostolic, because she keeps on the Apostolic Tradition, the Christian message that was first oral, hence ‘Tradition’, before being written down. By keeping that ‘Rule of life’ within a broader

ecclesiastical tradition, the Church believes that she continues the ministry, the doctrine, and the mission of the Apostles. It does not mean that the Apostolic Tradition should identify truth and customs, but rather that it ensures the constant assistance of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ The Spirit of Truth abides in the Church and makes the Apostolic Tradition an ever-rejuvenating deposit.

As regards the Universal Church, there is no Apostolic Tradition in the abstract but as contained in the existing Individual ecclesial traditions. Hence a Christian can authentically proclaim the Word only within a concrete ecclesial tradition. That is why Pope Paul VI insists on the fact that Evangelization is an ecclesial act (EN 14). Hence, it is only legitimate and reasonable that each Christian lives and proclaims the Word within his individual ecclesial tradition. Thus the Christ-experience or the Apostolic Tradition preserved in the Church becomes normative for living and proclaiming one’s faith.

2. Apostolic Christ-Experience and the Individuality of the Churches

A mere territorial difference is not at all decisive for an Individual Church. It is the human, rather than the territorial, element that has priority, though the territorial organization of the Church does have meaning for an Individual Church. All the Churches have to trace their origin to the apostolic experience of the Risen Lord. The experience of the Risen Lord, presented by the different New Testament writers, reflects the Christ-experience of the respective Individual Churches whom they represent. The Christ-experience represented by each New Testament writings has an Individuality of its own, which in its turn shows that the Church, which is represented by it, has its individuality, which distinguishes it from the others.

As the development of the Individual Church is linked with its origin, the original apostolic experience is decisive for its individuality and growth. The apostolic Christ-experience or the Word does not exist in the abstract but concretely in the particular

liturgical, spiritual, disciplinary and socio-cultural expressions of the faith of the Church. If the original apostolic Christ-experience remains a constituent of every Individual Church through its cultural transmutation through the centuries, the growth of an Individual Church, to be authentic, should be in harmony with those expressions of faith, through which the Apostolic Christ-experience is handed down to the Church.

V. Individual Church and Universal Church

1. The Primacy of the Individual Church in the Ecclesiology of Communion

The Church as Communion comes from the Trinity, reflects the Trinitarian Communion in its diversity and goes toward the Trinity, so that, in the final recapitulation of all things in Christ (Eph 1:10), He may hand her over to the Father in the communion of glory. The ecclesial communion is the place of encounter between the Trinitarian history of God and the history of humankind where one 'story' continually passes on to the other 'story' to transform it and to unify it, and where the events of this world are directed toward their fulfilment in God. Thus, the Church is the place of the covenant and the sign of the Trinity in the time of men, and this demands that the Church must be concretely situated in the world of human becoming. The Trinitarian and Pneumatological rediscovery of the Second Vatican Council leads us to give, in a sense, due value to the Individual Church. For the Individual Church is the community raised up here and now by the divine initiative, operative in the Holy Spirit. The Pneumatological renewal and the rediscovery of the primary value of the Local Individual Church are conjoined and inseparable.

The action of the Spirit, which animates ecclesial communion, in space and time of one concrete historical situation, does not happen invisibly. The Spirit-Event never prescind from the Christ-Event. Rather, it is the actualization of the Christ-Event in the diversity of human events.

The privileged place of the irruption of the Spirit is the Word (Christ-Event), made present in the Liturgy centred around the Eucharist, which is the summit and the source of the life of the Church (SC 10). It is an event of 'Charismatic newness' but, at the same time, it is the continuity of the 'Church's Tradition' ministerially structured. It is the Spirit-Event and at the same time an institution of Christ, faithfully passed on to the Church. It is 'the already' entrusted by the Lord, and, at the same time, the pledge and earnest of 'the not yet', promised by the Lord. In this two fold sense, Pneumatological and Christological, we can understand the affirmations: "The Eucharist makes the Church" and "the Church makes the Eucharist". The Eucharist makes the Church, in so far as the Eucharist is the place of the irruption of the Spirit, which represents the Pasch of Christ and gathers together the humankind in the power of the reconciliation, which is realized in that Pasch. The Church makes the Eucharist, in as much as the Church is the celebrating community, which, in obedience to the Lord's command, gathers itself in accordance with its own ministerial articulation to celebrate the memorial of the new covenant. Thus both Eucharist and Church came to be designated in the Christian tradition with the same term 'the Body of Christ'.

According to the Trinitarian perichoretic principle, the Individual and the Universal Church are inside one another. An authentic Individual Church is the true representation of the one Church in that place. It is wholly the Church, but not the whole Church¹⁶. The Church is universal only by being Individual. It is never a law unto itself, without solidarity with the other Churches throughout the world. It is fully the Church only in communion with the other Churches and with the centre of that communion, the Bishop of Rome.

Perichoresis is the mutual or reciprocal immanence and the abiding of the three Divine Persons. The result of the Perichoresis is that the whole Father is wholly and eternally in the Son and the Spirit¹⁷. Likewise the Individual and Universal

Church are inside one another. The Universal Church is not a federation of locally instituted Churches. The idea of simultaneity of the Individual and Universal is very central. Individual is the basis and content of the Universal. The Individual Church and the Universal Church are not understood by one's being antecedent to the other; they are simultaneous, the one subsisting in the other.

2. Communion and Community

The Communion, by its very nature, is invisible, because it is the Communion with God, the Father through the Son in the Spirit (1 Jn 1:1-4). This communion is on the increase throughout the course of history of which it is the ultimate reason and the final goal. St. Paul presenting the plan of God revealed and realized through Christ - Church - says that the ultimate goal is "*to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth*" (Eph 1:10). At the end, as St. Augustine says, there will be only one Christ, the only Son loving the Father for all eternity¹⁸.

This communion, though invisible by its nature, must yet manifest itself in and through a community, the Church, during the period between the resurrection of Christ and the parousia. Moreover, the community or the Church is the setting through which and in which this communion can be established and expanded. In successive generations of history, the Church will also be the community of Christ's faithful which, by its unity resulting from this communion, will witness before the world that the Father has sent His Son: "*That they may all be one, even as you Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me*" (Jn 17:21). It is through this community that the witness is borne that in the Son, God has reconciled the world to him and has entrusted to the Church the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20).

3. Visible Elements of Communion

If this communion should manifest itself in and through the Community, the Church, it is important

to trace the elements of this communion at the visible level, where the unity of the community has its structure. The summaries of the Acts, where Luke traces the portrait of the first Christian community indicates these elements of communion: "*Those who received his word were baptized... and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*" (Acts 2:41-42). Here we could trace perhaps the most important visible elements of communion in the Church, namely, Faith, the Sacraments and the Hierarchy.

4. Unity in Diversity

Though the elements of communion in the Church, at the visible level, are, the same in all the Churches, their concrete expression differs in the different Individual Churches. Thus, faith is the same in all the Churches. But it is expressed diversely in their Liturgy, Catechesis, Theology and Spirituality and brings in divergent experiences in the various Individual Churches. Similarly the Sacraments are the same in all the Churches. But their celebration differs and it invites the faithful to participate in them in diverse ways according to the practice of the different Individual Churches. Though the hierarchical authority is the same in all the Churches, its exercise varies and takes different structures, proper to the various Individual Churches. The communion among the Churches, therefore, is, and should be manifested in the harmony resulting from recognizing and appreciating mutually the unity in Faith, the Sacraments and the Hierarchy and at the same time, acknowledging and approving the diversity in their expressions.

5. Individual Churches versus the Universal Church

Regarding the relationship between the Universal Church and the Individual Churches, there is a discussion as to the question of priority. Some subscribe to an ontological and temporal priority of the Universal Church¹⁹. But there are others who hold that the Individual Church and the Universal

Church are simultaneous in all their concrete historical manifestations²⁰.

The generative principles of ecclesiality, present in each Individual Church, are of themselves and in themselves necessarily universal; they are, by their very nature, principles of universal communion as well as of universal mission. The Gospel and the Spirit, as 'given and received', the Eucharist and the Ministry as concretely 'realized', and the Communion and Mission as 'exercised' - bear, in themselves, the two dimensions of the Church: ecclesiality and locality. For, these generative elements are never found in abstraction, as some abstract universal 'coming down from a platonic world of ideas', but are always embodied, as a concrete historical, universal reality, successively incarnate in the Individual Churches. The final concrete historical and local (Individual) realization of the Universal Church took place at the Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13).

When speaking of the Dioceses or Particular Churches, the Second Vatican Council speaks of them as formed in the image of the Universal Church "*in which and from which the one and the only Catholic Church exists*" (LG 23). It is quite true of all the Individual Churches. In fact, the Individual Churches are formed out of and in the image of the Universal Church. The Individual Church is, in truth, the Church of Jesus Christ. The Individual Churches and the Universal Church are in a relation of mutuality. They are perichoretically in one another. This means that the structure of the Church cannot be grasped by mere secular categories, and that it belongs to the realm of mystery. It can function only through a miracle and that too through the work of the Holy Spirit²¹.

Thus, linking the priority of the Universal Church to the "historical/Christological line", and that of the Individual Church to the "actual/Pneumatological" line, we might say that the dialectical relationship is one of mutual interiority and intrinsic reciprocity between the Universal and the Individual Church. This mutuality is grounded on the relationship between mission and grace, between the

Christological and the Pneumatological, in some true if analogous way. This relationship would also seem to be one of inevitability and of providential tension, for the building up of the Body of Christ and the Church's mission in and to the world.

From this arises the necessity and the difficulty of reconciling particularity and universality, locality and catholicity, the concrete realization of the Church truly "Catholic", in a local community, in a given society at its particular intercrossing of time and place and culture.

And, yet, it is precisely in and through the mutual reception and communion of the Individual Churches that the Church Universal is realized and the "end term", toward which these processes move, is the communion of all peoples and all nations and all races into a unity that is really Universal or Catholic (Eph 1:8-10).

At times the idea of "Communion of Individual Churches" is presented in such a way as to weaken the concept of the unity of the Church at the visible and institutional level. Thus it is asserted that every Individual Church is complete in itself, and that the Universal Church is the result of reciprocal recognition on the part of the Individual Churches. It is an ecclesiological unilateralism and it impoverishes both the concept of the Universal Church and that of the Individual Church. As history proves, when an Individual Church seeks to become self-sufficient and weakens its real communion with the real Church and with its living and visible centre, its internal unity suffers, and it finds itself in danger of losing its own freedom in the face of various forces of enslavement and exploitation²².

Conclusion

Church as Communion has gained a new vigour in Catholic Ecclesiology due to ecclesiological reflections during and after the Second Vatican Council. The Catholic Church in India has also contributed to this development by developing a theology of Individual Churches in the context of Inter ecclesial dialogues.

The theologians of India succeeded in clarifying the terminology regarding the usage of the terms local, particular and individual Churches. The New Testament witnesses to the existence of distinct ecclesial traditions, which is a key to understand the further development of the Church as Communion of Individual Churches.

Church is a community embodying Christ-experience. The four different ways of carrying out the ministry of the Word in the Church constitute the basis of the diversification of the Individual Churches as expressed in the Catechesis, Theology, Liturgy, Spirituality and Discipline of the respective Churches.

Church as communion reflects the Trinitarian Communion in its unity and diversity. As each person in the Trinity is full in divinity, each Individual Church is full in its ecclesiality. As the communion of the three persons in one reality, Triune God, the communion of the Churches is also one reality, the Universal Church. As each person is Trinitarian, each Individual Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. According to the Trinitarian perichoretic principle, the Individual Church and the Universal Church are inside one another. An Individual Church is wholly the Church, but not the whole Church. It is fully the Church only in communion with the other Churches.

The visible elements of communion are Faith, Sacrament and Hierarchy. These are the same in all the Churches, but their concrete expressions differ according to the different Individual Churches in terms of Theology, Liturgy and Spirituality.

The Individual Churches and the Universal Church are in a relation of mutuality. They are perichoretically in one another. It is in and through the mutual reception and communion of the Individual Churches that the Church Universal is realized.

ENDNOTES

1 Cf. A. Anton, "Post Conciliar Ecclesiology, Expectations, Results and prospects for the Future", in Rene Latourelle (ed.), *Vatican II: Assessment and*

Perspectives, Twenty Five Years After-1962-1987 (N.Y., 1988) 422-423.

2 Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles left behind* (N.Y., 1984) 19.

3 Cf. R.E. Brown, "New Testament background for the concept of Local Church" in *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Annual Convention of CTS* 36 (1981) 9.

4 Col 1:18, 24; Eph 1:22-23; 5:23.

5 Acts 1:5,8; 2:33; 4:8,31; 10:38,44-47; 13:2,4; 15:28.

6 For a detailed study of the different ecclesial traditions in the New Testament Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles left behind* (N.Y., 1984).

7 Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles left behind*, 22-23.

8 Cf. F. Kattenbusch, "Der Quellort der Kirchenidee" in *Festgabe A. V. Harnack* (Tubingen, 1921) 170f.

9 Cf. also 1Cor 14:19, 28, 34, 35.

10 Rom 16:5; 1Cor 16:19; Col 4:15.

11 Cf. L. Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul* (N.Y., 1963) 190.

12 Cf. also Acts 2:15-21; 4:25-28; 8:32-35 etc.

13 Acts 6:7; 11:19-24; 13:48-49; 19:20.

14 Cf. M. Vellanickal, *Understanding of Evangelization in the context of present day India*, (Calcutta, 1974) 39-45.

15 Cf. E.R. Hambye, *Dimensions of Eastern Christianity* (Vadavathoor, 1983) 22.

16 Cf. J.J. Von Allen, "L'Eglise Locale Parmi les autres Eglises Locales", in *Irenikon* 43 (1970) 512.

17 Cf. B.T. Bilanuk, *Theology and Economy of the Holy Spirit; an Eastern Approach* (Bangalore, 1980) 34-35.

18 Cf. In Epist. Joan. Ad Parthes X, 3; PL 35, 2055-2056.

19 Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, (N.Y., Crossroad, 1989) 75; *Call to Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991) 44.

20 Cf. W. Kasper, "From the President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity", in *America* 184 (2001) 28-29.

21 Cf. W. Kasper, "Zur Theologie und Praxis des bischöflichen Amtes", in *Auf neue Art Kirche Sein: Wirklichkeiten-Herausforderungen-Wandlungen* (München, 1999) 42.

22 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Some Aspects of the Church understood as Communion* (Rome, 1991) 12-13.

5

Living Catholicity and Syro-Malabar Church

Dr Thomas Puthukulangara

Introduction

In the liturgy, when we profess the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, we say, “We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”. Since the very founding of the Church, these four attributes have been believed as her identification marks which reflect her essential features and mission. In other words, these four marks are necessary for a Church to be what she must be. Considering the history of the growth of Christian theology we can see that these four marks have had a prominent role in the enrichment of ecclesiology. We know that the word ‘catholic’ is a transliteration of the Greek adverb *kathō’olon* and the relative adjective *katholikós*, with a wide range of meanings such as: ordained to or towards all, pertaining to the whole or universal, general, total, complete, perfect, altogether, as a whole, etc¹. The term is present in classical Greek literature and as indicated by its etymology in the

Greek language, catholicity is primarily a matter of wholeness. Applied to the Church, the term was first of all used by St Ignatius of Antioch. “Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church”². To affirm that the Church is catholic is to say that she is destined by God to embrace the whole humanity.

Here we are aiming to give a concise theological consideration to the catholicity of the Church relating it to the life of Syro Malabar Church. For its elaboration we have two sections: a first part presents various theological concepts related to the notion of catholicity, and a second part proposes some practical suggestions to live more deeply the catholic nature of the Church. While enumerating these features of catholicity we can undoubtedly state that they are verified in the life of the Syro Malabar Church.

PART I

A Theological Approach to the Catholicity of the Church

A complete meaning to catholicity cannot be sought simply in the constitutional or structural clarifications, but must come from the deepest being of the Church. The Church is a mystery; she is the work of the Holy Spirit; she is the place where Christ accomplishes God's plan of salvation. Clement of Alexandria provides a useful systematic description of the Church. "As his [God's] will is work, and this is named the world; so also his counsel is the salvation of men, and this has been called the Church"³. Thus the very existence of the Church is undoubtedly related to the salvation of humanity. Any description of the catholicity of the Church is genuine only if it is enclosed in the history of salvation. Vatican II offers some key concepts to understand the role of the Church in the salvation history. The entire design of salvation springs from the infinite love of God having the Holy Trinity as its origin, model and final destination. This plan has a historical development from the origin of humanity. Finally, God establishes the Church, the new people of God, as the sign and instrument of salvation, providing her with all the means to realize salvation⁴. That means, catholicity as a property of the Church can have its norm and measure in the divine Trinity itself, and it is intended to establish the Church as sign and instrument of salvation, to which all are invited.

1. Catholicity of the Church and Holy Trinity

Vatican II teaches that the Holy Trinity is the origin and model for the life of the Church. Given that the Holy Trinity is both the origin and the ultimate determining factor of the Church, the notion of catholicity should be placed in a Trinitarian context. The relationship between the Trinity and the Church is revealed from a salvific perspective: the salvific will of God accomplished in the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The notion of catholicity unfolds

the Church's intimate relation to Christ and Holy Spirit. In other words, Christ's role of recapitulating everything by his death and resurrection and the Holy Spirit's manifestation at Pentecost event are fundamentally related to the catholicity of the Church. God wants to bring together the whole humanity into the heart of the life of the Trinity. The Old Testament reveals God's intention. "I will bring your offspring from the east and gather you from the west. To the north I will say, give them up; and to the south, do not hold them. Bring my sons from far away, and my daughters from the end of the earth" (Is 43:5-6; cf. 49:12)⁵. The universality of God's salvific will suggested in the Old Testament comes to its full fruition when God establishes a new and eternal covenant with humanity in Christ Jesus⁶. "He [God] wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth" (Tim 2:4). God wishes that this salvation may reach out to all mankind and such a task is entrusted to the Church⁷.

Consequently, the foundation of the Church's catholicity is found in her Christological unity and in her Pneumatological diversity. It confirms that the Church possesses *all the means of salvation* and therefore she is the *universal sacrament of salvation* and she invites *all* to her to be gathered in the salvific unity. This sacramental identity of the Church rooted in the Holy Trinity is kept alive in the Church through the sacramental celebrations. It enables the Church to be the sign and instrument of salvation. The Trinitarian source of catholicity denotes that the Church's 'being catholic' is a divinely guaranteed reality. Every local/individual Church is a bearer of the salvation that God offers to the humanity.

Catholicity therefore belongs to the very nature of the ecclesial reality, before appearing in its temporal and geographical universality. At the same time the Trinitarian theology of catholicity may remain only as an idealist ecclesiology, if unaccompanied by a treatment of its historical and cultural dimensions.

The fact that the Church is catholic because she holds the truth, wholeness, and all the means of salvation demands her to manifest and offer them to the whole of humankind.

2. Catholicity of the Church and its Cosmo-anthropologic Dimension

The concept of catholicity is not without explicit reference to cosmos and humanity. The world is capable of receiving God's gifts. Salvation is a gift involving all of creation and it brings the whole of creation under the realm of influence of the Church and the sacramental economy. The human factor is also a constitutive feature of the catholicity of the Church. This is because the humanity has an important role in bringing back the universe to its Creator. On the basis of God's universal plan to save *all* and of the central fact of Christ's death and resurrection for *all*, grace, though concealed, is active in the whole of human life, in everything that we call human⁸. In other words, the mystery of salvation is implicitly active in human life as a whole⁹. The humanity by virtue of being made in the image of God and therefore with an innate drive to full freedom, "is able to carry with [it] the whole of creation to its transcendence"¹⁰. It happens only in the Church. "The Church constitutes the place where man acts as the 'priest of creation', referring it to God (*anaphora*) in freedom and allowing it to become part of the body of Christ, and thus survive eternally"¹¹.

The various human cultures are not obstacles to the spread of salvation, instead they are the very terrene in which the salvation message is rooted and incarnated. The Church of God is not merely a spiritual reality but she is a historical reality concretely localized. The Church thus demonstrates her catholicity in her capacity of realization in diverse peoples and cultures. Accordingly catholicity is empirically realised in the local/individual Churches' engagement with the world, in their own social, cultural, economic and political context.

3. Catholicity of the Church and Locality

Each local/individual Church is 'catholic', for she possesses the fullness of the faith and means of grace so that she realizes the goal of the Gospel of God in a given place, that is, the reconciliation and transformation of a divided humanity into a humanity willed by God. Catholicity brings into clear perspective the unity, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, made visible in each place in the unity of the local/individual Church. It is not merely a visible summing up of individual believers; rather, it is the visibility of a Christian community which has its highest manifestation as the community celebrates the Eucharist. Thus the openness of the Church to the world, her capacity to overcome the division between races and classes, between cultures and nations, and to join them all again in one unity which takes on the tensions; all this is possible on the road to a catholicity lived and practiced in the local/individual Churches. They exist so that the catholicity of the Church of God takes concrete forms. A careful reflection on the local/individual Church helps us to understand the Church of God as an event in its continuous engagement with the world in geographical, temporal and cultural contexts. This catholicity of the Church related to the life of the local/individual Churches is safeguarded and fostered by Episcopal ministry.

4. Catholicity of the Church and Communion

The Church is destined to spread till the ends of the world. "Christianity was marked in the first few centuries of the great tradition by an authentic concern to combine unity of faith with diversity of praxis and teaching in accordance with the great variety of situations within which the Gospel was received"¹². This spatial-transcending capacity of the Church naturally leads to the birth of various local/individual Churches. The Syro Malabar Church whose origin is traced back to the preaching of St Thomas the Apostle, is aware of her unique apostolic identity and individuality and her communion with the other Churches. Here the catholicity of the Church would result as communion among the Churches, and

its manifestation would be in the harmony resulting from recognizing and appreciating mutually the unity in the one faith, the same sacraments and the same ministries and at the same time acknowledging and approving the legitimate diversities present in their expressions.

The mystery of communion makes the Church catholic. What is realized locally is what is realized universally. That means our understanding of catholicity as communion does not permit any local/individual Church to be closed in herself but rather demands openness towards other local/individual Churches. The relationship between the local Churches and the whole Church is unique. Two false understandings, one that the universal Church results simply from the federation of already existing local Churches and the other that the local Church is simply an administrative subdivision or ‘part’ of the universal Church, should be excluded. Affirming the necessity of the Church of God taking flesh in a portion of humanity is one thing, but it is quite another thing to exaggerate particularism which endangers the catholic unity of the Church. An over-emphasized particularity and local tradition do not open a local Church to other local Churches. There is no local Church which can be conceived in herself independent of other local Churches. Variety becomes richness only if there is unity. Unity, in order to be freed of uniformity necessitates variety. Both are complimentary for being a sign of catholicity. Catholicity of the Church is realised in the richness and multiplicity of the local traditions which bear witness unanimously to a single Truth, which is preserved always, everywhere and by all. Thus communion understood as sign of catholicity makes the Church go beyond all the spatial limits.

5. Catholicity of the Church and Apostolicity

Apostolicity can be described as that aspect of the nature and life of the Church which shows the dependence of the present Christian community on the Church’s foundational origins. The Church in her apostolicity faithfully protects, watches over and

authentically proclaims the Gospel to all the peoples. Thus, apostolic succession guarantees and transmits the Church’s orthodoxy from generation to generation. That means, in order to be ‘catholic’ the Church requires apostolic succession. Hence apostolicity and catholicity are closely related features of the Church since the former guarantees that the apostolic foundation is faithfully present in the subsequent generations. Furthermore it is also important to understand the apostolic succession in an eschatological key¹³. The apostolic succession makes the Church live the simultaneity of past and the future in the present. In this way the Church transcends all the time barriers. The fact that the Church embraces all the times by means of her catholicity is thus guaranteed by her apostolicity and this once again discloses the close relationship that exists between these two marks of the Church. The task of preserving and transmitting the apostolic faith of a community is formally entrusted to the bishop. It is considered that together with the ordained minister the faith life of the community is also fundamental to the apostolicity of the Church. Such an affirmation suggests that apostolicity, as bearer of catholicity in time, includes two inseparable elements: apostolic succession and traditions.

6. Catholicity of the Church and the Eucharist

All the dimensions of the catholicity of the Church – such as the presence of divine Persons in the Church, the transformation of the universe and its perfection by offering it back to the Creator, the unity of all humanity, the assurance of apostolic faith, the missionary outburst, the eschatological expectations – are revealed and realized in the Eucharistic mystery. The Eucharistic community is one of the most important moments where one experiences the catholic nature of the Church, for there all social and natural divisions are overcome just as it would happen in the kingdom of God. Within the celebration of the Eucharist there is a powerful dynamism at work that leads the Christians to perceive themselves as belonging to a gathered people for praising and adoring God. The Eucharist gives a

supra-temporal awareness to the community that those who participate locally in a Eucharistic celebration are involved in close inter-subjective communion with all those who are celebrating the same mystery in other places.

The Eucharist is the body of Christ and it brings the community itself into the body of Christ. It celebrates the unity of the community and it is the foretaste of the kingdom to come. Reflection on the liturgy as an important theological locus is an integral part of the theological reflection on catholicity. It is crucial to the teaching of the Council, “The liturgy, ‘through which the work of our redemption is accomplished’, most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church”¹⁴.

7. Catholicity of the Church and Ministry

The idea that communion manifests the catholicity of the Church includes a concern for unity, its sacramental focus in the Eucharist and the importance of ministerial function particularly that of the bishop. The bishop comes to be the official celebrant of the Eucharist together with the community. He is the guardian of the orthodoxy of doctrine and the heart of unity. He is the authentic preacher of the salvific message. He is the one who brings the authentic presence of his particular Church in the universal Church. That means, the bishop is the minister of catholicity; he is the bearer of the catholicity of his particular Church. Since there is only one Episcopate and all the bishops as successors of the apostles are partakers of the one Episcopate, *in* and *through* the episcopacy the particular Churches are bound to one another in the universal Church. The episcopacy which assures catholicity ‘locally’ demands a similar ministry at the universal level also. Thus ‘the successor of Peter’ becomes the guardian of unity and catholicity of the whole Church. He exercises the primacy precisely as bishop of Rome, as a member of the episcopate.

The Church possesses only one episcopate and as members of this one episcopate the Pope and the bishops together form a college in respect to the universal Church, which is denoted by the term collegiality.

Collegiality is the manifestation of catholicity, in the sense of unity in diversity and diversity in unity. *Lumen gentium*’s application of the notion of collegiality as the expression of the communion of the universal Church is a major achievement of the theology of catholicity. The Council speaks of the dependence of the college of bishops in relation to the primacy. The notion of collegiality presupposes a reciprocal relationship between primacy and the college of bishops. We are yet to have precise indications as to how all the principles regarding primacy and collegiality function together. In other words, many aspects of the relation between primacy and episcopacy are open for further discussion.

8. Catholicity of the Church and Mission

Given that catholicity is related to the saving will of God and mission is a part of the actualization of that saving plan, then catholicity cannot be separated from mission¹⁵. The Church, by virtue of the universal salvific will of the Father, owing to the redemption obtained by Christ for the entire humanity, and due to the assistance of the Holy Spirit, *is* and *should be* opened to all till the end of the world, without any limit of time and space. In *CCC* we read, “As the ‘convocation’ of all men for salvation, the Church in her very nature is missionary, sent by Christ to all the nations to make disciples of them”¹⁶. Her catholicity makes her to offer the *whole* of salvation to the *whole* of the world, because she is the sign and instrument of salvation. In other words, speaking of catholicity related to mission, it helps one to come to a better appreciation of how the Church must cooperate with God in his saving plan in the world. “Only *in* and *through* the visible preaching, administration of sacraments and leadership in the Church the invisible ‘fullness of grace and truth’ manifested and given to the faithful”¹⁷. Since

the Church is sent she cannot be satisfied of and reduced to her *ad intra* liturgical celebrations¹⁸. So the Church is both catholic and missionary; neither of these aspects can be separated from the other. The missionary nature of the Church is not a characteristic attached to her from outside, but, is an inner necessity of her own catholicity¹⁹.

In a theological-Trinitarian perspective it can be maintained that catholicity is a gift given to the Church and fully present in the Church (qualitative catholicity). Considering the same fact in a historical perspective catholicity demands for its complete realization, a principle that animates the mission of the Church (quantitative catholicity). So the catholicity of the Church involves two complementary dimensions, qualitative and quantitative. In a strict historical circle the catholicity of the Church is still to be realised. In this sense we speak of the ‘universality’ of the Church. Her encounter with humanity and cultures is an ongoing mission. The role of inculturation in order to accomplish catholicity in its quantitative dimension should be underlined. In other words, quantitative catholicity requires inculturation as an essential factor for its realization. By the process of inculturation the Church purifies and elevates the cultural elements to receive the Gospel. At the same time she receives to herself cultural elements for the proclamation of the Gospel. The Syro Malabar Church is almost identified with the culture of Kerala. She is aware of the fact that still there is a long way to go. But it should also be noted that as a Church her missionary nature is limited because of the territorial restrictions.

The Church ought to be involved in the world and in its history and this task should be carried out in a vision of the kingdom and its values, which the Church, and only the Church, can offer to the world. This mission of the Church is mainly carried out by the local/individual Churches. The Syro Malabar Church is responding very dynamically to her missionary nature. Her missionary quest is evident from the vast number of her priests and religious working in the various mission centres in India and abroad.

While remaining true to herself, that is, being faithful to Christ and the preaching of the apostles, the Church becomes a visible presence of grace *in* and *for* this world. She is the leaven in the world in its process of renewal in Christ, thus transforming the mankind into the family of God. So she has to respond to the situation of humanity afresh. It is expected that the Church be immersed into the life of the people, their struggles, aspirations and hopes. The mission of the Church should be oriented toward the incarnation of the Church in the life and sufferings of the excluded in their struggle for dignity and rights. Catholicity demonstrates the ability of the Church to touch each person, to embrace each culture with an abundance of love and concern. So the missionary opening-up of the Church to the world is a fundamental condition for her catholicity.

9. Catholicity of the Church and Ecumenism

For a fruitful mission of the Church, unity of the divided Churches is a must. A genuine and authentic catholicity demands a visible manifestation of the unity of faith in communion. Catholicity is fullness in unity. Catholicity makes the Church to acknowledge all the human values with their diversities and to secure the possibility of a full flourishing of these values within the unity of the Church²⁰. A great challenge of catholicity is the preservation of legitimate diversity in the Churches with zealous care for the preservation of unity. It must be articulated with more clarity that communion is expressed in and through the specific identities and contributions of the various local/individual Churches. It will be erroneous to presume that catholic tradition is ecclesiological uniform. Catholicity of the Church involves a unity embracing the diversities of all the local/individual Churches. A deeper reflection and analysis on the motif ‘unity in diversity and diversity in unity’ is long overdue. The relation-ship between catholicity and ecumenism shows that full, visible unity

among the Churches remains an indispensable goal of all the Churches.

10. Catholicity of the Church: Gift and Task

The catholicity of the Church is both a divine gift and a task, something that has to be continually realized through the efforts of those who make up the Church. The task nature of catholicity is evident in her efforts to overcome the divisions and in her ongoing mission of proclaiming the Gospel. The gift-task nature of catholicity is a concrete tension between what the Church effectively is and her longing to be what she is called to be. Thus we can say that on the one hand catholicity points to the totality of saving gifts given to the Church and present in the Church and, on the other hand catholicity denotes also the characteristic tendency of the Church to strive energetically and constantly to bring the whole humanity with all its richness back to Christ her head in the unity of his Spirit.

The task of catholicity involves a profound attitude of openness and comprehension. Any type of particularism and the monolithic inflexibility of certain structures in the Church generate hindrances to catholicity. It is observed that the one-sidedness in certain statements from the part of the non-Catholic Churches and the present ‘*Roman*’ character of the Catholic Church and the privileged place given to latinism create situations which hinder true catholicity. It should also be mentioned that the present limitation of the ‘proper territory’ of the Syro Malabar Church is a clear example for hindrance to catholicity²¹.

The Church’s authentic proclamation of definitive and irrevocable salvation does not cease with the history of mankind. The Church itself is not identified with the kingdom of God; rather she is the sign and manifestation of it and on the way toward its full realisation. Accordingly catholicity should be fully revealed only when the Church enters in the glory of God. But we are invited to live that eschatological experience now itself by the work of the Holy Spirit, especially in the Eucharistic celebration. Thus the

eschatological character of catholicity specifies that both the gift and task dimensions of the catholicity go hand in hand and cannot be seen separately.

Salvation of humanity is the salvation brought by Christ Jesus and proclaimed by the Church. Thus God’s universal will of saving the humanity does not come *without* Christ and his body the Church. This is a mystery. Nothing said about a mystery could ever be exhaustive. This guiding presupposition undergirds the fact that all the dimensions of catholicity that we have mentioned above are indeed mutually complementary and they need each other. It is inadequate to work exclusively with one or two particular affirmations on catholicity, for it may lead to serious imbalances and distortions. Catholicity implies that the Church, having all the means of salvation, is for all men the sacrament of salvation. In other words, the grace of God in Christ, without which absolutely no one finds supernatural salvation in God’s triune life, has its historical and eschatological manifestation in the Church. Catholicity refers to a reality from which the Church derives her life, in which she participates, and on which she is dependent.

PART II

Catholicity of the Church in Action

Catholicity belongs to the Church not as a property of which she is the cause but God is the origin of it. In virtue of the universal salvific will of God, accomplished by Christ Jesus for all, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is and should be opened to the entire creation offering salvation to all in its integrity, till the end of history, transcending time and space limits. In virtue of the same salvific will of God the Church possesses the fullness of revelation and the wholeness of truth, so that she preaches the Gospel in its totality, and she preserves all the means, institutions and ministers for the fulfillment of that mission. Consequently, the Church accepts the plurality of history willed by God and transmits the Gospel of salvation to all cultures, races

and nations. As sacrament of salvation for the world the Church shows that true communion has its manifestation in the unity of heart and mind, because the unity of the Church is based on the unity of faith and of love. Her influence on the world is not based on positions of power, political, social or economical, but on acts of faith and love. She is not tied to any political-social-cultural system of the world and is, therefore, able to collaborate intensively with all men.

The fullness of objective means of salvation that the Church possesses is the strength of her catholicity. The catholic character of the Church insists her to embrace all without prejudice and partiality. That means, catholicity should not be reduced to simply a theological-theoretical concept but must be a reality lived and practiced in the Church. No one is exempted from this task. Pope Paul VI in the encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* exhorts all the faithful that, “The mystery of the Church is not a truth to be confined to the realms of speculative theology. It must be lived so that the faithful may have a kind of intuitive experience of it, even before they come to understand it clearly”. Such an invitation is completely true with the reality of the catholicity of the Church. It is a property of the Church which each and every believer should live.

The idea of flight from the world no longer exists in the agenda of the Church; rather, her mission is to take the world with her in her eschatological expectation of the future, which she is already living through her liturgical life, and thus transforming the world here and now. Such a vision stimulates a commitment to the building up of a better world on earth. The Church cannot see the humanity as two sections: those who belong to the Church and those who do not. We should make visible in all those places where the Church is concretely visible – in the family, in the parish, in the diocese, in the universal Church – the catholic face of the Church. The setting up of this sign is the task of all believers, both laity and clergy, though the bishops are officially responsible for such a task.

It is not mistaken to affirm that Vatican II sought to retrieve the early century’s vision of the Church as local or particular communities gathered for the Eucharist presided by their bishops. The Council affirms that, “It is through the liturgy, especially that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church”²². Pope Benedict XVI remarks that, “The Church is not ruled by majority decisions but rather through the faith that matures in the encounter with Christ in the liturgy”²³. The liturgy ‘builds’ those within the Church as Lord’s temple and empowers the faithful to proclaim Christ. To those outside the community, the liturgy is said to reveal the Church as a sign raised above the nations, under which the scattered sons and daughters of God are being gathered into one. Hence, liturgy, doctrine and practice should interact and interpenetrate in order to formulate genuine concepts of catholicity. Theology might be located within a worshiping and praying community rather than the academy.

Presently we are witnessing tremendous changes in the relationship among humanity, and between man and cosmos. Unfortunately the communitarian spirit is getting lost day by day and individuality is extremely emphasized. In such a situation the mission of the Church is becoming difficult and challenging. Mission for a Christian means to witness to one’s own experience of Christ. The image of the Church as a “talking book” emphasizing not simply the written texts but the community that talks about salvation, as well as the community that embraces the ‘excluded others’, shows explicitly that she is truly catholic. The efforts to promote justice, peace and liberty among people and nations and the striving for a new civilization of love and charity are therefore fundamental perspectives for the Church today, insisted by her catholicity. Nowadays we must also pay special attention to our community which is becoming multi-cultural, multi ethnic, and multi racial. Currently we find a profound difference in the religious attitude of the people. Religion is becoming

an option that one may or may not choose to exercise. Now to be a catholic is voluntary. While remaining faithful to the tradition and teachings of the Church, we must learn ways to theologize in, for and from the present context.

The relationship between man and the cosmos is also moving towards some tragic consequences. The new discoveries, development of science and technology, better living situations, etc. make him blind, at least partially, such that he no longer sees the heavens under the control of God. No longer does he listen to the words about the wonder of God and creation and his responsibility before God. Man sees himself as becoming and developing. Human freedom is interpreted as the autonomy to make of man's life whatever he wants and act as he likes. Can the universe survive much more of man's abuse? It is not to conclude that Christianity will save the environment. It is to say that man, being conscious of his 'priestly' role in the universe can make significant contributions to the betterment of this world. There is a value contained in the Christian doctrine that man is created in the image and likeness of God and his dominion over the universe should be exercised responsibly, and as if it were appreciated, we would not be in the position that we find ourselves today. It is time that the Christian approach to life and creation offer a guide to the desire of contemporary man to develop, control and master the universe. 'Catholic' attitude must characterize our role in this planet. A serious consideration of catholicity of the Church on the basis of its cosmo-anthropological dimension would surely lead to develop a theology of ecology and thus offer valuable suggestions to face the present ecological crisis.

Catholicity involves a living praxis and not mere intellectual reflection. Praxis involves all the dimensions of catholicity without underestimating any one of them. De Lubac says, "For the more lively our sense of them [dimensions of the Church], the greater will be the amplification of our own existence; and this is the

way in which we shall realize fully in ourselves and for ourselves the title of 'Catholic' which we bear as individuals".

We should still grow in applying the 'catholic' paradigm explicitly in the life of the Church. Remaining faithful to the teachings and traditions of the Church, the community of believers – from the pastors to the last of the laity – we must develop, promote, and deploy the aspects, elements and dimensions which give shape to the catholicity of the Church. Liturgy, communion, primacy, collegiality, proper value of local/individual Churches, mission, pluralism in theological thinking, openness to experiences of and by Christians, promotion of Christian liberty, etc. are the fields related to catholicity in need of more orthopraxis. The theology of catholicity requires an overall reflection on all the domains of life which has significance for the Church and in the Church. If not, catholicity may remain as a theoretical mark with multiple interpretations generating continuously theological discussions and nothing more.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cf. G. W. H. Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1978, 690-691.
- 2 Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 8, in A. Roberts – J. Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, Hendrickson Publishers, Massachusetts 2004, 90.
- 3 Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, 1, 6, in A. Roberts – J. Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, 216.
- 4 Cf. *LG* 1, 2, 4, 9; *AG* 2, 7; *UR* 2; etc.
- 5 For more Old Testament references, see Gn 9:8-17; 18:18; Is 24:13-16; 25:6-8; Jer 16:19-21; etc.
- 6 Cf. Mt 8:11; 13:38; 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; Jn 1:1-5; 3:15-16; 11:51-52; Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:15; 1 Tim 2:6; 1 Jn 2:2; etc.
- 7 Cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3, 24, 1, in A. Roberts – J. Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 458. See also *LG* 13/1; *DV* 3.
- 8 The doctrine of the Seeds of the Word can be read here. Cf. *AG* 11; *LG* 17.

- 9 “The mystery of salvation is concretely and actively present wherever man experiences his own existence, even before there is any question of his coming into contact with or becoming a member of the Church”. E. Schillebeeckx, *The Mission of the Church*, The Seabury Press, New York 1973, 75.
- 10 J. Zizoulas, *Preserving God’s Creation: Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology*, in *King’s Theological Review* 13 (1990) 3.
- 11 J. Zizoulas, *The Mystery of the Church in Orthodox Tradition*, in *One in Christ* 24 (1988) 302.
- 12 J. -M. R. Tillard, *Theological Pluralism and the Mystery of the Church*, in C. Geffre – G. Gutierrez – V. Elizondo (eds.), *Different Theologies, Common Responsibility: Babel or Pentecost*, T & T Clark, Edinburg 1984, 65.
- 13 Cf. J. Zizoulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York 1985, 172-181.
- 14 SC 2.
- 15 In fact, the Council in AG 9/1 remarks that, “Missionary activity is nothing other and nothing less than the manifestation of God’s plan, its epiphany and realization in the world and in history; that by which God, through mission, clearly brings to its conclusion the history of salvation”.
- 16 CCC 767. See also AG 2-3.
- 17 J. L. Witte, *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*, in Vorgrimler H. (ed.), *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: Studies in the Nature and Role of the Church in the Modern World*, Sheed & Ward, London 1968, 17.
- 18 Cf. Y. Congar, *Un peuple messianique. L’Église, sacrement du salut: salut et libération*, Cerf, Paris 1975, 84.
- 19 Cf. AG 1.
- 20 Cf. LG 17.
- 21 Cf. M. Vellanickal, *Church: Communion of Individual Churches: Biblico-Theological Perspectives on the Communion Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, St Pauls, Mumbai 2009, 218-219.
- 22 SC 2. ●
- 23 Benedict XVI, *Images of Hope: Meditations on Major Feasts*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2006, 33.

6

Characteristics of Oriental Theology

Dr Joy Karukaparampil

Introduction

Vatican II and even some of the pre-Vatican writings and declarations of the Church encouraged the study of Oriental Theology. Among them *Orientalis Dignitas*,¹ *Orientalis Lumen*,² *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*³ and the resourcement theory of Vatican II deserve special mention.⁴

I. General Characteristics

I.1. Oriental Theology

Oriental Theology is born and developed in the East and in the Far East. It includes the venerable theological traditions of Alexandria, Antioch, Armenia, Persia and Constantinople. The theologies of these Churches have some common features and some specific characteristics. These Churches preserve with love, respect and with theological interest the teachings of the Fathers of the Church.

These Churches make no sharp distinction between theology and spirituality and they commonly accept mysticism as the common heritage of Christian life. They also preserve a deep spirituality based on the Scripture and Fathers of the Churches.

I.2. Process of Theology

Christian Theology, especially the Oriental Theology, is commonly characterized by:

- a. Monotheistic Trinitarianism
- b. Belief in the incarnation of the Son of God from Mary, the mother of God the Son
- c. Primary importance to the Sacred Scripture and Divine Tradition
- d. Importance given to apophatism
- e. The salvation of mankind as the re-entry and healing

The object and conclusions of Oriental Theology are not different from other theological traditions, but the difference is in the process of theologization.

In the West, theology is a sublime act of the intellect of man - a faith seeking understanding. The Oriental Theology gives importance not to the process of knowing the Divinity by the intellect but to the process of experiencing the Divinity by the inner man. The Oriental Traditions reasonably follow this method because of the inaccessible nature of the

Divinity-the Triune God. Divinity is a mystery and remains as a mystery. He reveals Himself and at the same time remains hidden in and through the types and symbols in the Scripture and in the Nature. This self revelation of the Godhead reaches its fullness in the incarnation of the second Person of the Divine Trinity. When this experience of the self revelation of the Divine Trinity in Christ, substantiated in the Word of God and put into the categories of symbols and imageries, forms theology. So Oriental Theology can be defined as the scientific explanation of the Christian experience of the Divine Mystery of the Triune God fulfilled in Christ, continuing in the Church, based on faith. Though it is fully revealed, the human intellect cannot fully comprehend it but the inner man can experience it.⁵ So, Oriental Theology is not *fides quaerens intellectum* but *fides adorans Mysterium*. In this process, theology is not an effort to know God but to experience Him. It is a gazing at the mystery of the Trinity and the sacramental understanding of the salvific activity of God in faith.

1.3. The Object of Theology

Since God is mystery and remains as mystery, He cannot be the object of theology. But the object includes:

1. The self revelation of the Divinity. This is the salvific action of the Triune God realized in Christ and its continuation in the church.
2. Man experiences this revelation and responds to it in faith. So the experience of the revelation of God is the main object of theology.

These two factors, the salvific activity of God and man's response are not the 'material objects' of theology. It is a call from God and man responds to it. This is a dynamic process of revelation of the descending God and ascending man to be in the glory of God.

1.4. Concept of God

When Oriental Theology speaks of God, it is Godhead - the Triune God - Father, Son and the

Spirit of Holiness who are one in essence and undivided. The Triune God is three unconfused and distinct divine persons who share the same divine essence which is uncreated, immaterial and eternal. In the Triune God, the Father is the eternal source of the Godhead. From this Father, the Son is eternally begotten and the Spirit of Holiness proceeds eternally.

Accepting the Christological doctrine of Babai the Great, the Easterners follow the syriac way of explaining the Trinity.⁶ In the Holy Trinity there is one *kyânâ*, three *qnôme* and three *parsôpe*. It is the same *parsôpe* of a *qnôma* that makes it known as Father not as Son and the Spirit of the Holiness. These three *parsôpe* are paternity, Filiation and procession. They are not accidents as in the creatures. So he makes a concrete explanation that when it is said Father is a *qnôma*, the *parsôpe* of paternity is included in this *qnôma*.

The persons in the Trinity have the same *kyânâ* of Divinity and at the same time three persons having three *parsôpe*. One person in the Trinity is related and fully present in the other two persons. This mutual relation among the three persons is explained by the theory of Perekhoreis⁷. For the Easterners this unity of the Triune God is the conclusion; but for the Westerners it is the starting point⁸. In the West the theology of the unity of the Godhead is a presupposition and in the East it starts from an experience of the three persons and moves to affirm the divinity and unity⁹. Based on the relation between the three persons the cappadocians taught on the triplicity of equal *hypostases* (persons) and the identity of the divine *ousia* (substance) comes second in the order of their minds¹⁰. St Ephrem explains this in the Hymns on Faith through the symbol of sun, rays and heat. The experience of the Spirit leads to Christ and in Christ man experiences the Father¹¹.

1.5. Double Source Theory

Even before the teachings of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) on the two sources of theology,¹² S. Scripture and the Divine Tradition, the Oriental

Theology accepted these two as equal sources of theology. There are some churches which assert that there is only one source and continues to say that in the beginning there was only an oral tradition and in turn it took the written form. They conclude that the S. Scripture is simply a part of the Divine Tradition¹³.

The oriental Churches agree that they are two different sources of theology and they are the legitimate expressions of the ultimate authority - the disclosure of God. They complement each other¹⁴ with equal weight and authority and they stand as the equivalent sources of Dogma and of supernatural life¹⁵. The Eastern churches do not accept the theory of the origin of one from the other, but they do not deny their mutual influence in their formation. They are pure and unadulterated truth established by Christ for the salvation of man¹⁶. The Sacred Scripture is the written form of the reality of the self revelation of the Triune God. It does not mean that it contains the whole Truth of revelation. So it is not proper to believe that the written form is the perfect and full experience of the revelation. The same conclusion can be applicable to the Divine Tradition also. It is the interpretation and explanation of the experience of Revelation. By divine protection this experience of the revelation is protected in the oral and written form and in the exhortations and teachings of the church. This can be Apostolic and Ecclesial and it is transmitted in the church through the teachings and liturgy of the church. The Tradition after the apostolic period is an active process of Tradition that which formed the church, in which the whole church is in process. So the Divine Tradition of/in the church is not an object which we possess but a reality by which we are possessed¹⁷. So the content of the Scripture and the Tradition is the same, Christ the incarnate Son. The Tradition transfers not Christ from one to another but the one who transfers the church to his glory through his life death and Resurrection.

1.6. Two Approaches

The approach in the Oriental Theology is different from the methods in other theological

traditions. In the West the theological pattern is creation-fall-redemption while in the Oriental approach is creation-*theosis* or deification; the former one is legal and the latter is mystical in approach.

This approach in the Western theology is based on St Augustine's interpretation of Saint Paul and insisted on a legal relationship of man with God. In turn, this approach resulted in the doctrine of justification. The influence of this is clear in the Western Ecclesiology, Canon Law and in the theology of Ministry¹⁸ whereas the Oriental Theology follows the mystical approach on the basis of apophatism, *theosis*, eschatology, etc.

1.7. The Created World

The material world is the free and loving act of the Triune God *ex nihilo*¹⁹. God alone has the self existence and everything has existence through him and in the words of Athanasius the creature exists by "grace of His grace, His will and his word... so that they even cease to exist if the creator so wishes"²⁰. The creation does not in any way limit the essence and the Being of God. At the same time, the creation is distinct from God, and it is worthy of God's love and concern and fundamentally is very good. So Meyendorff writes "Because God is what he is, He is not determined or in any way limited in what he does, not even by His own essence and being"²¹ and he continues to say that "the proper movement of nature, however, can be fully itself only if (it) follows its proper goal (*skopos*) which consists in striving for God entering into the communion with Him, and thus fulfilling the logos or divine purpose through which and for which it is created"²².

1.7.1 The Sacramental Character of the Nature

The created world depends always in its relationship with the Creator. The creation, together with that of the Scripture, acts as the two witnesses of God. They are not evidence of the existence of God but they are full of types and symbols²³ which points towards Christ and hence to God²⁴. So the

created nature is not to be considered as objects but they are invitations to experience God. Man has to experience, through the 'luminous eye', the sacramental character of the natural world to contemplate on the mystery of God.

Jacob of Serugh explains the revelation through the created nature as the continued divine act of creation²⁵ and in them the divine force inhabits. St Ephrem explains the natural world as the witness of God together with the S. Scripture. They are two harps in the hands of God filled with the hidden power²⁷. The aim of this natural world is to be always thankful to the Creator and to praise him²⁸. This is to experience the presence of God and to raise the mind and heart to the high and to experience the loving and continuing act of God in and through the natural world. The duty of man is to discern the aim of God in creation, to experience him and to be a mystic in the normal life. Man has to develop this thought through his own response to the Divinity in faith. This changes the thoughts of man to see and experience this sacramental character of the material world.

1.7.2 Creation of Man

Man is a special creation of God²⁹. He is created with freedom and in complete union and harmony with the Creator, universe and also with his fellow being. In order to show the perfect harmony in God, the Oriental Theology agrees with St Ephrem that he is created in glory, and that his tripological nature- body, soul and the spirit - relates to the three persons in the Triune God³⁰. The creation of man was only a timely act in history. Before his creation and of the material world, man was conceived in God; so he was old in conception and young in creation³¹. Creation of man in glory in the intermediary state of earthly Paradise shows his potential to enter into the eschatological paradise. The personal rejection of this invitation deprived him of the garment of glory and he was forced to wear the cloth of shame and hence he was expelled from paradise. The Son of Man puts on humanity to help the first Adam to re-enter into the most glorious eschatological paradise.

This picture of the creation and re-entry of man point to the fact that man is created to be the partaker of the glory of God in and through the incarnate Son of God - Christ himself³². This is at the same time a growth in his journey from the image to the likeness to be the full participant in the divine life - in *eschaton*.

1.7.3. Salvation

The quality of man is that he is created as a young child endowed with the potential for perfection³⁴ - to be the partaker of the glory of God. In order to lead back to the lost glory, man needed the Son of God and in the words of Athanasius his incarnation was to divinize him. Based on this, Oriental Theology explains salvation in terms of re-entry, healing and deification etc.

The second Adam, the Son of Man came, and opened the door and allowed man to re-enter into the paradise - i.e., into the Church to eat the fruit of the tree of life as a foretaste to enter into the more glorious paradise than that of the earthly paradise to which he was originally created for. This partaking of the glory of God is understood in terms of the mystical union-theosis or divinization, which is the goal of theology.

Eastern Theology is faithful and clear in explaining the mystical union. The Holy Trinity is the communion of three divine persons. The created nature of man cannot have a union with the essence of the H. Trinity³⁵. In order to explain this, Oriental Orthodox Theology speaks of two modes of divine existence: in His essence and outside His essence. The uncreated divine energies represent the mode of existence of God outside His inaccessible essence³⁶. They proceed from His very nature and are inseparable, just as the rays of sun would shine out from the solar disk, whether or not there were any beings capable of receiving its light³⁷. In salvation man becomes a partaker of this uncreated energies³⁸ and not of the essence of the Triune God.

Salvation is again explained in terms of incarnation. Incarnation is the core and cause of

salvation of man. Man can reach this participation in two ways: through his own effort and through the sacraments of the Church³⁹. The aim of incarnation is man's deification. In the economy of salvation, God the Father has given man his own life (Jn 10, 10) in and through his only begotten Son which cures and transforms the human life. This new life is shared with us through the Death and Resurrection of the Son. The Cross is the new tree of life in the new garden - the Church. The fruit of this tree is the Eucharist - the medicine of life/coal of fire⁴⁰. The medicine cures and enlivens man to be a partaker of the divine life. So Oriental Theology gives importance to the orthopraxis - the right praxis - of the liturgical life especially, the celebration of the Eucharist where through the body and blood, the risen Christ himself provides immortality to the human being. In each liturgical celebration, the sacraments are the continued salvific work of the Triune God through the Son in the Spirit. So each sacrament is both incarnation and Pentecost at the same time. The participation in the life of Christ in the sacraments in the Church is the beginning of the divinization. The Christian life, life in the Spirit - is a style of the experience of the Risen Christ in the Spirit and it is the starting point of the full participation in the glory of the Triune God.

II

After having gone through the general features in brief, now we deal with the specific characteristics of Oriental Theology.

2.1. Trinitarian

The source and the basic theme of the Oriental Theology is the Triune God⁴¹. This does not mean that the Triune God is the object of theology but it is the self revelation of the Holy Trinity in history and its continuation in the Church and in her activities. The Holy Trinity is the beginning, model, mission and aim of the Church. The pilgrim Church is modeled after the Trinity and moving towards the glory of the Trinity. So the beginning, the way and the aim of theology is also the Holy Trinity⁴². The Triune God

is the basis of Christianity and the Church and it is the source and model of the Christian life. Hence the basic theology is Trinitarian and all the other theological disciplines are derived from this.

2.2. Pneumatological

Oriental Churches give due importance to the Spirit of Holiness (*rûhâ d' qudsâ*) in theology and in the life of the Church. Christ is the agent and fulfillment of the self revelation of God. At the same time the Spirit concretizes and makes present Christ in the Church more concretely in the liturgy. The earthly life and the whole salvific actions of Christ were always with the Spirit and even the resurrection of Christ was in the Spirit and after the resurrection he became the life giving spirit (1Cor 15, 45).

Oriental Theology defines Christian life as a life based on the personal experience of the Risen Lord in the Spirit of Holiness. In terms of the Spirit of Holiness this theology defines also the Church, the salvation and the activities of the Church. In the liturgy, the Orientals give more importance to the Epiclesis, the invocation and the hovering of the Spirit. This is based on the emphasis given to the sending of the Spirit as the fruit and fulfilling of the Christ event. Oriental Theology makes a subtle difference in the works of Christ and that of the Spirit. In the salvific actions of Christ it is related to the human nature as a whole, whereas the action of the Spirit concerns person - applied to each one in the singular. And again Christ is the icon of the Father and his image is common to the whole human nature but at the same time the Spirit grants his grace to each person.

The Spirit of Holiness is understood in relation with Christ and Christ is fully understood in the Spirit of Holiness. The Spirit sanctifies the faithful and the whole Church to the glory of Christ. So the Spirit is also the agent of the eschatological nature of the Church. Though pneumatology is considered as a separate theological discipline, it is always understood with Christology. Christology is fully understood when it is explained in the pneumatological language.

This is called the pneumatological Christology⁴³.

2.3. Scriptural

Sacred Scripture is one of the two main sources of theology and it is the written form of the self-revelation of the Trinitarian God in history. It is the written form of Tradition and it remains as the unchangeable criterion in the life of the Church and theology. The interpretation and meditation of the Scripture is Theology. In this way the Oriental Theology can be called scriptural⁴⁴. But the interpretation of the S. Scripture should not be an exposition of one's own opinion (2 Pt 1, 20). It should be based on the commentaries and homilies of the Fathers. Their biblical commentaries are the interpretation of the Scripture in the proper cultural background and in the original language. This does not mean that Oriental Theology denies new scriptural interpretations. But it teaches that any scriptural commentary based on new researches in scriptural texts cannot be at total variance with the patristic understanding of the texts.

In Oriental Theology for the interpretative study the Syrian Churches follow the peshitta version of the Scripture. It is formulated and written in the Semitic - Mesopotamian cultures where Christ was born and Christianity grew in the early centuries. This version of the Scripture throws light on the meaning of the symbols and types used in the Scripture.

The Gospel in written form is considered as the icon of Christ. Generally this Holy Text is put on the right side of the Holy Altar during the Eucharistic celebration symbolising Christ's position on the right side of the Father. Scripture represents the living word of God and through it Christ speaks directly to the hearers. So traditionally Holy Scripture is covered in the fine and decorated cloth or kept in golden caskets.

2.4. Typological and Paradoxical

Symbolic theology using the types and symbols in Sacred Scripture and in the Nature is a

characteristic of Oriental Theology. The human intellect is incapable of comprehending the full theological meaning of the mystery of God⁴⁵. So God reveals himself in and through the types and symbols in Nature and in the Scripture. They are not signs of what is absent but symbols of what is present. The typological exegesis of the Sacred Scripture is special to the Syriac Theology. Ephremian theology is characterized by this method. This method helps:

1. to go deep and experience the theological meaning of the Scripture,
2. to provide a relation between the two Testaments, and
3. to develop a mystical theology where less importance is given to the rational categories.

Most of the theological concepts in the Oriental Theology are based on and derived from the typological method⁴⁶. The following examples substantiate it.

2.4.1. Christ the Divine Physician

Christ is presented as the healer or physician in the context of salvation where it is explained in terms of healing the sickness of sin⁴⁷.

Saint Ephrem explains this theme in the context of the fall of the first Adam and Eve and their return to the Paradise. After hearing the words of the Satan and eating the prohibited food they became sick and the earth produced thorns and bushes. The incarnate Son assumed humanity and preached the good news and gave the food of life in contrast to the poisonous word and food of death. Here the salvific works of Christ and its continuation in the Church represent the process of curing. Christ is the healer who distributes the life-giving Word and Eucharist which is the medicine of life.

2.4.2. Adam's side and Christ's side

The first Eve came out from the side of the first Adam (Gen 2, 21-22). She was a type of the Church and she gave birth to death and pain in the

world. Christ, the second Adam, allowed Himself to be opened on his side and from there came blood and water (Jn 19, 34)⁴⁸. It is the type of baptism and Eucharist, referring to the church. In baptism one enters into the community of the faithful and is nourished by the Eucharist. The cross of Christ is the antitype of the sword of the Cherubim who closed and guarded the gates of the Earthly paradise⁴⁹. The cross opened the closed paradise and allowed the faithful to enter into the eschatological paradise. At the same time, the Church has to wait for her full glorification in the eschaton.

2.4.3. Crossing the River of Jordan

This is the type of the baptism in the NT. This is a theological explanation of understanding the sacrament of baptism as a re-entry into the community of Christ. It is the preparation for the eschatological paradise, rather than only a preparation for the remission of sin.

In this way of symbolic and paradoxical interpretation of the types and symbols in the Scripture, Nature and in the Church moves from the literal and moral meaning to the theological understanding of the Scripture. The symbols are helpful in explaining the mysteries of God. Through the symbolic actions and languages, the Scripture explains the mysterious manner in which God made Himself present through the historical person, events and actions of Jesus Christ.

The paradoxes like the shepherd becoming sheep, the farmer becoming wheat, rich becoming poor, great becoming small etc. lead to the theological depth of the scriptural passages. The use of these symbols and paradoxes from the Scripture, Tradition and Nature explain also the goal of man - salvation - theosis.

2.5. Ecclesial

The ecclesial character of the Oriental Theology is related to the aim of theology and the person of the theologian. The theologian is one of the members in

the community of the faithful - the Church. He does not stand alone and above the faithful. But he has to follow and foster the faith of the Church and the Tradition of the Church. His task is to deepen the faith and build up the Church. So in teaching he has to follow the paths of the Fathers, to teach from faith to the faith (*min hymânûsâ al hymânûsâ*). The Oriental Theology follows this method and teaches that theology is not simply an intellectual exercise but it is an experience of the Divine and it is for the faithful⁵⁰.

2.6. Liturgical

In the theological tradition of the oriental Churches they well practiced and illustrated the theological dictum 'lex orandi, lex credendi'. The Oriental Theology affirms and teaches that the faith and dogma come second to prayer. Prayer and hence, the liturgy, is the celebration of the salvation history realized in Christ. These doxological prayers of the Church are found in the writings of the Fathers and in the early Church documents. So the Oriental Theology considers the liturgy of the Church as the source of theology second to Sacred Scripture⁵¹.

2.7. Patristic

The patristic character of theology is common to the theologies of the West and the East. In Oriental Theology, the teachings and writings of the Fathers and the early documents have a special importance in the formulation of theology and its development through the centuries. The content of the writings of the Fathers are the first interpretations of the Scriptures and their backgrounds are the prevalent liturgical practices of the early Church. They are also the official and authentic teachings and exhortations given to the Christian communities. The orthodox teachings of the Fathers were the background of all the seven ecumenical councils which formulated the foundations for the fundamentals of faith declarations of the Church. So this theology is patristic in content and nature.

2.8. Apophatic

Oriental Theology in her doctrine on God maintains both the transcendent and immanent nature of God; God is both revealed and hidden at the same time. This mystery character of the Godhead cannot be defined by the human intellect and in human language⁵². So in the faith life and in the liturgical prayers, Oriental Theology always maintains the awesome and transcendental nature of God. Based on this special thought, Oriental Theology follows the apophatic method - the way of negation in theology⁵³. The Capadocians and Saint Clement of Alexandria teach that man can experience and relate to God more by saying what God is not rather than saying what God is. This method in theology explains the way man can experience the Divinity now, the fulfillment of which is in future⁵⁴.

God is totally and wholly another existence. He is inconceivable and beyond human comprehension⁵⁵. Any positive word to denote the qualities of God is in vain, but the way of negating the positive aspects will help to experience the absolute mystery of God and to comprehend it. This is the way of knowing God through unknowing. Based on this, Oriental Theology tries to explain the mystical union of man - theosis - with God as a process. So Gregory of Nyssa and pseudo - Dionysius explain the goal of this method and compare it to the ascent of Moses on Mount Sinai⁵⁶. This method of experiencing God through the method of negation safeguards the transcendental and immanent nature of God and the potential of man to attain his mystical union with God.

2.8. Mystical and Eschatological

Theological knowledge is basically a mystical rather than a rational reflection. Gregory of Nyssa explains this mystical experience thus: 'the blessed are not those who know something about God but having God in life'. Evagrius of Pontius says that 'the theologian is the one who prays and the one who prays is a theologian'. So theology and theological thoughts are above human language and the empirical level. Emphasizing this aspect, Isaac of

Niniveh opines that 'the faithful theologian teaches always the language of the world to come'. Theology is to be practiced in the Christian life and its goal is to attain the mystical union with God. Here the salvation is not understood in terms of justification but as a mystical union with God, and Incarnation is the cause and basis of this mystical union⁵⁷. This special character points to the eschatological nature of Christian life.

2.9. Monastic and Spiritual

The Oriental Theology finds no distinction between spiritual theology and monasticism. Monasticism originated first in the East and later it was transferred to the West. For the Easterners, monasticism is the very soul of Church. A monk's life is personally related to the word of God, through which he is called and with the Eucharist with which he is nourished. The life of a monk is compared to the pre-fallen state of life of Adam and Eve in the earthly paradise which was marked by the companionship with God. The Monk shines in the world as a sign of the world to come, a radical witness to the eschatological life and an icon of the glorified Christ.

2.10. Icon Theology

Iconography and icon theology originated in the Byzantine Church. The artistic character of Oriental Theology is depicted in and through the science of iconography.

Icon theology originated and developed in the Incarnation theology. In the Incarnation, Christ became the true and visible Icon of the Father. So icons are holy pictures which represent the Incarnation and serve as symbols of Truth. These holy pictures are painted either by priests or monks or by a baptized person after intense preparation through fasting and prayer. Hence the icons become visual theology which express the experience of the spiritual man. They are painted on the basis of the teachings of the Fathers and the Divine Tradition of the Church. The purpose of the icons is to teach the faith and to hand

down it to the following generation. In theology, icons serve symbolic, catechetical, liturgical and aesthetic purposes.

Icons are venerated and this devotion is directed to the One whom it represents. This is described as “the manifestations of man’s spiritual power to redeem creation through beauty and art... part of the transfigured cosmos⁵⁸.”

In the oriental orthodox theology, iconographer is equated with a theologian. Both serve the same purpose of the propagation and deepening of faith in Christ. Both theology and icons have the same source of thought, the self revelation of God in the Incarnation of the Son.

Icons are sacramental symbols and they are compared to the sacraments. Icons, like the sacraments, are external and efficacious signs through which the grace of the Lord is conferred and the person of Christ, B. V. Mary, saints and the angels are personally experienced.

Oriental Churches find a close similarity between the Gospel and the message of the icons; icons are said to be ‘the scripture of the poor’. In the Sacred Scripture the revelation of God is expressed in words and icons are ‘visual aids’ and serves the same purpose in an artistic manner though colors⁵⁹.

Another important feature of the icon is that it proclaims the eschatological character of the Church and the future glory of the faithful. Icons praise God as Creator and Redeemer. Icons of Mary, saints etc. points to the future glory of man and the universe and they invite the faithful to have the anticipated experience of the future glory in the earthly life itself. Icons are pictures in a unique style which seek to convey the heavenly and open the door to eternity.

2.11. Ecological

The Oriental Theology recognizes the spiritual significance of the created world. Nature is one of the witnesses of God and this theology evaluates the

nature of the material world in its sacramental character. The types and symbols in nature serve as efficacious and external symbols which lead to the Creator. The hidden power behind the created Nature helps him to grow in faith and to see the world with a luminous eye. The created world is a gift from God and man has to be responsible in using it⁶⁰. This creates in man a spiritual outlook to experience the spiritual value of the material world. This revolutionary way of seeing Nature will create a sense of wonder, praise, gratefulness and prayer, and eventually lead to a mystical outlook⁶¹. This ecological vision in Oriental Theology is an answer to the ecological challenges and problems in the contemporary world.

2.12. Mariology

The Mariology of the Eastern Church is based on the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, especially of saint Ephrem, and saint John Damascene. In the early liturgical prayers, the Church believed and affirmed the faith in Blessed Virgin Mary⁶². Almost all the Marian dogmas defined in the Church through the centuries have their basis in the prayers of the Eastern Churches.

Mary is understood only in relation to Christ and Mariology in relation to Christology. The East Syrian Church does not directly call Mary the mother of God; she is called ‘the mother of the Son of God the Father’ or ‘the Mother of God the Son’. This is the same as *Theotokos*. See Elias of Jerusalem (and Damascus) of the 9th century⁶³ and the profession of faith of Iso-yahb, the Archbishop of Nisibis.⁶⁴

The Oriental Churches and their theology affirm the perpetual virginity and sinlessness of Mary. This belief went deep through recitation of the liturgical prayers⁶⁵. Through the definition of the feast of *sûnâÿâ* by Pius XII in 1950, the faith in the corporal Assumption of our Lady, the Church defined what the Fathers taught and what the faithful prayed in the liturgy of the hours⁶⁶.

The theological study on the Eve-Mary

typology is a valuable theological contribution of the Oriental Churches. This typological study imitated by Justin the Martyr and Irenaeus and an elaborated by Saint Ephrem.⁶⁷

The Mariology of the Oriental Churches originated and developed through the writings of the Fathers and through the liturgical prayers of the Church and remains as the basis for the Marian theology of the whole Church.

Conclusion

The Oriental theological tradition stand as a distinct branch of theology and serves as one of the sources for the other theological traditions. Oriental Theology remains unique in her theological speculations, process of theologization and in presentations. It is basically Trinitarian and hence it is mystical and its goal is *theosis*. Here theology is not simply an intellectual act but a mystical experience of God and a life style of the faithful in the Church.

ENDNOTES

1. Apostolic Letter of Pope Leo XIII, *Acta* 14, 1894, 358-370. In this letter Pope recalls the esteem and concrete help which the Holy See has given to the Eastern Churches and its willingness to safeguard their specific qualities.
2. Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II promulgated on May 2, *Acta* 87, 1995, 745ff; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rites, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 21 November 1964.
4. *Oriente Lumen*, 1.
5. Lossky, V, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, NY 1997.
6. Babai Magni Liber de Unione, Parisiis, J. Gabaldi, "Bibliotheca Scriptorum Syrorum, series secunda", T. LXI Rue Bomaparte 9, 1925; *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (CSCO)*, 79, 80 (Louvain) 1915 (Text and Translation). Quoted in Placid J. Podipara, *Mariology of the East*, OIRSI 91, Kottayam 1980.
7. This Greek word means, 'move around', 'sit around' etc. Saint John Damascene is the one who first used this term to explain the unity and mutual indwelling of the three divine persons in the Trinity. Later this theory was accepted in theology and defined by the church in the council of Florence in 1442. "On account of this unity the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son" DS 1331.
8. Boniface, H, "The Filioque Question", 78; also A. Walker, "Andrei Rubylov's Icon of the Trinity", *Diakonia* 11, 1976, 116. Quoted in Kallarangattu Joseph, *The Holy Spirit, Bond of Communion of the Churches. A Comparative Study of the Ecclesiology of Yves Congar and Nikos Nissiotis* (Roma 1989) 27. cfr. Archbishop Michael, "Orthodox Theology", *The Greek Theological Review*, 3, Summer 1957.
9. Kallarangattu, J, *ibid*, 26-27.
10. Parker, T, "The Political Meaning of the Doctrine of the Trinity" *Journal of Religion*, 60, 1983, 3.
11. Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 40, 1; 73, 1; 72, 2-3. For further study cfr. Beck, E, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre im Bild von Sonne/Feuer, Licht und Wärme*, CSCO 425; sub 65, Louvain 1981.
12. Philip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol 2 Grand Rapids 1985, 13.
13. "The agreed statement adapted by the Anglican-Orthodox joint Doctrinal Commission at Moscow, 26 July to August 1976" in *Anglican - Orthodox Dialogue*. K. Ware and C. Davey, eds., London SPCK 1977, 84. K. Ware, "The Exercise of Authority in the Orthodox Church" *Ecclesia kai Theologia*, 1981, 946-947.
14. *Ibid*.
15. Konstantinidis, C, "The Significance of Eastern and Western Traditions within Christendom" in *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. C. Patalos (Geneva WCC, 1978) 222.
16. Archbishop Michael, "Orthodox Theology" *The Greek Theological Review* 3, Summer 1957, 13; 1962 Almanac, New York: Greek Diocese of North and South America 1962, 195.
17. Kallarangattu, J, and Sr. Sophy Rose CMC, *Deivasastrathinu Oru Amugham* OIRSI 188, Kottayam 1996, 22-24.
18. This approach in theology is seen also in some of the protestant churches. In this juridical understanding Christ fulfills the law in place of sinners and taking upon himself it's just penalty in their behalf. See, Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith - A Matter of*

- Death and Life*, Philadelphia 1982, 43
19. *Hymns on Virginity*, 20, 12. Jacob of Serugh is more clear in explaining this theme: “The Father made the sign, and the Son created and the spirit perfected And the world came up in a Trinitarian way from nothing” cfr. *Homiliae selectae Mar Jacobi Sarugensis*, Vol III ed. P. Bedjan, Paris Leipzig 1905, 13, 15-16.
 20. Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, I, 20; PG 26, 55A.
 21. Meyendorff J, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York 1983, 130.
 22. Ibid, 138.
 23. Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 20, 12; 9, 2; *Hymns on Paradise*, 5, 2.
 24. Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, 5, 2; *Hymns on Faith* 4, 9; 35, 1; 45, 1; *Hymns on Virginity*, 1, 3-5; 8, 3. Brock S, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian*, Michigan 1992, 53-60.
 25. *Homiliae selectae Mar Jacobi Sarugensis*, Vol III, ed. P. Bedjan, Paris Leipzig 1905, 52, 6-11; V, 369, 2.
 26. Ibid, IV. 553, 20.
 27. Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 29, 1-2; *Hymns on Paradise*, 5, 2.
 28. Saint Ephrem explains further: “While I live I will praise, and not as if I had no existence; I will give praise during my life time, and will not be as someone dead among the living. For the man who stands idle is doubly dead, The earth that fails to produce defrauds him who tills it” (*Nisibian Hymns*. 50, 1).
 29. *Nisibian Hymns*, 28, 8; 69, 1-2; *Hymns on Faith*, 67, 19; 80, 3. A detailed study of this theme is in Bou Mansour. T, “La liberté chez saint Ephrem le syrien”, *Parole de l’Orient*, 11, 1983, 89-156; 12, 1984, 3-89. Cfr. Paikkatt Mathew, *Life Glory and Salvation in the Writings of Mar Aprem of Nisibis*, OIRSI 245, Kottayam 200, 1 29-33.
 30. Paikkatt Mathew, *ibid*, 24-35.
 31. Saint Ephrem, *Nisibian Hymns*, 38, 8-9; *Hymns on Church* 47, 9-11. Aphrahat also refers to this theme; *Demonstrations* 22, 7; cfr. *Patrologia Syriaca* I, 797; Pierre. M. J, *Aphraate le Sage Persan*, II, P. 736. no. 15.
 32. “The Word of God came in His own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father, Who could recreate man made after the Image. In order to effect this re-creation, however, He had first to do away with death and corruption. Therefore He assumed a human body, in order that in it death might once and for all be destroyed, and that men might be renewed according to the Image (of God)” St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54
 33. John of Damascus taught: “the expression according to the image indicates rationality and freedom, while the expression according to the likeness indicates assimilation to God through virtue”, *On the Orthodox Faith*, II, 12 (PG 94, 920b). T. Ware argues that the image means that “we are God’s ‘offspring’ (Acts 17, 28), His kin; it means that between us and Him there is point of contact, an essential similarity”, He continues that the image, then, refers to that aspect God placed in people from the beginning. Likeness, on the other hand, is a goal toward which they must aim. He concludes, “However sinful a man may be, he never loses the image; but the likeness depends upon our moral choice, upon our ‘virtue’. And so it is destroyed by sin”. *The Orthodox Church*, England 1963, 224.
 34. The Orthodox Church follows this teaching of Iranaeus who believed that “Adam was a child, not yet having his understanding perfected. It was necessary that he should grow and so come to his perfection”. Iranaeus, *Demonstrations of the Apostolic Preaching*, 12 quoted in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed., London 1968, 171.
 35. Lossky V, *Mystical Theology*, 69-70.
 36. Lossky. V, *Mystical Theology*, 73.
 37. Vladimir Lossky uses this imagery to explain the possibility and nature of mystical union of man with the Triune God. *ibid*, 74.
 38. The Orthodox Oriental theology call this ‘synergism’ - joining of two energies. Cfr. T. Ware, *ibid*, 251. Orthodox theology reject any doctrine of grace that might infringe on man's freedom. Man cannot achieve full fellowship with God without God’s help; yet he must also play his part. The path to deification includes asceticism, prayer, contemplation and good works. In this process they also believe in the help of B. V. Mary, saints, relics, icons etc. Cfr. Negrut Paul, “Searching for the True Apostolic Church: What Evangelicals should know about Eastern Orthodoxy”, *Christian Research Journal*, 20, 3, 1998.
 39. Tsirpanlis. C, *The Mystical Theology of Eastern Church*, London 1973, 69-70. The Orthodox stresses the importance of sacraments and teaches that they

- are the means of deification. A. Coniaris says: “He who was visible as our Redeemer has now passed into the sacraments... The sacraments are the way to Theosis”. Cfr. Coniaris, A, *Introducing the Orthodox Church: Its Faith and Life*, Minneapolis 1982, 123. So they come to the conclusion that the salvation is possible only in the church and Meyendorff concludes that “the Church and the sacraments are the way to God, for the Church is in absolute reality the Body of Christ” Meyendorff, J, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, Crestwood, NY 1974, 140.
40. cfr. Brock, S, *Luminous Eye*, 85-108. “The Mysteries Hidden in the Side of Christ” *Sobornost* 11 (1978) 464-472 (Reprinted in *Syrian Churches Series XIII*, ed. J. Vellian, Kottayam 1972, 62-72.
 41. Cfr. Lossky V., *Mystical Theology*, 158. Quoted in Kallarangattu J & Sr Sophy Rose CMC, *ibid*, 267.
 42. Kallarangattu. J & Sr Sophy Rose CMC, *ibid*, 76-78.
 43. Kallarangattu. J & Sr Sophy Rose CMC, *ibid*, 83-84; 279-284,
 44. Kallarangattu. J & Sr Sophy Rose CMC, *ibid*, 260, 276; A. Thottakkara CMI, ed., *East Syrian Spirituality*, Bangalore 1990, 83-88,
 45. Murray. R, “Recent Studies in Early Symbolic Theology”, *The Heythrop Journal*, 6.4, 1965, 412-433. Brock. S, *Ibid* 53-59.
 46. Brock. S, *Luminous Eye*, 53-59.
 47. Cfr. Aho Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem*, NJ 2004.
 48. Brock. S, “The Mysteries Hidden in the Side of Christ”, *Sobornost*, 11, 1978, 464-472 (Reprinted in *Syrian Churches Series XIII*, ed. J. Vellian, Kottayam 1972, 62-72.
 49. cfr. Murray. R, “The Lance which Re-opened Paradise: a Mysterious Reading in the Early Syrian Fathers”, *OCP* 39, 1973, 224-234.
 50. cfr. Kallarangattu. J & Sr Sophy Rose CMC, *Ibid*, 65-66; 280-281.
 51. Kallarangattu. J & Sr Sophy Rose CMC, *ibid*, 67, 280-282.
 52. Ware. T., *The Orthodox Church*, England 1963, 9-16.
 53. Lossky. V, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. J.H. Erickson (Crestwood, NY 1985) 13. “The negative way of the knowledge of God is an ascendant undertaking of the mind that progressively eliminates all positive attributes of the object it wishes to attain, in order to culminate finally in a kind of apprehension by supreme ignorance of Him who cannot be an object of Knowledge”.
 54. Bishop Maximus Aghiorgoussis, “East Meets West: Gifts of the Eastern Tradition to the Whole Church”, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37, 1993, 4.
 55. *ibid*; cfr, Lossky. V, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, NY 1997.
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7

Judeo-Christian and Patristic Roots of St Thomas Christians

Dr Thomas Koonammakkal

When did the contacts between the Mediterranean world, Mesopotamia, Persia and India begin? It is a question without any clear cut answer. During the third and second millennium BC Indus Valley and Sumer had very flourishing civilizations. Ancient tablets discovered from Ur, the home town of the ancestors of Abraham, refer to the trade between Sumer and Indus Valley. There might have been cultural and commercial interactions between them. The Brahmi script of India and Sumerian are said to be related, at least indirectly. Brahmi script has been discovered in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Gujarat, Egypt and Far East. Decipherment of *Indus script* somehow points towards *Brahmi* script. The Aryans are said to have come from *Aryana* (Iran) and pushed Dravidians from the Indus Valley to the south. *Tamil Vattezhuthu* script is somehow indirectly associated with Phoenician script. The contacts between Phoenicia and South India go back to the second millennium BC¹.

Jews came into contact with South India in the tenth century BC because of the commercial

enterprises of Solomon. Before Solomon there were well established trade relations between the Phoenicians of Tsur and South Indian Coast. In the days of king Hiram of Tsur, the contemporary of Solomon, these relations got strengthened. Solomon (972- 932 BC) sent his traders along with the Phoenician merchants of king Hiram to South India. Phoenicians were here even before the Jews². Spices, gems, ivory, gold, silver, apes, peacocks, etc. were exotic items sought after by the Phoenicians and Jewish traders. According to Koder, the first Jewish colony of India started in the days of king Solomon³. After Solomon the Jewish nation had to suffer two exiles. The Assyrian exile was a mass deportation from the Northern kingdom of Israel by Tiglath-Pilaser III in 734-732 BC⁴. Then there came the Babylonian exile in Juda in the 6th and 5th centuries BC as Nebuchadenazzar (604-562 BC) defeated the Jews in 597 BC and destroyed the Jerusalem temple in 586 BC and deported the Jews to Babylon as reported in 2 Kings 24,14-16; 25,11. For the deported Jews life was not at all bad in the

long run. It opened them to a new experience with international commerce. The Babylonian exile offered them an opportunity to learn Aramaic. Gradually the ordinary exilic Jews forgot Hebrew and became Aramaic speakers. In the seventh and sixth centuries BC Babylon was the greatest international market in the world. It was related to South India by a sea route which extended even up to Southern China. In the seventh century BC South India was the meeting point between traders from East and West. The Arabs who were already on the scene took over the international trade only later. Teakwood, sandal, pepper, rice, spices, ivory, precious stones, peacocks, apes etc. were all fascinating attractions from South India. These and similar goods reached the Assyrian and Babylonian empires before the fifth century BC. Teakwood from South India had been excavated in the Moon Temple of Ur. Indian wood appears also in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar⁵.

The Persian emperor Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC. He terminated the captivity of the Jews. After the Babylonian captivity, many Jews returned to reestablish Jerusalem and its temple. But many of them did not return for a hundred years (Ezra 1), because the Babylonian captivity was not altogether negative for the Jews. Commercial enterprises thrived during this period. Some of them who remained in Persia came and settled in the Malabar Coast⁶. This was the second Jewish arrival in Kerala. Jewish exiles of Assyria got scattered among many peoples and countries. Later on some of them are said to have come to different parts of India. This might be the third Jewish settlement in India. These two groups of exilic Jews were Aramaic speakers. The next Jewish emigration took place in the second and first centuries BC. Thus evidently we can speak of pre-exilic, exilic and post exilic Jewish emigration to India. They were all attracted by the international commercial importance of South India.

In 30 BC, the Roman army conquered Egypt and took over the control of international trade through Egypt. Within a few years one hundred and twenty ships began to sail every year from Red Sea

to the Malabar Coast. Within forty days the monsoon winds brought them to the Malabar Coast. During the opposite monsoon these ships could return to Egypt in the same year. Emperors Augustus (27 BC-14 AD) and Tiberius (14-37 AD) wholeheartedly promoted this international trade between Egypt and the Malabar Coast. More than five hundred coins of Augustus have been discovered in South India. The coins of Emperor Tiberius from South India number over one thousand. This is a clear indication of the flourishing trade with accelerated pace in the first century BC and first century AD. The Persian, Arab and Egyptian navigators already knew the course of the monsoon winds. But the Greek Hippalus happened to “discover” this long kept secret probably during the reign of Ptolemy Euergetes (BC 146-116). Later the so-called discovery of the Hippalus was divulged to the Romans in the first half of the first century AD⁷. According to Peutinger Tablets from the second century AD Egypt, there is a temple of Augustus at Muziris near the modern Kodungallur region⁸. Since the start of archeological excavations in Pattanam, which is part of ancient Muziris, in 2007 a re-writing of history has become necessary⁹. Naturally many Jewish settlers and traders had been to the Malabar Coast during this period. Roman trade expansion brought many Jews into direct contact with Jewish settlements in different parts of South India. From the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BC, Jews had become Aramaic speakers. But their forefathers were already familiar with Aramaic even in the pre-exilic period as we hear from OT texts. Ancient Aramaic (before 700 BC) inscriptions have come down to us from Upper Mesopotamia, Northern Syria and Northern Israel. Official Aramaic (ca. 700-300 BC) was the “lingua franca” of the whole region from Egypt to India. Alexander's invasion of India resulted in the accelerated cultural and commercial contacts. An offshoot of official Aramaic appeared as Biblical Aramaic (Gen 31,47; Jer 10,18; Dan 2, 4-7,28; Ezra 4,8-6,8; 7,12-26). Edicts of Ashoka (272-232 BC) have been found in Afghanistan in Middle Aramaic (ca. 300 BC onwards). Then we find Late Aramaic from

which Christian Aramaic or Syriac and Targumic Aramaic developed. Finally Modern Aramaic appeared¹⁰.

The apostles of Jesus Christ were keen to bring the message of the gospel to the scattered Jews living in the different parts of the world. Naturally Apostle Thomas undertook his first mission throughout the Persian region where he found many Aramaic speaking Jewish communities. They listened to him in their own language. In AD 50 he undertook the second mission, this time attracted by the Aramaic speaking Jewish settlements of South India. He found Aramaic speaking Jews in the Malabar Coast ready to accept the message of the gospel. It is not surprising that the seven Christian communities established by him were all in the vicinity of Jewish settlements. Most of the then Aramaic speaking Jews became Christians. Thomas arrived in the Malabar Coast guided by the Jewish merchant Habban. He was received by a Jewish flute girl in the royal capital of Malabar Coast. This we are told in the first Acts of Thomas, a composition of the late second century or early third century. St Thomas' coming to the Malabar Coast in the company of Jewish merchant Habban is attested also by the ancient Song of Ramban¹¹ revised and simplified in the year 1601. This source also speaks of forty families of Jews who are converted by St Thomas in the royal capital of Malabar. Similarly he might have converted in some other Jewish settlements of Malabar also.

In AD 70 the Roman army devastated Jerusalem and its temple was demolished. Jews got scattered to the different parts of the world. Some of them came to settle in the Malabar Coast. Again the Bar Cochba war (132-135) was a tragedy for the Jews. So after that incident some Jews of Palestine immigrated to South India. There were similar series of emigrations of Jews to South India in almost every century. Gradually their Aramaic too emerged into Syriac once they became Christians. Many of them became St Thomas Christians through conversions and intermarriages. There was a cordial relation between the St Thomas Christians and Jewish

settlers which puzzled the European colonialists, especially the Portuguese. Vestiges of these Jewish background point towards a Judeo Christian beginning of St Thomas Christians. Their Pesaha celebration, ablutions, purifications after death, Aramaisms of their Syriac, purification of mother and child after the child birth, the beginning and end of the day in the typical Jewish fashion, all point towards underlining Jewish connections of the past. Old Testament names were very popular among St Thomas Christians. This in fact did not please the Portuguese missionaries. There were no statues or even pictures in the churches of the St. Thomas Christians. This might be a latent Jewish heritage as well as an East Syrian tradition. Christians of Kaduthuruthy closed their eyes in anger and grief as they were shown a statue of blessed Mary. "With these errors they had many similar ones regarding images, which they did not admit except the Cross..."¹². St Thomas Christians are the only Christian community which commemorates symbolically every year the Jewish Passover in a Christianized manner.

In the days of Persian Sage Aphrahat in the first part of the fourth century we find some Persian Christians celebrating a kind of Jewish Passover. This might point out the existence of different Judeo-Christian communities following the same tradition in the Malabar Coast as well as Persia. It is my firm belief that the Christians of South India came into contact with the Persian Christians towards the middle of the second century. Christians of Malabar had many apocryphal stories of St Thomas which are still to be collected comprehensively. Apocryphal stories associated with St Thomas existed in all the seven Christian communities of the Malabar Coast as well as in Mylapore. Many of them are lost except for later traces, embellishments, additions and interpolations.

Originally the so called Acts of Thomas emerged in South India. Most probably these stories reached Edessa and Persia by the middle of the second century. They were written down in Edessa

in a confused manner. The stories of St Thomas associated with South India were mistakenly mixed with stories on St Thomas' first mission in the Persian region. The historical kernel or nucleus of the story of the Acts was originated in the Malabar Coast. They were composed by Maliekal Thoma Ramban (probably the II) by the middle of the second century. Forty eight generations later in 1601, a Ramban Thomas of the same lineage recast the story with later interpolations. In between them how many additions and simplifications and interpolations were made is a matter of dispute. Anyway these stories were independent of the Acts of Thomas, at least in its original oral and written forms. Perhaps they were revised many times in the course of history for historical and theological reasons. The present Syriac Acts of Thomas is a second edition according to many scholars. The original Indian version of Thoma Ramban was based on the so called 'Diary of Apostle Thomas' which was entrusted to the Maliekal family by the Apostle Thomas before his martyrdom. We hear about the 'Skin Book' (manuscript written on parchment) of Apostle Thomas. Writing on parchments is not at all an Indian custom. So the parchment of Thomas must have come from outside India. More than a century ago, even the memory of this 'Skin Book' of Thomas disappeared. It was kept inside the wooden wall of the Maliekal family of Niranam. That is the last oral tradition about this parchment. Later generations did not dare to open the wall to see the parchment. How many times the wooden wall was rebuilt, we do not know. But every time it was rebuilt, the parchment was kept inside. It was a family secret. We cannot but believe that this parchment is either a Jewish scroll or draft of a gospel or apocryphal from the first century. Resonance of this we hear in the Church History of Eusebius in the fourth century. He writes: Pantaenus "found the Gospel according to Matthew" in India written "in the Hebrew language"¹³. Pantaenus brought it to Alexandria. He visited South India between 181-191 AD. What if the Gospel was in Aramaic spoken by Jews in those days? The apostles and earliest

Christians were speakers of Aramaic.

Before the written down gospels many Aramaic orally transmitted stories of Jesus were popular. Once the canonical gospels were written the oral drafts just went into oblivion. Many apocryphal stories associated with Apostle Thomas, child Jesus and Mary survived as vestiges until recently. Do these stories come from the written down versions imported from elsewhere is a question to be answered by scholars. What if they were original South Indian oral collections? The Aramaic of the St Thomas Christians even after the development of the classical Syriac somehow survived in its special Syriac pronunciations¹⁴. All these point towards a pre-Nicean apostolic simplicity of the Church of St Thomas Christians. Many of the post-Nicean doctrinal developments just did not reach their consciousness. The post-Constantinean doctrinal formulations and theological controversies did not occur to them. Simplicity of doctrine or the lack of doctrine is the hallmark of this apostolic version of Christianity. The third-fourth century theological situation of the Syriac Churches elsewhere attests to this. Only in the post-Nicean period a systematic doctrinal awareness began to creep up in the Syriac mind. Authors of pre-fifth century Syriac literature represent this stage to some extent. The Hellenistic theological intricacies and doctrinal niceties did not interest and arrest the Syriac mind. The simplicity of the gospel led them through and through. St Thomas Christians, until the arrival of the Portuguese on the scene, clung on to this original, primary apostolic simplicity of the gospels. In the fifth and sixth centuries some Indian Christian students had been associated with the scholars of the school of Edessa and Nisibis. A series of Persian Christian migrations took place between fourth and ninth centuries to the Malabar Coast. By seventh century more hierarchical interventions of Seleucia took over. Until then South India had hierarchical relations with Persia in particular. By the ninth century this takeover was complete. In the fourteenth century the Persian church was devastated by the Mongolian invasions. The hierarchical relations were not imposed by the

Persians or the Seleucians, instead it was an voluntary undertaking from the part of St Thomas Christians.

The theology of episcopacy remained very primitive among them. Indeed there are scholars who argue that their concept of ecclesia was not Episcopal but congregational¹⁵. The position of the Archdeacon emerged in this context as a unique institution among them¹⁶. He had temporal as well as spiritual powers. The bishop was a monastic spiritual head almost dissociated from the daily running of the Church. His role was more priestly than hierarchical. This again points to a pre-Ignatian concept of episcopacy. We should not forget that it is Ignatius of Antioch (ca.110) who introduced the monarchical episcopate. After him it became the model par excellence. Development of hierarchy centred on a monarchial bishop took two or three generations. Emergence of such a structure was the culmination of a gradual process. In isolated pockets such developments might not have taken place.

The development of hierarchy even in the Persian Church is a very gradual and long process about which we hear even in the first half of the fourth century. Even in the Roman Church, Archdeacon Lawrence was the most prominent figure after the bishop of Rome. Temporal matters were more or less in the hands of deacons as in the days of the apostles (Acts 6,1-7). Social work, charity, accumulation and expenditure of wealth and material administration were all undergoing transition and development. The gradual emergence of prominent episcopacies and the problems associated with property and wealth began to enhance primary interventions by the bishop himself. But we find that the St Thomas Christians did not become part of this kind of development even in the fifteenth century. That is why the idea of having a local, native bishop just did not occur to their mind. For them the bishop was a spiritual and priestly symbol of communion - an overseer in every sense. But the daily and this-worldly business of the community is in the hands of lay leaders, priests and Archdeacon.

Even priests were dependent on Palliyogam. Bishops and monks were superior to this daily business and worry. It was a kind of apostolic democracy, a combination of theocracy and democracy. It was the rule of the Divine through the rule of the elders, a kind of democracy through elders under 'the Old Man' (Dan 7,9.13.22).

The craving for native bishops began to appear only when the Portuguese tried to Latinize the Syriac rite and to prevent Mesopotamian bishops reaching here. Practically Palliyogam on the local, regional and national levels headed by priests and Archdeacon were handling the daily running of the church. The Archdeacon remained the symbol of pastoral, priestly and temporal power though he was under the bishop and the local king. Life of the Church in the community was coordinated under his leadership which extended over all St Thomas Christians. Just as in the Mesopotamian and Persian Churches even temporal disputes were handled by the Archdeacon, priests and Palliyogam - the Christian republic according to some foreign missionaries.

Just as the episcopacy system did not develop among St Thomas Christians, the parish system also did not appear until the Synod of Diamper in 1599¹⁷. It was the Portuguese authorities who decided to divide St Thomas Christians into various parishes with strict geographic and demographic boundaries. This is clear from a careful reading of the decrees of the Synod of Diamper regarding the bifurcation of the one Church into parishes and appointment of parochial vicars for every parish. These too are theological pointers to the pre-Constantinian patristic period when hierarchy, dioceses and parishes were all exhibiting simpler forms and rudimentary structures. It is also an indication that the St Thomas Christians did not wander away from the apostolic days and gospel roots (Jn 14,6; Acts 9,2; 18,26; 19,9.23; 22,4; 24,22). They were always keen to cling on to the way (*mārgam*), tradition and Law of Thomas. They were called 'People of the Way' in the typical apostolic fashion of the New Testament

times. For the apostolic fathers of the first and second centuries, Christian life style is called the *Way-mārgam* (Didache 1,1-6,2). This is following the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. Christ is the Way and, Christianity is the Way. This is the Way preached and established by St Thomas in India. So following this Law or Way or Tradition of Thomas is the Way of the Thomas Christians. Otherwise they ceased to be Christians at all. They saw this Way as a reecho of the Aramaic oral gospel teaching or message of Christ entrusted to their forefathers by Apostle Thomas.

The filial and firm attachment of all Thomas Christians to the Way of Thomas is evident in their confrontation with the Portuguese. The Way of Thomas is the tradition of Thomas starting with the gospel orally transmitted by him to their forefathers in the first century. It is indeed the Way which is Jesus Christ as preached by the apostles and in their case by Apostle Thomas. It involves orally transmitted, spiritual, liturgical and theological heritage and customs through which this way of life is transmitted and exhibited. It is a continuation of the apostolic kerygma which is unique to the first century Christians. Historical additions and developments upon the foundation of these orally transmitted traditions also deserve serious concern and respect on the part of believers. Aberration from the Way of Thomas is impossible because it is the Way of Christ Jesus.

Didache which was composed in the last decades of the first century instructs the Christian believers, “you should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays”¹⁸. This instruction was made in the background of Jewish Christian tensions and in a Judeo-Christian context. Jews used to fast on Mondays and Thursdays. If Christians follow the Jews in this matter the people will confuse Judaism with Christianity. So fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays is suggested as an identification mark for the early Christians. Is it not amazing that this instruction was kept up among the St Thomas Christians until recently and to some extent exists even today? The

teaching of the apostles to the earliest Christians did not fall on deaf ears. St Thomas Christians are following the first century apostolic and patristic instructions in this matter. The Portuguese were surprised to find this custom among the Thomas Christians. Fasting from milk products, meat products, alcohol, sexual life, etc. was noticed among the Thomas Christians. Abstinence from sexual life practiced in marriage points towards the third-fourth century Syriac traditions, as we hear from the Acts of Thomas, Demonstrations of Aphrahat (died c. 345), the works of Ephrem (c. 306-373) and the Book of Steps (second half of the fourth century). Some pious people did not marry. They remind us of the 'Sons and Daughters of the Covenant' of the fourth century Syriac world. '*Oru neram nilkkuka*' (ഒരുനേരം നിലക്കുക), '*upavasam nilkkua*' (ഉപവാസം നിലക്കുക) are the two significant phrases that echo the spiritual vision of the Syriac Fathers like Jacob of Nisibis in the fourth century and Simon Stylite in the fifth century. These holy men used to 'stand' all day and night! Imitating them St Thomas Christians used to 'stand' on days of fasting. They used to 'stand' in the corner of the house, pray and meditate in imitation of angels who never sit or sleep. It reminds one of the early Syriac Christian 'Sons and Daughters of the Covenant'. They took their stand for Christ, like Christ, and with Christ. It was their standing, covenant or *qyāmā* for Christ as children of resurrection. They tried to live like angels on earth. They were trying to re-create the life of Adam in the pre-fallen state¹⁹.

The ascetical orientation of St Thomas Christians is clear from the different kinds of fasts they used to observe strictly like the fifty days fast of lent, the twenty-five fast of advent, fifty days fast of the apostles, fifteen days fast, three days fast of Ninevites, eight days fast, fast of Wednesdays and Fridays, fast of twelve Fridays after Christmas, fast of the virgins, fast of Elijah, fast of Transfiguration and other vigil fasts²⁰. When counted together the fasting days number about two hundred and ninety but when we avoid the overlapping, the days number

about two hundred and twenty five. The ascetical orientation of the entire Christian community is a reflection of the pre fifth century Syriac spiritual heritage. Again these are indications to the teachings on Christian life by the Syriac fathers of the early Christian era. It seems that the St Thomas Christian spiritual vision is a direct offshoot of the patristic period. From the very beginning the Syriac Christian way of life developed a very deep and intense ascetical tendency. The Christian life style was depicted on the basis of Biblical, Christo-centric and apostolic overtones. The Christian community in general held on to asceticism²¹. Asceticism was not only for specialists. It was part and parcel of the Christian life style of all ordinary members. The wedge between monk and laymen was very thin. Every baptized Christian was more or less Christ-like, an ascetic, or a monk. Asceticism is an imitation of Christ²². In the Greek and Latin Christian world, this sort of universal asceticism is not a general characteristic phenomenon. Their asceticism appears to be a substitute for martyrdom and hence the monastic movement happens to be an aftermath of persecution. In the Syriac speaking world, every Christian is oriented toward radical discipleship in following Christ, by taking up the cross of Christ. The pre-fall life style of Adam and Eve in heavenly paradise is a nostalgic and divine call. Life of this angelic state was the ideal and a challenging invitation.

Early Syriac Christianity and asceticism were intrinsically intertwined. They are found to co-exist from the days of oral the Gospels. St Thomas Christians too had them through the Apostle Thomas. Unlike elsewhere, this latent asceticism did not flourish into a particular monastic movement. It does not mean that monastic life style was entirely absent among them. Married clergy and laity wore white dresses whereas the celibate monks wore black clothes. Because of the attraction to the Christian monastic life style, even the devotees and pilgrims of Ayyappan of Sabarimala wear black clothes and take

the vow of temporary celibacy! Saffron and yellow were the colours of monastic dress in Vedic religions, Buddhism etc. It was in the vicinity of Chayal or Nilackal, one of the seven communities, founded by Apostle Thomas. Renunciation of the world and the forty one days of abstinence of Ayyappan pilgrims is only a Thomas Christian monastic influence.

On fasting days of Lent and Advent, St Thomas Christians used to eat a single meal, that only after evening prayers. Most of them used to come for morning and evening prayers in the church. Some of them used to come even for midnight prayers.

Throughout the Lent they entered every day three times in the Church, one in the morning on getting up, the other at night fall, and another at mid night, in which although many defaulted, in the first two in the beginning and at the end of the day, nobody was missing, praying most commonly prostrated with the face to the earth.²³

I have seen some elderly people who as little children were instructed by their mothers to wake up in the middle of night for night vigil and prayers. Many St Thomas Christians used to eat nothing but a few pieces of indary (ഇണ്ടറി) and kozhikatta (കൊഴിക്കോട്ട) from Maundy Thursday or Pesaha noon until the evening of the following Saturday. Many did not sleep during these nights. They kept vigil. During fasting days, many used to sit inside the church praying (ജന്മമരിക്കൽ). This need not necessarily be an Indian custom alone. Jews used to spend days and nights in or around the temple during days of fast and some feasts. Many of them being Judeo-Christians, St Thomas Christians were not unfamiliar with these roots.

Elements of Agape survive among St Thomas Christians even today, especially on the fast of the Ninevites and some other feast days. Razakanji (റാസക്കഞ്ഞി), oottu (ഊട്ട്), tamuk (തമുക്ക്), pachor (പാച്ചോർ), different kinds of appams (അപ്പം) and

nerchas (നേർച്ചകൾ) are vestiges of once widespread practice of agape. All these were served inside the church or near by the church in the context of the celebration of Qurbana.

These Christians call “Nercha” a dinner which some, either by devotion or as a result of a vow, give to all the Christians on the porch of the church, laying tables and sitting in their order; which tables are attended by the Prelate. In the case where he is present, he blesses them, and in his absence, the eldest priest, giving his part trebled to the Bishop, and one more to the priests, because for the rest of the people, according to that of Saint Paul, a priest will honour with double honour, and in many churches there are fixed sources of income to give these dinners on some fixed days, and in all they do it during the three days of fasting... which they call the fasting of Jonas... In which dinner they observe customs of the primitive Church, for thus the faithful did and called these dinners Eulogias or Agapes, showing in this great charity and brotherly love with which all of them dealt with each other, from which these Christians have this eating and bread of the Nerchas as a thing sanctified and blessed. In the primitive Church, these dinners were held, especially for the feast of the martyrs. And in the funerals of the dead, and to the priest was given double (Nercha), and the Bishop was invited, to whom if he was not present his share was given, as noted by Clement of Rome ...²⁴.

We have to remember that the practice of Agape was found in Egypt and Syria disappearing by the middle of the second century. The works of the Fathers like Ephrem and Narsai (399-503) were read during the fast of Ninevites. Another living tradition among them is interesting. It is in connection with the death anniversary. After prayers in the Church and at the tomb, there are also prayers in the house. Then all assembled sit for a special meal. Unlike in normal meals, there is a curious and antique custom. First of all two plantains are served. These should

be eaten by all who take the meal. For, Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit which brought about their fall. Death is the fruit of this fall. As the second item everyone is given three ‘neyyappams’ (നെയ്യപ്പം) each. It is to be eaten next. They symbolize Eucharist, baptism, Christ and Trinity - life and resurrection. “That which came through eating of the fruit is gone by eating of the bread” (പഴത്താലെ വന്നതു അപ്പത്താലെ പോയി). This custom is a unique tradition of St Thomas Christians. After eating two plantains and three ‘neyyappams’ (നെയ്യപ്പം) the death anniversary meal follows.

The theological, liturgical, spiritual and monastic compositions of the Fathers of the Church have tremendously influenced the life style of Thomas Christians. Many of the East Syrian monastic writers were also influential in their spiritual formation. Most of their spiritual heritage and Syriac literature were systematically destroyed in fire by the Portuguese soon after the Diamper Synod. They destroyed and disfigured the Syriac literary heritage of the Thomas Christians. We will never know what all books of Syriac tradition, popular among St Thomas Christians, were burnt by the Portuguese since the catalogue is incomplete. Sample items of lost works give us only a very shady view²⁵. Pantaenus was not an isolated visitor among St Thomas Christians. In the days of Catholicos Papā (early fourth century or late third century), David, the bishop of Basra, resigned from his see in order to go to preach in India²⁶. St Thomas Christian students were attracted by the fame of the school of Edessa and Nisibis in the early fifth century. Some of them got their theological education and spiritual formation in this first Christian university. Evidence for this is not entirely lacking. “There is even a hint that these schools must have aroused the attention of Indians and attracted them to do their studies here. A precious colophon in the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, composed by Išōdad of Merv (9th cent.), informs us about such a student, Priest Dāni’ēl of India who has assisted Mar Kōmai in his translation work”²⁷. Herewith we give the relevant portion of this colophon. “Mar Koumi translated this Epistle

from Greek into Syriac for Mari, the Presbyter with the help of Daniel the Presbyter, the Indian²⁸. Koumi, Probus, and Ma'nā were the famous disciples of Ibas, the head of the school of Edessa in the early fifth century. Along with Ibas they translated the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia soon after his death in 428. Ibas became the bishop of Edessa after Rabbula's death in 435. Ibas is famous as 'the Translator'. He was the enthusiastic leader who promoted the translation of the Greek commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia into Syriac. His disciples earnestly followed him in this translation process. It seems that scholarly students like Daniel of India were able to help in this translation work. It is very unfortunate that the Indians do not know anything about this Daniel, evidently a Thomas Christian of the early fifth century. About we hear later. He translated the works of Theodore and Diodore. Later he was very influential in Persia. He composed and other liturgical chants in the Persian language and sent them to India.²⁹ Evidently he might not have forgotten Daniel, his Indian student who might have returned to India after his theological education in Edessa. Manā translated many texts of the Greek Fathers into Syriac and sent to India³⁰. Existence of the monastery of St Thomas in India in the fifth century is a probability though we do not have certain evidence to prove this³¹. Monasticism in the Syriac Church evidently strengthened and nourished the Christianity of Thomas Christians in India³².

Many monks of the monasteries of Awgen, Beth Abhe, the Upper Monastery etc. came to India as missionaries, teachers and bishops. St Thomas Christians were careful to select only learned monks from these famous monasteries as their bishops and spiritual guides as far as the evidence goes. These monks, scholars and holy men of the Syriac world did not come to India empty handed. They brought many Syriac books with them in order to give liturgical, theological, spiritual, monastic and canonical formation to the Church of St Thomas Christians. The case of Daniel the Indian is not isolated one. It seems that from time to time, students from St Thomas Christians went to various monastic schools of the

Church of the East for theological education. Even the Portuguese found some evidence for this. "Two priests who had gone to study in Persia" wrote Parismão, on luck, magic etc.³³ This might not be an exceptional case. Many such young scholars who had been to Persia for higher education might have written on other topics as well.

The Portuguese missionaries were ignorant or unfamiliar with many of the East Syrian patristic traditions. So they accused these simple Christians on every count. "They had in addition the error of those who believe that the souls of the saints will not see God, except after the Day of Judgment"³⁴. This is sheer ignorance of the patristic eschatology like that of Justin (165) and Syriac Churches. According to many Fathers, the dead await resurrection enjoying a foretaste of divine presence or absence. That is why death is compared to sleep. The dead awaits the morning of resurrection but enjoying heaven or hell in advance. Another Portuguese accusation against the St Thomas Christians was that they "ordinarily did not baptize the children after eight days, but after they were some months old, others one year old and seven and eight and ten years old"³⁵. During the patristic period, baptism was very often postponed to boyhood or adulthood. Some of the Fathers were even against child baptism, while others were for it. There was no uniform practice of child baptism among Christians anywhere during patristic period. Compulsory child baptism was never universally seen. It seems that St Thomas Christians followed this patristic view point regarding baptism. But even those un-baptized ones were associated with Christian religion and practices, as we hear from the Portuguese themselves. Another baseless Portuguese accusation is as follows: "They heard Mass on Sundays, but not as an obligation and thus those who wanted went for it"³⁶. It is better to know that the Oriental Christians are not under the curse of obligation in matters of faith. Instead, freedom, choice and personal convictions, rather than the burden of legal obligation, were the driving forces in matters of Christian faith. Nor did they fast or abstain

because of legalism. The element of voluntariness was part of their version of Christianity. In fact, St Thomas Christians were not burdened with the literal legalism of Western Christianity.

The following works were known to Indian Christians in the pre-Portuguese period: Acts of Thomas (3rd century), Simeon Bar Sabb'ae (344), Ephrem (ca. 306-373), Aphrahat (4th century), Book of Steps (late 4th century), John the Solitary (6th century), Ibas (457), Narsai (399-503), Works of Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius, Synodicon (5-8 centuries), Abraham de Beth Rabban (6th century), Johannan de Beth Rabban (6th century), Mar Āwa I (552), Abraham of Kashkar (503-588), Abba Dadisho (529-604), Abraham of Nathpar (7th century), Babai of Nisibis (7th century), Abba Ba'ut (6-7 centuries), Henanisho (7th century), Sabrisho I (604), Babai the Great (ca. 550- ca.629), Ishoyahb I (596), Ishoyahb II (646), Ishoyahb III (ca. 658), Dadisho of Qatar (7th century), Isaac of Nineveh (7th century), Yausep Hazzaya (7th century), Simeon of Rewardashir (7th century), Gabriel of Qatar (7th century), Abraham Bar Lipeh (7th century), Johannan Saba (8th century), Timothy I (780-823), Theodore Bar Koni (8th century), Thomas of Marga (9th century), Isho Dnah of Basra (9th century), Ishodad of Merv (850), Abdisho of Soba (1318). Certainly some of their works had formative influence in the theology and spirituality of Thomas Christians. Monasteries and monastic schools of the Church of the East constantly contributed to the spiritual and intellectual nourishment of the Church of St Thomas Christians. Liturgical and prayer books of the East Syrian tradition sustained the Christian life style of the Indian Christians in the pre-Portuguese period. It is this Biblical, apostolic and patristic tradition of St Thomas Christians, that the Portuguese missionaries wanted to destroy. For them, whatever is in Syriac is tainted with 'Nestorian heresy'. Under this ploy they tried to divide and uproot this apostolic and catholic Church.

All the manuscripts burnt by Diamper indicate

that the Church of St Thomas Christians was theologically, spiritually, liturgically, canonically an East Syrian Church. The famous library and the Episcopal Archives of Angamaly were systematically burnt. After the Synod, Mimeses visited and burnt the Syriac books in at least 59 churches. After the Angamaly library, the Syriac collections of Cheppadu and Chengannur which were also burnt, were the most prominent ones. Evidently it is the greatest tragedy of St Thomas Christians' spiritual heritage. One can compare it only to the destruction of the Alexandrian library by the Muslim conquerors in 641 AD. The Angamaly collection was built up over many centuries as the most important intellectual centre of St Thomas Christians who had the theological university there. Vatican Syriac 22 somehow escaped the fire of Diamper. It is an East Syrian liturgical lectionary of the Epistles of St Paul with an important colophon³⁷. It was written in the year 1301 in the Church of Mar Kuriakose at Kodungalloor by deacon Scaria, son of Yausep, son of Scaria in the days of Yahb Alaha III (1281-1317) and Mar Yakob Metropolitan who occupies "the Throne of St Thomas, the Apostle". It is a standing monument of the identity of St Thomas Christians and their interest and scholarship in the Syriac language and liturgical tradition. It is amazing that Deacon Scaria who wrote this manuscript was only a fourteen year old boy! How many hundreds like him wrote similar manuscripts in the course of centuries! It is these Syriac and Karshon manuscripts which ended up in Portuguese fire! There were many Malpanates or Schools of Theology in all important centres of St. Thomas Christians. They continued to exist and function until the middle of the 19th century in spite of Portuguese repercussions. These schools had their own collections of Syriac and Karshon manuscripts. Karshon (Malayalam written in Syriac characters) originated in the pre-Portuguese period³⁸. In the collection of books burnt by the Portuguese there were many such items. Some of the Syriac books were the copies of the theological compositions of Narsai and other Eastern Fathers. Each deacon had to copy all the important liturgical books as a condition for his ordination. A committee of priests supporting

Francis Roz was in charge of the correction as well as the destruction of the Syriac books.

Another manuscript which escaped fire has survived in the Chaldean Syrian Archbishop's library of Trichur. It was written in 1585 at Kothamangalam "in the church of Holy Virgin Marth Mary Mother of Light and Life", by Mathai, son of Punnurkudan Ouseph Kashisha which is a kashkol or typically East Syrian breviary. The very few manuscripts which had the good fortune to survive the fire of Diamper show us the enormity of the loss of Syriac heritage suffered by the St Thomas Christians because of Portuguese high handedness. In the post Diamper period a lot of Syriac manuscripts have reached Kerala. It is again an indication to the serious intellectual pursuit of the Syriac Churches in India³⁹.

ENDNOTES

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- 5 J. Kennedy, "The Early Commerce of Babylon with India", *JRAS*, 1898.
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- 13 Eusebius, *Church History*, V, 10.
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- 33 Cf. Malekandathil, op.cit., 247.
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- 35 Ibid, 238.
- 36 Ibid, 241.

37 W.F. Macomber, "The Chaldean Lectionary System of the Cathedral Church of Kokhe", *OCP* 33, 1967, 483-516.

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8

Trinitarian Theology in the East Syriac Patristic Tradition

Dr Philip Mattathil

Introduction

How to understand and express the faith in God who is one and three? This has been one of the fundamental questions of Christian thought. The history of the early Church, especially of the second half of the fourth-century, shows that different efforts have been made to comprehend and explain the paradox of the “oneness” and the “three-ness” of God; the efforts of Athanasius of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, the Cappadocian Fathers and of Hilary of Poitiers are often hailed in this regard, especially against the “Arian” and “Neo-Arian” teachings. The manuals of theology and Patristics however are often silent about the theological contributions of the early Syriac patristic tradition towards the defence of the “orthodox” faith against Arius, Aetius and Eunomius and their followers. The history of the early Syriac-speaking Churches reveals that, in spite of some “initiatives”, it is in Ephrem the Syrian that the early Syriac Patristic tradition found a “saviour”, like St Basil in the Greek tradition, to defend, promote and inculcate the true Christian faith in God the Father-

Son-Spirit. The present article is an effort to highlight how the faith was understood, expressed and celebrated in the early Syriac-speaking Churches until and during the time of Ephrem the Syrian in whom a rather “developed” theology of the “Holy Trinity” of the early Syriac tradition is found¹. For the sake of convenience, this article is divided into two sections: early Syriac profession of faith i) before and ii) during the time of Ephrem the Syrian.

1. Early Syriac Profession of Faith before Ephrem

Before the fourth century, the Christian faith was not a matter of discussion (*theoria*) but rather a truth of experience (*praxis*); this is all the more true with the Syriac tradition where the faith in God was expressed more through prayers, doxologies and baptismal formulae. Early Syriac tradition concentrated more on the “experience” of God; the faith in God was thus experienced and expressed through prayers, doxologies and hymns. Likewise, the “intelligence of faith” was understood and expressed, by the early Syriac tradition, more in a

symbolic, synthetic and intuitive way and not in a rational, systematic and philosophical one. The following pages highlight briefly some of the salient features of early Syriac understanding and expression of the faith in God before the time of Ephrem the Syrian.

1. The documents existing before the time of Ephrem, such as the Odes of Solomon, *the Acts of Thomas*, *the Anaphora of Addai and Mari*, *the Epistula Apostolorum*, *the Didascalia Apostolorum* and the Demonstrations of Aphraates bear witness to a distinct phase of the “doctrine of God”. They speak about some early forms and expressions demonstrating certain initial efforts of the early Syriac-speaking Christian communities to profess, communicate and affirm faith in God. There are, for example, in the *Odes of Solomon*, some symbolic portraits of God the Father-Son-Spirit; with the help of a metaphor of milk flowing from God the Father’s breasts - a metaphor which may not be seen in any other documents after the *Odes of Solomon* - the first Christian hymn-book presents the divine act of revelation (*Odes*, XIX, 1-5). The flowing of milk from the Father’s breasts to the world illustrates the interior dynamism of the “Holy Trinity”; God’s revelation - an eminent act of the loving mercy of God - is a “combined” act of the three divine Persons. Though the role of the Holy Spirit is not explicitly mentioned, it is the third Person of the Holy Trinity who provides the “mixture of milk” (from the Father’s breasts) to the world; that is, the Holy Spirit has a significant role in realizing the divine dispensation. In addition, the Holy Spirit functions as the “womb” of the Father in which the milk (the Son) is received and mixed². Another significant image used in the *Odes of Solomon* is that of the letter shot from heaven; the metaphor of a letter - an image of God’s revelation - gives way to the image of a tablet written by the “finger of God” on which the names of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are mentioned (*Odes*, XXIII, 6, 21-22). The letter sent to the world represents symbolically the Son, the Father being the Sender while the Holy Spirit (finger of God) realizes

the divine economy. Likewise, if the hypothesis of an interpolation is ruled out, the author of the *Acts of Thomas*, with the help of divine names, asserts that God is one and three: “they are various by (in) Names, the Father, the Son and the Spirit” (LXX). Another profession of the “tri-unity” of God is found: “You are divided without being separated and one though divided the “division” presents symbolically the “three-ness” of God, because here the “division” does not know any “separation” in the Godhead (cf. Acts LXX)³. *The Anaphora of Addai and Mari* - the first official liturgical document of the early Syriac Church - is an early witness of the solemn and official profession of the divine dispensation; this archaic Eucharistic prayer celebrates, in a Semitic flavour, the divine economy of salvation, realized through the Incarnation, the Paschal mysteries and the coming of the Holy Spirit⁴. The Holy Trinity is fully and wholly at work in the entire history of salvation which is commemorated, celebrated and thanked in and through the liturgy. *The Didascalia Apostolorum* also, speaking against “heretics” and “blasphemers”, affirms the faith in God the Father-Son-Spirit (XXIV-XXV)⁵. It is in the *Demonstrations of Aphraates* that one finds a significant text of faith - most probably a baptismal proclamation of faith, often called as the Credo of Aphraates (*Dem I*, 19); the first part of the so-called *Credo* highlights both the triple functions of God (creation-protection-redemption) and speaks about the “three Persons” of the Godhead.

2. Before the creedal formulation, the faith in God was understood, expressed and celebrated through different liturgical elements. This becomes clear from the documents like the *Odes of Solomon*, *the Acts of Thomas*, *the Anaphora of Addai and Mari*, *the Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Demonstrations of Aphraates* where a number of prayers, sermons, hymns and other liturgical elements, expressing faith in God, are found. The Church makes her solemn affirmation, profession and celebration of the divine dispensation in the liturgy; what is believed is celebrated in the liturgy and, on the other hand, what is celebrated expresses what is believed.

Liturgy is hence the source of theology (*locus theologicus*). It is in this regard that the *Anaphora of Addai and Mari*, the earliest Eucharistic prayer, may be considered as one of the Depositum Fidei of the early Syriac Christianity. The “I-character” found in the *Odes of Solomon* reminds one of a member of a worshipping community; that is, the hymns of worship and praise found in the ancient Hymn book indicate the presence of a worshipping community.⁶ In addition, the “state of rest” often indicated in the *Odes of Solomon* alludes to the state of salvation, identical with the primordial paradise, which is related to the “cultic realisation” of the eschatological salvation “conceptualise” as the primeval rest in paradise⁷. The *Acts of Thomas* highlights the experience of Christian salvation through prayers, hymns and other liturgical activities; immersion in water, the reception of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist and the role of the Holy Spirit are significantly associated with the experience of salvation. Through the reception of the sacrament of baptism, a person becomes the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit and thereby of the Holy Trinity⁸. Aphraates the Persian Sage also teaches of the Trinitarian inhabitation in a person through the reception of baptism (*Dem XXIII*, 63). In the same way, the doxologies were used as an accepted means of the confession of faith⁹; while the faithful is unable to speak of God because of an “apophatism”, doxologies, prayers and hymns had great place in the East. Both the Trinitarian and Christological doxologies found in different documents of the early Syriac-speaking Church are thus significant.

3. All existing beings and things bear a name. The “Semitic” tradition believed that the name of a person stands for that person and his power.¹⁰ This must be understood in relation to the Old Testament belief according to which one was forbidden to pronounce the name of God (for example, Ps 20, 1 and Lev 18, 6)¹¹. Although human beings were “forbidden” to pronounce it, the name of God became a reality in the Person of Jesus Christ; “Logos” is called as the name of God incarnate by

Philo (*De Conf. Ling.* 146). The divine name stands hence for the divine Person. In addition, it remains as the medium for communicating the divine mysteries¹². The divine names and titles have abundant use in all the documents of early Syriac Christianity; they are sometimes used to speak of God the Father, sometimes to speak of God the Son and sometimes of the Holy Spirit (for example, *Odes*, XXIII, 22). The divine names have frequent use in connection with the sacrament of baptism; as it is a Trinitarian act, the sacrament of baptism is always conferred “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*Acts of Thomas*, XLIX, CXXI). In addition, the powerful name of God is said either over the Eucharistic elements or over the faithful or over the unction oil.¹³ The author of the *Acts of Thomas* affirms that God cannot be named and whenever the name of God is given it is given for the sake of humanity (*Acts of Thomas*, XLVIII)¹⁴; that is, God gave himself names to reveal himself to the humanity. Names and titles indicate some aspects of God's activity and attributes; Aphraates quotes the names of God which are transcriptions of their Hebrew forms: (*Dem XVII,5*)¹⁵. Likewise, praise is given to the “name” of God; for example, in the concluding doxology of the *Anaphora of Addai and Mari*, glory, honour, thanks and adoration are given to God's living, holy and life-giving name¹⁶.

4. Though it was only in a later period that the Holy Spirit became an “object of intellectualisation”, early Syriac-speaking Churches were very much conscious of the “functional presence of the Spirit of God”. This becomes clear from the number of divine names, doxologies and baptismal formulae where the appellations and invocations are made to the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is experienced, celebrated and proclaimed throughout the early documents. Some images and metaphors are employed to convey the indwelling presence and mission of the “Third Person”; the metaphor of clothing has particular applications to express the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is differently known: the “breath of life”, the “Spirit of

the Father”, the “Spirit of the Messiah”, the “Spirit of Christ”, the “Spirit of the Most High”, and so on. The epicleses found in the *Acts of Thomas* and in the *Anaphora of Addai and Mari* are noteworthy, because they contain some of the "archaic" elements of an anaphora developed and structured later in the Greco-Latin traditions.¹⁷ The Holy Spirit has a specific role in the realization and accomplishment of the divine dispensation; that is, the Spirit of God is active and at work in the Incarnation, Paschal Mysteries and in the sacraments.

The theological understanding and expression of the early Syriac tradition was more symbolic than systematic and rational. This does not mean that the early Syriac tradition was “unsystematic” in its “theologization”; although many Greek linguistic and philosophical elements are found, the mode of thought and expression of the early Syriac tradition was symbolic than rational. The flowering of a symbolic method in theology is found later in Ephrem the Syrian whose writings made use of a rich and intelligent use of different symbolic devices.

2. “Trinitarian” Profession of Faith in Ephrem the Syrian

Ephrem the Syrian, the greatest Syriac representative of the fourth-century, is known for his erudite teaching and exegesis, attractive musical compositions and holiness of life and faithful service to the Church. As he is of the first three quarters of the fourth century, especially of a period known for theological “controversies and heresies”, a study on his theological contribution is significant; it is in his teachings that one can find a rather “developed and matured” theological vision and defence of the early Syriac tradition.

1. Ephrem's theology of the tri-unity of God may be understood in the background of the religious scenario of his Church which was often agitated by the teachings of Marcion, Mani, Bardaisan, Arius and Aetius and their followers¹⁸. Theological discussions on the divinity of the Holy Spirit and on the Holy Trinity obliged

Ephrem to engage himself with the defence and promotion of the “orthodox” faith in God the Holy Trinity; his Hymns on Faith contains teachings and polemics against the “false teachings” on the Holy Spirit and of the Holy Trinity¹⁹. Ephrem's theology of the Holy Trinity is more symbolic in character and approach; he makes use of the biblical and natural symbols and divine names in the affirmation of the Trinitarian faith.

2. Different to his theological “adversaries”,²⁰ Ephrem opted for dynamism of the symbolic poetic thought in “theologization”. He employed poetry as a “mode” of theological discourse; as it allows oneself to go beyond “concepts” and “notions” and opens new horizons; poetry has its best application in his symbolic thought. Like his contemporaries, the Cappadocians and Hilary of Poitiers, Ephrem also held the thesis of the divine inaccessibility and thereby showed the fruitlessness of the “Neo-Arian” claim of “investigating” the Godhead; he expressed his dislike for such groups of Neo-Arians calling them “investigators”, “disputers” and “scrutinizers” (Virg LII, 6-7)²¹. Making use of an image of the ontological chasm, Ephrem held that human beings can neither “define” nor “pry” into the divine Essence because human intellect can investigate only those which are on its side of the chasm²². Although it is not possible to define or categorize the being of God, who is on the other side of the chasm, the human intellect can “depict” God through symbols, paradoxes etc. which are intelligible and accessible to the human intellect; using a number of rhetorical devices such as symbols paradoxes, parallelisms, divine names, numbers and seasons, in the light of an internal dynamism of faith, he leads a person to make an analogical movement from visible objects/things to the invisible Truth. According to Ephrem, every object/person has a “sacramental character” allowing it to become a “symbol of God”. The symbolic meaning of

every object/person however is seen only when it is looked through the “luminous eye” of faith²³. All such symbols, images and metaphors have their significance only in relation to the Paschal mysteries of Christ in and with whom they find their accomplishment. What was hidden in the symbol subsequently becomes revealed in the reality; there is a continuous dynamism between a symbol and its signifying reality. Likewise, there is an internal relation between different symbols, paradoxes and metaphors themselves and between them and God; because of such interrelatedness, a person is invited to enter into a world of analogical relationship and finally to God who is the basis of all relations²⁴.

3. The human inability to reach the Godhead is the basis of Ephrem's theological vision; that is, a human person cannot cross the “ontological chasm” between the Creator and the creation. This however matters only for a person and never the other way round. As no human being is able to look at the sun directly, no person is able to reach God. Nothing of the divinity is hence accessible to the human intellect; neither the divine nature (*Hymns on Faith XI*, 11; *XXVII*, 3), nor His essence, nor His fatherhood (*Hymns on Faith XLIV*, 7), nor the generation of the Son (*Hymns on Faith I*, 3 and *Hymns on Virginity LII*, 4), nor the procession of the Holy Spirit (*Hymns on Faith XXIX*, 5 and *XXXIII*, 7). Although a human being is unable to reach Him, God the Almighty takes the initiative and reveals himself to humanity; as the sun is seen through its light and heat, God is known through Son and Spirit. God, out of His infinite love, takes the initiative and reveals himself to humanity. This divine revelation, according to Ephrem, is three-fold: i) through symbols; ii) through divine names and titles and iii) and through the Incarnation of the Son of God (*Hymns on Faith XVIII*, 1-3). These three different modes of divine self-revelation however indicate the one and the same act of the “divine disclosure”; they refer to the three different progressive stages of the

single act of God's revelation²⁵. God the Father reveals himself through His Son and Spirit; He “mixes” His Son and “mingle” among human beings (*Hymns on Faith XLI*, 6). Both Son and Spirit hence are seen with things below while Father is with things on high (*Hymns on Faith LXXIII*, 2).

4. Paradoxes have great place in Ephrem's symbolic thought and stand as a significant element in his theology of the Holy Trinity. According to him, the “one-ness” and the “three-ness” of the Godhead is the great paradox. As already indicated, Ephrem is fond of paradoxes; the paradox that prevails throughout Ephrem's theology of the divine revelation is that God, who reveals himself, remains again hidden. God's hiddenness and revelation are therefore two sides of the divine manifestation. Likewise, the binomial silence-word also is related to the paradoxical pair of hidden-manifest; the pair of silence and speech has its best application in Ephrem's theology of the Holy Trinity. Ephrem speaks of the “silence of the Father” and the “voice of the Son”; that is, the silence of the Father becomes eloquent in His Word. While “Silence” is related to the hiddenness of God, “Word” is associated to the divine epiphany; a person speaks about what is revealed while keeps silence about what remains hidden. With regard to God and His revelation, it is said that the Great Silence sounds in His Word; the Word of God is the Speech of God the Father. This Voice of God became a body in and through the Incarnation; that is, God left His silence and speaks to the humanity in His Son who became Incarnate. It should also be noted that the divine epiphany is also a divine pedagogy; that is, theological reflection is advocated on the revealed things. Unless God reveals himself, nothing may be known of Him; divine knowledge thus is a gift from God and the source of any divine knowledge is divine self-manifestation. In the acquisition of knowledge, God provides humanity three harps: the Old

- Testament, the New Testament and nature. Although these harps have the same function, some kind of "priority" is given to the Scriptures over nature as the former is set up as a mirror reflecting the truth; because they reveal the Holy Trinity, the Gospels are considered as a "miraculous mirror" (*Hymns on Faith* XLI, 10). Ephrem draws a parallel between baptism in three divine names and the playing of the three harps (*Hymns on Virginity* XXVII, 4); the faith in the three harps is paralleled with and founded in the faith in the three divine names with which the Church baptizes a person.
5. The divine names and epithets have a brilliant and efficacious application in Ephrem's theology of the Holy Trinity. According to Ephrem, every name stands for its reality; a name therefore represents its corresponding reality. The divine names also hence stand for the divine Persons; as they are inscribed by God himself in the Scriptures, they are true and trustworthy and stand as a means of knowing God. They function both as "unifying" and "distinguishing" elements in the comprehension and expression of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The divine names serve as "distinguishing" elements in Ephrem's teaching on the tri-unity of God; the divine name "Father", for example, refers to the Father's begetting and distinguishes Him from the Son who is begotten (and also from the Spirit). As they are capable of distinguishing "individual subsistences" it becomes clear that there exists an internal relation between "name" and "individual subsistences"; that is, the divine names have the function of revealing the truth of "distinction" in the Godhead. Likewise, they serve as "unifying" element of the "different subsistences"; the divine epithet "God", for example, functions as a common and unifying element. That means, although they stand for their distinct subsistences, the names "Father" and "Son" form a common platform shared by both Father and Son; this common platform is the divine epithet "God". In other words, God is the name of both the Father and the Son²⁸.
 6. In addition to the divine names, Ephrem draws abundantly symbols from nature with a view to affirming the faith in God the Holy Trinity. Although he makes use of symbols like human body, wheat-grain, seed, fiery-coal, sun and so on, it is that of sun/fire that has its best illustration in Ephrem's Trinitarian theology (cf. *Hymns on Faith* XL, LXXIII, LXXIV)²⁹. The sun/fire is the primary element, brightness (ray) and warmth (heat) being the second and third elements; Ephrem reminds the indissoluble relation existing between these three elements. Although each element is "separate" and "distinct" from the other two, all three elements form a single entity. Ephrem applies these distinct elements to the mystery of the Holy Trinity and asserts that the sun stands analogically for Father, while brightness for Son and warmth/heat for the Holy Spirit (*Hymns on Faith* LXXIII, 1-3 and 21).
 7. The image of the sun-sunlight-warmth has an important application among the images used to teach the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Ephrem asserts the consubstantiality and co-equality of the three Persons; as sunlight and its warmth exist always together with sun, both Son and Spirit exist eternally with the Father. Reminding one that sunbeam is the sun's child, he affirms that the Son's consubstantiality with the Father. He puts it analogically that the sun begets an offspring as splendid as its begetter; this begetting is "without cutting off and without motion" (cf. *Hymns on Faith* LXXV, 13-16)³⁰. The Father and the Son are one and share the same divine nature; they dwell in one another (*Hymns on Virginity* XXV, 7 and *Hymns on Faith* XI, 6): each One is "mingled" with the Other (*Hymns on Faith* XXXII, 16). Ephrem asserts: "A Trinity which is one being" it becomes clear that he teaches here of the Uncreated Self-Existing Being who exists triply. Likewise, as is impossible for the warmth to be cut off from the other two elements (sun and sunbeam), the Holy

Spirit is not cut off from the Father. In addition, each divine Person is complete and perfect in himself and all three divine Persons are complete and perfect in the divine Nature; each Person is mingled with the other Two (*Hymns on Faith* XL, 5). Each Person “contains” the other Two and is “contained” in the other Two. Moreover, as the “harmonious” descent of the Three at Christ's baptism shows all the three divine Persons are in perfect agreement and concord. That is, because of Their perfect unity and harmony, They are united also in their actions; all the three divine Persons descend upon a candidate at Christian baptism (*Hymns on Faith* LXXVII, 2). In short, all three Persons in the Godhead dwell in one another; this truth is explained through the language of “intermingling” (*Hymns on Faith* XL, 8).³¹ Similarly, as is with the triple elements in sun/fire, the three divine Persons are “distinct” but not “separate” from the divine nature; in other words, the “trinity” of the three divine Persons are explained through the expression “distinction”.

8. Christ's baptism in the river Jordan is a “privileged” scene of the affirmation of the Trinitarian belief. Ephrem holds that Jesus-Christ is baptized by the Holy Trinity (the ‘three-fold mysteries’). In other words, Christ's baptism is a combined activity of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (*Hymns on Faith* LI, 7-8 and *Hymns on Nativity* IV, 22); Father through His voice, Son through His power and the Holy Spirit, through His descent baptized Jesus-Christ. Triple human senses are hence related to the Trinitarian epiphany in the river Jordan; hearing to Father, touch to Son and sight to Spirit. In short, God expresses himself triply; the united hovering of the Holy Trinity reveals the equality and mutual agreement between the three divine Persons. The “Jordan-event” shows hence not only the mutual knowing but also the mutual witnessing of the three divine Persons. Christian baptism is based and founded upon Christ's baptism (cf. *Hymns on Virginity* XV, 3).

As is with Christ's baptism, a person is baptized by the Holy Trinity; Ephrem asserts this truth saying that it is by the three-fold names that bodies are baptized (*Hymns on Faith* LI, 8). This is again affirmed when he recalls that the Christian baptism depends on the three names (*Hymns on Virginity* VII, 5) which are the seal of Christian faith in God. The Lord entrusted three names to the disciples so that they may take refuge in them (*Hymns on Faith* XIII, 5). The Holy Trinity are hence the “principal actors” of Christian baptism (*Hymns on Faith* LXV, 3).

Conclusion

Ephrem may be considered as the most celebrated and erudite Church Father of the fourth century Syriac-speaking Churches. His writings are however so closely related to those which have their origin before Ephrem's theological entry; many of the ideas and images found in the documents before his time have often an extended usage and application in Ephrem. A symbolic thought-pattern, often blended with a poetic flavour, is found both in the writings of his predecessors and of Ephrem. As a chosen “vessel” of his mother Church, often agitated by “heresies” and false teachings, he defends and deepens the true Christian faith. It is in this regard that his “Trinitarian” theology deserves scholarly attention; he teaches on the “presence” and “activity” of the Holy Spirit and thereby affirms the Trinitarian faith. It should however be noted that the Pneumatological orientation in his Trinitarian theology is more elusive and open than its Christological side. That is, while Christological impulse in the Trinitarian theology is often limited to the Father-Son relation, a Pneumatological outset concentrates on the dual relationships, that of the Spirit to the Son and to the Father, and presents a better dynamism of the Holy Trinity. It is in this regard that the Eucharistic epicleses, found in the *Acts of Thomas*, the Anaphora of Addai and Mari and in Ephrem become significant; that is, the consciousness of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit is one of the distinguishing characteristic of early Syriac-

speaking Churches.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This study is limited to a period which ends with Ephrem the Syrian with whom starts a new phase of Syriac theology. Cf. P. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology: Pneumatology of Ephrem the Syrian* (Doctoral Thesis, ICP, Paris & KU, Leuven, 2011), vol. I, 4.
- 2 For further details, see MAattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 43-46.
- 3 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 80-86.
- 4 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 89-114.
- 5 For further details, see Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 131-149.
- 6 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 18.
- 7 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 19-20.
- 8 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology...*, vol. I, 67.
- 9 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 83; J. Kallarangatt, "The Acts of Thomas deserves more theological and ecclesiological attention," *Reflections on Theology and Church*, J. Kallarangatt, ed., OIRSI-Kottayam, India, 2001, 115.
- 10 Cf. G. Gertoux, *The Name of God: Its Story*, University Press of America, 2002, 9.
- 11 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 46; J.E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 36, J.C.B. Mohr, Paul Siebeck, Tübingen, 1985, 85.
- 12 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 47;
- 13 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 81.
- 14 The same idea is found also in Justin Martyr, *Apol.* II, 6; Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* IV, and Aphraates, *Dem* III, 9.
- 15 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 158-159.
- 16 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology...*, vol. I, 110-111.
- 17 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, 189.
- 18 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 201-215.
- 19 It is in this direction that T. Jansma concludes when he writes: "In these songs (*Hymns on Faith*) a passionate defence of the Trinitarian creed is combined with an unqualified rejection of Arianism which by the time of their composition had reached its acme in Edessa." "Narsai and Ephrem: Some Observations on Narsai's *Homilies on Creation* and Ephrem's *Hymns on Faith*," *Parole de l'Orient* I, 1970, 51.
- 20 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 201-215.
- 21 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 239; C. Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria*, North American Patristic Society – Patristic Monograph Series 20, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 2008, 115. What Ephrem however disliked was the "misuse" of the Greek analytical method and categories by the heretics. It is in this regard that one should understand Ephrem's rejection of the "poison of the wisdom of Greeks" (*HcHI*, 11-13; *HcJI*, 5; *Nat* XXVIII, 8; *HdF* II, 23-24). See also, T. Koonammakkal, "Ephrem's Philosophy of Theological Language," [paper presented at the International Colloquy on Ephrem at Ligugé (France), 7-9 June 2006, unpublished], 9; P.S. Russell, "A Note on Ephraem the Syrian and "the Poison of the Greeks" in Hymns on Faith 2," *The Harp* X/3, 1997, 45-54; T. Koonammakkal, "St. Ephrem and Greek Wisdom," *Symposium Syriacum VI, Orientalia Christiana Analecta* CCXLVII, 1994, 171.
- 22 For further explanations and use of this image, see Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 242-245.
- 23 For further details, see Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 246-248.
- 24 For further details on the symbolic method of Ephrem, see: Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 237-279.
- 25 For further details, see Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 281-289.
- 26 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 314.
- 27 Cf. Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 311-318.
- 28 For further details on the theological use of the divine names in the affirmation of the Trinitarian faith in Ephrem, see Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 335-342.
- 29 For a brief discussion on symbols from nature used in Ephrem's Trinitarian teaching, see Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 342-349 and 364-379.
- 30 Ephrem's teaching here is faithful to that of the Nicene Creed.
- 31 For further details see Mattathil, *Symbolic Discourses and Trinitarian Theology*, II, 373-378.

9

Basic Orientations of The Christology of St Thomas Christians

Dr Sebastian Chalakkal

Introduction

Christology is that branch of theology, which reflects systematically on the person, being and doing of Jesus of Nazareth. It includes the person, mission and destiny of Jesus Christ. It asks questions about the life and teachings of Jesus (what he did and said), about the person of Jesus Christ (who he was), about the work of Jesus Christ (what he accomplished), and about his significance (what he means to us).

From the history of the Church it is clear that Christology is always an interpretation of Jesus Christ by the Christian community in a particular time and place. Every generation attempts to reformulate their understanding of Christ in order to meet challenges and needs particular to their situation. The context of the people helps to determine the Christological articulations. Christians in different times and places have confessed their faith in Jesus Christ in a manner shaped by their particular context.

The first Christians of India, the St Thomas Christians, led a life in accordance with the teachings

of Jesus and formulated a Christology within their particular context. This article is an attempt to present the basic orientations of the Christology of the St Thomas Christians. As the St Thomas Christians followed the East Syriac tradition, the important Christological teachings of the East Syrian Fathers belongs to the Christological tradition of the St Thomas Christians. Since the East Syrian tradition owes its allegiance to the Antiochene tradition, after presenting the Christological teachings of the East Syrian Fathers, we also point out the important elements of the Christologies of some Fathers of the Church in the Antiochene tradition. It is followed by the presentation of the important characteristics of the Christology of the St. Thomas Christians.

1. Christological Teachings of the Fathers of the Church

There are three basic ecclesial traditions in the universal Church: Latin West, Greek East and Syriac Orient. But unfortunately the Syriac Orient is often forgotten. Scholars like Sebastian Brock have always

insisted on the need of revitalizing the Syriac Oriental tradition. According to him, unlike the human beings, the Church is endowed with three lungs: the Latin West, the Greek East and the Syriac Orient¹.

One can find two poles of Syriac theology: the Semitic and Hellenic poles. The first four centuries of Christianity are usually considered as the Semitic pole. During this period the Syriac theology was least influenced by Greek philosophy and culture. It is genuinely Asian and free from European cultural and intellectual influences. Theological terms and thought categories of this period were primarily Syriac. Aphrahat and Aprem belong to this period and both of them represent a genuinely Semitic and Asian form of Christianity. The Hellenic pole of Syriac theology represents the period from 5th century onwards. During this period Syriac Christianity adopted Greek thought forms and was hellenized and the Syriac writers who belong to this period fall under the Greek influence. Even if we make a distinction between the Greek and Syriac poles in Syriac theology, we can not make a sharp division between them. No Syriac writer of the 4th century is purely Semitic or totally unhellenized. The difference between these two poles is basically a difference in theological approach rather than merely a linguistic one. The Greek approach is philosophical and analytical while the Semitic approach is primarily symbolic and synthetic. These two approaches in theology are different modes of understanding and presenting. They are not mutually contradictory, but complementary². Within the Syriac tradition itself we have later (in the fifth century) the branching off into West Syriac and East Syriac traditions. We concentrate here only on the Christology of the East Syrian Fathers.

1.1. Important Teachings of the East Syrian Fathers

1.1.1. Aphrahat (345)

Aphrahat, the first known Father of the Syriac Church belongs to the period in the history of the Syriac Church when it was least Hellenized. The twenty-three *Demonstrations* written by him are one

of the earliest surviving literary works of the Syriac Church. He uses descriptive and poetic language full of imageries and typology. The central concern of the Christology of Aphrahat is the redemption brought by Christ for us.

In section 6 of the 2nd Demonstration, *The Demonstration on Charity*, Aphrahat teaches that Christ fulfilled what the Old Testament Law and Prophets were lacking. Christ offered himself instead of the offerings which are in the Law³.

Aphrahat uses the term *Ihidaya* (The Only Begotten) for Christ. Referring to Jn 1:18 he says that “the *Ihidaya* who is from his Father’s womb gives joy to all the *Ihidaye*”⁴. The term *Ihidaye* means all those who believe in the Only Begotten, i.e., the Christian believers.

In sections 10-12 of the 6th Demonstration, *The Demonstration on the Sons of the Covenant*, using the examples of water, fire, dust and sun, Aphrahat teaches that Christ with his Spirit dwells in many⁵. Aphrahat presents how Christ is different from other prophets in section 13 of the same Demonstration. The prophets Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist performed the signs by means of the Spirit whom they received in measured quantity. But our Saviour received the Spirit without measure and many are the signs which the Spirit of Christ has performed⁶.

The purpose of the 17th Demonstration, *The Demonstration on the Messiah who is the Son of God*, was to give an answer to the Jews who criticised the Christians by saying that they worship a crucified man as God. In sections 9-10 Aphrahat argues that “Jesus was early promised from ancient times by means of the prophets and was called the Son of God”⁷. In section 2 he gives the various names of Jesus and argues that Jesus is the Son of God. “It is certain for us that Jesus our Lord is God, Son of God, King, Son of the King, Light from Light, Creator, Counsellor, Guide, Way, Saviour, Shepherd, Gatherer, Gate, Pearl and Lamp. We shall however

leave them all aside and demonstrate concerning him that he is Son of God and God who came from God⁸.

1.1.2. Mar Aprem

Aprem, acclaimed as the ‘*Harp of the Spirit*’, the *Pillar of the Church* and the ‘*Prophet of Syria*’, is one of the greatest theologians of the early Christian Church. He was a great exegete, theologian and poet. He defended the Church against the heresies of Arianism and Manichaeism.

Aprem emphasises that Christ is fully divine and fully human. Christ’s divinity is not adopted. He is a divine person from the moment of conception. Incarnation is self-emptying of God out of his immense love for humanity. The form of God assumed the form of servant. Aprem uses the example of painting to speak about the intimate union of the two natures in Jesus Christ. Like a painter, mixing the pigments for painting, God is uniting the divinity and the humanity.

Aprem speaks of more than one birth of Jesus Christ. At first in eternity, he was born from the Father without a mother. In time he took a body from the virgin and was born from her without a father. After his baptism, he was born from the river. After his death, on the third day he was born from the tomb. He has to reborn in the mind and heart of each and every believer.⁹

In Aprem’s theology the restoration of man from his state after the fall is depicted as an act of Christ by giving back the robe of glory. When Adam was driven out of paradise and lost the robe, God sent his son to put on the lost robe. The blessed one, having pity on Adam, clothes him in the robe of glory to cover his nakedness¹⁰.

The mystery of the incarnation, in which divine and human natures united in the single person of Jesus Christ, was expressed by Aprem by resorting to the imagery of clothing. He uses frequently the expression “He clothed Himself with the body” for the incarnation

as it signifies the human nature in Jesus. God, without losing the absoluteness of His nature, came down to earth, clothed Himself in human nature or became one among them and redeemed humanity. He clothed Himself in the likeness of man in order to bring man to the likeness of Himself¹¹.

In the incarnation, God became man not to perfect himself but to restore man from his fallen state. So in the incarnation, God assured man a share in God’s own fullness and, in its fullness, it was an act of love which is revealed in Jesus Christ. For Aprem incarnation is the wonderful action of God’s love and mercy for humanity. And this love and mercy of God become flesh in Jesus Christ restored the dignity of man. Christ is the high priest who came down from heaven to re-admit Adam into paradise by purifying him¹². Jesus Christ descended from heaven in search of Adam and found him in *Sheol*, the underworld. He took him out of there and admitted him along with many others to Eden¹³.

1.1.3. Narsai of Nisibis (502)

Narsai, the famous East Syrian poet, taught at the ‘Persian School’ in Edessa until 471, when he moved to Nisibis, where he eventually became head of the renowned theological School of Nisibis. He followed the Antiochene Christological tradition and spoke of the two distinct natures in Christ. He was at the same time careful to avoid the notions of the ‘two sons’ or ‘two persons’. He taught that Christ is in two *kyane*, and one *parsopa* of Filiation. According to Narsai the very act of incarnation was a refiguring process: the New Adam as the perfect image of God was structured by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Narsai makes it clear that in the incarnation the Word did not change his nature, *kyana* into human nature, but assumed the human nature. The nature of the Word remained as such. There is only one Son, since the Word and the body are one in divine Being (*ituta*) and one in Person (*Parsopa*). He also speaks of an invigoration of the incarnate Son through the

descent of the Spirit. This is explained as regards the order of willing and operation. Jesus was already the Son because of the assumer. At the baptism this is publicly announced by the open appearance of the Spirit and confirmed by the Father¹⁴.

1.1.4. Babai the Great (628)

Babai's Christology is to be seen primarily in his work *Book of Union*. According to Babai, Jesus Christ is the one *Parsopa* having the two natures in their proper *Qnome*. Both natures have their properties without mixture, separation and independence. The union and distinction last forever. There is unity and there is duality. Christ is one. In his divinity Christ is Son by nature; in his humanity, he is Son by union and assumption. The principle of union in Christ is the *Parsopa* of filiation. The second *Qnoma* of the Trinity, assumed our humanity to his *Parsopa*. The human nature received the *Parsopa* of filiation at the very moment of its formation and thus became the Son of the most High. The human nature was perfect endowed with a rational soul and body. The Word did not take the place of the soul, but was united to both soul and body. This union is everlasting and never breaking. The natures do not come into any kind of mingling. Each nature keeps the properties proper to it. When they are united, they are distinct; when they are distinct, they are united. They are united in the one *Parsopa* of filiation; they are distinct in the properties of each nature¹⁵.

1.2. Prominent Christologies of the Antiochene School

1.2.1. Diodore of Tarsus (391)

Against the Monophysitic teaching of Apollinaris, Diodore defended the full humanity and divinity of Christ. He speaks of the Word-Man. According to him, the union of two natures is very profound. But this union does not in any way change the two natures. Humanity is described as the temple and the Word of God indwelt his temple. Diodore made a distinction between God the Word and the man born of Mary

in the one person of Jesus Christ. But it was misunderstood by the opponents as two separate persons in the Lord. Hence he was considered as the originator of the heresy of Nestorianism¹⁶.

1.2.2. Theodore of Mopsuestia (428)

Theodore is a disciple of Diodore and is considered as the pillar of orthodoxy and the interpreter par excellence. He emphasised the full humanity in Jesus Christ and developed systematically the doctrine of two natures in Christ. His emphasis on the true humanity led him to expressions that may suggest the independence of Christ's humanity. By the perfect conjunction or unity (*synapheia*), Jesus Christ is one and the same in the person, but not the one and the same in the natures. God the Word came down and put on the form of servant for our salvation (Phil 2:6-7). It is through the medium of humanity that the Word of God revealed himself. For Theodore, Mary is both mother of God as well as mother of man. He used *ousia*, *physis* and *hypostasis* as equivalents. *Ousia* and *physis* refer to nature in a general sense and *hypostasis* refers to a concrete expression of a given nature. *Prosopon* expresses the being. Theodore did not speak of two *prosopa* in Christ; he used it for the union of two natures. Theodore's overemphasis on the humanity of Jesus led to his condemnation in the Second Council of Constantinople (553). But the modern scholars say that apart from certain dubious expressions, his Christology is free from any error¹⁷.

1.2.3. Nestorius (451)

Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, is known in history because of the Christological heresy attributed to him called Nestorianism. Nestorianism is explained as a heresy that denies hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ and that argues that there is only a moral union of a human person and a divine person and that there are two persons in Jesus Christ.

The Christological controversy began with the problem of *theotokos*. Nestorius allowed himself to be a mediator in a dispute among the members of his

Church. Some of them were calling the Blessed Virgin, “Mother of God” (*Theotokos*), while others calling her, “Mother of man” (*anthropotokos*). Gathering both parties together, Nestorius suggested that she should be called “Mother of Christ” (*Christotokos*), a term which represented both God and man. This change was the cause of considerable controversy.

Nestorius differentiates *prosopon* (person) on the one side and *physis* and *Hypostasis* on the other side. There are two concrete realities in Jesus Christ: divinity and humanity. He named this as two *hypostaseis*. The two concrete realities are united as closely as possible. This union is illustrated by him as similar to the union of an idol to a temple or as God is united to the prophets and saints. Such a union is accidental; hence the union in Christ is merely a moral and a spiritual union. Consequently it follows that Mary is the mother of the humanity of Christ only and she is the vessel of the divinity. Nestorius uses the term *synapheia* (conjunction) to designate the union in Jesus. He taught the *synapheia* of Christ’s two natures in one *prosopon*. His model suggested that each of the two natures could be said to enjoy its own *prosopon*. In other words, this suggests the presence of two “persons” and a conjunction rather than an Incarnation. The ambiguity of terminology, especially of the word *prosopon*, made it an open question as to whether Nestorius was referring to individual properties manifested in a single concrete existent or two distinct subjects in a union of love.

Actually Nestorius did not hold the view of two persons in Christ, by the use of the term *Christotokos*. Modern studies on Nestorius have revealed that Nestorius was not a Nestorian¹⁸.

2. East Syriac Christological Terms

The following are the important Christological terms used in the East Syrian tradition.

2.1. Kyânâ: It corresponds to the Greek *Physis* and to the Latin *natura*. But it has a wider

application as it refers to the common elements of a species. It is nature in general and abstract.

2.2. Qnoma: It is one of the most difficult and complicated Syriac terms. It corresponds to the Greek *hypostasis* and to the Latin *substantia*. It is the principle which particularizes the general nature (*Kyânâ*) common to all species. It is a concrete that exists by itself. For example one can speak of the particular nature (*Qnoma*) of Jesus of Nazareth in contrast to the abstract general human nature (*Kyânâ*). One could also speak of the divine nature of the Logos (*Qnoma*) in contrast to the general divine nature of the Triune God (*Kyânâ*). In short, *Qnoma* is the manifestation of the *Kyânâ*. *Qnoma* is the particular nature, but not yet a person (*Parsopa*). It is sharing the general nature (*Kyânâ*) with all the similar *Qnome*. *Qnoma* is distinctive among its fellow *Qnome* by reason of any unique individual properties like form, temperament, fatherhood, sonship, masculinity, femininity etc. which it possesses in its *Parsopa*.

2.3. Parsopa: Parsopa in Syriac is equivalent to Greek *prosopon* and the Latin *Persona*. It is different from *Qnoma*. It is the sum total of the accidents and collective properties of a *Qnoma* which distinguishes it from others of the same species¹⁹.

3. The Christology of the St Thomas Christians

The Christian life and worship of the St. Thomas Christians were based on theology. But we do not have the documents and text books of systematic theology just like we have them in the western Christianity. What we can do is to point out some salient features of their Christology based on their ecclesial life and liturgy.

3.1. Christology based on the Christ Experience of St Thomas the Apostle

The Christology of the St Thomas Christians is born from the authentic Christian faith of the community. This faith experience of the community is

the sharing in and the continuation of the Jesus-experience of St Thomas, the apostle of India. The St. Thomas Christians of India called themselves as those who follow the “Law of Thomas” or “Way of Thomas”. It is an indication that their faith in Christ was rooted in the faith of St Thomas the Apostle.

The Synoptic gospels do not give us a detailed account of the Christ-experience of St Thomas the Apostle. He is mentioned only in the list of the twelve. But the gospel of John give Thomas an important position (Jn 11:16; 14:5-7; 20:24-29). According to the Bible Scholars, the Christological confession of St. Thomas the apostle (Jn 20:28) is a text in the New Testament where Jesus is clearly called God. Jesus’ equality with God is an important theme in the gospel of John. Thomas’ confession marks the climax of the Christology of John. St Thomas Christians throughout history have remained faithful to this Christological profession of faith of St Thomas the apostle²⁰.

3.2. Christology based on Ecclesial Life

We note an essential relationship between the ecclesiology and the Christology of the St Thomas Christians. The Christian way of life (*Kristu Mârga*) brought by the St. Thomas the Apostle was called *Thoma Mârga*. The *Thoma Mârga* was the sum total of the life and heritage of the St. Thomas Christians²¹.

It is unfortunate that some hold the position that the St Thomas Christians, who received faith from the apostle Thomas, later abandoned this faith and accepted Nestorian heretical doctrines because of their relationship with the Church of the East. This propaganda created a false image that the St Thomas Christians were heretics and schismatics before the Synod of Diamper. Many acts and decrees of the Synod of Diamper were directed against these so called “Nestorian errors” or “heretical doctrines”, which in fact the St Thomas Christians did not know or profess. At the same time, it is to be mentioned at this juncture that even amidst this misunderstanding

and misinterpretation of the faith of the St. Thomas Christians; some missionaries have acknowledged that the St. Thomas Christians have remained catholic in their faith. For example, the Jesuit Fr. Francis Dionysio, who was the rector of the Jesuit residence at Cochin from 1576-1578, wrote in a letter in 1578: “These Christians commonly believe in all the articles of the Nicene Creed and the equality of the divine persons and the two natures and one person in Christ”²². Moreover, we have evidence to prove that the St. Thomas Christians of the pre-Diamper period have used the expression ‘Mother of God’. A metal church bell cast in 1584 kept at Kuravilangad calls the Blessed Virgin Mary *emmeh d’alâha* (Mother of God) in embossed letters²³.

Many studies have demonstrated that even the Church of the East has never professed the heresy called Nestorianism and the books of this Church do not contain any heretical doctrine. The Church of the East never denied the divinity of Christ, nor advocated any division or separation in the person of Christ, who is true God and true man. The common Christological declaration signed between Pope John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV (the Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East) on 11th November 1994, acknowledged that both the Churches profess the same unique faith in the mystery of Christ and recognized that the Marian formulas of both Churches (the Assyrian Church-Mary, “the Mother of Christ our God and Saviour”; the Catholic Church-Mary, “the Mother of God” and also “the Mother of Christ”) are legitimate expressions of the same faith. Thus it is proved that the expressions used by the St Thomas Christians are true to the catholic faith and authentic expressions of the faith in Jesus Christ²⁴.

3.3. Liturgical Christology

The eastern approach to theology is more liturgy-centred. The Christ - event is proclaimed, celebrated and actualized in the liturgy. When we speak about the Christology of the St Thomas Christians we can never abandon its liturgy because

“the rule of prayer is the rule of faith” (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). Liturgy is the living source of the Christology of the St. Thomas Christians. Christology occupies the central and the prominent position in the liturgy.

The text of the Holy *Qurbana* reflects the important characteristics of the East Syrian Christology. It is a Christology which maintains the two natures of Christ and at the same time proclaims the complete divinity and humanity of Christ. The divinity of Jesus is explicitly and implicitly mentioned many times in the *Qurbana*. It can be seen in the prayer just before anaphora, in the middle of the fourth *G'hantha*, in the prayer before *Huttamma*, *Onitha d'Raze*, Prayer of the assembly after Holy Communion on Sundays and in the third *G'hantha*²⁵. Many prayers in the *Qurbana* emphasise the complete human nature of Jesus. The third *G'hantha*, the prayer before the gospel reading etc. are some of the examples. The personal pronoun ‘you’ used in the Holy *Qurbana* is an indication of the human nature of Jesus²⁶.

The text of the Holy *Qurbana* is rich with various Christological titles. The various Christological titles help us to reach the knowledge of the mystery of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, Christological titles are used as confessions, acclamations, formulas of faith, and hymns, to describe Jesus’ dignity, status and qualification. Titles are distinctive names that indicate attributes of Jesus and illuminate his being and his saving work. Christological titles found in the New Testament, in one way or the other, describe Christ’s identity and dignity as the responses of different believers. Each title contains the seeds of a type of Christology. Each draws our attention to some aspect of the many-sided reality of Jesus. Importance should be given not to the titles, but to the person who is revealed through the titles²⁷. The typical Christological title of the St. Thomas Christians is *Išo M’siha*. Other important titles include *M’siha*, the son, the son of God, Holy Son, Your beloved and our Lord *Išo*

M’siha, Lord, God, Lord of all, Saviour, Brightness of the Father’s glory, Image of the *Qnoma*, Light of the Lord, Life of all, The only begotten (*Ihidaya*), First born of all creation, Hope of our nature, Good shepherd, Adorable king, Pledge and so on²⁸.

Various aspects of salvation in Christ are listed in the text of the Holy *Qurbana*. In the prayer of the presentation of the gifts, the self-sacrifice of Christ for our salvation is remembered. The salvific work of Christ is seen here in terms of Christ’s atoning death for us. The second part of the third *G'hanta* prayer runs as follows: “You have showered upon us such great blessings for which we can never thank you enough. To make us share in Your divine life, you assumed our human nature, restored us from our fallen nature, and brought us from death to life eternal. Forgiving our debts You sanctified us sinners, enlightened our minds, defeated our enemies, and glorified our frail nature by Your immense grace.” According to this prayer, the first effect of salvation is the sharing of divine life. The eastern and oriental theology of deification (*theosis*) is reflected here in this prayer²⁹.

3.4. Pneumatological Christology

As we find in the Scripture, the Spirit is at work at all stages of Jesus’ life. Jesus is anointed with the Spirit and it is in the Spirit that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is different from other bearers of the Spirit not only in degree but also in kind. Jesus is not simply moved by the Spirit but conceived and formed by the Spirit. The Spirit rests on him and impels him. He gives himself on the cross in the Spirit to the Father. It is in the power of the Spirit that Jesus is raised from the dead and he becomes a living spirit. The mode of existence of the *Kyrios* is the *Pneuma*. Now it is through the Spirit that Jesus is made present to us³⁰.

The St. Thomas Christians have adopted a Pneumatological approach to Christology. This fact is evident from the Divine Liturgy which ascribes an important role to the Holy Spirit. After the prayer of

the congregation following the Holy Communion, the deacon announces that it is by the gift of the grace of the Holy Spirit that we have approached the holy altar and have been accounted worthy to participate in these glorious, holy, life-giving and divine mysteries. The prayer of epiclesis points to the special role of the Spirit in the consecration and the transformation of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. The fourth *g'hanta* prayer states that the *Qurbana* is to be blessed and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ that it results in the pardon of debts, remission of sins and the great hope of resurrection from the dead and the new life in the Kingdom of heaven³¹.

3.5. Christology, Contextual and Sensitive to the Culture of India

Each Christological trend is rooted in a particular cultural context. The St Thomas Christians have always remained faithful to the Scriptures and Tradition of the Church and at the same time developed an inculturated theology. The St Thomas Christians in India witnessed to Christ and at the same time, preserved the socio-cultural practices. They adopted and Christianized the socio-cultural customs of the Hindus. Though they accepted Christ and his gospel, they maintained some customs and traditions of the Hindu brethren³². They were "Christians in faith, Indian in culture and oriental in worship"³³.

They had harmonious and peaceful relationships with the members of other religions. They were friendly and co-operative with other religious communities in India. The St Thomas Christians lived among the followers of other religions in tolerance and mutual recognition. As A. Thazhath observes, "The Church of St Thomas which grew in the cosmopolitan culture of Sangham period had elements of Buddhism, Jainism, Dravidic religions, and Aryan, Persian and Jewish religions..."³⁴. This tolerance and mutual recognition however does not mean relativizing or reducing the Christian faith.

Concluding Observations

Some aspects of the Christology of the St Thomas Christians are pointed out in this article. This theme cannot be restricted only to a number of pages and it requires continuous study and serious research. The author of this essay would be happy and remain satisfied, if this humble attempt sheds at least a ray of light in the path of the St Thomas Christians to discover their own Christology.

Theology in general and Christology in particular has to take into account the actual life situation of the people. Otherwise theology remains static, stagnant class room fabrication. St Thomas Christians have succeeded in integrating the life of the people of their time in their ecclesial life and theological speculations. Their Christology was in solidarity with the experiences of the people and sensitive to the Indian culture.

Any relevant Christology can not but take into account the glaring realities of our society. Jesus proclaimed the good news to the poor and the downtrodden in Palestine. It is the same mission that we have to do in India. We should know our people and their problems if we want to preach Christ today to the people of India. As in Palestine, inequality and injustice are the main problems that we have to face today in India. The vast majority of the people are affected by poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and lack of health. The women, the Dalits and the tribals are marginalized in our society³⁵.

All our Christological speculations should lead us to the basic proclamation and affirmation of faith as St. Thomas has proclaimed "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28). But this affirmation of faith necessarily includes our mission of love and service to the people. Because the uniqueness of Jesus consists in the fact that he is the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity. The mystery of incarnation is the greatest example and expression of God's love and kenosis. This God, who is revealed

in Jesus, is a friend of the poor, the weak, the last and the lost. The power and strength of this God is revealed on the cross. It is in forgiving and loving all, even the enemies, that he showed us his greatness. Our faith in Jesus should impel us to love our brethren and to be humble servants of our Lord. Hence, to conclude, I feel that what is urgent in today's context is a Christ-like-life of the Christians. Those who are attracted to the true Christian way of life from their personal experiences will not have the difficulty to accept and proclaim Jesus Christ as their Lord and God.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cf. S. Brock, "The Syriac Orient: A Third Lung for the Church", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 71 (2005), 5.
- 2 Cf. Archbishop Joseph Powathil, "Early Syriac Theology: Some Basic Features", in P. Maniyattu (ed.), *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, Ephrem's Publications, Satna, 2007, 30-32.
- 3 Cf. Aphrahat, *2nd Demonstration, The Demonstration on Charity*, no. 6, as translated by K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat. Demonstrations I*, SEERI, Kottayam, 2005, 44-46.
- 4 Cf. Aphrahat, *6th Demonstration on the Sons of the Covenant*, no. 6, as translated by K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat. Demonstrations I*, 141.
- 5 Cf. Aphrahat, *6th Demonstration on the Sons of the Covenant*, 10-12 as translated by K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat. Demonstrations I*, 146-150.
- 6 Cf. Aphrahat, *6th Demonstration on the Sons of the Covenant*, 13, as translated by K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat. Demonstrations I*, 150-152.
- 7 Cf. Aphrahat, *17th Demonstration, The Demonstration on the Messiah Who is the Son of God*, 2, as translated by K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat. Demonstrations I*, 146.
- 8 Cf. Aphrahat, *17th Demonstration, The Demonstration on the Messiah Who is the Son of God*, 2, as translated by K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat. Demonstrations I*, 2005, 140.
- 9 Cf. T. Kalayil, "St. Ephrem's View of Christ as the Unique Mediator of Redemption", in X. Koodapuzha, (ed.), *Eastern Theological Reflections in India*, OIRSI, Kottayam, 1999, 126-127.
- 10 Cf. Aprem, *Hymns on Paradise* XII: 6, as translated by S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1990, 162.
- 11 Cf. Aprem, *Hymns on Paradise* XI: 6, as translated by S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 156.
- 12 Cf. Aprem, *Hymns on Paradise* IV: 4, as translated by S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 98-99.
- 13 Cf. Aprem, *Hymns on Paradise* VIII: 10, as translated by S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 134-135.
- 14 Cf. I. Arickappallil, *The Holy Spirit in Narsai of Nisibis: A Theological Synthesis*, (Doctoral Thesis Extract), Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, 1992, 11-12.
- 15 Cf. G. Chediath, *Christology*, OIRSI, Kottayam, 2002, 153-154.
- 16 Cf. L. D. Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1990, 142-143.
- 17 Cf. G. Thumapanirappel, *Christ in the East Syriac Tradition*, Ephrem's Publications, Satna 2003, 48.
- 18 Cf. A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, A. R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, London 1965, 373.
- 19 Cf. J. Thoppil, "Christology in the Early Syriac Tradition", in P. Maniyattu (ed.), *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, Ephrem's Publications, Satna 2007, 162-163.
- 20 Cf. M. Vellanickal, "St. Thomas' Christ-Experience: Foundation of the Syro-Malabar Church", in M. Manakatt & J. Puthenveetil (eds.), *Syro-Malabar Theology in Context*, OIRSI, Kottayam 2007, 83.
- 21 A. Thazhath, *The Law of Thomas*, OIRSI, Kottayam, 1987, 9.
- 22 J. Thaliath, *The Synod of Diamper*, Rome 1958, 13; as quoted in P. Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India*, Rome 2003, 28. See also X. Koodapuzha, *Faith and Communion of the Indian Church of the St. Thomas Christians*, Kottayam 1982; P. Pallath, "The St. Thomas Christians and Inculturation", *Ephrem's Theological Journal* 4, 2000, 149-175; P. Pallath, "Were the St. Thomas Christians in India Nestorians at the time of the Synod of Diamper in 1599?", *Ephrem's Theological Journal* 5, 2001, 34-70.
- 23 Cf. Koodapuzha, *Faith and Communion* 121.
- 24 Cf. Pallath, *The Catholic Church in India*, 32-33.

- 25 Cf. S. Athappilly, “SyroMalabar Qurbanayile Misihavijnaniyam” in J. Kallarangatt (ed.), *Paurasthyadeivasasthra Darsanangal*, OIRSI, Kottayam, 1997, 269.
- 26 Cf. S. Athappilly, “SyroMalabar Qurbanayile ...”, 277.
- 27 Cf. J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, New York, 1977, 291.
- 28 Cf. J. Kochuparampil, “The Liturgical Christology of the Syro-Malabar Church”, *Thomas Christian Heritage* 1, 2008, 86-87.
- 29 Cf. S. Athappilly, “Christological Faith-Expressions in the Syro-Malabar Qurbana”, *Christian Orient* 14, 1993, 85-86.
- 30 Cf. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 251, 256.
- 31 Cf. S. Athappilly, “Christological Faith-Expressions in the Syro-Malabar Qurbana”, *Christian Orient* 14, 1993, 86-87.
- 32 For a detailed presentation of the different aspects of the life of the St. Thomas Christians in tune with the Indian culture, see A. Thazhath, *The Juridical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church: A Historico-Juridical Study*, OIRSI, Kottayam, 1987, 22-63.
- 33 This is a very famous expression of Fr. Placid J. Podippara about the St. Thomas Christians in India. Cf. T. Kalayil, ed., *Collected Works of Rev. Dr. Placid J. Podippara C. M. I.*, Vol. II & III, Mannanam, 2007, 531-540. The first publication of this article seems to have been from Wuerzburg, Germany, in 1959 in *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 89-104.
- 34 A. Thazhath, *The Quest for Identity: The Syro-Malabar Church and Its Rite*, Thrissur Institute of Theology, Trichur, 1992, 25.
- 35 Cf. K. Pathil, “The Syro-Malabar Church in Theologizing: Context and Concerns Today”, in M. Manakatt & J. Puthenveetil (eds.), *Syro-Malabar Theology in Context*, OIRSI, Kottayam 2007, 181.

10

Christological Agreement between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Catholic Church

Dr George Thumpanirappel

Introduction

For Christological reasons, the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Coptic Church and the Church of the East, remained apart for centuries. These Churches have finally realized that they profess the same faith in Jesus Christ. *The common christological declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East* can be considered as one of the greatest ecumenical achievements of the twentieth century as it paved the way for the end of a division or separation in Christendom that had existed since the post-Ephesian period. On 9 November, 1994 at the General Audience Pope John Paul II introduced Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV with the following words:

He has come also to sign with the Catholic Church a Common Christological Declaration, that will allow the separation, which came about following the Council of Ephesus in the year 431 to be overcome. This will bring to an end after

more than fifteen centuries the misunderstandings concerning our faith in Christ, true God and true man, born of the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit. You can well understand how joyful my soul is for this occasion and with what sentiments of esteem and fraternal communion I receive His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV¹.

1. Background

We shall now examine the background of the Declaration. First of all, it was the contribution of the scholars that paved the way for such a declaration. The last century produced many studies, which changed the attitudes towards the person of Nestorius as well as towards his doctrine.

1.1. Contribution of the Scholars

George Badger (1815-88), an Englishman wrote about the Church of the East from a real acquaintance. He was also the first to make a serious observation that its doctrine was not, from a Catholic point of view, heretical². Insisting that the Church of

the East should be allowed to speak for itself, he attempted to understand the doctrine of this Church using her own Syriac books and in particular her prayers and liturgies³. He asked:

May it not be, then, as many learned men have concluded, that though in error with respect of the language in which they declare their belief in the Second Person of the Glorious TRINITY, and blameworthy in the unseemly comparisons and the improper expressions by which they attempt to explain a mystery which infinitely surpasses the extent of man's imperfect reason, and justly to be condemned for their refusal to submit to the authority of the Church, the Nestorians, nevertheless, hold in effect, the true Catholic doctrine as it is revealed to us in Holy Scripture and as was set forth and established by the Council of Ephesus?⁴.

The next important writer was Arthur John Maclean (1858-1943). In a report published in a Church magazine in 1887, he wrote of the Assyrians:

They use unorthodox language and regard Nestorius as a saint; but I believe their faith is right. And those of them who know anything of the subject readily agree that the question between them and us is but one of words. Of course they did very wrong in rejecting the Council of Ephesus - i.e. in setting themselves above the rest of Christendom - but one may find many excuses for them⁵.

Maclean's way to a position of ecumenical sympathy was somewhat academic. The Lambeth Conference of 1908 debated the problem of the relation of the Church of England with these "Separated Churches" of the East. A kind of "occasional intercommunion" was allowed. The Lambeth Conference of 1920 ratified provisions for intercommunion with the Church of the East⁶. The Anglican Church made an official attempt to examine the orthodoxy of the Christology of the Nestorians and the Lambeth Conference received

the report from the special committee appointed by the 1908 Lambeth Conference for this purpose. This committee was perfectly satisfied concerning the doctrinal explanations given by the authorities of the "Nestorian" Church; these led to the recommendation of occasional inter-communion between the Anglican and the Nestorian Churches.⁷ A collection of the canons of the councils and synods recognized by the Church of the East were published in Syriac with a French translation by J. B. Chabot.⁸ This collection will enable us to understand the official teaching of the Church of the East during the formative period of the fifth to seventh centuries. The text published by Chabot is only a part of a vast synodal collection which is transmitted in a number of nineteenth and twentieth-century manuscripts copied from a manuscript of the thirteenth or fourteenth century (Alqosh Ms 169). This collection was made by Patriarch Elia I who ruled between 1028-1049 A. D, and put together in its present form in the eleventh century. It is interesting to note that 27 canons of Chalcedon are included in the list of the western synods⁹. In 1905 Loofs had published a collection of Nestorian texts entitled *Nestoriana*¹⁰. The French translator of the *Heracleides* had added to his works some recently found material.¹¹ This work gave for the first time an opportunity to survey the remains of the works of Nestorius that were accessible. Although the Greek original is lost, the Syriac translation was made in 540 AD and was preserved in a manuscript, dating from about 1100 AD, in the Library of the Nestorian patriarch of Kotschanes in Persian Turkestan. The rediscovery of this work of Nestorius was first made when the existence of the Strassburg manuscript was heard of in 1897¹². Bazaar of *Heracleides* was made available for the public in 1897. In 1889 a Syrian priest by name of Auscha'na succeeded in secretly making a hurried copy of the manuscript for the library of the missionaries at Urmia. One copy of this came into the possession of Professor Bethune-Baker of Cambridge; a fourth copy was for the use of Bedjan. The publication of Nestorius' *Bazaar of Herackides* helped immensely to remove the misunderstandings

about the teaching of Nestorius. It shed light on Nestorius' teaching by using his own words. Bedjan edited the Syriac Text and F. Nau the French translation of the first work¹³. G.R. Driver has made a translation in English¹⁴. Bethune-Baker had already introduced the *Bazaar of Heracleides* in his work entitled *Nestorius and his Teaching: a Fresh Examination of Evidence with a Special Reference to the Newly Recovered Apology of Nestorius*,¹⁵ Since the rediscovery of the *Bazaar of Heracleides* of Nestorius at the end of the 19th century, historians such as Harnack, Loofs, Bethune-Baker and Duchesne have tried to re-establish Nestorius' good name to what is held in the Church of the East today. As Bethune-Baker says: "However outspoken he was, however one-sided his phrases may seem, they are at least always straight forward. Perhaps his very straight forwardness was his bane."¹⁶ It is certainly true that Nestorius was misinterpreted for centuries. Bethune-Baker states:

The primitive faith in Jesus as at once both God and man:— it was just this faith for which Nestorius contended, the faith which he found expressed in the Gospels and believed to have been always the faith of the Church, faith in a Person who was both God and man, very God incarnate¹⁷.

After studying Nestorius' theology based on the *Bazaar* Bethune-Baker concluded that Nestorius was not "Nestorian"¹⁸. The study of Abramowski, *Untersuchen zum Liber Heraclides des Nestorius* is also worth mentioning¹⁹. As Wigram says Nestorius could rejoice in his own personal condemnation and abandonment, on hearing that the cause for which he preached had been secured, by the Concordat between Cyril and John of Antioch and by the publication of the Tome of Leo. although he most probably did not live to hear of the sealing of it at Chalcedon²⁰. As Bethune-Baker points out in view of history it is difficult to believe that there was anything fundamentally wrong with the faith of the Nestorian

Church. There is, as far we can gather, nothing essentially unorthodox in the faith of its members or in the writings of the Fathers to which it appeals²¹.

In 1932 Mingana discovered and published in English the translation of a Syriac text of Theodore's *Catechetical Homilies*. The publication of the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, until then unknown to scholars, helped to understand better the views of Theodore who was considered a "Nestorian before Nestorius"²².

Another scholar to be remembered is Andre de Halleux. His article "La christologie de Martyrios-Sahdona dans l'evolution du nestorianisme" is worth mentioning²³. According to de Halleux personal anathemas have often resulted from a lack of mutual understanding²⁴. He says; "As Nestorius never professed the heresy called Nestorianism, the Assyrian Church of the East, which like him has always condemned this heretical Nestorianism, professed the common faith in the unconfounded unity of Christ throughout the formulation of its own tradition"²⁵. According to Grillmeier, Theodore was searching for a new interpretation of the participation of man in God and the conjunction of God and man in Christ, so as to be able to achieve a synthesis between the immanence and transcendence of God in us and in Christ in the face of the Arians and the Apollinarians. This immanence of the Logos and the integrity of the manhood in Christ are preserved. He interprets the unity of God and man in Christ along the lines of that of a body-soul unity²⁶.

As Grillmeier states:

Nestorius, too, played a part in theological developments after his deposition (431) and exile (436), though - apart from the influence of his writings and his supporters - he exerted no direct influence upon them. If we still assign the Theopaschites (431-5) and the Tragoedia (= First Apologia) to the period about Ephesus, only the Liber Hereclidis (the Second Apologia) and the 'Letter to the inhabitants of Constantinople' are

relevant for the period of his exile. This last, written after the ‘Robber Synod’ of 449, shows that Nestorius declared himself in agreement with the Christology of Flavian of Constantinople and of the Tome of Leo I to Flavian. The Liber Hereclidis also confirms the fact that Nestorius had knowledge of this important writing of Leo’s²⁷.

And as Grillmeier adds:

After the publication of the *Tomus ad Flavianum* by Leo I, a new situation arose for Nestorius. Now he had to show that his own Christology was in accord with that of the Tome, which in historical terms amounted more to an incrimination of the Tome than a justification of Nestorius. But as a result he had an opportunity to develop the whole structure of his Christology and go ground it in individual details. We have the result of this in the second part of the L. H²⁸.

As Grillmeier says the chief concern of the former bishop of Constantinople was to provide for a clear distinction of natures in the face of the heretical tendencies of his time, whether real or imagined so²⁹. The ecumenical importance of understanding Nestorius is described by Grillmeier: “The more we can show the orthodoxy of his thought, the more ecumenical contact will be possible with Nestorian Church of today, though Nestorius himself would probably not claim to be the father of a new community”³⁰.

Mar Aprem, the bishop of the Assyrian Church of Trichur says: “The Christology of the Church of the East neither teaches the duality of the person of Christ, nor is it a denial of the divinity of Christ”³¹. No human terminology can adequately convey the mysterious union of the divine and human in one person. But to a great extent, Nestorius was successful³². As Bethune-Baker says: “No trace of heresy has crept into them; I can find no trace of Nestorianism in the Church of the East of that time”³³. Nestorius says that if he held the views attributed to him he would condemn himself, and even beg that

his guilt might be visited with retribution, as would be just, even though he made ten thousand supplications for mercy and brought forward all manner of arguments in justification of his words³⁴. We read in the *Bazaar* thus: “Rejoice for me, O desert, my beloved and my foster-parent and the home of my habitation, and my mother [the land of] my exile, who after my death will guard my body unto the resurrection by the will of God”³⁵.

Geevarghese Chediath’s study on the *Christology of Mar Babai the Great* helps us to understand the Christology of the Church of the East as articulated by one of her most prominent theologians³⁶. Scipioni, has also conducted an important study on Nestorius in his works: *Nestorio e il concilio di Efeso: storia, dogma e critica* (1974) and *Ricerche sulla Christologia del “Libro di Eraclide” di Nestorio: La Formulazione teologica e il suo Contesto filosofico* (1956). Among current scholars, Sebastian Brock’s contribution is worth mentioning. His researches bring to light the importance of the teaching and contributions of the Assyrian Church of the East. In his article “The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials” he has analyzed the Christology of this Church from its synodal sources. Recent researches may be said to have contributed to a new image of Nestorius.

1.2. The *Pro Oriente* Foundation

In 1964, at about the same time as the Second Vatican Council published its decree on ecumenism, the *Pro Oriente* was founded by Cardinal Konig in Vienna³⁷. There were a series of ecumenical meetings in Vienna and visits from Vienna to the leaders of the Old Oriental Churches. Qualified theologians from the Oriental Churches and representatives of the Roman Catholic Church discussed ecumenical goals and existing difficulties at the first Viennese unofficial ecumenical consultation (1971) and the well-known Viennese Christological formula was jointly drawn

up. It became evident that linguistic and theological misunderstandings had led to tragic conflicts in the past³⁸.

During the five unofficial consultations between theologians of the Roman Catholic and the non-Chalcedonian Churches, neither the subject of Nestorius, nor that of Nestorianism, nor the Assyrian Church of the East were on the agenda. Extreme emphasis on duality is repeatedly condemned by the wording of the five Vienna dialogue rounds, obviously called Nestorianism. On the other hand, the extreme position of monophysitism was rejected under the label “Eutychianism”. Even though there was a difference of opinion as to whether include the Assyrian Church of the East in the dialogues conducted by the *Pro Oriente*, they were later included. Mar Aprem of Trichur agreed to the Vienna Christological formula, during the second regional symposium held at Kottayam, in Kerala in 1993. He stated that not using the term *Theotokos* did not imply that the Assyrian Church denied the position of Mary as Mother of God.³⁹ The consultations of the *Pro Oriente* foundation helped to regain an enormous amount of common ground, first and foremost in the vitally important field of Christology. It helped to heal a rift that had existed for more than fifteen centuries. The unofficial Christological agreement arrived at the *Pro Oriente* consultations in Vienna is today known as the “Vienna Christological Formulation”⁴⁰. It was the achievements of the Pro Oriente Consultations that the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches discovered the already existing deep bonds of union among them.⁴¹ As Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV agreed in his “Preamble” to the first Syriac Dialogue:

I am happy to say that among the benefits of the efforts of these scholars; along with the patient and diligent labour of others was the historic signing of a “Common Christological Declaration” by His Holiness John Paul II and myself on 11 November, 1994. This most welcome development could not have taken place without the understanding brought about through the gesture of opening the eastern and western Churches towards one another⁴².

Mar Dinkha IV acknowledged the contributions of the scholars towards the understanding of the real position of the Church of the East, which led to the signing of the common Christological declaration. The initiatives made since the time of Vatican II by the Pro Oriente Ecumenical Foundation, the organization of the five unofficial consultations between the Roman Catholic Church and Oriental Orthodox theologians under the guiding influence of its founder, H. Em. Francis cardinal Konig, and the contribution of this organization has made toward the re-energizing of eastern Christianity led by its current president Alfred Stirnemann are of incalculable worth. The healing of ancient wounds that had taken place through Pro Oriente’s efforts brought the Church of Christ a new healthy vigour and rekindled hope for the renewal of the original unity and mutual cooperation that had marked the Churches of the earliest fathers, both East and West⁴³.

The activities of *Pro Oriente* have created a new awareness of true Christian fellowship and mutual confidence from which we may draw hope for a future of complete communion in our sister Churches⁴⁴. The Syriac Commission was formed in 1994. The official representatives of all eight Syriac Churches (Syrian Catholic Church of Antioch, Maronite Catholic Church, Syrian Orthodox, Chaldean Catholic Church, Assyrian Church, Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, Malankara Catholic Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Church) and the members of the *Pro Oriente* foundation are the members of the “Syriac Commission”. This commission is the unique platform for the Syriac Churches to come together and to discuss the matters pertaining to Syriac Culture and heritage. This would aid full communion⁴⁵. In 1994 there was a consultation in Vienna to evaluate the position of the Assyrian Church. There was another consultation in 1996, the third consultation in Chicago in 1997 the fourth consultation in Vienna 2000. All of these were published by *Pro Oriente* with the title of “Syriac Dialogue” (1994, 1996, 1998, 2001 respectively)⁴⁶. The Assyrian Church of the East had been simply ignored or sidelined by the other Churches in the modern ecumenical discussions. It

was the initiative of the *Pro Oriente* foundation to take up the lead to bring this Church into the ecumenical forefront and the dialogue among the Syriac Churches⁴⁷.

1.2.1. The Vienna Christological Formula

The most important result of the Vienna dialogue with Oriental Orthodox Churches was the so-called “Vienna Christological Formula.” This is contained in the communique of the First Vienna Consultation unanimously accepted on 12 September, 1971⁴⁸. Proposals made by the theologians assembled in Vienna in their personal capacity as experts and the faithful were submitted to the judgment of the competent Church authorities. They were received by both popes and patriarchs and adopted even word for word by common declarations signed by the Roman Pontiffs (Paul VI, John Paul II) and Patriarchs of Antioch (Ignatios Yacoub III, Ignatios Zakka I Iwas) and Alexandria (Shenouda III). Thus the Vienna Christological Formula was officially recognized by the highest Church authorities⁴⁹.

1.2.2. The Vienna Christological Formula: Point of View of the Assyrian Church

Mar Bawai Soro of the Assyrian Church went through the Vienna Christological formula clause-by-clause, indicating where the Assyrian Church of the East would have no difficulty in giving full assent, and where the phraseology of the formula posed problems. The extent of agreement that Soro brought was encouraging. The two main points of difficulty lay primarily in a certain ambiguity inherent in the wording of the formula. The first of these concerned references to the ‘dogmatic decisions and teachings,’ and ‘the faith’ of Ephesus (alongside Nicea and Constantinople). The problem was, in the first place, that the Church of the East had never accepted the Council of Ephesus. Apart from its procedural irregularities, this was a council convened by the

Roman emperor, and so not applicable to the Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire. Since the Council of Ephesus never issued any new credal formula, it is unclear what precisely is meant by ‘the faith of Ephesus’ and thus several different interpretations of this are possible⁵⁰.

1.3. Visits of the Patriarchs from the Church of the East to Rome

The Chinese ‘Nestorian’ Rabban bar Sauma, Vicar General of the Assyrian Patriarch *Yaballaha* visited Rome, at the time of the death of Pope Honorius IV (3 April, 1287). The cardinals accepted the confession of faith, which was given them as perfectly orthodox. The cardinals allowed the guest to celebrate the Holy Eucharist in St. Peter’s⁵¹. The same Rabban bar Sauma celebrated the Eucharist of Mar Addai and Mari in the presence of the English King Edward I who also received Holy Communion from his hands, probably at Westminster⁵². Later when the question of succession occurred in the Church of the East, a monk was elected and sent to Rome for the approval of the Holy See. In the year 1553 John Sulaqa was consecrated Patriarch for the Chaldeans. This was the formal communion of a part of the East Syrian Church with Rome although it is true that the majority of the Church was not in communion under the Patriarch John Sulaqa. During the First Vatican Council there was an official invitation to the Assyrian Church of the East to participate in the Council under the Patriarch Reuben Sim’on XVIII (1860-1903). Due to the interference of the Anglican missionaries this was not realized.

Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Dinkha IV met in Rome on 7 November, 1984. They expressed the desire to work together towards the mutual understanding of each other’s theology and Christology⁵³. Both the Pope and the Patriarch considered the meeting as a basic step on the way towards full communion between their Churches. They could indeed, from then on, proclaim before

the world their common faith in the mystery of the Incarnation⁵⁴.

In June 1994 there was an unofficial consultation “Orthodoxy and Catholicity in the Syriac Tradition with Special Attention to the Theology of the Church of the East in Sasanian Empire.”⁵⁵ The Pope and Patriarch established a mixed committee for theological dialogue and charged it with overcoming the obstacles that still prevent full communion⁵⁶.

At a meeting in Australia in July 1994, the Assyrian Holy Synod reached a number of important decisions concerning the life of this Church. The bishops established a Commission on Inter-Church Relations and Education Development under the guidance of Bishop Bawai Soro to prepare for theological dialogues with other Churches and the development of programming in religious education.

The Common Christological Declaration signed on 11 November, 1994, by Pope John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East marked a significant phase on the way to the communion of these Churches. The Common Declaration no longer insisted that the term *Theotokos* be applied to the Virgin Mary. Many both in West and East would have thought that the terminology of *Theotokos*, if not also the two natures of the Tome of Leo, were the essentials of orthodoxy. The new comprehensiveness of these statements promises much for the future⁵⁷.

Dinkha IV was convinced that the Christological differences between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East were merely a question of terminology that did not affect the essentials of the faith. He repeatedly expressed to the Holy Father his hope of one day arriving at a common declaration, which could also help dispel the memory among his faithful of past theological controversies, and give new impetus to relations between Catholics and Assyrians

in countries where they are called to live side by side⁵⁸. On the occasion of the Common Declaration Pope John Paul II said:

At the time of your previous visit, you shared with me your ardent wish that a declaration of the Pope of Rome and of the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East would one day be able to express our two Churches’ common faith in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary. Historians and theologians immediately set about examining very carefully the Christological consequences of the Council of Ephesus. In an atmosphere of fraternity and mutual confidence, a fruitful dialogue has enabled us to overcome the ambiguities and misunderstanding of the past. Today, we have arrived at the Common Christological Declaration, which we are about to sign together. This constitutes an important witness, which will not fail to cause rejoicing among the faithful of our two Churches⁵⁹.

This declaration does not pertain only to the theological level. It was meant to dispel misunderstandings with regard to the manner of expressing the mystery of Christ in order to draw practical consequences for the life of the faithful in all those territories where Catholics and Assyrians live close to one another, it was also meant for effective pastoral collaboration.⁶⁰ This perspective of collaboration, which obviously extends to those Chaldeans who entered into communion with the Church of Rome in the mid-sixteenth century and are closest to their Assyrian brothers and sisters because of their affinities in liturgy, language and culture, “can also strengthen their ability to give a common witness to the truth of the Gospel, insofar as this is possible.” (Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism, Ecumenical Cooperation in Catechesis, n. 188) Dialogue can only live in fraternal reciprocity⁶¹.

2. Common Faith Declared by the Pope and the Patriarch of the

Assyrian Church

Both Pope John Paul II and Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV consider the Common Christological Declaration (CCD) as a basis on the way towards the full communion to be restored between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. They can really proclaim together their common faith in the mystery of the Incarnation⁶². A shared faith in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was acknowledged by the Common Declaration. We read there:

As heirs and guardians of the faith received from the Apostles as formulated by our common Fathers in the Nicene Creed, we confess one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father from all eternity who, in the fullness of time, came down from heaven and became man for our salvation. The Word of God, second Person of the Holy Trinity, became incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit in assuming from the holy Virgin Mary a body animated by a rational soul, with which he was indissolubly united from the moment of his conception⁶³.

Actually both Churches firmly accept the faith of the Nicene Creed as a common faith.

2.1. Faith in the One, double-natured Divine Person

The *Common Christological Declaration* (CCD) affirms that both Churches believe that Our Lord Jesus Christ is true God as well as true man. It agrees that both the Assyrian Church and the Catholic Church proclaim Christ to be one divine person. So we can no longer accuse the Assyrian Church of being “Nestorian” according to which there are two persons in Jesus. We read in the CCD:

Therefore our Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true man, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, consubstantial with the Father and consubstantial with us in all

things but sin. His divinity and his humanity are united in one person, without confusion or change, without division or separation. In him has been preserved the difference of the natures of divinity and humanity, with all their properties, faculties and operations. But far from constituting “one and another,” the divinity and humanity are united in the person of the same and unique Son of God and Lord Jesus Christ, who is the object of a single adoration. Christ therefore is not an “ordinary man” whom God adopted in order to reside in him and inspire him, as in the righteous ones and the prophets. But the same God the Word, begotten of his Father before all worlds without beginning according to his divinity, was born of a mother without a father in the last times according to his humanity⁶⁴.

In Jesus Christ divinity and humanity are united in one person, without confusion or change, without division or separation. Both Churches hold the same faith in one person and two natures. The so-called Nestorianism holds two persons, corresponding to two natures. However, according to CCD neither of the two Churches, holds this error. In Jesus divinity and humanity are united in the person of the same and unique Son of God.

3. Mother of God and Mother of Christ

The CCD acknowledges the legitimacy of calling the Blessed Virgin Mary both “Mother of God” and “Mother of Christ.” Therefore there is no point in continuing to accuse the Assyrian Church of the East as being “Nestorian” on the grounds that they do not call Mary “Mother of God.” We read in the CCD:

The humanity to which the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth always was that of the Son of God himself. That is the reason why the Assyrian Church of the East is praying the Virgin Mary as “the Mother of Christ our God and Saviour.” In the light of this same faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as “the Mother of

God” and also as “the Mother of Christ.” We both recognize the legitimacy and tightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety⁶⁵.

It is clear that the reference to the Virgin Mary as the Mother of ‘Our Lord God, Jesus Christ’ states the Orthodox understanding of Mary as the Mother of God. The liturgical expression of Mother of Christ used by the Assyrian Church is the same as Mother of God. The understanding of the Assyrian Church on the concept of Mother of God can be illustrated in an explanation given by the Assyrian Patriarch in 1911 to the Archbishop of Canterbury in a consultation with the bishops of the Assyrian Church:

Concerning the blessed Saint Mary, we confess that she is the Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, in that, from the commencement of the conception of the humanity of our Lord, God the Word, the second ‘qnuma’ of the Holy Trinity, was united therewith, and became one Son, one Person, to all eternity⁶⁶.

The Assyrian Church of the East prays to the Virgin Mary as “the Mother of Christ our God and Saviour.” It is a mistake to think that the Assyrian Church of the East did not honour Mary as Mother of God.

3.1. Past Controversies as Terminological Misunderstandings

The CCD accepted that in the past there had been many controversies which led to anathemas. The Churches are aware of this, and ready to change:

This is the unique faith that we profess in the mystery of Christ. The controversies of the past led to anathemas, bearing on persons and on formulas. The Lord’s spirit permits us to understand better today that the divisions brought about in this way were due in large part to misunderstandings⁶⁷.

The Churches want to have a common witnessing before the world which removes all differences:

Whatever our Christological divergences have been, we experience ourselves united today in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace. We wish from now on to witness together to this faith in the One who is the Way, the Truth and the life, proclaiming it in appropriate ways to our contemporaries, so that the world may believe in the Gospel of salvation⁶⁸.

This is a new approach. It is an irony to hold faith in the same Jesus Christ without real unity. Unity is essential for common witnessing. Even those who elected John Sulaqa and sent him to Rome in their letter addressed to the Pope say “We Oriental Nestorians,” “thy humble sinful children the Nestorians.” The term Nestorian often denoted nationality rather than faith⁶⁹.

As we also read in the Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and the Armenian Patriarch Karekin I, linguistic, cultural and political factors immensely contributed towards the theological divergences that found expression in doctrinal terminology⁷⁰. Pope John Paul II during his Message on November 13 at the Angelus said:

This reciprocal lack of understanding actually goes back to the early centuries of Christian history, when theological reflections was obliged to spell out the precise content of faith in Christ. In teaching that it was legitimate to venerate Mary as the “*Theotokos*” “Mother of God,” the Council held at Ephesus in 431 wanted to underscore the Church’s deep conviction that “Christ’s humanity has no other subject than the divine person of the Son of God, who assumed it and made it his own, from his conception” in Mary’s womb (cf. CCC n. 466). The calm, in-depth dialogue with our brothers

of the Assyrian Church of the East made it possible to overcome the misunderstandings that occurred at the time of that council, and today we share the joy of recognizing that, over and above different theological emphases, our faith in Christ, true God and true man, is one, and equally great is our love for Mary, his most holy Mother⁷¹.

The Antiochean Christological tradition, represented most fully by the Church of the East, was shaped by the need to emphasize the transcendence of God, and at the same time to combat Apollinarism. As a result, this tradition came to visualize salvation as being brought to humanity through the human nature of the incarnate Christ⁷². “Nestorius’ subsequent controversy on the *Theotokos* is not a gratuitous attempt to bring to and impose on Constantinople the Antiochene theology as against the Alexandrian theology. Nestorius is explicit and unambiguous in affirming that he does not want to forbid the *Theotokos*, but this only *propter unionis rationem* \ one can not say that the whole of Christ’s being began with Mary, or that in her a celestial spirit with a changeable nature found its ultimate definition⁷³.

Nestorius never taught “the Nestorianism” for which he was condemned. Scholars, after making a special study of Nestorius’ *Bazar of Heracleides*, Loofs *Nestoriana*, the *Sermons of Nestorian Church* etc. came to the conclusion that Nestorius was not a ‘Nestorian.’⁷⁴ It will be interesting to note the opinion of Grillmeier:

The more we can show the orthodoxy of his thought, the more ecumenical contact will be possible with the Nestorian Church of today, though Nestorius himself would probably not claim to be the father of a new community. In his letter to the inhabitants of Constantinople, he expresses his disapproval of the teaching of his more extreme followers, a fact which is not usually noticed: ‘leur enseignement et le noire

n’est pas le meme.’⁷⁵

There is no reason to suppose that Nestorius intended at any time to introduce new doctrines or to make innovations of any kind⁷⁶. Nestorius never spoke of “two sons,” nor did he consider Christ as simply a man (*purus homo*); hence it was improper on the part of Eusebius of Dorylaeum to accuse him of the Adoptionism of Paul of Samosota, a theology that saw Christ as a man who through his sufferings and virtues, attained the dignity of a Son of God (*Bewahrungs-theologie*)⁷⁷. Grillmeier has also recognized the importance of the theological position of Nestorius, although he cannot totally appreciate the Nestorian formulas⁷⁸. It has been generally understood that Nestorianism was very close to the Chalcedonian understanding of Christ. Grillmeier observes that, as his (Nestorius’) formulas and the readiness with which he welcomed the *Tome* of Leo show, he stood at the very gateway of Chalcedon⁷⁹. Cardinal Tisserant has also noted:

Popes Celestine I and Leo I, between 422 and 460, were no longer able to read the works of Greek theologians: the first did not even find interpreters when he wished to refute Nestorius, while the latter was more fortunate because he found Marius Mercator and others who translated for him. It seems that the lack of a good knowledge of Greek was a severe handicap for the Latin theologians who had a part in the great dogmatic controversies which continued in the East in the fifth century⁸⁰.

The “Tome of Leo” (*Tomus ad Flavianum*) can be considered as one of the most important Christological documents of its kind which the Latin Church has produced. The impulse for it came from the East. In it we have virtually a synthesis of what Pope Leo had to say on the Christological question before the Council of Chalcedon. He shows the origin of the two natures in Christ using the Creed and Scripture. He also shows the co-existence of the two natures of

Christ in the unity of person and the mode of operation of the two natures⁸¹. The mystery of divinity however is beyond all human comprehension and has to be accepted on faith⁸². While the Western Church adopted the term *Theotokos*, the Church of the East continued to use the title *Christotokos* - a term of an older period that in the West was deemed inadequate for the purpose of accounting for a true metaphysical union of natures⁸³. We read in the *Book of the Dove* of Barhebraeus:

When I had given much thought and pondered on the matter, I became convinced that these quarrels of Christians among themselves are not a matter of factual substance, but rather, one of words and terms. For they all confess Christ our Lord to be perfect God and perfect human, without any commingling, mixing or confusion of the natures. This bipinnate likeness is termed by one party ‘a nature,’ by another ‘a hypostasis/ by yet another ‘a prosopon.’¹ Thus I saw all the Christian communities, with their different christological positions, as possessing a single common ground that is without any difference. Accordingly I totally eradicated any hatred from the depths of my heart, and I completely renounced disputing with any one over confessional matters⁸⁴.

It is interesting to compare this with an agreement between the Orthodox and Reformed traditions on the concept of nature:

Speaking of the union of natures in the person of Jesus Christ is normative for both the Orthodox and reformed traditions. However, the term “nature” should not be understood statically, or abstractly, nor as if the human and divine natures were two individual instances of a generic concept of “nature.” What this language directs us towards is the reality of God in the unity of his person and history⁸⁵.

4. The Mystery of Salvation

The common faith in the mystery of the

incarnation is emphasized in the CCD:

The mystery of the Incarnation which we profess in common is not an abstract and isolated truth. It refers to the Son of God sent to save us. The economy of salvation, which has its origin in the mystery of communion of the Holy Trinity-Father, Son and the Holy Spirit-, is brought to its fulfilment through the sharing in this communion, by grace, within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which is the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Spirit⁸⁶.

The concrete reality of the mystery of salvation, has its origin in the Trinitarian communion by grace, within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which is the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Spirit.

4.1. Church and Sacraments

The common faith in the sacraments is also stated:

Believers become members of this Body through the sacrament of Baptism, through which, by water and the working of the Holy Spirit, they are born again as new creatures. They are confirmed by the seal of the Holy Spirit who bestows the sacrament of Anointing. Their communion with God and among themselves is brought to full realization by the celebration of the unique offering of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. This communion is restored for the sinful members of the Church when they are reconciled with God and with one another through the sacrament of forgiveness. The sacrament of ordination to ministerial priesthood in the apostolic succession assures the authenticity of the faith, the sacraments and the communion in each local Church⁸⁷.

Both the Catholic and the Assyrian Church of the East have common faith in the sacrament of Baptism by which human beings are made members of the Church. Both of these also believe in other

sacraments such as Anointing, Eucharist, and the sacraments of reconciliation and ordination. Both Churches use the rite of anointing the sick in relation to forgiveness of sin, its efficacy being attributed to the healing presence and power of Jesus. As Soro says:

The Church of the East has a sacramental system which resembles the sacramental systems of the Greek and Latin traditions. The Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist are primary, and the Sacraments of Holy Orders effects the other Sacraments. Confirmation is administered with Baptism and absolution is a benefit of the Eucharist, though absolution is also administered separately during a common service of Absolution, and is also administered to individuals, with penance, in the case of serious sin. The Sign of the Cross, Unction, and “Holy Leaven” are defined as additional Sacraments⁸⁸.

The priesthood is reckoned as one of the sacraments of the Assyrian Church by Mar ‘AbdisV of Nisibis. Matrimony is not reckoned a sacrament by the Assyrians. They have the “Holy Leaven” as a sacrament. Mar ‘Abdiso’ considers the life-giving Cross as the seventh sacrament⁸⁹ Patriarch Timothy (1318-32) speaks of the seven sacraments in the Church⁹⁰. Even though there is some difference in the calculation of sacraments, basically the sacramental system of the Catholic and the Assyrian Church are the same.

4.2. The Catholic and the Assyrian Churches as Sister Churches

The *Declaration* recognizes that the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church are “Sister Churches.” As communion among these Churches is not full, they are not able to celebrate the Eucharist together. As we read in the CCD:

Living by this faith and these sacraments, it follows as a consequence that the particular Catholic Churches and the particular Assyrian Churches can recognize each other as sister Churches. To be full

and entire, communion presupposes the unanimity concerning the content of the faith, the sacraments and the constitution of the Church. Since this unanimity for which we aim has not yet been attained, we cannot unfortunately celebrate together the Eucharist, which is the sign of the ecclesial communion already fully restored.⁹¹

According to the CCD the Catholic Church and Assyrian Church of the East are sister Churches and the teaching on the concept of sister Church expressed in the Second Vatican Council is applied to them (UR 14). What is lacking between them is only full ecclesial communion which would enable them to concelebrate the Holy Eucharist. As even the separated Churches are sisters meeting together in a spirit of mutual respect for their autonomies that can be made towards restoring the full visible communion.⁹²

4.3. A Common Witness

The *Declaration* emphasizes the need for common witnessing in the field of evangelization and pastoral co-operation. As we read in the Declaration:

Nevertheless, the deep spiritual communion in the faith and the mutual trust already existing between our Churches, entitle us from now on to consider witnessing together to the Gospel message and co-operating in particular pastoral situations, including especially the areas of catechesis and the formation of future priests.⁹³

Both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church have the history of great evangelical witnessing. What is required now is the common witnessing which is essential for the success of evangelisation in the modern world. John Paul II is very optimistic about the implementation of the *Declaration* on the pastoral level. He said in his

11 November, 1994 address:

For my part, I am confident that this agreement will open up wide horizons at the level of pastoral collaboration. Of great importance will be the

strengthening of co-operation in the spiritual and theological formation of future priests and responsible laity. The same applies to catechesis of children and of young people: we must apply all possible concern in this direction.⁹⁴

This Christological agreement has deep implications and far reaching consequences. As the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East arrive at an agreement regarding faith and doctrine of these Churches it is possible for them to co-operate in the common faith formation programmes such as common theological formation centres. What is required now is concrete programmes for common faith formation of clergy, religious and laity in faith formation. The Church officially admits that both Churches hold the same faith in Christ, but misunderstandings in the past have caused divisions and mutual condemnations and alienation. The Church of Thomas Christians of India is a victim of those misunderstandings⁹⁵.

Catholicos Patriarch Dinkha IV expressed his joy on 11 November, 1994:

Today the time has come to bring down the walls, which have separated us and kept us apart for 15 centuries. Today the door of opportunity is open and we are bidden to enter and labour together toward the noble goal of unity in the Church, the unity which our Lord Jesus Christ so fervently prayed, “that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (Jn 17: 21). It is with deep gratitude to God that we now gather to sign a common Christological declaration. This agreement will bring the sons and daughters of our two ancient and honourable traditions closer to one another than at any time in the last 15 centuries⁹⁶.

5. Further Growth in Co-operation

For the attainment of full communion the *Declaration* recommends the following:

In thanking God for having made us rediscover what already unites us in the faith and the sacraments, we pledge ourselves to do everything possible to dispel the obstacles of the past which still prevent the attainment of full communion between our Churches, so that we can better respond to the Lord’s call for the unity of his own, a unity which has of course to be expressed visibly. To overcome these obstacles, we now establish a Mixed Committee for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East⁹⁷.

The Pope and Patriarch have also established a mixed committee for theological dialogue and charged it with overcoming obstacles that still prevent full communion. The first meeting, in November, 1995 began a study of the sacraments. This was continued at the second meeting, held in Adama, Lebanon, 10-12 October, 1996. In the second meeting the concentration was on the theological meaning and celebration of marriage and the anointing of the sick. Though these were not among the Assyrian tradition’s sacraments, the mixed committee reached an agreement as to the theological content and significance of these two ecclesial acts. There is a great similarity in the two traditions’ biblical foundations and theological content regarding marriage and family life, the indissolubility of marriage, the fidelity of conjugal love, and the openness to fertility. This theological dialogue helped to improve the relationship between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church. In November of 1996 Mar Dinkha IV and the Chaldean Patriarch Raphael I Bidawid met in Southfield, Michigan, and signed a Joint Patriarchal statement that committed their two Churches to working towards reintegration and pledged co-operation on pastoral questions such as the drafting of a common catechism, the setting up of a common seminary in the Chicago-Detroit area, the preservation of the Aramaic language and other common pastoral programs between their respective parishes and dioceses around the world⁹⁸.

The third meeting of the mixed committee was held in Rome, 23-27 October, 1997. It continued its study of the meaning of sacraments and sacramentals and explored the significance of the *Malka* (holy leaven) and the sign of the Cross (both included as sacraments by the Church of the East). It also studied the Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed and the Roman Catholic dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the bodily Assumption of Mary⁹⁹.

On 29 November, 1996 the two patriarchs, Mar Dinkha IV and Raphael I Bidawid, met in Roselle, Illinois at the Chaldean Chancery and ratified a "Joint Synodal Decree for Promoting Unity," that had been signed by the members of both Holy Synods. The decree also restated the areas of pastoral co-operation envisaged in the Joint Patriarchal Statement, recognizing that Assyrians and Chaldeans should come to accept each other's diverse practices as legitimate. It also formally implemented the establishment of an Assyrian-Chaldean "Joint Commission for Unity," and declared that each side had recognized the apostolic succession, sacraments and Christian witness of the other¹⁰⁰. As a gesture to foster better relations with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Holy Synod decided in 1997 to remove from the liturgy all anathemas directed against others¹⁰¹.

A mixed commission, responsible for the ongoing dialogue between the two Churches meets annually. Recent discussions have concerned the sacramental life, including the Holy Leaven (*Malka*) and the Sign of the Cross in the Assyrian Church; and Matrimony and the Anointing of the Sick in the Catholic Church. Although these last two are not numbered among the sacraments of the Assyrian Church's tradition, the members of the commission did reach "a profound agreement on the theological content and significance of these ecclesial acts"¹⁰². The goal of the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East is the fullness of unity, remembering that this must be a unity lived in legitimate diversity¹⁰³.

6. Dialogue in Progress between the Assyrian Church and the Catholic Church

The first session in the dialogue took place in Rome in 1995. It focused on the sacraments and especially the Eucharist, and noted that the Christological agreement had been positively received in both Churches. The second meeting of the dialogue took place in Beirut in October 1996, and dealt with the theology of matrimony and the Sacrament of the Sick. The third meeting took place in Rome in October 1997. It continued its study of the sacraments, and took up consideration of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and Catholic doctrines on the , Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary¹⁰⁴.

6.1. Reception of the Common Christological Declaration

As Soro says in Catholic and Church of the East circles CCD has obliged many intelligent people to re-examine conventional views held with conviction for many centuries¹⁰⁵. But it cannot be ignored that there is a minority who consider CCD as just the first among many stages in an effort to absorb the Assyrians and their Church into Catholicism. The attitude of the people of the Assyrian Church, expressed by their bishop, is that as long as they are assured by their hierarchy that essential elements of their creed and culture, such as the content and the teaching of the faith, liturgy, ecclesial self-government, language and ethnic identity, are kept intact and their essence will in no way be compromised in the future, they would not oppose such a noble cause as the unity of all Christians¹⁰⁶. Soro says:

The Assyrian, Indian, and American constituencies of the Church of the East were certain that for over 1500 years their theological tradition was misrepresented and misunderstood; and they were also conscious that their forefathers had suffered greatly and

for many centuries had paid the ultimate sacrifice for simply remaining faithful to Christ in the same theological tradition¹⁰⁷.

A positive development after the signing of CCD is that the Assyrian Church of the East was accepted into the Catholic Family of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). As another positive result of the CCD, Catholic schools have welcomed students from the Assyrian Church. Among the mainstream Christian Churches and various ecumenical organizations there is an increased interest in the Assyrian Church of the East after the promulgation of the CCD.¹⁰⁸ There are also negative reactions on the part of the “Religious Conservative Pattern” in some parts of Iraq. Their negative verdict on the Catholic Church, based on their experience and interpretation of Church history, has prevented them from admitting any possibility that the CCD has offered for healing the diseases of mistrust and separation that have stood between brothers and sisters in Christ for long and bitter centuries¹⁰⁹. As circumstances change, we hope they will be able to accept the changed mentality of the Catholic Church. The CCD has affirmed the fact that there is absolutely no difference in the faith of both Assyrian and the Chaldean Church Fathers¹¹⁰.

6.2. An Anaphora without the Institution Narrative

A recent development in the growing relation between the Catholic Church and the Church of the East is that the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith of the Catholic Church has already approved the Liturgy of the East Syrian Church - the Anaphora of Addai and Mari without the Institution Narrative - as already existing among the Assyrian Church of the East¹¹¹. This is a land-mark in the understanding of the Eucharist among the East and West. For the Easterners, the whole Anaphora is consecratory. The Latin Church emphasizes the role of the ‘Institution Narrative’.

Among the three Anaphoras used by the

Church of the East it is the Anaphora of Mar Addai and Mar Mari which is doubtless the main liturgy of the Church of the East. It is the most discussed and most venerable. One of its major features is the absence of the Institution Narrative¹¹². The Latin Church which had for long time insisted on the importance of the Words of Institution has now started to appreciate a liturgy which does not have Words of Institution at all. Thus, the appreciation of the East Syrian Qurbana even without the Words of Institution, is a great sign of growing doctrinal agreement.

Conclusion

The authors behind the *Common Christological Declaration* have prepared a theological and intellectual ground for the growing communion between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. The declaration has clarified many misunderstandings. The concept “Mother of Christ” in the liturgical tradition of the Assyrian Church is equal to “Mother of God” in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions. Both the Catholic and Assyrian Churches accept the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ: one person in two natures. The declaration makes it clear that while dealing with the Church of the East the use of the terms “heresy,” and “schism” may not be historically justified. This Declaration has paved the way for understanding among all Churches. It can be considered as a landmark in the history of Christological controversies in the Christendom.

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11

Salvation as Re-entry into the Lost Paradise According to Mar Aprem of Nisibis

Dr Mathew Paikatt

Introduction

Mar Aprem of Nisibis¹ known as the poet-theologian of the fourth century whose literary output is enormous, became renowned beyond the frontiers of the Syriac world even during his lifetime. His writings were translated into Greek and Armenian shortly after his death, if not during his lifetime itself, and are still widely used. It is true that he was not known much in the West mainly on account of the Syriac language and because some western writers passed negative judgments on him². But the present century has witnessed a great awakening of interest in early Syriac theology. During this period of rediscovery, Aprem is amongst the main Syriac Fathers being appreciated and approached by numerous authors³.

Mar Aprem is a voluminous writer, orthodox theologian and a religious poet whose works include exegetical, dogmatic, polemical, ascetical, liturgical and other writings⁴. He is a poet-theologian who represents the East Syriac tradition. The Judeo-Christian origin of the East Syriac Christianity with

its distinctive Semitic character, not much influenced by Greek thought and terminologies, and with its Syriac language (Edessan dialect of Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of the contemporary Orient) is now widely accepted. This is true at least up to the time of Aprem, thenceforth it came under gradual Greek influence⁵. Aprem is the renowned representative of this period in thought, method and linguistic artistry⁶.

His theological vision on Salvation is more biblical and ecclesial. As scholars generally agree, his method of exegesis complies with what was later systematized in Antioch. Although the main features of Aprem's hermeneutics are similar to the Antiochean method of interpretation, it is more correct to say, as Ginnetti notes, that he does not belong to any school at all⁷. On the one hand the hermeneutics of Aprem are textual and historical; on the other hand, they are typological and spiritual. His vision of Salvation starts with the first Paradise and ends with the second heavenly Paradise. In between these two Paradises there exist three stages: the state after the first sin, the redemptive work of Christ, and the time of the Church which is the earthly Paradise⁸.

Creation and the First Paradise

Human life was created with glory and splendour in the first paradise, where the first parents lived in intimacy with God. The main source of study on creation and the first Paradise is the commentary of Mar Aprem on Genesis (*GET*). His other works are also very useful⁹. The commentary of Aprem on the creation-fall narrative occupies about one-third of his whole commentary on Genesis and Exodus, obviously pointing to the importance it occupies in the theological - spiritual thought of Aprem. The life in the first Paradise was in union with God, mankind and nature. This three-fold relationship was broken only after the first fall. Man was at the centre of creation.

Commenting on the second account (Gen 2,7) Aprem sketches out the divine benevolence which at creation, crowned Adam/ Eve with power, privileges and honour:

After having spoken about those things that were left and not described on the first day, he (= Moses) turned to write about the formation of Adam, saying thus: There was no Adam to work upon earth, and he did not exist in those days before the sixth (day) since he was created on the sixth (day). And the Lord moulded Adam on the sixth (day), dust from the earth and breathed in his face the breath of life and Adam became a living person. Even the beasts, animals and birds were existing in the same way with their bodies and life, nevertheless He honoured Adam with many things: first, by this, that is said, namely He moulded him with His own hands and breathed the soul into him and (then) made him Lord of Paradise and of those things outside Paradise, and secondly, clothed him with glory and gave him his word (*melta*), thought and perception of greatness (*GET* 11,4).

Aprem enumerates here the blessings man freely received from his Creator. Even the day of his creation (sixth day, i.e. Friday) is blessed (*HNat* 26,9)¹⁰. Adam did not exist before the sixth day - a

clear indication that God created him *ex nihilo*. Life entered this dust and it became a human being. The dignity of man is the special act of creation. God has taken unique care in the creation of man and He breathed into his nostrils the *breath of life*. In that moment he became a *living person*. In that same moment he received a human soul, the life-principle. Therefore, the life-giving breathing of God is the unique divine act of creation that formed mankind out of dust. God created human beings male and female. He formed Eve from the rib of Adam and adorned her. Before she was taken out of Adam she was fully in him, not only in the body but also in the soul (*GET* 1, 29; II, 12). So it could be rightly said: *God created them male and female* (Gen 1, 27). It also follows that Eve shares in the same human life that Adam received from God.

Man and the Paradise

After the creation of man, God put him in the garden of Eden (= paradise). The hymns of Aprem on paradise depict Eden in human language and figures, because of our inability to grasp its greatness (*cfr. HParad* 2; 3,1; 4,7-9; 11,8)¹¹. There are three symbolic realities in the history of salvation where there is a continuity of perfection: *Paradise, world and the second Paradise*; or *sky, world and Paradise (hell)* (*HParad* 13-14; 8,9).

As he was blessed, Adam received power on earth and became the lord of everything on the day of creation (*GET* II,10). He was the lord and governor of all the animals (*GET* 11,15) and he had mastery over all the trees of paradise (*GET* I, 31). In *HEcc* 28,4 Aprem speaks of the great power man possesses and the unfortunate tragedy that occurred because of an undisciplined use of that power:

Let us weigh: what is better**** our soul (*napsa*) or creature.

For, let us consider that we have subdued *** the creation and everything in it.

And our soul that subjugated everything *** is rebellious because it was undisciplined.

We have not increased as much as *** we have decreased.

He gave us (the power) to lead everything *** but He refused to punish us.

Property goes and is subdued *** and the heir is rebellious and corrupt.

The divine act of the creation of human beings is a symbol of divine intimacy with humanity. Humanity was also in intimacy with its Creator until the first fall. Intimacy with God means intimacy with the universe and harmony within human nature. The fall damaged this intimacy in all realms.

The First Fall and the Loss of Paradise

The impact on human life of the first fall was so grave that it inflicted great harm on that life in its relation to God and universe. And it caused disunity within both human nature and universe. God set the tree of knowledge inside paradise and encircled it with death so that, if Adam did not obey the commandment of the Creator with love, he would be punished with death (GET 11,8). Adam had to prove his love towards God by obeying His commandment. The divine plan behind the commandment was to allow man to eat from the tree of life and to grant eternal life. Mar Aprem comments on the divine plan in *GET II*, 17:

Indeed God created the tree of life and kept it hidden from Adam and Eve, first for the reason that it should not make war with them through its beauty giving them scope for doubled struggle. Besides, it was not fitting that, for the sake of a reward that remained before their eyes, they were to obey attentively the command of Him who is invisible. Indeed, though He gave them everything out of grace, He wanted to give them, out of Justice, the immortal life that was conferred by eating from the tree of life. Hence He set down the command. It was not a great command that was worthy of the excellent reward that was prepared for them. But He withheld from them one tree, enough to be under

the command. He gave them the whole Paradise so that they might not have any pressure on them to violate the law.

This leads to the idea that God created man in an intermediary state: man was neither mortal nor immortal. Man had to choose his own future using his freedom¹². Two things quickly happened after the sin: the first parents did not receive the promised life, and they lost their robe of glory. The main purpose of the command of God was to make man divine, to grant him immortal life by allowing him to eat from the tree of life¹³, and unmistakable knowledge, by allowing him to eat from the tree of knowledge (*HParad* 12,15). As a consequence of the first sin man lost the Paradise; the life and glory of the Paradise. T. Kronholm summarizes:

The expulsion of man from the distinguished Paradisiacal world, to a place far below at the heels of Paradise in the terrestrial domain, is executed to prevent man from forcing his way to the tree of life. As the tree of knowledge once was placed as a frail border to the inner parts of Paradise, the fearful Cherub is set up as a forceful guard at the entrance of the whole of Paradise¹⁴.

The first parents made themselves so unworthy of the pure and virgin paradise that they were driven out of it. Far away from paradise, on earth, their new abode, they lived carrying the burdens of the punishments: birth-pangs and subordination to man in the case of woman; sweat and pain for man. Death set its net over them. As a punishment inherited, humanity lives on earth in misery, division and concupiscence. Humanity had to wait until the arrival of the Physician (Christ), to be delivered from this state, the same Physician who brought the Medicine of life (fruit of the tree of life) for the vivification of humanity.

Salvation as Re-entry

It is common in the Syriac tradition to perceive salvation as regaining the lost-paradise. It was the divine plan behind the punishment to grant mankind

eternal life and the glory of paradise if man repents and searches after it. This divine plan and the divine economy are inseparably united. The re-entry into paradise is not meant to be a mere return to the first paradise from which Adam/Eve were once expelled to this terrestrial abode, but an entry into a new paradise restored in Christ, where God allows humanity to eat from the *tree of life and of knowledge*.

Ortiz De Urbina describes the eschatological aspect of this paradise in his article, *Paradis eschatologique*¹⁵. This new paradise is not exclusively eschatological. The symbolical structure of the paradise in Aprem represents various realities: primitive time, the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Church, both mystical and eschatological. It is not only of the past or of the future; but it is inside the structure of the universe, the summit and centre of the universe and of the divine plan¹⁶. It is ever present in sacred time and space¹⁷. Aprem uses many images to explain salvation, all related to the life and glory of the paradise. Resurrection of the Just is an entry of body and soul together into paradise (*HParad* 8,9). In *HParad* 6,8-9, the redeemed state is compared to the glorious life in paradise. Adam obtained hope to re-enter the paradise when he saw Enoch entering therein (*GET* V,2; *Gen* 5,24). Adam and Nebuchadnezzar are compared in *HParad* 13, 4-11. As Nebuchadnezzar was given back his lost royal glory when he repented (*Dan* 4, 4-37), so also Adam.

Human life on earth is sometimes described by Aprem as a journey and the earth itself as a temporary abode. This has to be understood in the above mentioned context. History is a progress, a journey in time, a duration which implies a development. It is the *time* moving towards Christ illuminated by the divine plan. This is the history of revelation; the history of salvation. It commences with the creation, progresses through history and culminates in Christ. It moves on to the eschaton, but Christ remains always at the centre (cfr. *CH* 26-27; *HParad* 14). The journey of Human life in view of a second life is the subject matter of *HEccl*

17, 7:

Whoever has travelled like us?
Our provisions (for the journey), we leave behind
to those who eat,
and we divide the document for sighing
to go and stand before the One who asks
account.
Blessed is the one who carries
(with him) alms.

Jacob who led his flock back to the house of his fathers (*Gen* 31,2ff.) is a symbol of the human journey. Let us return to our father's house; let us not be fastened by the love for this transitory world. For, our mother-town is Eden (*HParad* 14,7). Blessed is he who prepares the necessary material for the journey to our Lord (*HParad* 14,1). The world is like a prison; on the contrary, Eden is the house of freedom (*HParad* 14, 3-7) where we join our friends and relatives.

Re-entry through Christ

Salvation is the entry into the life and the glory of paradise, and this entry is made possible by Christ. In other words, He opened the closed doors of the paradise, the doors once closed against mankind. This theme is discussed here briefly and will be further elaborated in this chapter. Christ, the second Adam, reversed all that the first Adam brought to mankind through his sin. Christ is the high priest who came down from heaven to re-admit Adam into paradise purifying him (*HParad* 4,4; *Hebrews* 9, 11-14). He descended from heaven in search of Adam and found him in Sheol, the underworld. And He took him out of there and admitted him along with many to Eden (*HParad* 8,10-11):

Blessed is the Merciful One who saw the sword
beside paradise, barring the way
to the tree of life; He came and took for himself
a body that was wounded, so that by the
opening of his side

He might open up the way into paradise
(*HNat* 8,4)¹⁸.

Christ is the *way* and the *leader* of the journey to paradise. Mankind was preparing provisions for the journey to Gehanna. Everybody was preparing for ruin. Christ came down, became the leader and the way ('urha) for our journey to the Kingdom (*HVirg* 39,12). Through His entry into paradise, Christ paved the way for others also (*CH* 26,6). Thus, He has become the joy of the heavenly ones and the hope of those on earth (*HEccl* 35,19). The good tidings of our Saviour who came down to take Adam back to Eden in garments of light is the topic under discussion in *HVirg* 16, 8-9.

Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the second Adam, the physician, the life-giver and the king (*CDiat Arm* 20,22; 10,13; 4,3 etc.) who restored the lost Paradise. He is the shepherd (*HNat* 3,15), the lamb (*HVirg* 31,5; *HNnat* 24,6; *HAzym* 1,7; 6,8-14), the Merciful One (*HNat* 3,2; 8, 4-5), the priest (*HVirg* 31,5) and the door (*HVirg* 31,9; *HParad* 13,13).

Re-entry through Christ as Second Adam

The concepts of the *first and second Adam* and their comparison are already seen in St. Paul (1 Cor 15,45-49; Rom 5,12-21). This is very frequent in Mar Aprem, especially when he elaborates on the salvation history. Christ is the new (or the second) Adam who reversed all that the first Adam did to mankind (*HNat* 23,13). Aprem sees both Adams as *corporate personalities*: the first Adam, the head of all mankind; the * second Adam, the new head of the redeemed mankind¹⁹. Aprem relates almost every aspect of Christ's saving act to the first Adam and to the pre-fall state of humanity. Christ separated Adam from the beasts and allowed him to return to paradise (*HParad* 13, 5-6). He reshaped and refashioned Adam (*CNis* 69,6) and he renewed the image of Adam (Homily on Nativity, 109-110). Adam brought a curse to the earth; Christ, instead, a blessing (*HParad* 9,1; *HNat* 17,12). The will of Adam was divided against the Creator in the garden of paradise;

and it received its formal state through the prayer of Jesus in the garden of olives (*HCrucif* 8, 2; Lk 22,42). *De Ecclesia* 51,8 sums up all the ideas.

In the month of Nisan²⁰, our Lord paid off the debt of the first Adam (1 Cor 15,45)²¹ He gave (His) sweat in Nisan for the sweat of Adam (Gen 3,19; Lk 22,44) and the cross instead of his tree, the sixth day for the sixth day²². And in His re-entry, He turned back the thief to Eden And perhaps also the month of Adam was Nisan; since He put the day equal to the day, thus it is becoming to collate the month to the month.

Re-entry through Christ's Suffering

Thorns and pains, sweat and toil became the inheritance of humanity as a result of the first sin (*HEccl* 48,11). The anti-typology of all these occurred in Christ (cfr. *HEccl* 51,8). He took the Adamic pains to himself (*HVirg* 31,14), crowned with thorns (*HNat* 3,18; 18,17; *HCrucif* 4,2), gave the bread of life without toil to those who were hungry, deposited the sweat of Adam with His own sweat (*HCrucif* 8,1)²³. The O.T. - N.T. paschal meal typology in Aprem is not limited to the paschal lamb alone, but is applied to the paschal meal of Jesus, crucifixion and the eucharistic celebration of the Church (*Commentary on Exodus*, 111,3). So it has Christological, ecclesiological and sacramental applications²⁴. The hymn 11 of *De Virginitate* gives a variety of symbols from nature on Christ's salvific passion. They all teach us how to gain glory through suffering. They also demonstrate how Christ removed the pain and suffering (the effects of the first sin) from humanity through His own suffering. In short, Adam who was put to shame after the fall, regained the lost-paradise and the lost-glory through the Cross of Christ.

The parallelism between the Cross and the tree of Eden is both of concordance and discordance.

Concordance in the sense that they both were means of life or death. Discordance in that the tree of Eden finally became the means to death, even though it was meant for life; and the Cross, on the other hand, led us to life, even though it was an instrument of death (*HEccl* 49, 8). The piercing of the side of Christ with a lance (*Jn* 19,34) is full of symbolism in Aprem. The wounded side of Christ is the entrance to the paradise and the blood and water that came out of His side signify the birth of the new paradise - the church and the sacraments. Through Him Adam/Eve entered into the lost paradise and the door still remains opened to humanity. The pattern of salvation can be understood as Christ clothing humanity with its lost 'robe of glory' and the *promised glory*. In other words, Christ put on Adam (humanity) and thereby Adam put on his lost glory (*CDiat* 16, 10). Christ the Physician healed the first Adam and clothed him with the lost robe of glory giving entrance into the lost-paradise. This is the salvific act of Christ realized through the economy of the Incarnation.

Re-entry through the Church

The new life and glory of the new paradise offered by Christ through His salvific act is made possible to all generations through the life-giving Mysteries of the Church (i.e. the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist). The Mysteries of the Church (*raze*) are the opening doors to the new paradise. Especially, the Mysteries of Baptism and Eucharist take mankind to life and glory. Aprem locates the mysteries of the Church in the main stream of salvation as fulfillment of the Old Testament types and as a continuation of the mysteries of Christ. All the mysteries of Christ are hidden in the Old Testament in their embryonic stage, and the Old Testament accomplished its fulfillment in Christ at His arrival. Thus, in the theological vision of Aprem, the Church and the Sacraments are not isolated from the Old Testament. On the contrary, they are the continuation of the Old Testament symbols and signs, fulfilled in Christ, continued in the present time,

opening the door to the eschatological time. The Old Testament symbols and types were shadows of the symbols of the Church and the symbols of the Church continue till the end (the heavenly Church)²⁵. Thus we have a *progressive typology* in Mar Aprem.

He has entered into fulfilment *** and put on the garment of the symbols (*raze*) woven for him *** by the Holy Spirit.
The type (*raza*) was in Egypt, *** the reality (*srard*) in the Church;
the sealing of the reward *** (will be) in the Kingdom (*HAzym* 5,22-23).

The renewal through baptism (*HEpiph* 7,12) has two aspects: the regaining of the lost glory and image, which denotes the re-entry into the lost-paradise, and the receiving of an invisible mark which is a sign of belonging to the new paradise where one is allowed to eat from the tree of life, fore-tasting the eschatological banquet. In baptism, Christ clothed Adam with the glory that Adam once had and subsequently lost:

In baptism Adam discovered that glory (*tesbohta*) of the place of trees- He (= Christ) came down, took him from inside the water, put him on and ascended, and he (= Adam) was glorified by Him
Blessed be He who has pity for all- (*HEpiph* 12,1).

From the baptismal water one receives the 'robe of glory' that was lost by the first sin. It is sanctification through baptism (*HEpiph* 6,9). The invisible darkness is taken off the baptized and he puts on 'light' (*HEpiph* 7,22). The white dress of baptism symbolizes this recovery of the lost glory (*HParad* 6,9; *HdF* 30,8).

Symbolically and typologically the Eucharist is related to the important events in the history of salvation from Eden to the Church (Eden, tree of

life, Passover of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Church etc.). First and foremost the Eucharist is the life-giving mystery of our Lord (*CH* 26,5) in the Church. The healing and life-giving salvific act of Christ is now continued in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the ‘medicine of life’ and *the living Bread*. Aprem often finds parallelism between the Eucharist and the fruit of the garden of Eden. This is because of the identification of Christ’s body with the Eucharist. Christ’s body is the fruit of the tree of life, the Cross (*HResur* 1,6; *HdF* 18,14). While the fruit of Eden brought forth death, the Fruit of Golgotha delivered many from the yoke of death (*SDN* 3). Thus, the Eucharist is the *living Fruit (perd hayya)* of the new paradise, the Church (*HEccl* 13,18).

This *living Bread* makes the re-entry into the paradise possible. The tradition of spiritually nourishing the newly baptised with the Eucharist symbolizes this re-entry. Thus the Eucharist becomes an eagle that takes us up into the paradise. Aprem writes:

The spiritual Bread of the Eucharist *** makes light and causes to fly.

The Peoples have been wafted up *** and have settled in paradise (*HAzym* 17,9).

By means of the spiritual Bread *** everyone becomes an eagle who reaches *** as far as paradise (*HAzym* 17,12)²⁶.

Conclusion

The history of salvation begins with the divine act of creation. It ends with the re-entry of mankind into the heavenly paradise. Mankind is in a journey towards this paradise. The period of journey in between is that of battle, agonies, temptations, hopes and despairs. Jesus Christ, who came down to this battlefield set an example of how to be victorious in this struggle to reach the final goal. He founded the earthly paradise, the Church, which resembles to an extent, the first paradise: mankind can fight and win paradise eternally or lose it for eternal condemnation. Redemption means a re-settlement in paradise, not

in the same paradise-lost, but in a new paradise where mankind is allowed to eat from the tree of life and thereby attains eternal life. Christ put on a human body and fulfilled this mission of redemption. He revived the lost-paradise, adorned it with more glory and life, and opened its gate to mankind through His own re-entry. As the physician and the medicine of life, He healed human nature, clothed it with the ‘robe of glory’. He subdued the adversaries of humanity: Satan and death. In brief, the redemptive work of Christ was a battle against Satan and death so that by defeating them, Christ granted the human race a new life in the new paradise. Life in this new paradise is similar to that of the first paradise to a certain extent: mankind is free to choose the way of life that leads to the tree of life and to eternal life.

The theological vision of Mar Aprem is cosmic and comprehensive such that it transcends all the boundaries of earthly life. The first paradise, earthly paradise (i.e. the Church) and the heavenly Kingdom are, though separated ‘historically’, inseparable in his integrated vision. The history of salvation and the redemptive work of Christ cannot be restricted to the *Incarnation-Crucifixion-Resurrection* mysteries alone; it has to be understood in a wider spectrum, beginning with the first paradise and reaching the heavenly paradise, but being realized in the earthly paradise. Thus we notice a developed eschatology in Aprem.

ENDNOTES

- 1 St. Ephrem of Nisibis or St. Ephrem the Syrian.
- 2 ‘His writings are without much content, extraordinarily prolix; his style is allusive and unnatural’ etc.; cfr. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*, 96-100, 108-110; Wright, *Syriac Literature*, 1.
- 3 For details on the life and works of Mar Aprem; see, Oritz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, 56-76; Baumstark, *Syrischen Literatur*, 31-53; Beck, “Ephrem le Syrien”; Emereau, “Saint Ephrem le Syrien”, 1-10; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers XIII*, 120-152 (Introductory Dissertation by J. Gwynn); Vööbus, *History of Asceticism II*, 70-92.

- 4 Cfr. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, 61-73 .
- 5 S. Brock describes this as the two poles of syriac tradition: *Semitic and greek*; see, Brock, “The Two Poles”.
- 6 The cultural and Christian background of Aprem is studied by many . For details; see, Vööbus, *History of Asceticism I*, 3-30; II, 84-92; Murray, *Symbols*, 4-38; Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 1-9; Brock, *The Two Poles*.
- 7 It is unlikely that Aprem was influenced by the Antiochean School which was founded by Lucian who died in 312. The Holy Scripture and the traditions of the Syriac Church are the basis of Aprem’s exegesis: cfr. Ginnetti, *Un precursore di Efeso*, 14.
- 8 For a complete vision of Aprem’s theology of salvation see, Paiktt, M. *Life Glory and Salvation in the Writings of Mar Aprem of Nisibis*, OIRSI, 245, Kottayam 2001.
- 9 Aprem’s reflections on the creation-narrative is the content of *HdF* 6,6-16. We have the article of P. Feghali, “*Note sur l’ exegese*” which is a good introduction with notes and French tr. of section VI to the commentary of Aprem on Genesis. His “*Commentaire de GN 1,1-2, 4*” offers a French translation of the prologue and the first section of the commentary of Aprem on Genesis with an introduction. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 35-84 treats of the exegesis of Aprem of the creation account with particular reference to the influence of Jewish exegetical tradition.
- 10 El-Khoury, *Die Interpretation*, 59. The creation of man, the first fall and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ fell on the same day of the week (Friday) according to Aprem (*HEccl* 51, 8).
- 11 Cfr. Lavenant, *LeParadis*, 25-29. In addition to the edition and German translation of E. Beck, we have the French translation of *HParad* by R.Lavenant with introduction and notes by F. Graffin, *probably the most beautiful and successful translation of Ephrem’s hymns into any modern language*, as R. Murray remarks in *Symbols*, 257, note 4.
- 12 Cfr. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 18.
- 13 The tree of life was a means to life, but has become a cause of death. On the contrary, the cross was an instrument of death, but has become the cause of life for man. On the tree of life and the Cross; see, Yousif, “*Croix de Jesus*”, 39-42.
- 14 T. Kronholm , *Motifs*, 86.
- 15 “le Paradis adamique est pour Ephrem le Paradis eschatologique, le ciel”; Ortiz de Urbina, “*Paradis eschatologique*”, 469.
- 16 Cfr. Lavenant, *Le paradis*, 17-18.
- 17 Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 18.
- 18 Translation from Brock, *Harp*, 12.
- 19 Cfr. Murray, *Symbols*, 82-86,301-304.
- 20 The month of April.
- 21 The concept is that the creation and the crucifixion fall on the same month of Nisan. It is to be further noted that the annunciation (conception of Christ) also took place in the same month (10th of Nisan; cfr. *HNat4*, 32; 5, 14.
- 22 On the sixth day of the week, our Lord died; on the sixth day, Adam was created.
- 23 Murray, *Symbols*, 84-85.
- 24 For details (OT Paschal meal and the Eucharist, paschal lamb and the unleavened bread, the two lambs, their comparisons, effects); see, Yousif, *L’Eucharistie*, 75-85.
- 25 Beck, “*Symbolum Mysterium*”, 32-34; Yousif, *L’Eucharistie*, 65-67.
- 26 Translation of both stanzas is from Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 79.

12

The Understanding of Divinization in St Ephrem

Dr Sebastian Vethanath

Introduction

Man by nature and vocation is a religious being. Beyond physical well-being, material security and pleasure, one has an earnest desire for something beyond. In other words, the quest for God is deeply rooted in the heart of human beings, because they are created by God and for God; and God ever calls them to himself. In human beings there is a divine element dynamically oriented towards God. This divine element is the ultimate cause for human transcendence. One can transcend from this finite world to an infinite divine one. The human capacity for transcendence opens up the horizon of divine-human communion. By divine grace, received through sacramental life and ascetical practices, human beings can attain blissful communion with God.

At every moment of life God invites human beings to have an authentic communion or participation with him. Only through an intimate life of communion with God, can one find the true meaning and fulfilment of one's existence. Human

beings realize their true self as much as they are raised by divine grace to God in order to be united with him. The human person is dignified and is made godlike through this communion, which is a gift of divine grace that is to be accepted and accomplished by human effort. Though this communion between God and human being has its beginning in this world through spiritual progress, its final fulfilment is to be realized in the eschatological existence. This idea of participatory union with God, generally known as divinization, is the end of humanity.

The doctrine of divinization is an important theme in Christian theology. It belongs to the common Christian heritage¹. It remains as the central theme of patristic anthropology and its importance is constantly emphasized in contemporary theological discussions and in the magisterial teachings of the Church. In the Christian theology, though this theme is much developed in the Greek tradition², its basic contents and features are found in the Latin and Syriac traditions with a different mode of expression. The

Fathers of the Church developed the doctrine of divinization with different expressions such as human participatory union with God, sanctification effected through divine grace, and spiritual ascension into the glory of divine likeness. The distinctive way of the presentation of the same doctrine adds to its beauty and richness. This article is an attempt to understand and appreciate the Syriac perspective of divinization, seen in the writings of Ephrem, whose thought patterns are Semitic and basically uncontaminated by Greek patterns.

1. Novelty and Uniqueness of Ephrem's Presentation of the Theme

In Ephrem the doctrine of divinization finds in its least hellenized form, closer to the origin of Christianity. Ephrem, the prime representative of the Syriac tradition, is a person of great importance and attraction in the contemporary theological world which shows a renewed interest in re-discovering the richness of the Syriac tradition with its Semitic character in which Christianity was born. The Semitic background of Ephrem's doctrine of divinization, especially the Jewish influence in his description of paradise, brings it closer to the origin of Christianity, least influenced by Greek philosophy.

Ephrem unveils the mystery of divinization by way of symbols in opposition to the rationalistic mentality of making categorical statements. He presents the divine realities in a language of common understanding and experience. His symbolic method has an extraordinary freshness, dynamism and universal appeal. The symbolic presentation of divinization will certainly add to its experiential dimension, safeguarding the mysterious character of the divine revelation.

The language which Ephrem makes use of to present divinization is symbolic. Being well motivated by the richness and profundity of symbolism, Ephrem invites human beings, by way of symbols, to relate

themselves with the divine realm and to fulfil the desire for communion with God. Making use of various images such as paradise, clothing, womb, and the sacraments of the Church, Ephrem unveils the mystery of divinization. By way of typology and parallelism, having both the nature of concordance and discordance, between Adam and Christ, Eve and Mary, Ephrem gives expression to the doctrine of divinization.

2. Divinization in St Ephrem: General Considerations

According to Ephrem divinization is the process of human beings' spiritual ascension into the glory of the divine likeness. It is human beings' becoming children of God, 'sharing in the attributes of' or 'belonging to the category of' God³. Naturally for Ephrem divinization does not envisage a merging of humanity into divinity. Divinized humanity will not in any way be on par with God. The ontological gap between the Creator and created beings is fully preserved in Ephrem's thinking. What he understands by divinization is human beings' participation in the divine gifts of knowledge and immortal life, adorned with the glory of God, beatific vision, and the perfect divine-human communion. Human beings, abandoned to their own strength, are incapable of realizing divinization. Ephrem is very much aware of the fact that humanity can attain the privileged state of divinity solely through divine grace: "God in His mercies called mortals gods through grace"⁴.

2.1. Divinization as Spiritual Ascent into the Likeness of God

For Ephrem, the goal of human existence is full and perfect divinization, the ascension of the body and the soul to the realm of the spirit. The process of human beings' ascension to the likeness of God takes place in the Church mainly through the sacraments. The sacraments are the unique moments of God's descent (*katabatic*) and human beings' ascent

(*anabatic*). Sacraments involve twofold movements: God's coming down through Christ in the Spirit, and human beings' going up through Christ in the Spirit to the Father. God's descent through the sacraments aims at human beings' ascent. These descending and ascending dimensions are important themes in sacramental theology⁵. The Spirit of God makes possible the ascent of human beings in the Church through the sacraments, provided that they cooperate with the divine grace.

The descending and ascending dimensions of sacraments have great importance in Ephrem's sacramental theology, especially in his teachings on the sacraments of Christian initiation. For Ephrem the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist are the means for the encounter between God and human beings. Divinization through incorporation into the divinity of Christ is extended through these mysteries. Human beings' return to the re-opened paradise through the pierced side of Christ is accomplished in the Church through the water and the blood, i.e., the mysteries of Baptism and the Eucharist: "There came out from Him water and blood; Adam washed and lived, and returned to Paradise"⁶. Human beings can receive life and grace through these mysteries and can ascend to the divine realm, experiencing communion with God.

Ephrem understands the final stage of divinization after the final resurrection as a spiritual ascension in which the whole tripartite nature of human being is raised to a new life and heights⁷. The human ascension to a higher level of existence is a well expressed theme in Ephrem's thinking. In the eschatological paradise, the tripartite nature of human beings, consisting of body (*pagrâ*), soul (*napdâ*) and spirit (*ruhâ*) will be raised one step higher: "For bodies shall be raised to the level of souls, / and the soul to that of the spirit, / while the spirit will be raised to the height of God's majesty; [...]"⁸. In this ascension process each of the tripartite nature of

human beings will put on the beauty of the other, higher in order.

Far more glorious than the body is the soul, / and more glorious still than the soul is the spirit, / but more hidden than the spirit is the Godhead. / At the end the body will put on / the beauty of the soul, the soul will put on that of the spirit, / while the spirit shall put on the very likeness of God's majesty.

The ascension of human beings to the heights of paradise is the final stage of divinization. In this ascension a stream of spiritual delight will flow from the Father through the Son upon the gathering of seers and this would be the beatific vision of paradise⁹. This glorious vision of the beauty of God's hiddenness and the splendour of his majesty would be seen according to each one's capacity¹⁰, i.e., the degree of one's vision would correspond to the purification and to the opening of spiritual senses¹¹. The Lord of radiance will make each one shine with flashes of light coming from him, and perfect them with more intense rays¹², without losing one's individuality. At this final stage there is perfect communion and encounter between God and human beings.

2.2. God as Transcendent and Immanent

Ephrem emphasizes both the transcendent and the immanent dimensions in his approach to God and the divine realities. The unbridgeable distance and the great closeness of God are repeated themes in Ephrem¹³. The far away God is very near in Christ and the nearby God is, in fact, far away¹⁴. The transcendent and immanent aspects of God are often referred to by the terms of 'hiddenness' and 'revealedness'¹⁵. On the one hand Ephrem is intensely aware of the mysteriousness and inaccessibility of the divine realm. God is hidden and mysterious; he is beyond space, time and human accessibility¹⁶. On this point, as A. de Halleux remarks, Ephrem might have been influenced slightly or greatly by the Neoplatonic sense of the divine transcendence¹⁷. On the other hand Ephrem depicts the immanent aspect of God. He is not hidden within

the mysterious realm. The hidden One is manifested in revelation. Ephrem expresses these hidden and manifest aspects of God as follows:

He shadowed forth things upon things which are visible, that He might shew the things which are not seen by the things which are seen: He imprinted His mysteries upon trees, that He might explain the things which are not comprehended by the things which are comprehended¹⁸.

God has inscribed the invisible and incomprehensible hidden mysteries on the visible and comprehensible realities. The divine content of *râza* is hidden, though *râza* as such are not hidden. In other words, hiddenness is the characteristic of mystery both in the sense of symbols, whether in scripture or in nature, and in the sense of sacraments. God is hidden, except in so far as he allows himself to be revealed. The human experience of God's hiddenness is possible only through God's various instances of self-revelation. At the same time through the individual self-manifestation of God one cannot have a full knowledge of God's hiddenness, because many of the visible things to some extent are in fact incomprehensible. When one attempts to understand the manifested things they become almost like hidden things. Even if the nature of the manifested things proves to be rudimentary, one should be more careful about the things which are hidden by nature¹⁹. The hidden nature of the revealed things reveals the depth of the hiddenness of the One who is being revealed.

Being very conscious of the transcendent and hidden nature of God due to the chasm (*pehtë*) between the Creator and creatures, Ephrem meditates upon the sacramental character of the world. Types and symbols together with divine names, found in nature and in scripture are the means to fill the gap between the divine and human realms. Through these intermediary means humanity can approach God, of course in a spirit of faith and reason combined with wonder and praise. Human beings,

created in the image and likeness of God, can rise to the divine realm through the life-giving principle in the soul, i.e., spirit.

2.3. Living in and out of the Experience of Paradise

For Ephrem the image of paradise refers to the state of intimate and perfect relationship between God and man. It is an experience of living in the presence of God, enjoying the divine gifts of immortal life and infallible knowledge, symbolized by the paradisiacal trees of life and knowledge. The Paradisiacal state of life is central to human life, because God creates each one in view of making him participant in the divine life. At every moment of life God invites humankind to live in the experience of paradise, i.e., life of communion with God. It is only through the perfect experience of paradisiacal life that human being's desire for divinization can be realized. In Ephrem's vision divinization is the state of human beings' living in the experience of paradise.

The image of paradise with its trees of life and knowledge occupies a central place in Ephrem's anthropology and soteriology. He employs this image to explicitate the primordial, present and eschatological stages of divine-human relationship. For Ephrem divinization is human beings' experience of living in the paradisiacal state of life. In the human approach to God, the image which Ephrem makes use of profusely is paradise. He depicts it in earthly and spiritual, immanent and transcendental dimensions. Human beings' approach towards the paradisiacal trees of life and knowledge, the symbols of immortal life and knowledge of the glory of God, are of vital importance in deciding their destiny and relationship with God. If they are approached in the right spirit and in obedience to God, they will certainly lead human beings to the life of communion with God.

Making use of the imagery of paradise Ephrem presents the different stages of human being's journey

to the attainment of divinization in relation to past, present and future dimensions of divine-human communion. Paradise refers to the perfect state of communion or relationship between God and human beings. The life of communion with God, enjoyed by Adam in the primordial paradise, but lost through the Fall, and then restored through Jesus Christ, is continued in the Church, the restored paradise, through the mysteries of initiation and ascetical practices. The final stage of this communion will be realized in the eschatological paradise. In this sense, human life is a journey from the primordial to the eschatological paradise passing through the stations of Golgotha and the Church with the aim of perfect communion with God.

Life in the primordial paradise was meant for the attainment of the higher state of life, i.e., divine gifts of wisdom and immortal life²⁰. Adam, created in an intermediary state of life, neither mortal nor immortal with a free will, had to strive personally for the higher state of life through his dependence on divine grace. Freedom had an important role in deciding human destiny. In so far as human beings co-operated freely with God's grace they could live in the experience of paradise. While the first parents' life in paradise was a sign of perfect communion with God, life outside of paradise expressed their state of broken relationship with God and creatures. When Adam's communion with God was broken through the Fall, he was put out of paradise, an experience of the knowledge of bodily shame, sickness and death, caused by the loss of divine grace in human beings.

2.4. Incarnation and Divinization

The incarnation of the Son of God is the wonderful action of God's love and mercy for humanity²¹, and its aim is divinization through the restoration of the promised life and glory, raising human beings to the status of children of God. The story of the Fall teaches two things with regard to human beings' attainment of the gift of divinity (1) Human beings are incapable of

achieving divinity by their own effort. (2) Only by the grace of God can they fulfil the desire for divinity. Since Adam failed in his attempt to gain the gift of divinity, God sent his Son to make human beings divine. If the absurd project of Adam's eating of the prohibited fruit did not make him a god, as C. Giraud points out, the same God put on a human body for the divinization of human being²². The very aim of the incarnation is human divinization: "The Most High knew that Adam wanted to become a god, so He sent His Son who put him on in order to grant him his desire"²³. The Son of God descended and became man so that human beings might become heavenly²⁴. He came to make human bodies havens for God's dwelling²⁵. God became small so that human beings might become great²⁶ through divine humiliation. Thus St. Paul's teaching on Christ's humiliation (cf. *Phil* 2,6-9) and the consequent human exaltation find expression in Ephrem: "The sons of men made You small, since You did come down to them, and clad Yourself with their form, that they might be made great by Your humiliation [...]"²⁷. Ephrem continues to express the same idea of divine humiliation and human exaltation: "He who was small that He might be on a level with us, was great that He might enrich us. He was small, and great again that He might make us great"²⁸. This line of Ephrem's thinking makes one conscious of the intimate relationship between incarnation and divinization. Incarnation is the basis of divinization. God became man so that human being might become god. This is possible through the attainment of the status of the children of God, possessing and partaking in the divine life. God's intention of making human beings participants in his life is the very aim of the whole of salvation history.

One of the important effects of the incarnation is the reciprocal change of the divine and human natures between God and man: "He gave us the Divine nature, we gave Him human nature"²⁹. God received human nature in order that human beings might acquire divine nature or participation in God's life: "[...] Glory be to the One who took from us

so that we should all the more abundantly receive what is his by means of what is ours”³⁰. He clothed himself in the likeness of Adam in order that human beings might receive divine likeness: “Grace clothed itself in his likeness in order to bring him to the likeness of itself”³¹. The mutual exchange of divine-human natures becomes the basis of divinization: “Blessed is He Who came in what is ours / and mingled us into what is His”³². In short, the progressive revelation of God, culminating in the incarnation of his Son, aims at the divinization of human beings. The intimate union between the divine and human natures in Christ³³ is the basis of divinization. This divine-human union continues to take place at every time and place for each individual human being³⁴.

2.5. Dimensions of Divinization

Ephrem’s doctrine of divinization contains different aspects such as pneumatological, ecclesiastical, sacramental, ascetical and eschatological. After his redemptive work, Christ, being present in the Church, continues the process of divinization through the Holy Spirit’s divinizing activity in the sacraments of initiation, the privileged locus for the encounter between the descending God and the ascending man. Making use of the example of the sun’s heat Ephrem brings out the sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit in everything³⁵. Just as the fire by its heat purifies and gives life to all, humanity is sanctified by the warmth of the Holy Spirit. It destroys what is impure and evil in human beings³⁶. The Holy Spirit’s warmth is a source of vivification and sanctification of humanity.

Ephrem’s understanding of divinization as human beings’ becoming children of God and as spiritual ascension into the likeness of God’s glory finds its realization in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. These mysteries, through the restoration of the lost robe of glory and the distorted image of God, renew and transform human beings into a spiritual nature. Together with the sacraments of initiation, the

practices of asceticism and virginity, repentance and penance, fasting and prayer sanctify human beings from the stains of sin and help them to live in the experience of communion with God. This communion has its final stage of sealing in the *eschaton*. In the eschatological existence, after the bodily resurrection the tripartite human nature will be elevated to the spiritual nature of paradise, enjoying the final stage of divinization.

Conclusion

In the light of the above-mentioned synthesis, it is clear that Christ is the centre of human beings’ journey towards divinization. He is the realization of all images that symbolize the reality of the divine-human communion. He is the very experience of paradise. Human beings can have communion with God in and through Christ, the mediator and the bridge between divinity and humanity. Christ is the source of immortality, the essence of divinization. Human beings’ desire for immortality can be realized only in and through Christ, who defeated the power of death through his death and resurrection. He enables human beings to experience the immortal life in the Church through the sacraments, which has its final fulfilment in the eschatological existence where the fragrance of Christ will give eternal life to those who are worthy.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cf. E. G. Farrugia, “Christianity as a Society of Mourners: Introducing Eastern Theology”, in *Catholic Eastern Churches: Heritage and Identity*, P. Pallath (ed.), Rome 1994, 52.
- 2 Cf. E. Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology: An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae*, Carlisle, Cumbria 1999; J. Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers*, P. A. Onica (tr.), California 2000; N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford 2004.
- 3 Cf. S. P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, Kalamazoo, Michigan 1992, 154.

- 4 *Hymns on Faith* 29: 1.
- 5 E. J. Kilmartin has developed the *katabatic* and *anabatic* dimensions of the sacraments. According to him different elements of the liturgy of the sacraments reflect and actualize both *katabatic* and *anabatic* movements. The *katabatic* dimension of the sacraments in the divine self-giving necessitates an *anabatic* one in the human self-opening.
- 6 *Hymns on Nisibis* 39: 7.
- 7 Cf. C. Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm, Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahai Faith*, New York 1999, 281.
- 8 *HParad* 9: 21. These three levels in the ascension of human being can be compared to three distinct stages in the spiritual life, developed by the later Syriac writers. They are the levels of body (*pagrânutâ*), soul (*napdânutâ*) and spirit (*ruhânutâ*). In the bodily level, though there is the practise of virtues, one is still divided in one's heart and is not completely get rid of passions. In the mental or psychological level one receives perfect control over one's thoughts. One can distinguish between thoughts coming from the Spirit of God and those from the evil one. In the level of the spirit one is controlled by the Holy Spirit. Guided by the Spirit of God one is transformed into the likeness of God. Cf. T. Spidlik, "Some Aspects of Syrian Spirituality", in *Homage to Mar Cariattil: Pioneer Malabar Ecumenist*, C. Payngot (ed.), 65-66.
- 9 Cf. *Hymns on Paradise* 9: 24.
- 10 Cf. *Hymns on Paradise* 9: 25.
- 11 Cf. *Hymns on Paradise* 9: 26.
- 12 Cf. *Hymns on Paradise* 9: 25.
- 13 Cf. *Sermons on Faith* II: 709-713.
- 14 Cf. *Hymns on Virginité* 36: 9.
- 15 Cf. G. Noujaim, "Anthropologie et économie de salut chez saint Éphrem: autour des notions de *ghalayata*, *kasyata* et *kasya'*", in *ParOr* 9 (1979-1980), 313-315; T. Koonammakkal, "Divine Names and Theological Language in Ephrem", in *StPat* 25 (1993), 318-323; S. P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 26-29.
- 16 Cf. *Hymns on Faith* 11: 11; 27: 3; 69: 3; *Hymns on Virginité* 52: 4.
- 17 Cf. A. De Halleux, "Mar Éphrem théologien", 42. The difference between the invisible and transcendent God and the visible world is fundamental in Platonism.
- 18 *Hymns on Faith* 76: 11-13; cf. *Hymns on Faith* 19: 2; 51: 2-3.
- 19 Cf. T. Koonammakkal, "The Self-Revealing God and Man in Ephrem", in *The Harp* 4 (1993), 241.
- 20 *Hymns on Paradise* 12: 15.
- 21 Cf. *Hymns on Faith* 41: 6; *Hymns on Nativity* 5: 2.
- 22 C. Giraud, *In unum corpus: Trattato mistagogico sull'eucaristia*, Cinisello Balsello 2001, 67.
- 23 *Hymns on Nisibis* 69: 12.
- 24 Cf. *Hymns on Nativity* 3: 16, 17.
- 25 Cf. Sermon on our Lord 59.
- 26 Cf. *Homily on Nativity* 125.
- 27 *Hymns on Faith* 32: 9.
- 28 *Hymns on Faith* 31: 9.
- 29 *Hymns on Faith* 5: 17.
- 30 *Sermon on our Lord* 10; cf. *Hymns on Faith* 5: 17.
- 31 *HParadise* 11: 6.
- 32 *Hymns on Nativity* 21: 12.
- 33 Cf. *HNativity* 8: 2.
- 34 Cf. K. E. McVey, "Saint Ephrem's Understanding *Hymns on Faith* of Spiritual Progress: Some Points of Comparison with Origin of Alexandria", in *The Harp* 1 (1988), 120.
- 35 Cf. *Hymns on Faith* 74: 3-4.
- 36 Cf. S. P. Brok, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, J. Vellian (ed.), Kottayam 1998, 27-28.

13

Life in the Holy Spirit: Role of the Holy Spirit in the Theology of the Syro-Malabar Church

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Introduction

The Spirit of God is the principal agent and force behind every confession of faith in Jesus Christ. This truth of the New Testament is a conviction that the Syrian Christian tradition has lived and handed down to the generations. The Syro-Malabar Christians of Kerala, belonging to the eastern Christianity of the Syriac religious culture and thought patterns, strongly rooted in the biblical world, are happy to speak of the pneumatological richness of their tradition.

Thus, in this paper we concentrate on the theological richness of the Holy Spirit as the life-giving principle of the very dynamism of the Christian life. We shall analyze first some of the aspects of the Early Syriac theology of the Holy Spirit, namely the inseparable relationship between the Spirit and Jesus the Messiah, and the role of the Spirit in leading a person to recognize the Messiah.¹ Thereafter, we

discuss the indispensable work of the Holy Spirit as celebrated and lived in the Sacraments of Initiation. We shall conclude this study of the richness of the Holy Spirit in our life by pointing out its relevance today.

1. The Inseparable Relationship between Jesus the Messiah and the Spirit

Following closely the Economy of Salvation as revealed in the Scripture, the Syriac writers looked at the presence and action of the Spirit of God in close connection with the redemptive work of Jesus the Messiah. The Messiah and the Spirit are inseparable and they work together for the realization of the salvation of humanity as willed by the Father. This theological insight of the inseparable relationship between the Messiah and the Spirit is not a confused look at the reality. The Messiah and the Spirit are inseparable as well as distinct in their functions. That

means, the Syriac tradition has well understood the economy of salvation being achieved in and through the work of the Messiah and the Spirit from creation onwards.

1.1. The Spirit of God at Creation

The Syrian liturgical tradition always paid much emphasis to the action of the Spirit of God in the realization of the sacraments. To understand this it is enough to look at the epiclesis or the invocation to the Holy Spirit. The studies on epiclesis in the Syrian tradition² have proved their close association with the symbolic action of the Spirit of God as a “hovering over” (*mrahpha*) as presented in Gen 1:2. As a result, a technical term for epiclesis in the Syrian tradition is connected to this action of “hovering over” (*ruhappa*) of the Holy Spirit, which is well employed by the Syrian writers while developing the theology of baptism and Eucharist.³

In Gen 1:2 it is revealed that the Spirit of God was hovering over to bring life from emptiness. Aphrahat, the first Syrian Church Father, for example, compared the baptismal activity of the Spirit of God to that of the same Spirit of God who was hovering over the primordial waters.⁴ But St Ephrem did not see in Gen 1:2 an activity of the Spirit of God. However, he had no problem in using this symbolism of the hovering action of the Spirit of God. In his *Hymns on Epiphany* 8, 15 he compares the baptismal action of the Holy Spirit to that of the Spirit’s hovering over the primordial waters:

*At creation the Spirit hovered
over the waters.
They conceived and gave birth to reptiles,
fishes and birds;
The Holy Spirit hovered over the
baptismal water
and it gave birth to symbolic eagles -
the virgins and
leaders, and to symbolic fishes -
the chaste and the
intercessors, and to symbolic reptiles
the cunning who have become
as simple as doves.*

As we shall see later, this parallelism between the action of the Spirit at the beginning of creation and the same Spirit’s indispensable action at baptism (accepting Jesus the Messiah as Saviour) are pointers to the close relationship that the Spirit maintains with the Christians in the economy of salvation.⁵

1.2. The Spirit of God as the Spirit of the Messiah

The Syrian writers referred to all the actions of the Spirit of God mentioned in the Scripture. They were well aware of the important function of the Spirit of God upon the prophets. As everything culminated and centered on Jesus the Messiah, it is the same Spirit who is present at his birth and baptism. Witnessing to this work of the Spirit upon the Messiah, Aphrahat writes:

*See, my beloved, that our Lord also, (who)
was born of the Spirit, was not tempted by
Satan until he received the Spirit in baptism
from on high.⁶*

Reading Jn 1:33, where it is said that the Spirit of God rested on Jesus, Aphrahat makes the conclusion that Jesus the Messiah is the one upon whom the Spirit of God dwelt in permanence. According to him, the Messiah is the only one with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.⁷ Consequently, the Spirit of God has a new title, namely that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Jesus the Messiah. Indeed, the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ is a fundamental New Testament revelation that one finds in Rom 8:9 and in other New Testament verses.

1.3. Importance of the Relationship between the Spirit and the Messiah

In the early period, it is Aphrahat who developed considerably this inseparable relationship between the Messiah and the Spirit and pointed in the direction of a Spirit-Christology or the pneumatological dimension of the Christ event. Indeed, this particular characteristic of Syriac theology is well recognized as we read: “... the Syrian

tradition often spoke of a Spirit Christology in place of Logos christology articulated in the Gospel of John. (...) The rich descriptions of the Spirit in relation to Christ are one of the more enduring contributions the early Syriac Churches have made to Christian history.”⁸

As we know well, in theology today, there is a renewed attempt to discover the pneumatological dimension of the life and activity of Jesus Christ in order to understand the mystery of Christ himself. Walter Kasper and other theologians have noted that a pneumatologically oriented Christology could best show how the mystery of Jesus Christ is at once unique and universal.⁹ The Syriac theological insights on the Christ-Spirit relationship remain therefore as an important source of inspiration for further developments in this line of thought.

If the Spirit is seen inseparable from Jesus the Messiah, then this same Spirit, the Spirit of the Messiah, is inevitably present in Christian life too. That means, the Spirit and the messiah are to be experienced together, not separating one from the other or forgetting one or the other. Therefore, it is this Spirit-Christ relationship, as seen in the economy of salvation, that has motivated Aphrahat and other Syrian theologians to discover the indispensable activity of the Spirit of Christ in the Christian life beginning with baptism.

2. The Holy Spirit and the Confession of Faith in Jesus Christ

In 1 Cor 12:3 we read that “no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.” Where then is the role of the Holy Spirit, before or after the baptismal confession of Jesus as the Lord? The question seems rather strange; but the early Syriac Christianity and its liturgical practice of a pre-baptismal anointing, apparently intended to provide the Spirit, makes one think in this direction that the Spirit came first to lead a person to confess his or her faith in Jesus Christ. We shall briefly see this from the Apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, which sheds light into the early Syrian liturgical practices.

2.1. The Pre-baptismal Anointing and Its Pneumatological Significance

Although the *Acts of Thomas* is an Apocryphal writing, it is a valid source to look into the 3rd century Syriac liturgical milieu.¹⁰ The five accounts of the administration of baptism to the newly converts narrated in this book made the historians of liturgy to take them seriously in order to re-construct the very early Syrian liturgical practice of baptism, Eucharist and a special ceremony known as an anointing that preceded the baptism proper, or the immersion into water.

We shall take the first account of Christian initiation mentioned in *Acts of Thomas* chapter 27. Receiving the request from the candidates of baptism, the Apostle Thomas pours oil over their heads and makes a long prayer invoking the name of the Messiah and the Holy Spirit. We read this as follows:

And Judas (Apostle Thomas) went up and stood upon the edge of the cistern, and poured oil upon their heads, and said: “Come, holy name of the Messiah ...” And he baptized them (...).¹¹

This rite of pouring the oil first upon the head of the candidates of baptism is found in all the narratives of baptism. Moreover, no post-baptismal anointing is mentioned. Through the invocation to the Spirit upon the oil, the oil becomes the vehicle of the Spirit in order to strengthen the candidate of baptism to profess Jesus as the Messiah.

In fact, it seems that this practice of a pre-baptismal anointing to provide the Spirit is not emphasized and it is a question that needs further explanations. However, here one can remember that in the Syrian tradition, the oil is the preferred symbol of the Holy Spirit and as the oil strengthens the body, the Spirit strengthens the faith.¹² We can see this in the New Testament itself. Accordingly, in the Acts 10:44-48, we have the coming of the Holy

Spirit first before the baptism in the case of Cornelius and his household. As the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Messiah, the same Spirit moves in a mysterious manner and it is the Spirit who is behind every confession of faith in Jesus the Messiah. The fact that early Syrian tradition had captured this pneumatic dimension and lived it in their Christian life must make us think further.

3. Role of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Eucharist

The celebrated saying, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, the rule of prayer as the rule of faith, is very much verifiable in eastern theology in general and particularly in the Syrian theology, because its early theological developments are centered around the liturgy, the *locus theologicus*, a source of theology. Hence, to understand the Syriac pneumatology, one has to dive deep into the liturgical life of this tradition. That means, it is in the sacraments of Christian initiation, namely in baptism and Eucharist that we find indispensable role of the Holy Spirit and the resulting theology of the Holy Spirit becoming evident.

3.1. The Reception of the Holy Spirit at Baptism

According to the Syrian theologians the main effect of baptism is the reception of the Holy Spirit. Aphrahat and St Ephrem demonstrate well this pneumatological touch of Christian initiation. It is interesting to note that more than the question of concentrating on an important aspect of baptism, namely the remission of the original sin, it is on the positive reception of the gift of the Spirit that this theology has concentrated upon.

According to Aphrahat it is the Spirit of the Messiah that the believer puts on while confessing faith in Jesus the Messiah at baptism. He writes:

For from baptism we receive the Spirit of the Messiah. In that hour in which the priests invoke the Spirit, She opens the heavens and descends and hovers over (mrahha). And those who are baptized put Her [the Spirit] on.¹³

What the believer receives at baptism, and this is presented here as “putting on,” is the Holy Spirit. It is important to remember here that this expression “to put on” in Syriac theology is used to speak of the mystery of Incarnation where one finds often the expression that Jesus has “put on” the human body. If Jesus the Messiah has put on our human nature, those who believe in Him now put on the Spirit of the Messiah. Thus we find clearly the dynamic action of the Spirit of the Messiah enabling and empowering the Christians to continue their faith in Jesus that they engage upon at baptism.

Coming to St Ephrem we have the same understanding of the baptismal reception of the Holy Spirit presented more emphatically. St Ephrem is very much concerned of this active reception of the Holy Spirit when he writes in his poetical lines in a clear way as follows:

*Go down, my brethren,
Put on the Holy Spirit from the
water of baptism.*¹⁴

Later on, in the baptismal reflections of Jacob of Serugh (452-521) also one can find the emphasis on this pneumatological dimension. According to him, the new garment that the baptized receive at the moment of baptism is fully made of light and fire,¹⁵ which means a garment or enveloping of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit himself becomes the clothing¹⁶ for the Christian who is now no more under the shame of sin. The believer is put under the new life, a life in the Holy Spirit, which must become his or her main motivating force to witness Christ in this world. Here the believer is invited to recognize this Holy Spirit in his or her life as a new strength and source of Christian life and activity.

The transforming effect of the Incarnation of our Lord is something that always fascinated the Syrian writers. St Ephrem in His *Hymns On Nativity* 22, 39 explains beautifully this happy consequence of Incarnation as an exchange between God and humanity. He writes:

*You put on our visible body; let us put on
your hidden power.
Our body became your garment;
Your Spirit became our robe.
Blessed is He Who was adorned and
adorned us!*

According to St Ephrem, seeing the misery of the humans, God makes a marvelous exchange with them. He assumes their condition and his own “Condition,” namely God’s life, the inner life in the Holy Spirit, is extended to humanity. This exchange between God and humanity by giving the human beings what is of God, namely His own Spirit, is something beyond human imagining. The miserable body of the human beings becomes God’s own body in His Son. But the beneficiary is the human being who receives God’s own Holy Spirit.

Therefore, God’s gracious gift to humanity, through the Incarnation of His own Son, is His own Holy Spirit. In fact, the entire Trinity is involved here. The newness that has come to the human life in Jesus Christ at His Incarnation is God’s own life in the Spirit. This is to be contemplated and understood at a deeper level in order to appreciate this wonderful gift of God. As St Ephrem said, God adorns the human beings with His own Holy Spirit. The humanity in turn must now learn to adorn this world with the same Spirit of God.

Finally, we see that St Ephrem hints at this Spirit of God as a “hidden power.” We know well that the Holy Spirit is presented as the power from on high in the Gospel of Luke 24:49. A Christian is thus invited to discover this power of the Spirit that is offered for Christian life and for witnessing to Christ in the day-to-day life.

3.1.1. The Baptism as Re-Entry into the Paradise

The early Syriac theological reflections on the life of a Christian are very much related to its reading of the original catastrophe of the first human beings due to sin, namely the expulsion from paradise.

Consequently, this theology has insisted on baptism, the Christian initiation into the faith in Jesus the Messiah, and the resulting membership of the Church as a re-entry into the paradise. There are ample evidences on this theme of re-entry into paradise in the early Syriac sources. We have a fine expression of this in Odes 25, 8:

*And I was covered with the covering
of Thy Spirit,
And I removed from me the garments
of skin.¹⁷*

The salvation that has reached the Christian is qualified here as a life in the Holy Spirit. The removal of the old sinful nature of the human being, thanks to the redeeming work of Jesus the Messiah, is the happy consequence of putting on the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit, the result and gift of Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, makes the Christian enter into the Church, the new paradise, through baptism and thereby the believer is enabled and enkindled to live and announce Jesus boldly to this world.

3.1.2. Holy Spirit and the Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation as Celebrated Today

We shall now briefly look at the Scriptural passages and the prayers currently in use in the celebration of the mysteries of initiation in the Syro-Malabar Church. As the three mysteries of initiation, namely Baptism, Anointing (Chrismation) and Eucharist, are given together we find that the role of the Holy Spirit is becoming very clear in a person’s full Christian living and incorporation into the Church.

To begin with, it is important to note that the first prayer of the priest for the person to be baptized is a request for the new birth or regeneration “in water and Spirit” as Jesus has commanded in Jn 3:5. As this new birth in the Spirit itself is the remission of sins, the emphasis on the washing of the sins is secondary or an external sign of that inner reality. Moreover, it is through the coming of the Spirit of

God that the person to be baptized gets purified of the stains of sins. This becomes clear as one listens to the reading from Ezek 36:24-28, where it is said that the Spirit is the guarantee of the new life. In fact, this text is one of the most important promises of the Old Testament regarding the future bestowal of the Holy Spirit by the Messiah. As the reading from Rom 6:3-11 reminds us of the baptism as our death to sin, it is highlighted again through the listening of the Gospel of Jn 3:1-8 that without the Spirit there is no entry into the Kingdom of God and the attainment of the new life.

The immediate following of the celebration of Chrismation (Confirmation) is then aimed at perfecting the newly baptized person as the temple of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, so that the person may be a true follower of Jesus Christ. The epiclesis over the oil to be sanctified and the water of baptism are clear examples of the indispensable role of the Spirit in making one a follower of Christ. It is also to be noted that an anointing precedes the proper baptism, namely the pouring of the water over the candidate of baptism. This too indicates that the Spirit leads one to the confession of faith in Jesus Christ through the baptism, as we have noted earlier from the ancient Syriac tradition. Moreover, this water of baptism is not ordinary water; it is the water sanctified by the Spirit. It is the water in which the power of the Spirit is present through the invocation to the Spirit. Furthermore, the use of the passive form so and so "is baptized" (instead of "I baptize") shows that it is not the priest's doing. The priest who performs this holy act is an agent of the Holy Spirit who enables him through the ordination.

Thus, as we have seen earlier, the Syriac tradition has the theological consciousness of the inseparable relationship between the Spirit of God and Jesus the Messiah at all the moments of his life and mission of attaining the redemption of humanity. The same is now re-lived in the sacraments of initiation, emphasizing that it is in the Spirit of the

Messiah that one is being made a Christian. This means that without the Spirit of the Messiah, the Spirit of God, there is no true Christian life.

3.2. The Holy Spirit and the Reception of the Eucharist

The fruit of baptism and the consequent re-entry into the eschatological paradise, the Church, means that the believer is now entitled to eat of the fruit of the tree of life that the primordial human beings have much desired and waited for (Gen 3:6). Here we shall see how the same Holy Spirit who initiated a person to believe in Jesus the Messiah continues to nourish his or her life through the Eucharist. The present practice of giving the Eucharist to the newly baptized child can be understood as an emphasis to this Syrian tradition being revitalized today.

3.2.1. The Eucharistic Epiclesis

An invocation to the Holy Spirit is an essential part of the celebration of the Eucharist in the Syriac tradition. In the *Acts of Thomas* chapter 50 we read about the Eucharistic celebration. There we find the epiclesis or the invocation to the Holy Spirit, which goes as follows: "Come Holy Spirit (...) and communicate with us in this Eucharist."¹⁸ The result of this invocation to the Holy Spirit is that for the *Acts of Thomas*, the Eucharist becomes the vehicle of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

This invocation to the Holy Spirit and the resulting presence of the Spirit in the Eucharist becomes clearer in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari. There is the real petition for the coming of the Holy Spirit as follows:

May there come, O Lord your Holy Spirit and rest upon this oblation of your servants, and bless and sanctify it (...).²⁰

According to the Syriac theology, it is by the arrival of the Holy Spirit at the epiclesis that the resurrection of Jesus is relived in the liturgy of the Eucharist. Here the Holy Spirit is invited not only to

sanctify, that is to make Jesus Christ present, but also to rest upon the Eucharist. In fact, the Holy Spirit dwells permanently in the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Jesus. Together with Jesus, the Holy Spirit also is the content of the Eucharist.²¹

3.2.2. From the Reception of the Eucharist, the Spirit-Filled Body of Jesus Christ, to a Life in the Fire of the Holy Spirit

The above-mentioned, undeniable presence and action of the of the Holy Spirit in the celebration of the Mystery of the Eucharist, made the Syrian theologians to consider the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Jesus as truly filled with the Holy Spirit. Here also we find Jesus and the Holy Spirit remain inseparable. This is well emphasized by St Ephrem in his often-quoted verse:

*In Your Bread, Lord, there is hidden the Spirit who is not consumed, in Your Wine there dwells the Fire that is not drunk: the Spirit is in Your Bread, the Fire in Your Wine, a manifest wonder, that our lips have received.*²²

Later on, in this Syrian tradition, we find another insightful reflection on the Eucharist related to the Holy Spirit in connection with Isaiah 6:6. A live “Coal of Fire” is brought by the Seraph and it touches the lips of the prophet and purifies him. The above-mentioned epiclestical role of the Holy Spirit, the Divine Fire, and His living presence in the Eucharist are thus strengthened by this reference to Isa 6:6.²³ The Eucharist is for our purification and life, for our divinization, as we can experience Christ and Spirit in it.

According to the Syriac theology, the *Qurbana* is ‘sacrifice’ offered to God. But there is also another beautiful dimension that can be derived from the etymological analysis of this Syriac word, *Qurbana*. The root verb, *qrb*, also means “to approach” or “to

be near” to God. To approach the Son of God and to get him into our life in the power of the Spirit is the final purpose of *Qurbana* and the reception of the Eucharist. This we find in the exhortation of the deacon before the communion rite of the Syro-malabar *Qurbana* as follows: “Let us receive the Holy *Qurbana* (Eucharist) and be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” Although it goes often unnoticed by the participants, the effect of this prayer and the consequent activity of the Spirit in the communicant cannot be denied theologically in the light of what we have seen so far.

Having been baptized in the Holy Spirit and then being nourished by the Spirit-filled Body and Blood of Jesus, the Christian life is a call to become a ‘fire.’ That means, to become the living temples of the Holy Spirit here on earth. St Ephrem clearly points at this truth when he writes:

When the Lord came down to earth to mortal beings he created them again, a new creation, like the angels, mingling within them Fire and Spirit, so that in a hidden manner *they too might be of Fire and Spirit.*²⁴

Receiving this ‘fire,’ the Divine Fire of the Holy Spirit, from Jesus the Messiah, the Christians are invited to be “men and women on fire” in this world which is growing cold to the awareness and recognition of God as the author of our life.

4. The Syriac Theological Insights on the Holy Spirit and Its Relevance in Theology Today

What could now be the fruit of this re-reading of the Syriac theological heritage and the present-day liturgical celebration of our Church regarding the Person and activity of the Holy Spirit? Or, what shall we do with this rich pneumatological insight of our Syriac tradition? Here we aim to indicate only certain areas of interest.

4.1. Announcing Jesus Christ in the Power of the Holy Spirit

Reflecting on the role of the Holy Spirit in our ecclesial tradition, we must discover and re-discover this power of the Spirit that is offered for our Christian life and mission. It is necessary to make one aware of this power of the Spirit, even prior to the official recognition of Jesus as one's own Messiah, the Unique Saviour, at a baptismal commitment.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Mother Church is never tired of insisting on the role of the Holy Spirit in the Evangelization of the non-Christians. Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* exhorted the theologians to "study more thoroughly the nature and manner of the Holy Spirit's action in evangelization today."²⁵ In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, Pope John Paul II has exhorted the Asians to be "a genuine sign and instrument of the Spirit's action in the complex realities of Asia" and to listen and discern "the Spirit's call to witness to Jesus the Saviour in new and effective ways."²⁶ Therefore, in the light of this rich pneumatological consciousness of the Syriac tradition, the theologians and the faithful are to search for the action of the Holy Spirit, the principal agent of evangelization. In our Indian context, where the vast majority are still groping in darkness with regard to the light of Jesus Christ, the hidden power of the Holy Spirit at work is to be asked for. The present celebration of the Mission Year (2011-2012) of the Syro-Malabar Church shall concentrate on this pneumatological emphasis too.

In the Christian theology of religions, a branch of theology that is dominant today,²⁷ noted theologians like Jacques Dupuis,²⁸ Claude Geffré²⁹ and Michel Fédou³⁰ have well insisted that in this world of religious pluralism, it is the Spirit of Christ who must guide the announcement of Christian specificity. J. Dupuis writes: "The Spirit is the "point of entry" of God's self-communication to human

beings; but the Spirit of God is, at one and the same time, the Spirit of Christ, communicated by him in virtue of his resurrection from the dead."³¹

Indeed, this emphasis on the action of the Holy Spirit in evangelization is not for replacing the face of Jesus Christ. It is the Word who incarnated in the power of the Spirit of God and therefore, the action of the Spirit is to be seen inseparable in the new areas of evangelization where Jesus Christ must become a reality. Pneumatology thus allows us to acknowledge the unique and universal significance of the Christ event before the millions of Asians who opt for a variety of religious and quasi-religious practices that they can await the full realization of their existence only in the Person of Jesus Christ and in the Spirit.³²

4.2. Strengthened by the Spirit of Jesus Christ

Mission and evangelization in India today is under threat of evil resisting the arrival of the Kingdom of God. We find widespread oppression, persecution and destruction of Christian life and property under the pseudonym of "forced-conversion." True conversion is the conversion of a person's heart taken and possessed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This becomes evident in the very many witnesses of Christians, empowered by the Holy Spirit, not only withstanding the severe persecution, but also undergoing martyrdom for the sake of Jesus Christ.

At this time of history when mission and evangelization in India implies witnessing Jesus Christ at the cost of shedding one's own blood, the hidden power of the Holy Spirit becomes evident. The gift of the Spirit, namely 'Fortitude' is more necessary than ever to be a follower of Christ in this country. It is high time that the Syro-Malabar Christians, with their rich pneumatological consciousness on their Christian existence, re-discover and enable the entire Christian community to be re-kindled and empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to be effective witnesses of Jesus Christ.

4.3. The Holy Spirit as Life: Towards a Theology of Life

In the light of this theological reflection on the Holy Spirit in our Syriac tradition, we find that the best title for the Spirit is “the Spirit of Life.” In fact, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, as used in the Syro-Malabar *Qurbana*, calls the Spirit as the “Lord and Giver of life.” It is certain that without the Spirit of Christ there is no divine life. It is the Spirit who interiorly makes the life of Christ present in our Christian existence.

Life is what the humans seek on earth. Behind every effort of human beings to increase pleasure and fame is the desire for increasing life. But the question, what is real and true life? In fact, it is life that the humans lost while trying to touch the fruit of the tree of life as we read in Genesis chapter 3. As the Syriac theology envisages, through this loss of life, the human beings became sick and were in need of a healing. Jesus Christ is, therefore, the true ‘Physician,’ the Healer, who brought back life to humanity, which is salvation. The Syriac theologians rightly called the Eucharist as the “Medicine of life” that heals everyone and provides life.³³

As we have seen above, since the Eucharist is the Spirit-filled Body of Jesus Christ, in it God has hidden the life of the Spirit, the Divine Life itself, for the human beings. Aphrahat sees it clearly when he prays:

We thank you healer of our illness, who has hidden in us your Spirit as the remedy for our body.³⁴

Truly, as the Syriac Christianity has understood, it is the life of the Spirit that is hidden in us by Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, the task of the Syro-Malabar Christians to discover this life in the Spirit and to live it, and thereby to answer the quest of the world today in its search for life so that the world may not perish by being caught by the attractions of vanishing and self-annihilating forms of life.

Conclusion

Ex Oriente Lux: “Light [comes] from the east.” The East represents the rising sun and its illuminating light. As Syro-Malabar Christians, as Eastern Christians, living in the East of our world, we have to look at the ever-shining light of Jesus the Sun, namely at His Holy Spirit. Jesus the Eternal Sun sheds always His light of the Holy Spirit and we have to spread this light of the Holy Spirit to all Indians, to all Asians, in our effort to evangelize everyone.

As we have seen from the Syriac tradition, the entire Christian existence from beginning till end is envisaged to be a dynamic one under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of Christ. Consequently, Christian life is a life in Christ and in the Spirit for the glory and praise of the Father. It is in being filled with the Holy Spirit of Jesus that one shall announce Jesus to all. Hence the pneumatological dimension of the Syriac theology that we have highlighted from its liturgical life and theology points certainly toward a Christian life and mission to be shaped in the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ.

ENDNOTES

- 1 ‘Messiah’ means Christ, the Anointed One. Syriac writers often use this word, which is more Syriac than the Greek, Christ.
- 2 There are very many convincing and detailed studies by S. P. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition* (Pune: The Syrian Churches Series, Volume 9, 1998); (Enlarged Second Edition). See also S. P. Brock, “Invocations to/for the Holy Spirit in Syriac Liturgical Texts: Some Comparative Approaches,” in R. F. Taft & G. Winkler (eds.), *Comparative Liturgy. Fifty Years After Anton Baumstark (1872-1948). Acts of the International Congress. Rome, 25-29 September 1998* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2001) 377-406.
- 3 See below the explanations on Baptism and Eucharist.
- 4 See the below quoted Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 6, 14.
- 5 A detailed and clear study of this is done by, S. P. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*. See especially, 126-134.
- 6 Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 6, 17.

- 7 For further the details, see E. Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life. A Study of the Holy Spirit in the Early Syriac Tradition* (Kottayam: OIRSI, 2003) 57ff.
- 8 D. T. Irvin and S. W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*. Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453 (Bangalore: TPI, 2004) 63.
- 9 See Jacques Dupuis' evaluation on this theme of Spirit-Christology in his various writings. Some of his works are mentioned below.
- 10 Cf. A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, Commentary* (Leiden: 1962).
- 11 A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, 77 (italics added).
- 12 See S. P. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 143 ff.
- 13 Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 6, 14. For this use of the feminine gender to the Holy Spirit see, E. Kaniyampampil, "Feminine-Maternal Images of the Spirit in Early Syriac Tradition," *Letter & Spirit* 3 (2007) 169-187.
- 14 St Ephrem, *Hymns on Epiphany* 5, 1.
- 15 See E. Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life*, 250, note 160.
- 16 See E. Kaniyampampil, "The Holy Spirit as "Clothing": An Imagery of the Holy Spirit in the Early Syriac Theology," in *The Harp* XXII (2007), 23-35.
- 17 J. H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon*. The Syriac Texts. Edited with Translation and Notes (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 102.
- 18 A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, 91.
- 19 Cf. T. Elavanal, *The Memorial Celebration. A Theological Study of the Anaphora of the Apostles Mar Addai and Mari* (Kottayam: OIRSI, 1989), 169, note 79.
- 20 Cf. T. Elavanal, *The Memorial Celebration*, 161.
- 21 Cf. T. Elavanal, *The Memorial Celebration*, 161-171, 168.
- 22 St Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith* 10, 8.
- 23 For a detailed study of Isa 6:6 in Syriac tradition, see T. Kuzhuppil, *The Vision of the Prophet Isaiah. A Theological Study of Narsai's Interpretation of Isaiah 6* (Kerala: Good Shepherd Books, 2006).
- 24 St Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith* 10, 9 (Italics added).
- 25 Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n° 75.
- 26 Cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, n° 18.
- 27 See Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002).
- 28 Cf. James Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and His Spirit. Theological Approaches* (Bangalore: TPI, 1977). See especially, pp. 245ff.; Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2001).
- 29 Claude Geffré, *Le Christianisme au Risque de l'Interprétation* (Paris: Cerf, 1988). See especially, 204-206.
- 30 Michel Fédou, *Les Religions selon la Foi Chrétienne* (Paris: Cerf, 1996). See especially, 94-98.
- 31 Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 197.
- 32 Cf. Achiel Peelman, "L'Esprit Saint comme fondement du pluralisme religieux: Quelques réflexions," in *Pontificium Concilium pro Dialogo Inter Religiones*, Bulletin 124 (2007) 36-62.
- 33 Cf. St Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity* 19, 16. See, Aho Shemunkasho, "Salvation History as a Process of Healing in the Theology of mar Ephrem," in *The Harp* XI-XII (1998-1999), 175-185.
- 34 Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 23, 52.

14

Ecclesiological Perspectives of St Thomas Christians

Mar Joseph Kallarangatt

Introduction

This is a theological study, which brings out the various ecclesiological aspects of the St Thomas Christian heritage (of the Syro Malabar ecclesial tradition). The St Thomas Christian ecclesiology is different from the systematic ecclesiology of the western model. This ecclesial tradition was developed outside the Greco-Roman sway, in the Persian continent. It forms a living segment of the Syriac Orient.¹ St Thomas Christian Ecclesiological perspective is a synthetic approach to the mystery of the Church. It is a living experience of the faith in Christ, the Saviour. Hence it is a soteriologically determined Christology and ecclesiology. There is a saying that history is the navigator of theology. It is actually a historical approach and a historical perspective that directs the course of theology. This is all the more true with regard to the St Thomas Christian ecclesial tradition. Liturgy is the matrix of this ecclesial heritage. The Apostolate of St Thomas is the formative ground of its ecclesial identity. This tradition is the living memory of that Church. Its spirituality is the breeding ground of its ecclesial

vision. To make a leap in the field of ecclesiology a retrospective look into the meaningful traditions of this ecclesial community would be helpful. Therefore to get a critical and balanced appreciation of this ecclesial heritage we have to travel through several main roads and then come to a synthetic approach to this. One should not seek an ecclesiology of this tradition elsewhere. Among the Thomas Christians there was an uncorrupted view of the Church. Their consciousness of the Church was a living one. It was not a reflex, scientific, and systematic consciousness. They placed the Church all round in their Christian life. The sense of the Church was never disconnected from their ordinary life. The Church was a body of people praying and doing penance. In short we could say that the St Thomas Christian ecclesial heritage is a living spirituality. This is a unique Christian tradition, which articulates an integral ecclesial vision rather than an ecclesiology proper in the modern sense of the word. We have a deep and authentic ecclesiology, which focuses on the faith traditions of the Church. The identity of this Church is to be sought in these elements of faith. It shows that Church is the Way of authentic Christian life. Its ecclesiology is to

be culled out from its biblical fidelity, its liturgy, tradition, priestly formation, catechesis, Christian life, spiritual motivations, devotion to the apostle and apostolic tradition, devotion to Virgin Mary, to saints and martyrs etc. Hence it is a synthetic whole.

India: Land of Apostolic Theology and Apostolic Tradition

The ancient Thomas Christian community in India has a prestigious and glorious position. We have a firmer and steadier tradition of St Thomas. According to tradition, the apostle Thomas evangelized India and he is the founder of the Thomas Christian Church. The ecclesial identity of a Church is vested in the tradition which comes from ‘the apostles through the Fathers and which is part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church.’² The essence of a Church is its apostolic tradition and apostolic faith.³ Speaking about the apostolic tradition of the Malabar Church Cardinal Tisserant says: “the ancient Christianity of Malabar is a living witness to the early messengers of faith”.⁴ The mission of St. Thomas in India is recorded even in the very ancient documents.⁵ There was a very ancient evangelization started by St Thomas the Apostle, and mainly in South India.⁶ “Since early times, at least since the fourth century there is general agreement in the West and in India as to the coming of St. Thomas to this country (India).⁷ “Christian communities existed in the first centuries, not only at Mylapore, but further South down to Cape Comorin and ‘in Malabar’ ... Kaveripattanam, Vaipur, Vembar etc. were inhabited by St Thomas Christians”.⁸

Therefore India can be named as the land of apostolic theology and tradition par-excellence. As Vatican II says: “and of these (the various eastern Churches) many glory in taking their origins from the apostles themselves”.⁹ Christianity in India is practically as old as Christianity itself. The venerable tradition of the Church is that St Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, came to India in 52 AD preached

the Gospel and established the gospel communities or Christian communities here. This Christian community has the glory of being one of the most ancient Christian Churches in the whole Christendom. The apostolic individuality of the Malabar tradition is something to be jealously guarded. The deeply rooted apostolic tradition is the key factor in the individuality consciousness of the Thomas Christians. It serves as a living symbol of the unbreakable link between the apostle and the present day community.

The apostles provided the primary link between Jesus Christ and the Church. Their witness to Jesus’ teaching, his miracles, and above all to his death and resurrection were foundational to the mystery of the Church. In that perspective a direct apostolic touch to a Church is an unrepeatable reality. An apostle is an eye witness to Christ and a direct witness to the formation of the Christian community. Their contribution to the founding of a Church is incomparable. He constitutes a real tradition. A Church can be practically identified with that tradition.¹⁰ The apostolate of St Thomas and the uniqueness of the earliest gospel communities occupy the central thrust of the Acts of Judas Thomas,¹¹ Rambban Pattu (Song), Margham Kali Pattu, Veeradian Pattu, Panham Pattu etc. The very existence of the St. Thomas Christian community itself is the tangible sign of this apostolic tradition. This tradition has been largely shared by the Fathers of the Church like St. Gregory Nazianzon, St. Ambrose, St. Jerome etc.¹² A reference to the Church in Malabar can be seen around the middle of the fourth century in the story of Theophilus the Indian.¹³ The first truly circumstantial mention of a Church of St. Thomas in our Modern India is made by western travellers of the lower Middle ages: Marco Polo (1293), John of Monte Corvino (1291), Friar Oderic (1325), the Papal Legate Marignoli, who visited the tomb in 1349, Nicolo Contian merchant who arrived in Mylapore in 1440 and so on.¹⁴ Speaking to a crowd in New Delhi, Pandit

Jawaharlal Nehru said: “St. Thomas the apostle preached the Gospel in India right from the beginning of the first century. In this matter we have a tradition, a tradition stronger any history”.¹⁵ The tradition which a church maintains is that of Christ. This tradition comes to a community from an apostle through liturgies and the writings of the Fathers. This tradition is actually the memory of a Church. This memory is expressed through various elements like liturgy, spirituality, theology, cultural integrations etc. It is the Way of the Church. In antiquity the St Thomas Church is equal to the Roman Church. The apostolate of St Thomas in India, his martyrdom there, and the transference of his relics to Mesopotamia form a matter of traditional belief among the Christians of India.¹⁶ Nicolo de Contian, Italian merchant who visited India several times between 1415 and 1438 says that there were thousand Christians then living in Mylapore. Here the body of St Thomas lies honourably buried in a large and beautiful Church.¹⁷ Pope Paul VI says: “according to a very ancient and common tradition, St Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, preached the Gospel in India and died a martyr there”.¹⁸

The Varthamanappusthakam, an outstanding ecclesiological treatise, brings out the deep apostolic devotion that Mar Cariattil and Paremmakkal kept. They prayed before the tomb of the apostle before their tedious journey to Rome. “After two days we began visiting the holy places connected with the apostle St Thomas. At Chinnamala we saw the cave in which the apostle out of fear of the heathens, lived and said Mass, and saw the small Church built over it. A little away from the Church we can see the footprint of the apostle on a rock into which is cut a small cross. We saw these and kissed the footprint”.¹⁹ “By the infinite mercy of God and by the merits of the apostle St Thomas, its first apostle and founder, our community has until now followed faithfully as far as it could, its customs and the rite of our forefathers”.²⁰ Not all particular Churches or any mission Church can claim a distinct apostolic origin and distinct continuity as the Malabar Church can.

Four feasts were kept in honour of the apostle St Thomas: the first Sunday after Easter Puthunjayar, July 3 Dukhrana, December 18 - the bleeding of the Cross-, and November 21 -arrival of St Thomas on the Malabar Coast.

The Four Churches which are Dear and Near to Each Other: The Thomistic Bond

The Indian Church of the Thomas Christians is one of the four great Thomite Churches of the East. The three others are the Edessan, the Chaldean (of Mesopotamia or Iraq), with Seleucia Ctesiphon as its center, and the Persian (of Persia proper or Iran). All these four Churches are Thomite in the sense that they looked to St Thomas as to their direct or indirect apostle.²¹ The Church of Edessa believes that the disciple of St Thomas, Addai is the founder of their Church. The Church of Seleucia Ctesiphon is connected with St Thomas through Mari, the disciple of Addai, and that of Persia through St Thomas himself. All these four ancient Churches have an unexceptionally great affinity to St Thomas. This Thomite affinity made them dear to each other. There emerged a feeling of oneness among them basically because of this apostolic rootedness. This made the root clear to an ecclesial solidarity in liturgy and hierarchical communion. This intimacy has been cemented and more solidified through a common liturgical language -Syriac. The words of Cathanar Thomman Paremmakkal are very inspiring: “We are Syrians. From the time of the apostle St Thomas who was in our country and gave us the treasure of the holy faith, we have been until today, without any break, performing our ecclesiastical ceremonies and practices in the Syriac rite. Your predecessors tried their best to change this ancient rite of ours. But they realized they could not”.²² Some of the representatives of the Malabar Church wrote to Pope Gregory XIII in 1579 saying: “Our prayers are in the Syriac or Chaldean language which was given to us by our: Lord St Thomas”.²³ Besides these spiritual realms of ecclesial intimacy there are social and political

contacts between these four Churches. The centuries old commercial relationship between India and the Middle East, cultural affinities etc., might have naturally propelled the ecclesial relationship. That means commercial and cultural contacts have brought these Churches closer. “The commercial relations between Chaldea and Malabar go back at least to the VIIIth century B.C. it is evident from the teak beams etc. found in the ruins of Chaldean Ur. This intercourse continued down the century”.²⁴

A Judeo-Christian Ecclesiology

The presence of the Jewish colonies from B.C 10th century and the arrival of the apostle to his own community naturally lead us to the presence of the Judeo-Christian and Indian Church from the very beginning. “As Christianity had its origin among the Jews in Palestine, the question of the relations between Jews and India before the Christian era and during the early centuries of the Christian era is very important. The Jewish relations with India date back to at least the tenth century BC. We find from relevant sources that even as early as the tenth century BC the Jews had considerable intercourse with the Indian sub-continent ... From later documents we understood that the Jews had seven or eight important settlements in South India. Thus history tells us that there were colonies in Cranganore, Parur, Palayur, Quilon, Muttom, Chenot etc. It is a strange coincidence that the seven Churches founded by St Thomas in South India are situated in or near these Jewish colonies.”²⁵ The seven Churches traditionally ascribed to St Thomas are: Cranganore, Quilon, Chayal, Niranam, Kokamangalam, Kottakkavu or Parur, and Palayur. The Jewish tradition has greatly influenced the liturgy of the East Syrian tradition. “The synaxis was in its shape simply a continuation of the Jewish synagogue service of our Lord’s time which was carried straight over into the Christian Church by its Jewish nucleus in the decades after the passion.”²⁶

The Indo-Persian Relationship

At a very early age the Malabar Church established links with the Church of Persia proper and then with that of Mesopotamia. It got down its bishops one after another from these Churches from which it shared the East Syriac Liturgy. But it was neither an offshoot nor an integral part of these Churches. It gloried in its own apostolic tradition. Keeping undamaged the East Syriac Liturgy it enriched it by modifying and christianizing the Hindu way of life common to the Malabarians. The St Thomas Christians saw this liturgy as their own but with necessary and meaningful adaptations.²⁷ Seleucia Ctesiphon was the capital of the Persian Empire that comprised Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Persia (Iran) proper. In the fourth century the bishop of Seleucia Ctesiphon, tried to put in order the Churches of the Persian Empire after the outline of the Roma Empire. He liked to be the head of all. There was tough antagonism especially from the side of the Persia proper. The latter contended that the Church of Persia proper since it was founded by the apostle Thomas, could not be under the Church of Seleucia Ctesiphon, which had its founder Mari, who was the disciple of Addai, another disciple of Thomas. But slowly the bishop of Seleucia Ctesiphon was recognized as the head of the Church of the Persian Empire. The Church of Persia proper continued to offer resistance to the Chaldean patriarch (of Seleucia-Ctesiphon).

India had strong relations with the Middle East, especially with Persia. Because it was the nearest neighbour. The Metropolitan status of Persia proper, and the belief that the apostle St Thomas was the originator also of the Church of Persia might have forced India acknowledge the headship of the Metropolitan of Persia proper. Through Persia; proper, India was in some way subordinated to the Chaldean Church and to its patriarch. India seems to have profited by the confrontation of Persia proper. The Chaldean Patriarch Iso-Yahb or S-liba

Z-cha raised the Indian Church to Metropolitan status and the Chaldean Patriarch Timothy I (8 or 9th cent) took India away from Persia proper and placed it directly under him. Thus the directly apostolic Church of India, which was indirectly subordinated to the Chaldean Church and to the Chaldean Patriarch, was directly subordinated to the same Church and to the same Patriarch though the latter Church was only indirectly apostolic.²⁸ The Thomas Christians of India do not seem to have had the amenities to expand their own, full-fledged ecclesiastical orderliness. The special relation with the Persian Church, which was also found by St Thomas, encouraged them to form part of the ecclesiastical set up of that Church, keeping their own ecclesial identity

The Holy See of St Thomas: The Metropolitan of All India - Principle of Communion

The bishop of India had the name “the Metropolitan and Gate of All India” (In Syriac - metropolita o-thara d-kollahhendo). The Gate among the Easterners signifies ‘sublime power’, or ‘sublime authority’. In this situation the Gate is of All India (Kollah Hendo), or of the whole India. Hence this metropolitan had a privileged status. He was designated as Metropolitan Bishop, Prelate, and Ruler of the Holy See of St Thomas the Apostle and the entire Holy Church of the Christians of India.²⁹ This is usually known as ‘the Metropolitan and Gate of All India’. Vatican Codex (Syriac) XXII written in Scengala,³⁰ that is Cranganore, Malabar in 1301 by a deacon Zacharias, one of the disciples of the prelate Mar Jacob, designates this Mar Jacob as: “Mar Jacob, being Metropolitan, prelate and ruler of the Holy See of the Apostle St. Thomas, namely our ruler and ruler of the entire Holy Church of the Christians of India”.³¹ Here we have an ecclesiological rich expression “Holy See of the Apostle St Thomas”. This expression is very significant since the See of the Chaldean Patriarch was not the See of the Apostle St Thomas. This is an

exact suggestion to the unique apostolic identity of this Church. Again the expression “ruler of the entire Holy Church of the Christians of India” agrees in content with the implication of “the Gate of all India”. Here the expansion of the Metropolitan is obvious. It spreads through out the whole sub-continent without any restriction. Therefore it was not an empty title. It is also a sign to the Christians spread through out the whole India. The ecclesiological principle inherent in this is that he is the spiritual head of all the various Christian communities in India. The theological meaning of this is that he is the principle of communion. He serves as the link with the apostle and between the different Christian communities. It brings out the fact that a bishop is an ecclesial man. He is the guarantee of the intimate and interlocking relation between the community of the believers and the mystery of Christ. This Indian understanding of the relation between the metropolitan and the Church is similar to that of the early Fathers of the Church, especially that of the Eastern Fathers.

Campori SJ who was in Malabar testified at the opening of the 17th century saying: “according to the information gathered from several books and well-known facts, the bishop of Sera (Malabar) was always an archbishop, and the oldest in India. Its archbishops and prelates were always called archbishop metropolitan of All India and its confines”.³² About the extension of India, Roz SJ, contemporary to Campori SJ and the first Latin Prelate of the Thomas Christians says: “relying on the authority of an author who lived centuries ago says that Hendo which signifies the same as India extends from the river Indus to the Cape of Comorin”.³³ The confines may mean the neighbouring or the bordering countries of India. And so may mean the suffragan Sees of the Metropolitan in question (in Socotra and in Great China).³⁴ The last Metropolitan and the Gate of All India was Mar Abraham (1597). Mar Abraham’s residence was Angamale in Malabar, which was also the title of the diocese or archdiocese over which he ruled as a Patriarch rules over a particular diocese or

archdiocese like other prelates of his Patriarchate. The jurisdiction of the metropolitan extends to the whole India. He had a kind of autonomy though the East Syrian Patriarch of Mesopotamia sent him. This might be the ground why he was sometimes spoken of as Patriarch. "Though it was not a patriarchate, or Major Archiepiscopate, or Catholicate, it was in some sense all this, except for its dependence on the Chaldean Patriarch, for its Metropolitans and Bishops, even though once these Metropolitans and Bishops were in India their dependence on the Chaldean Patriarch was only nominal, except in matters of very extra-ordinary as for example the ordination of bishops".³⁵ The Thomas Christians considered the Persian bishops as from their own community because of the linguistic, cultural, liturgical and apostolic affinities. "It seems that the Chaldeans were not considered as foreigners. It was in 1599 that the Chaldean jurisdiction over the Malabarians was done away with... The Malabarians had a great attraction for the Chaldean rule because during the rule they had enjoyed autonomy under the local leaders called archdeacons. They hoped they could restore this autonomy under the Chaldean rule. It was this hope as well as their Chaldean liturgy and their reluctance to be under the Latin rule that were the main reasons for their attraction towards the Chaldean rule".³⁶

Archdeacon of All-India: The Unifying, Co-ordinating and Organizing Factor

The existing historical sources are too insufficient for an adequate picture of the office of the Archdeacon³⁷ in India. The most primitive document that can be traced is a letter of the Chaldean Patriarch Timothy (780-826) addressed to the Archdeacon of India. The Patriarch addresses the Archdeacon as the 'head of the faithful in India'. The Archdeacon is called the 'Jathikku Karthavvian' -the head of the community. Francis Dionysio SJ wrote to the Jesuit General on Jan 2, 1578: "There is in this Christianity, a priest, a native -of this country belonging to the Malabar caste, approved for his

virtues and habits, and learned and experienced in ecclesiastical matters. He knows the scripture and understands and speaks Chaldean. He is esteemed very much by these Christians and before the gentile kings and lords he holds influence and recognition. He is the Archdeacon of Angamale and helps the archbishop, serving him as his provisor".³⁸ In a report of Fr. Valignani SJ: "The archdeacon then affirmed that the whole Christian community of Malabar rested on his shoulders both in spiritual and in temporal matters".³⁹ The great amount of correspondences from Rome addressed to the Archdeacon also shows the central position of the Archdeacon in the Malabar Community. The archdeacon resisted the latinization policy and defended the 'Law of Thomas'. The archdeacons were trying to keep the individuality of the ancient Church of the Thomas Christians. He was their lawful authority though there were also bishops sent from Chaldea. He was the unifying, coordinating and organizing factor of the Church. Leadership of the Church was in his hands. A document of the 17th century recorded by the Italian Carmelite Joseph Sebastiani OCD: "Among the Christians of St Thomas the position of the archdeacon is next to the archbishop. It is a very ancient privileged position, which comes down in succession from the same family. It is a great dignity as it is according to the Greek Church. There is no other indigenious dignity neither secular nor religious, greater than the archdeacon who is considered to be the prince and head of the St Thomas Christians".⁴⁰

Now we enter into the ecclesial administration among the Malabar Christians. The efficient government of the Malabar Church as we know from tradition and from certain documents of the 16th and 17th centuries was in the hands of local prelates known as Archdeacons. The title of the Archdeacon was "the Archdeacon of All India". Campori SJ says that these archdeacons were always called archdeacons of All India and its confines. "In the Chaldean Church each bishop or metropolitan had an archdeacon for his diocese. But here we find that the archdeacon was for the whole of India and for

its boundaries. Hence he was archdeacon of the Metropolitan in capacity of the latter's office as the Metropolitan and the Gate of All India and of its confines.⁴¹ "We do not know when or how the office of the archdeacon in question was instituted. In fact the government of the Church was in the hands of the archdeacon. Cardinal Gesuald in 1599 treating the Church of Angamale, after the death of Mar Abraham says: "In the said city of Angamale there is an archiepiscopal Church which has an Archdeacon, and the jurisdiction of the Archbishop used to be exercised by the archdeacons".⁴² All the celebrated Archdeacons were from a family that believed to have received baptism from the apostle St Thomas.⁴³ These archdeacons were unmarried priests. While the metropolitan led an ascetical life exercising for the most part the powers only of the Episcopal order, the archdeacon governed the whole people who were isolated in several kingdoms that were ruled over by non-Christian kings. The archdeacon enjoyed royal privileges also.⁴⁴ The archdeacon played an important responsibility in the General Assemblies of the Malabar Christians. There was only one archdeacon at one time, even though there was more than one bishop at the same time.⁴⁵ The archdeacon assisted the metropolitan in administrative, social, material and national affairs, but in such a manner that the metropolitan remained as father and spiritual director. Visibly and socially, it is the archdeacon, who came to be considered as the head of the Indian Church.⁴⁶

Pallyogam (Parish Yogam and Pothuyogam): Expression of Communion The Active Participation of the Laity

In the St Thomas Christian tradition the laity was very active. One can note an already developed lay theology among the Malabarians from the very earliest times. Malabar Church can be taken as a model for a practical laicology (theology of the laity). The laity was actively involved both in the Christian life and in the administrative affairs of the Church. The whole Malabar tradition shows that the laity was

in no way subordinated to a merely juridical make up of the Church. There was actually no clericalism in this Church. The lay people were not mere appendages to the priests. The Thomas Christians preserved a very glorious sense of the Church as 'people of God' having only different functions to be performed in the Church.⁴⁷

In Malabar there were parish assemblies (Yogam) consisting of adult males and priests attached to the parish priest. This assembly looked after the good of all those who were ascribed to the Church with power even to excommunicate public delinquents and to decide about their re-admission into the community. This assembly has a say even in the selection of the candidates for the priesthood. Matters that concerned more than one Church of a region were dealt with the representatives of these Churches, while matters of a general interest (social, political and religious), were decided by the General Assembly of the representatives of all the Churches (Pothuyogam). Thus, towards the end of the 18th century, the Thomas Christians formed a Christian Republic.⁴⁸ "The assembly of the adults and priests ascribed to a parish administered the temporalities of the parish and looked after the Christian life of the people. This assembly had the power even to excommunicate public delinquents. Matters of serious nature were dealt with in the joint assemblies of two or more churches or parishes, while matters that pertained to the whole Church or community were treated by the representatives of all the parishes".⁴⁹ There were gatherings of such kind before and after the 'Koonan Cross' oath. The archdeacon keeps a watch over this gathering. It was the Malabar Church Assembly that authorized Cariattil and Paremakkal to go to Rome and handle the affairs of the Malabar Church. "The Malabar Church Assembly authorized the delegates to do anything whatever that would in any way be conducive to the good of the Malabar Church".⁵⁰ If the matter is very great then all the Churches will meet together to handle the case. "Matters pertaining to the whole of the community

were not decided by one or two Churches; all the Churches used to assemble together to deal with such matters".⁵¹ Speaking about the Angamale meeting Paremmakkal says: "The gathering of the Churches at Angamale was, in conformity with what our forefathers used to do, and it was also in conformity with the spirit of our community".⁵² This is an indication to the traditional practices which prevailed in Malabar. Paremmakkal reveals the authentic and authoritative character of the Malabar Church Assembly when he was scolded by the Cardinal of Propaganda for having taken the boys with them (for seminary studies) on account of the advice of the Malabar Assembly: "If the cardinal had known the high standing unity of our people he would have realized that the bishop could not send Syrian boys of Malabar without the consent of our Assembly, or if he sent them, Propaganda could not force our Assembly to accept them should it refuse to do so. If he had known our status he would not have acted as he did, but he would have accepted the boys taking the decision of the Malabar Assembly as authoritative".⁵³

The Malabar Assembly had both temporal and spiritual powers. Sometimes people misunderstand it as the lay people's right to intervene in the temporal and financial affairs only. It is more the lay people's responsibility to be genuinely Christian. Basically it was a spiritual force. It is also unspiritual to make a radical distinction between the temporal and spiritual aspects of the ecclesiastical affairs. Its ultimate aim was the maintenance of the Christian life of the Malabarians. It was actually the Christian life of a parish that was the main concern of the parish assembly. Usually it was the parish priest who presided over the Palliyogam.

The charitable works were also performed under the guidance of the yogam.⁵⁴ The general Church Assemblies were practically supreme, and actually no higher ecclesiastical authority questioned their decisions. A manuscript document in Italian kept in the archives of the Propaganda Congregation,

Rome, says as follows: "In all the Chaldean rite Churches, the Christians handle the ecclesiastical affairs in their respective assemblies. These assemblies consist of the clergy and the people. The matters treated are not only those pertaining to express from the funds of the Church or for restoration or maintenance work but also for promotion of candidates to sacred orders and absolution from censures to be done by the clergy and the people. The bishops do not promote anyone to sacred orders or absolve anyone from censure unless the petitioner presents the recommendation of the community. The community gathered in the Church and having listened, the petitioner forwards the request to the ordinary (bishop). In matters of major issues they convoke assemblies of the neighbouring churches; when the matter to be treated is very important they call together all the Churches of the particular kingdom and at times of the whole diocese...".⁵⁵

The Palliyogam is something unique among the Thomas Christians of India. This assembly seems to owe its origin to the ancient village assembly, Manram, which was common among the Dravidians. The Dravidians of the sanghakalam (1-5 centuries A.D.) used to gather together to discuss matters of common interest and take decisions on them. The Dravidian culture itself is closely connected with the Christian culture and civilization.⁵⁶ The leaders of the families were members of the Manram. In the same way the Palliyogam also consists of the leaders of the families.⁵⁷

The assembly conserved several features of the ecclesia of the early millennium. It expresses the collegial or the communion aspect of the Church. The Malabar Palliyogams were effective means of maintaining the integrity and communion aspect of the Church. It was an effective means of decentralization and co-responsibility. Co-operation and equality are its main motto. It creates participation on all levels. It is a check to the one-sided monarchical and authoritarian aspect of the Church. Authority is considered here as service. It is an expression of the

collegiality and communion of churches. The Palliyogam created a belongingness and brotherliness to each other. There was a strong feeling of sisterhood and brotherhood among the Malabarians. Cardinal Ratzinger says that the collegiality of the bishops is possible only where there is brotherliness of the Church.⁵⁸ In Palliyogam the heads of the domestic churches are united together by the head of the local (parish) church. It is a miniature form of the full Church. In the collegiality of the bishops there is the question of primacy, the first one, (cephality and synodality (equality,)). In palliyogam too we note this. Even if the majority were the faithful the priest or the archdeacon presides over the yogam. Paremmakkal says: “the sessions were held in the cathedral Church. Cathanar Kuriap Panamkuzha of Kuravilangat, the oldest and one well versed in the traditions, took the first seat; the other cathanars and mapilas were seated in order”.⁵⁹ The relation between the head (one) and many has been well kept in the palliyogams.

The Malpanate System: An Ecclesiocentric Clerical Formation

The Malpanate system is a Church centred style of priestly formation. The Syriac word malpan means ‘guru’, teacher or one who is learned. Among the Thomas Christians those who had been giving training and formation to the priest candidates are known as malpans. Malpans are well known scholars in the Syriac language, sacred scripture, and teachings of the Fathers. They were saintly people and reputed pastors as well. Malpan is the one who gives wisdom. The Church considers only those priests who are holy and wise as malpans. Intellectual, pastoral and spiritual areas are well integrated in their training system. That training was a kind of gurukulam. The student was staying with the elderly and scholarly malpan or guru. The bishop gives ordination to a priest candidate in the light of the recommendation of the Palliyogam, Malpan and Archdeacon. The Malpanate system means an ancient system of giving training for the priest candidates among the Thomas Christians.

These houses are known as malpanates. Not all the parishes have this kind of training system. Several parishes together took the responsibility of giving malpanate training. In Pallippuram, Poonjar, Palai, Ollur, Karakkunnam, Kuthiyathode, Chathanattu, Nagappuzha, Vadayar, Bharananganam, Changanassery, Mylacompe etc. there were malpahates. During the time of Bernadinos, the metropolitan of Verappolly there were 20 malpanates in Kerala. It is he who stopped this type of training. But soon the western type of seminary system came into existence and it has also become a rule that in order to get ordination the students have to be sent to the seminaries. Thus ended the malpanate system. There was not a definite time limit for the malpanate training. Importance is given to the study of Syriac language, Scripture, especially psalms, liturgy, and moral principles. In this training priority was given to the pastoral orientation. “There was a system under which certain Syrian priests called malpans educated in their houses a few youths when they prepared for the priesthood”.⁶⁰ They were also greatly in touch with the teachings of the Fathers of the Church. The main interest of the malpan houses was the preservation and handing of the Thomite tradition and patrimony”.⁶¹ Besides that there were also theological centers in Malabar. Fr. Carneiro who visited Kerala in 1557 says that there was a very famous university in Angamale.⁶²

An Ecclesial Vision Rooted in an Authentic Spirituality

St. Thomas Christian community was a spiritual and ascetical community. Its Metropolitan himself was the best model for the ascetical life style. He was a spiritual man, a man of the scriptures and traditions. The St. Thomas Christians’ spirituality is vested in fasting and penance. “In addition to almost all Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year, the Thomas Christians kept abstinence during the holy seasons which covered almost half of the year and this latter abstinence went along with fasting. Abstinence, especially abstinence on fast days was

abstinence from all kinds of food except vegetarian, from intoxicating or alcoholic drinks, from even chewing an aromatic leaf which they used to chew always, and from conjugal life. On days of fast they took only one full meal, and that was a little before sunset. Days of fast were days of special prayers and of almsgiving. All these show that they were practicing Christians. It has to be observed that the obligation to keep the abstinence and fast just mentioned was not an obligation under mortal sin as it was the case among the Latins. In addition to the obligatory fasting, there were more than 70 optional fast days. One of these optional fasts was the fast of 'eight days' preceding the feast of the nativity of Our Lady in September. This fast was and is peculiar to Malabar alone. The European missionaries in the 16th century had only admiration for the Way the Thomas Christians observed fasts and abstinence. The missionaries called them 'sons of fast' and confessed their inability to imitate them.⁶³ The ecclesial spirituality of the Thomas Christians has mystical, monastic and ascetical features. This is closely associated with their ecclesial vision. Or we could say these features constitute the very uniqueness and identity of their Church. It is this life that they considered as the main stem of their ecclesiology. It is a biblical, traditional as well as living spirituality.⁶⁴ "Our tradition (East Syrian) has a complete vision of Christian spirituality. It possesses an immense spiritual heritage, provided by liturgical prayer books, rites, liturgical commentaries, collections of sources of Synods, institutions and living practices, such as monasticism, the organization of the community, manuals, of biblical teachings and commentaries, theological synthesis and works of spiritual life".⁶⁵

Among the Malabarians there were monks. Paulinus of St. Bartholomaeus OCD at the end of the 18th century found in Malabar, ruins of monasteries at Angamale, Mylacom and Edappally.⁶⁶ Priests were of two classes. One class led a retired life and practiced asceticism without

eating meat and drinking wine. Laymen in their advanced age led a kind of solitary life in prayer and penance.⁶⁷

From what is said here it is clear that the Thomas Christians were known for their asceticism. It was deeply rooted in the Indian religious tradition inspired by the saints and sages of Hindu and Buddhist monasticism. The Thomas Christians spent long hours in prayer, strictly followed the fasts, in preparation for the important feasts, prayed in the morning and evening, and went on pilgrimages. Their special devotion to Virgin Mary is unique. Their spiritual life was centered on the temporal cycle, which commemorates the mysteries of Jesus Christ.⁶⁸ The spirituality of the St Thomas Christians was a spirituality practiced and experienced in the whole life of a man through the good religious traditions in the family. The habit of family prayer at the evening ..belongs to the normal family life of the Thomas Christians. The celebration of the pesaha under the leadership of the head of the family, breaking the bread (Kurishappam, Indiryappam) and distributing it with 'pal' (milk) is something unique found among the Thomas Christians. The Thomas Christians have a spirituality of their own rooted in the scripture, apostolic heritage as well as in the Indian cultural heritage. They had great respect and veneration for the Holy Bible and St Thomas Cross. The Thomas Christians were known as lovers of the scriptures. The traditional Indian spirit and love for meditation and contemplation was a profitable background for the spread of the Gospel message here. St Thomas Christian Tradition is a Church of the saints, martyrs, eminent leaders, ecumenists etc. "They have martyrs and recluses leading a monastic life".⁶⁹ It is said that towards the end of the fourth century there was a monastery of St. Thomas containing two hundred monks somewhere south of Baith Katraye.⁷⁰

Liturgical Ecclesiology: A Notable Feature of Thomas Christian Ecclesiology

The Indian St. Thomas Church is the best example for the preservation of the ancient adage that the Eucharist makes the Church. A Church *sui iuris* manifests itself mainly in and through the liturgy, especially through the Eucharistic celebration. Every Church has to be faithful to its faith- tradition and its authentic expression, which is the liturgy. The liturgical celebration of the Church is the manifestation of its faith experience in -full communion with the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The liturgy, which the Syro-Malabar Church celebrates, is a precious one. The distinctiveness of the Church can be seen in it. One could easily note the Trinitarian, Christological, Pneumatological foundations of an ecclesiology in its liturgical books. It presents the Church typically as a mystery. The mystery of the Church is expressed through types, symbols, figures and allegories. The sacramental aspect of the Church is also well articulated in this liturgy. Monastic, spiritual and ascetical ideals are also there. The love and fear of the faithful towards God is one of the fundamental features of this liturgy. A Church is best expressed at her liturgy. When we participate in this liturgy we experience that ultimately the Church is of God, of Christ and of the Spirit. In short, one can confidently say that the St. Thomas Christian ecclesiology is a liturgical ecclesiology. A Church is concretely manifested in her liturgy. The ascetical, monastic, mystical, and martyriological identity of the Church has to be seen actually in the liturgy of the Church. The normative traits of a Church are rooted in the liturgy. It is to the Church of the ascetics, mystics, monks and martyrs that we commune with while celebrating the liturgy. Again the Thomas Christians are exceptionally blessed with a beautiful Liturgy of Hours. The whole liturgy of the Hours is arranged centering on the Mystery of Christ and the Church. This liturgy of Hours expresses a mosaic of thinking and a galaxy of imageries regarding the Church.⁷¹

The Law of Thomas: A Symbol of

Christocentrism and Ecclesiocentrism

If there is a single expression in which we can join together the Christological and ecclesiological perspectives, that is the 'Law of Thomas'. The Thomas Christian margam ecclesiology is meticulously biblical. Apostle Thomas said to Jesus: Lord we do not know where you are going; how can then we know the way? Jesus said: I am the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 14: 5-6). This margam (Way) theology is typically Christological in its content. When this is put into practice it has become the brain of a practical ecclesiology. The sum total of the Thomite heritage is known as Thommayude Margam- Law of Thomas.

The Law of Thomas actually means the sum total of their Christian heritage distinctively expressed in the life style of their Church. A well-known adage, which expresses the law of Thomas, is that of Placid Podipara: "Hindu in culture, Christian in religion, oriental in worship".⁷² It is remarkable to note that by this expression in Kerala what is really meant is the Christian religion itself. By Law of Thomas they meant the customs and laws they had inherited since the time of the apostle Thomas. The Law of Thomas governed the See of Thomas. It is a vibrant expression, a living theology and spirituality. It is a theology drawn from its own liturgical and spiritual tradition. Hence we could name it an authentic ecclesiology. It expresses the character and trait of this Church as a whole.

Thommayude Margam includes the whole life style of these Christians. It need not be limited to the written books only. It includes also a mentality to be genuine in Christian life. It presupposes the simplicity of mind and heart. This should not be seen as sectarian movement but as fidelity to one's own ecclesiality. "The St Thomas Christians of India use a term 'Law of Thomas' which adequately expresses the gist of their theological, liturgical, ecclesiastical, ascetical and socio-cultural life style... They

considered the Law of Thomas a great patrimony and it was the warp and woof of their spiritual life. The remarkable feature of this Law of Thomas was that it was thoroughly Christian, Oriental and Indian at the same time, being well adapted to the socio-cultural life of Malabar⁷⁷.⁷³ Thoma Margam is the margam who is Christ it is the sum total of the experience of the apostle Thomas of Christ. It is experienced and lived in the liturgical celebration and day-to-day life of the Thomas Christians.⁷⁴ It is precisely the Mar Thoma Margam which is the gist of St Thomas Christian tradition that makes the Church of St Thomas in India a distinct Oriental Church.⁷⁵ The Thoma Margam, like the Torah for Jews, was the sum-total of the religious discipline of the Thomas Christians. Thoma Margam and Thommayude Niyamam are synonymously used. The Law of Thomas made the Thomas Christians fully at home in the Indian soil both from the religious and the cultural points of view.⁷⁶

An Ecclesial Vision Realized in the Missionary Activity

The Church is by her very nature missionary. St Thomas Christians were always interested in the evangelization and missionary activities. This Church took particular interest in sharing the spiritual heritage and ecclesial faith experience in its distinctiveness and enshrining it in each culture. Ecclesial identity and evangelization are fostered through genuine ecclesial formation. Before the arrival of the missionaries from the West the Thomas Christians have kept a spontaneous taste and zeal for evangelization.⁷⁷ E.R. Hambye says: “for centuries the Thomas Christians of India expanded, thanks to their own zeal, though inspired also by the apostolic spirit of their East Syrian brethren. We know that some monks from India went to the Far East, if not to China and Central Asia. Thomas Christians during the tenth and eleventh century tried to spread their faith in the Maldivian Islands, and as late as the 15th century, Nairs in Kerala were joining their ranks”.⁷⁸ Mar Abraham Mattam

gives a detailed account of the missionary zeal of the Thomas Christians.⁷⁹ The East Syrian Church was a Church on fire for its extraordinary taste in its missionary effort. It was really impossible for the Thomas Christians to remain unaffected by this zeal. Indian missionaries worked in China, Central Asia, and in the Far East. The Church of the Thomas Christians was somewhat extensive all along the coastal regions on the west and the east. It is definite that Christian communities existed, though perhaps sparingly, on the chief sectors including central India. The Christian missionaries of India proclaimed the Gospel to their countrymen, in diverse parts of the country and spread the faith to China, Maldives, and other neighbouring countries.⁸⁰ Cosmos, an Alexandrian merchant, who travelled extensively and came to India between 520-525 A.D. narrates: Even in the island of Trapobene (Ceylon) in inner India where the India Sea is, there is Church of Christians with clergy and a congregation of believers ... And such also is the case in the land called Male (Malabar) where the pepper grows ... And in the place called Kalliana there is a bishop appointed from Persia as well as in the land of Dioscoris (Socotra), in the same Indian Sea... And so likewise among the Bactrians and Greeks and Elamites, and throughout the whole land of Persia, there is a countless number of Churches with bishops, and a large number of Christians, and they have many martyrs and recluses leading a monastic life.⁸¹ There is clear evidence from 423 A.D. onwards that many of the inhabitants of the island Socotra were then Christians and that they said their fathers had been evangelized by Thomas.⁸² Fr. Hosten in his ‘Antiquities from San Thorne and Mylapore’ says: there appears to have existed in pre-Portuguese India an almost unbroken line of Christian settlements from Sind down to Cape Comorin and Mylapore.⁸³ Christianity was widespread in the whole of India before its Aryanization or Hinduization. The Saka civilization of ancient India and Saka era started in 78 A.D. contributed greatly to Christianity in India.⁸⁴ Dr. M. Deivanayakam pointed out that

Dravidianism that existed in the South, outside the realm of the Saka Empire, was nothing but Christianity.⁸⁵ “Already in those remote days the Syrians of India possessed genuine missionary spirit, the more so because of was spontaneous”.⁸⁶

St. Thomas Christians: A Model for Liturgical and Ecclesial Catechesis

The St. Thomas Christian tradition always insisted on the Liturgical and Ecclesial faith formation. It was a Christian Community, which practiced this kind of a faith tradition. An ecclesial faith formation means a system of preserving the faith of the Church in an integral way by a constant adherence to the factors that constitute the faith traditions of the Church. The St. Thomas Christians may be one of the best examples of this type of ecclesial vision. They had always the strong feeling that the faith of a Church lies in the faith traditions of that Church. We have already mentioned their concern towards the Bible, Fathers of the Church, saints, martyrs and mystics. An ecclesial catechism, is the best means for preserving the ecclesial identity. Basically, this is the concern for all the oriental Churches. Canons of the Eastern Churches address the catechetical directories that need to be elaborated in the patriarchal and metropolitan Churches. It requires that the special character of the Eastern Churches be taken into account in such a way that the catechetical teaching emphasizes the importance of the Bible, and the liturgy as well as the traditions of each Church sui juris in patrology, hagiography, and iconography”.⁸⁷ The St Thomas Christian community always had given great priority to this type of a liturgical faith formation. “The pre-eminence of the liturgical patrimony is even greater in the eastern Churches because they have maintained in a special way the primacy of the liturgy as the summit of Christian life, remaining thus completely faithful to the spirit of the Church of the Fathers ..., Liturgy was the place where catechesis and religious teaching occurred”.⁸⁸

St Thomas Christian Ecclesiology: A Model for Inculturation

The Gospel as such is not subject to any cultures. It transcends all cultures. Liturgical inculturation is part of a wider question, the inculturation of the Gospel. Though the Gospel transcends every culture, the Gospel message is lived by a particular people of a given culture. The power of the Gospel transforms the cultures. “The Gospel message takes flesh in those cultures, is embodied in them. The spirit of the Gospel having penetrated through them, cultures are evangelized”.⁸⁹ India is rightly described as a museum of cults and customs, creeds and cultures, faiths and tongues, racial types and social systems.⁹⁰ Culture is the life style of a society or people, which finds expression in their social, intellectual, and religious activities and artistic works. Religion and culture cannot be fully separated in the life of a people. Religious beliefs are expressed in a culture. Religion influences and changes the culture.⁹¹

Though this Church is hierarchically related to the Persian Church, the running of the Church and the sacraments were carried out in a way adapted to the Indian life style. The Thomas Christians are Hindu in culture, Christian in Religion, and Oriental in worship.⁹² The Christians of Malabar who are fundamentally of the Dravidian stock are heirs of the ancient Dravidian culture. Malayalam, their everyday language, is Dravidian. The Dravidian culture in India is pre-Aryan. Still, even those of the Dravidian stock are fascinated by the fruits of the Aryan culture, so much so that they neglect their own rich patrimony, which to the Thomas Christians of Malabar is easily accessible in the Tamil classics.⁹³

These Christians have been rooted in the Indian soil and their customs have developed in agreement with the social surroundings of ancient India, and except for their faith and morals, they have been hardly discernible from, their compatriots of other creeds. “On its part eastern Christianity’ has accepted many elements not in doctrine but in religious practices, from India especially from Buddhism. Processions, festivals etc. were a common feature

for Buddhists, Hindus and Christians”.⁹⁴ “In the family life they are similar to the Brahmins in many ways. On the occasion of marriages they use their ancient privileges. Of all these various Christian communities, old and new, now in Kerala, the ancient Thomas Christians alone had the high privileges of using silk umbrellas (kottakuda), day-lamps (pakal vilaku), walking cloths (pavada), palanquin (antholam), band (pancha-vadyam), lingual cheers (kurava), body-guards and fore-runners to clear the way, elephants to ride on, festal sheds (pandal), ornaments, slaves, the title of mappila, gate houses (padipura), etc. Only the Brahmins. and the princes of the royal houses could use these privileges. As privileges the Syrian Christians were entitled to use them”.⁹⁵ There were reciprocal exchanges and improvement: The oriental Christian tradition in India is a fantastic fusion’ of culture and faith. It is to be observed that India is a multi-cultural land. ‘A thorough study of the cultural reality of India is a pre-requisite for any meaningful attempt at inculturation. The study should go to the very roots, the origins, the history and evolution of the dominant cultures’ in India, the contributions of different peoples and races made in the cultural field.”⁹⁸ There are several sectors yet to be explored in the field of theology and inculturation.

Concluding Remarks

Thus the ecclesial heritages of the St Thomas Christian tradition are a complex reality. There are many noble thoughts and a sound theology in that. Its ecclesial vision and ecclesiology are interconnected with the various aspects of biblical traditions, theology, spirituality, and liturgy. Actually it is a living spirituality and a practical ecclesiology. Some of the fundamental aspects of this ecclesiology have practically become extinct in the present Syro-Malabar tradition. To my way of thinking, to propose an ecclesiology proper to the present Syro-Malabar tradition, the above said original and foundational aspects of this ancient Church have to be re-established. The lost dimension of the modern

systematic ecclesiology can also be seen there to a certain extent. One should not uncritically compare this ecclesiology with that of the post- Tridentine and modern ecclesiology.

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15

“Abide in Peace”

Eschatological Expectations in the Texts of Funeral Services of Priests in the Chaldean and Malabar Churches

Dr Thomas Neendoor

Introduction

Here we shall try to find out the eschatological themes given expression in the funeral rites of the East Syrian Church and the Malabar Church. To make a comparative study between the funeral services of the two Churches is seemingly a futile exercise because the funeral service of the Malabar Church is an abridged form of the East Syrian Services. However, it must be admitted that almost all the themes and gestures are kept up in the funeral services of the Malabar Church. The funeral rites of priests and that of laymen are compared, and that too, only from the perspective of eschatological thinking. As this is not an essay on a liturgical topic, a comparative study of the texts is not our aim; the themes that have eschatological significance are broadly dealt with. Wherever we come across some

specific variations, we shall try to mention them. In order to examine the eschatological themes of the texts, we make use of the Chaldean text for the funeral of priests rendered in English by Badger¹ and the Malayalam text for the funeral of laymen in the Nestorian Church of Trichur².

This is an attempt to understand the eschatological themes found in the traditions of the Thomas Christians. Strictly speaking, such a study cannot be limited to the traditions of the present day Syro-Malabar Church, for there are many more churches that can claim the traditions of the Thomas Christians. The eschatology of the Thomas Christians should be deduced from many sources- Divine Liturgy, Liturgy of the Hours, Monasticism, Fasts, etc. Because all the above mentioned topics are discussed in the present volume in one way or

another, we limit our study to the eschatological themes given expression in the funeral rites of the Thomas Christians. *Liturgy, being the locus theologicus*, the theology of death and the life after are to be sought primarily in the funeral services of a Church, because they carry the eschatological expectations of a Church in its most vivid and lively form.

1. Patristic Approach to the Phenomenon of Death

The most intriguing and arresting development within patristic eschatology concerns the understanding of death and its relationship to the resurrection. Several Fathers of the early Church grapple with the meaning and necessity of death. The Fathers are, in general, positive about the phenomenon of death which is a necessary factor in human life. It is suggested that God invented death as a kind of remedy for sin. Without death, sin is in danger of becoming immortal, whereas with death sin can be removed once and for all. For many, the sinful individual is likened to a flawed piece of art that needs to be reduced to its raw state so that it may be restored to perfection. Theophilus stated sometime in the year 180 AD “Take some sort of vessel that is discovered to have a particular defect after its completion. It is recast and refashioned so that it becomes new and perfect. A similar thing happens to man through death: he is, if I may put it that way, broken in pieces that he may be found whole and sound at the resurrection.”³

A similar perception of death can be found in Methodius, writing towards the end of the third century in a work on *The Resurrection*. God through death “dissolved man into his primeval matter, in order that, by a process of remodeling, everything blameworthy in him might melt away. . . for the melting down of the statue. . . corresponds to the death. . . of the body, while the refashioning and restoration of the original material finds its parallel in the resurrection.”⁴ Thus the breakdown of the individual

in death becomes the basis of the breakthrough in resurrection. In this way, it begins to emerge that death is not simply the wage of sin but also the remedy of sin. As such, death is not only a part of the Fall but also an essential element in the story of salvation which terminates in the resurrection.

2. Death in the Salvific Plan

Funeral rites are a universal phenomenon; as death is a reality experienced by everyone and since the dawn of history man has honored his dead and maintained some contact with them. The OT conserves the essentials of this secular tradition: deeds of mourning translate the grief of the living (2 Sam 3,31; Jer 16,6); ritual burial (1 Sam 31, 12f; Tb 2, 4-8), prompted by a dread of death without burial (Dt 21, 23); care of tombs, which touches closely on familial piety (Gn 49, 29-32; 50, 12f); funeral banquets (Jer 16, 7); even offerings on the tombs of the dead (Tb 4, 17), although they are placed “before mouths forever closed” (Si 30, 18).⁵

Death has changed its meaning since Christ made his death an instrument of salvation. The fact that the apostle of Christ appears to men, in his weakness, as one dying (2 Cor 6, 9), that he is in constant peril of death (Ph 1, 20; 2 Cor 1,9f), that he “dies each day” (1 Cor 15, 31), all these are no longer signs of defeat. He bears in himself the mortality of Christ in order that the life of Jesus might also be manifest in his body; he is freed from death because of Jesus, in order that the life of Jesus might be manifested in his mortal flesh. This daily dying really makes the death of Jesus present and prolongs its fruitfulness in His Body, which is the Church.⁶

Hence, the bodily death takes on a new meaning for the Christian. It is no longer an inevitable destiny to which one resigns oneself, a divine decree one accepts, a condemnation incurred because of one’s sins. “The Christian dies for the Lord” just as he lived for Him (Ro 14,7f; cf; Ph 1, 20). From an anguishing necessity, death has become an object of

beatitude. “Blessed are they who die in the Lord! Let them henceforth rest from their lives.” (Ap 14, 13). Death for the just is an entry into peace (Ws 3, 3), into eternal rest, into perpetual light.⁷

Not only has union with His death made us live with a new life, but it has also given us assurance that “He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give your mortal bodies life” (Ro 8, 11). Then, by the resurrection, we shall enter into a new world where “death shall be no more” (Ap 20, 4); or rather, for the elect who rise again with Christ there will be no “second death” (Ap 20,6). This is why dying for the Christian is, in the last analysis, a gain, since Christ is his life (Ph 1, 21). His present condition which binds him to his mortal body is oppressive to him. He would prefer to quit this life in order to go and be with the Lord (2 Cor 5, 8); he is anxious to put on the clothing of glory of the risen, in order that whatever in him is mortal might be absorbed by life (2 Cor 5, 1-4). He desires to leave in order to be with Christ (Ph 1, 23).⁸

3. The Testament of Ephrem and the 4th Century Funeral Services

The Testament of St. Ephrem is a mine of information about the funeral services of the 4th century Syriac Church, especially about the funeral of clergyman. The author’s basic concern here is to admonish his disciples about the simplicity to be kept in his own burial which is imminent. Primarily, the text is a testimonial to his humility; but side by side with it we are introduced into various customs followed in the funeral, most of which are also found in the Malabar Church. The authenticity of the Testament is doubtful. Some of the practices could go back to the middle of the third century or early fourth century, for they are attested in the early Syriac documents such as *the Syriac Acts of Thomas, the Martyrdoms of Shmona and Guria,*

*and Habbib the deacon.*⁹

In his Testament Ephrem informs his disciples that he would be content with a burial with strangers. They should not cover him in costly dresses except his tunic. There was a custom of burying bishops and clergymen under the altar, inside the sanctuary or in the church. This was a custom that was in vogue and continued even now, but not very common though except in the case of bishops, in the Malabar Church. St. Ephrem is strictly opposed to such a burial in his case:

I adjure you my disciples; with adjurations that may not be loosed,
That my words be not set aside: that ye loose not my commandments.
Whoso lays me beneath the altar: he shall not see the Altar of heaven;
For it is not meet that foul stench; should be laid in the Holy Place;
Whoso has laid me within the temple: he shall not see the temple of the Kingdom.¹⁰

Similarly Ephrem does not like to be interred with martyrs. He says, “It is not that I hate their neighborhood: because of mine unworthiness, I fear it.” Apparently this refers to the custom of placing the bodies in the tombs of the martyrs, as we will find in the *Martyrdom of Habbib the Deacon.*¹¹

The bodies of the clergy were probably carried on hand, as a sign of honor. But Ephrem asks that his body may be carried on the shoulders as in the case of the lay people. The funeral liturgy was long for the members of the priestly orders. Ephrem prefers a rather short ceremony.¹² Ephrem insists that he may be buried with ordinary dress, whereas the priests or deacons were given their liturgical dress. In the above-given matters, the ceremonies in the Malabar Church are almost the same. In the funeral procession, candles were carried and Ephrem forbids it in his burial:

Whoso lays with me a pall: may he go forth into outer darkness!

And whoso has laid with me a shroud: may he
 be cast into Gehenna of fire!
 In my coat and cowl shall ye bury me: for
 ornament beseems not the hateful,
 Nor does praise profit the dead: who is laid and
 cast into tomb.”
 “Whoso carries before me a taper: may his fire
 be kindled beside him!
 For to what end avails fire: for him whose fire is
 from himself?”¹³

In eastern Churches the bodies of the bishops
 were covered with spices; and this custom could be
 traced back to the fourth century. This might have
 been the practice in the funeral of martyrs. In
 Ephrem’s days, the bodies of priests, deacons and
 saintly monks were buried in a similar way. But in his
 humility, Ephrem asks to offer prayers and hymns,
 instead of incense and spices. The saint does not
 permit his followers to cover his corpse with costly
 silk¹⁴ as it was the custom:

Lay me not with sweet spices:
 for this honor avails me not;
 Nor yet incense and perfumes:
 for the honor benefits me not.
 Burn sweet spices in the Holy Place: and me,
 even me, conduct to the grave with prayer.
 Give ye incense to God: and over me
 send up hymns.

.....
 Wrap thou not the fetid dung: in silk that profits
 it not.”¹⁵

Instead of the tombs specially prepared in the
 churches or churchyards, Ephrem desires that his
 body should be buried in a public cemetery with the
 strangers; it simply means that both the above customs
 were common in those days.

Lay me not in your sepulchers:
 for your magnificence profits me not;
 For I have a covenant with God:
 that I shall be buried with strangers.

I am a stranger, as they were: with them, O
 my brethren, lay me!”¹⁶

The funeral practices that are mentioned in the
Testament certainly existed in Edessa and some of
 them could go back to the middle of the third
 century.¹⁷

According to the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, after
 the death of the apostle, Sifur and Vizan sat beside
 the tomb “the whole day and they passed the night
 there also.”¹⁸ Then Eucharist was offered at the tomb,
 followed by a meal: “And all the brethren who were
 there assembling together and praying and offering
 the (Eucharistic) offering and breaking (Bread).”¹⁹
 In his ‘Explanation of the Divine Mysteries’ John Bar
 Zobi makes the following explanation on the
 Eucharistic sharing. “The celebrant receives the
 communion first and then he distributes to others too.
 He thus recalls that Jesus is risen first and then He
 assured the resurrection from the dead for all His
 race. Our participation with the priest in the terrible
 Mysteries signifies our participation with our Saviour
 in the heavenly kingdom.”²⁰ The practice of offering
 prayers on the following day after the burial of a priest
 is given in the book of Badger.²¹

4. Eschatology in the Funeral Service of Priests in the East Syrian Church

Now we go through the funeral service for
 priests in the East Syrian Church and to single out
 the points that seem relevant to our area of
 exploration. Extreme unction is unknown to the
 Nestorians; but the Chaldeans have adopted it from
 the teaching of Rome.²² In the Eastern Churches,
 the celebration of the sacrament of the anointing of
 the sick is sometimes rather complex and somewhat
 prolonged. Supplication is made for the Lord to grant
 salvation of the body and soul to the sick, as much in

the present circumstances as in the end times, when he will render his faithful participants in the fullness of divine life.²³

4.1. In Praise of the Holy Trinity

Almost all the prayers in funeral rites in the Eastern Churches are to give praise, thanks and worship to the glorious Trinity. For example, after the washing of the dead body of a priest it is laid out with this prayer, “Let us thank, worship and praise the hidden and adorable power of Thy glorious Trinity, for Thou art the Lord of the two worlds which Thou hast created, O Lord of our death and life, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.”²⁴

In the prayer after the litany of the deacon we find, “Blessed, adorable, magnified, and exalted, are the eternal mercies of Thy glorious Trinity, whereby Thou dost freely pardon sinners, O our righteous Hope, and our all-merciful Refuge, O Lord of all, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.”²⁵ To situate the death of a faithful and that of a priest in the eternal plan of God becomes something focal in the whole ceremony- it is understood as something expressive of the hidden and adorable power of the glorious Trinity, that is, in the eschatological expectation to participate in the glory of the Trinity.

4.2. In Praise of the Salvific Work

The rationale for the praise is the whole salvific work which is often summarized in a few words, “O Thou Who didst form Adam out of clay, Who didst raise his children from the dust, and didst restore him from his fall after he had become corrupt;- unto Thee we give thanks.”²⁶ Praising God in general terms is common in the Divine Liturgy of the Malabar Church, e.g., the conclusion of the second part of the third G’hanta prayer in the Taksa²⁷; there also the salvation history is summarized in a few words. The priest is the one who celebrated the salvation through the mysteries, so praise is also his due.

The incense is offered for the forgiveness of

sins and debts as a condition for the entry into “Thy glorious bridal chamber of light in that day when every man shall be rewarded according to his works.”²⁸ In the liturgical prayers of the Malabar Church, the incense also indicates prayers offered that raise up to heaven.

4.3. Expression of God’s Justice and Mercy

The death of a priest is seen as an expression of God’s justice and mercy, “O Thou who formed us in Thy grace, and caused the sentence of death to be passed upon us in Thy justice, and shalt make us to rise again in the abundance of Thy mercies, - unto Thee we give thanks.”²⁹ God does not allow His dear ones to continue as a prey to the guiles of Satan. He wants to show him mercy by calling him back to a life that is fitting to his dear one; God hastens to adorn him with the glory of resurrection.

The bodily existence needs God’s mercy because, “Thou hast clothed us with a mortal nature which is ever tormented by sin and pain, and if we cast off this abode of misery in a grievous death, the garment of our actions still defiles us.”³⁰ The priest is conscious of the failures in life, both as a priest and as a faithful. His bodily existence should have been fittingly used to attain redemption; it was in and through his body that he had to seek his salvation.

4.4. Death - an Invitation to New Creation

The call of God at death is sweet, inviting the dead to a new creation; “Glory to Thy sweet-sounding voice, and to Thy sovereign word, which in Thy grace and mercy shall summon us from the grave, and gather together our dust from every quarter, and shall make us a new creation, O Lord of our death and life, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.”³¹ The same idea is repeated in the services elsewhere.³²

The Lord’s call is sweet also for the reason that He is the Cause of life and the Hope of our souls, “Blessed art Thou upon earth, and praised art

Thou in heaven, O Thou Who art the Cause of our life, and the righteous Hope of our souls.”³³ The freedom from the clutches of sin is guaranteed by the fact of death- it is at once freedom from captivity and call to/beginning of glory. Death is a freedom from captivity, “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks unto Thy name. Praise be to thy Name, O Thou Who quickenest the dead.”³⁴ Death is an invitation to the Glory of the Kingdom, “Raise up our dead, O Lord, and make them stand at Thy right hand, and clothe them with a goodly glory in Thy kingdom with all the just and righteous who approved themselves before Thee, O Thou merciful One, Who forgivest iniquities and sins...”³⁵

4.5. ‘Abide in Peace’- A Journey from and to

The funeral rite is specifically didactic and the didactic feature appears more specifically in the doctrinal hymns called *Madrasa* which are seen in several places of the rite. Madrasas contain an exhortation or consolation from the part of the dead priest to the members of the community which he was ministering to.³⁶ *Madrasas* are distributed for various ranks of people- for the Catholicos, for bishops, priests, deacons, monks (hermits), aged people, young people, physicians, women, scholars, those skilled, the rich, the strangers, religious women, children etc. the second Malabar edition which chose a reduced number, came up with three new ones for the Pope.³⁷

There is a chant when the dead body of a priest is taken in procession from his house to the church. Journey starts from the earthly temporal dwelling place to the heavenly and eternal abode. It is an abode where one is freed from all sorts of physical and spiritual torments- a home of perfect rest and peace. The priest is supposed to bid goodbye to the house and to the brethren, “Abide in peace, O temporary dwelling place, which canst not deliver those who possess thee; I am now going to a region of light, the abode of the righteous, who have ceased from their labours. Abide in peace, O my brethren and friends,

the Lord requite your labor of love, and when you stand in the holy place remember me in your prayers.”³⁸ The priest has begun experiencing that heavenly peace and bliss to which he is inviting his people. For reasons that are obvious this chant of bidding goodbye to house is absent in the funeral services of priests in the Malabar Church but there is a chant reminiscent of this- the chant recited as the priest bids good bye to the people of the town where he served (*Nagarikanikal*).³⁹ The funeral procession is a symbol of the pilgrimage of the Christian from this world to the paradise. Songs called “songs for the way,” (*Qala d’Uraha*), are sung during the procession. These hymns (*Qala*) are very ancient and are attributed to St. Ephrem, and are seen also in a 823 AD Jacobite collection of funeral hymns.⁴⁰

4.6. On the Threshold of Heaven

The death of a priest gives an occasion for an earnest expectation of heaven, “O thou pure priest, pray of thy Lord, that mercy and peace may dwell with thy flock, and that in the day when His mercy shall appear, we all may be counted worthy to enter into the chamber of the supper.” The people rests assured that the power of intercession of the priest would continue in the heavens and hence they plead the departed priest to intercede for them.⁴¹ The return of the priest to the eternal abode instills in them not a sense of loss but an increase in the intensity of their faith in the heavenly reward awaiting them.⁴² The priest gives them a guarantee for their trust “Abide in peace, O ye my friends, for I am going the way of death. (May) The Lord bestow upon you a good reward for the tears which you have shed over my unworthy self.”⁴³ The congregation expresses its never fading assurance to the departed priest, “Go in peace, O our pure brother, for the gates of the highest are open before thee, and the Father invites thee, saying: Come in, thou righteous one, since the will to My Majesty is satisfied with thee.”⁴⁴

The congregation entertains good hope for the departed priest, “O God give us a good hope of him

who worshipped Thee, and make him to rejoice at Thy right hand in Thy kingdom.” Again the priest also is in complete trust; “Since Thy decree has cut me off from the ministry of Thy sanctuary, grant that I may glorify Thy name in the Church of Thy First-Begotten above.”⁴⁵ Aphraahat reminds his people thus, “The upright and righteous and good and wise fear not nor tremble at death, because of the great hope that is before them. And they at every time are mindful of death, their exodus, and of the last day in which the children of Adam shall be judged.”⁴⁶ The departure of the priest reminds the congregation of their imminent face to face encounter with the Lord, “Fit us, O Lord, to stand before Thee and to go forth to meet Thee with confidence, in the day of thy appearance, that with the heavenly hosts we may glorify Thee”⁴⁷

4.7. Bright with Eschatological Hope

Carrying the bier in the church is common in both early Syriac churches and the Malabar Church. The first verse is to be said at the step of the chancel, the second, at the door of the bema where the priest received ordination, the third, at the north side of the nave, the fourth, at the south side of the nave, and the fifth, at the entrance of the church.⁴⁸ In the Malabar church, however, there are four verses; the verse at the bema is missing.⁴⁹ In Malabar, priests carry the coffin and make it touch the edge of the altar, the two side doors and the main door, when the beautiful hymn of *Edta Poosle* is sung in a devotional and meditative melody either in Syriac or in Malayalam.⁵⁰

The departed priest is crowned in the Malabar tradition; the same crowning is done in the case of layman too. This gesture invariably reminds us of the heavenly crown assured for the faithful. The layman is given a cross as a sign of victory over sin and also as a sign of glory awaiting him. All the prayers during this ceremony are vibrant with eschatological hopes and they are expressive of hope and optimism that are very bright, “I am going away and yet I am not afraid, for my Lord calleth for me; a crown of joy

and glory will He place upon my head.” The people also are much hopeful about the warm welcome awaiting the departing priest “Depart in peace, O pure priest of the household of God, for behold, thy companions Moses and Aaron come forth to meet thee.” Again Aphraahat has this to add, “They that live daintily fear death; but the afflicted look forward with hope that they shall be speedily taken away. All the rich tremble because of death; but the poor desire it, that they may rest from their labor. Death terrifies the mighty when they remember him; but the sick look forward with hope to him that through him they may forget their pains. Again the young children are afraid of death, for when it comes upon them they shall leave their pleasures; but the old men advanced in years pray for it, they that are in need of daily bread.”⁵¹ The departure of a priest, however, is most painful for the Church, “The Church laments thee, O priest, the altar has put on mourning, and the veil of the sanctuary weeps for thee with a broken heart.”⁵²

The people are certain that a due reward is awaiting the diseased priest in the world to come, “The Lord will give thee rest, O thou happy one, with all the saints in the kingdom, and will reward thy labors in the bridal chamber of light with all the righteous who have approved themselves before Him.”⁵³ The ecclesial value and relevance of priesthood are the underlying principles for all these expectations, “The holy Church doth glorify Christ by her priests as do the cherubim; she bears the living cross and sings praises unto Him, that He may turn towards her, help her, and give her joy in the bridal chamber of light.”⁵⁴ It is the right of a priest to enter the bridal chamber of heaven for he had been faithful in his ministry.

4.8. Entry into Glory

The praise and worship are really indicative of the glory awaiting the departed priest and also his people for whom he ministered. In the courtyard of the church the celebrant prays, “Send forth help, O Lord, to the congregation of Thy blessed worshipers

through the great power of the cross; save them, by Thy grace, and sow Thy peace among them, that they may give thanks to Thy holy name, O Thou glorious One Who dwellest in the heaven.”⁵⁵ All the prayers recited when the coffin is carried to the grave repeat the above-given themes. To show reverence to the priest, the body is carried in the hands, whereas that of a layman is carried on the shoulders.⁵⁶

In a prayer at the grave the hope in resurrection is once again expressed, “Blessed is the mighty decree of Thy Majesty which killeth and maketh alive, which bringeth down to sheol and raiseth up, and which clotheth our bodies with glory in resurrection, O Lord of our death and life, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.”⁵⁷ Aphrahat expresses the optimism of the ancient Church for the departed, “The sons of peace remember death; and they forsake and remove from them wrath and enmity... On that which is above they set their thoughts, on that which is above they meditate; and those things which are beneath their eyes they despise... They abide in the world as aliens, sons of a far land; and look forward to be sent out of this world and to come to the city, the place of the righteous.”⁵⁸

The anthem of bidding goodbye to the priest is really very touching, however, keeping alive the fond hope for the crown awaiting the priest and also entertaining the hope of meeting yet again in the world to come in the company of saints. Just quote one or two “Depart in peace, thou victorious priest: the Lord, Whom thou lovest give thee joy in His kingdom.” “Thou art separated from our company, O, our brother, but we shall see thee again in the assembly of the saints in the kingdom.”⁵⁹

4.9. Ardent Appeal for Prayer

The lowering of the coffin into the grave is compared to the entering into Sheol⁶⁰, “Come enter in, and see the ranks of human kind, how their mouths are stopped up with dust in the bosom of sheol.”

Hence the priest is reminded, “Come, enter in, O, our brother, bid farewell to thy dearly beloved, and ask them to pray for thee.”⁶¹ The departed one is to preach to the souls there too. The dead priest is continuing with his fervent and moving appeal for the prayer of the congregation and his co-priests and deacons with whom he ministered, “O ye pure Priests and Deacons with whom I ministered, when ye stand in the sanctuary then pray for me.”⁶²

The dead priest however, is conscious of the shortcomings in his ministry which will be exposed before the Lord and will be decisive in the future life, “The degree which I received I did not exercise as I ought, and who will plead for me in the judgement. And, therefore, “In the day when the living sign of the Son of God shall appear, lest I should meet Him with confusion of face, pray for me.”⁶³ Even though he had been given the grace enough to discharge his duties, the priest has serious apprehensions regarding his conduct in fulfilling his ministry. However, he has a firm trust in the effectiveness of the prayer of the congregation whom he served, “All of you entreat Him for my unworthy self, perchance He may have pity upon me, and fit me for mercy. Pray for me.”⁶⁴

4.10. The Dead One Deserves Prayer

Anyone who is dead is not in a position to repent for his sins which he had committed while he was alive. St. Clement of Rome in his so-called Second Letter to the Corinthians tells his readers “Let us, then, so long as we are in the world, repent whatever evils we have done in the flesh, so that we may be saved by the Lord while yet we have time for repentance. For, after we have departed from this world it will no longer be possible to confess, nor will there be then any opportunity to repent.”⁶⁵ Hence he has to depend on the supplications of those for whom he rendered his service.

St. Cyprian of Carthage, after reminding his

people regarding the agonies awaiting the evil-doers, says, "The grief at punishment will then be without the fruit of repentance; weeping will be useless, and prayer ineffectual. Too late will they believe in eternal punishment, who would not believe in eternal life." And he continues, "When once you have departed this life, there is no longer any place for repentance, no way of making satisfaction. Here life is either lost or kept. Here, by the worship of God and by the fruit of faith, provision is made for eternal salvation. Let no one be kept back either by his sins or by his years from coming to obtain salvation."⁶⁶ St. Cyprian again reminds his people about the need of encouragement: "If the battle comes suddenly, he will be found ready for it, having been strengthened by us."⁶⁷

Referring to the parable of 'the Rich man and Lazarus', Aphraahat the Persian Sage says, "This shows that after death and resurrection there will be no repentance. Neither can the wicked repent and enter the kingdom, nor can the righteous any longer sin and go to perdition. This is the great abyss."⁶⁸ St. Basil the Great adds, "No, when life is over there is no longer any opportunity for the improving of piety."⁶⁹ In the Malabar Church, before closing the bier, the celebrant, on behalf of the community, consoles the departed priest, "Dear brother, till now we followed you faithfully. From now on the angels of God will accompany you... May God reward your sufferings and works in a fitting manner."⁷⁰

Then, finally, the celebrant shall take earth in his right hand, and shall say this, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return, may He raise thee up there from rejoicing in the resurrection of the dead..."⁷¹ This prayer is common to both the Chaldeans and the Malabarians because almost all the prayers in the funeral rite of the Malabar Church are faithful to the East Syriac original.

Conclusion

Primarily what catches our attention is the

brightness expressed all through the ceremonies. It indicates the hope and expectation of the congregation for the diseased. The optimism of the church is evident for the departed one and his future life. The services do not consider death as a failure or end; it is a beginning of a new life and an opening to the world to come. It is the expression of God's will and the divine plan for the diseased. The prayers are all given in general terms, it is not just a concern for the one who is dead but the prayers consider the death as an ecclesial event. The prayers are presented in ecclesial form; the solidarity of the community is its main thrust and not the loss experienced due to the death. Death is seen as something natural and universal and not accidental nor unexpected.

The prayers, in general, end with a doxology—a praise of the Lord of life and death. The death is then a beginning of life in the realization that God is all in all. Finally, the dead realizes the vanity of earthly desires and interests unless they are properly motivated for a life which is yet to come. The dead is given a ceremonial bath which signifies the removal of the stains of sin and worldliness and death is understood as an end of the reign of sin. The white dress given to him is, of course, symbolic of the place he has assured with the saints in heaven and the holiness with which he is adorned. The congregation pays homage to the departed by placing incense and flowers on the coffin. This gesture indicates the perfume of glory awaits the one who is devoid of sin and blemishes. It is also a sign of reverence and the solemnity of the services.

Almost all prayers anticipate a vision of the divine paradise in which the departed one is sure to participate in the bliss of the divine paradise. The death, then is an opening to heaven; it is an entry into the heavenly choir. The departed soul is then assured of the company of the saints and the angelic choir. Entry into the bridal chamber is the pet theme of the services; the soul achieves its well deserved rest and attains the intimacy of its heavenly bridegroom. The

crowning of the dead is expressive of the crowning that awaits him in the heavenly palace. Death, then, is the beginning of this royal existence that is prepared for him.

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- 41 In the Malabar tradition the people bids farewell to the departed priest by kissing his hands and not the face of the dead. They are seemingly requesting the blessing of the priest, by the very hands which blessed all through these years.
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16

Missiology of the Thomas Christians

Dr Xavier Kochuparampil

Introduction

Missiology is the systematic study of the evangelizing activity of the Church and of the ways in which it is carried out. Traditionally we have understood it as the science of missions where missions signified simply “missio ad gentes”. And Missiology is a relative newcomer to the circle of theological disciplines. It is of 20th century origin. However, from the very beginning onwards the Church of Christ had been doing missionary work. For, Christianity by nature is a missionary religion. Mission thrust is built into the very being of the Church, that Vatican II has rightly stated “the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature” (AG 2). Mission is the *raison d’être* of the Church. Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of 1975 states: “Evangelization is the grace and vocation proper to the Church. She exists to evangelize” (EN 14). Church without mission or evangelization would be a misnomer.

Apostolic Christ Experience

The Apostles were the privileged founders of the Church. To them preaching of the good news of

the Kingdom was their primary mission (1 Cor 1:17). It is the preaching of Jesus and the Apostles that has given birth to the Church: “the Church originated in the evangelizing activity of Jesus and the twelve Apostles” (EN 15). Apostles were sent out to preach the Good News of God’s Kingdom even during the earthly days of Jesus (Mt 10). Formal missionary command was given to all before the Lord’s ascension into heaven, to go out to preach, teach and baptize, thereby form the community of the faithful (Mk 16:15-16; Mt. 28:19-20; Lk 24: 46-49) which would later grow into a full fledged local Church headed by a hierarch. The apostles were sent into the world by Jesus as He himself was sent by His Father (Jn 20: 21). They had the very same mission to continue the mission of Jesus; i.e. to bear witness to God’s fountain of love. They were to preach and teach the good news with the Lord given power and authority. So too they were to bring the salvific message to the ends of the world, beginning with Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8). Thus each of the early Churches is defined by the interaction between the Gospel message preached by the Apostles and the cultural milieu that received

the same. The mystery of Christ was fully present in all these communities presided over by a bishop to celebrate the holy Eucharist and all of them were known as the Church of Christ. The Eucharistic celebration and apostolic succession were central to all local Churches.

Evangelization through Thomas Christians

According to ancient, strong and continuous tradition, the Church of St. Thomas Christians in India was founded by Apostle Thomas. It is remarkable that this living tradition has till today no other rival anywhere in the world. This belief was shared by all other early Churches and was well reported by casual visitors from abroad. And the Indian Church of St Thomas just like any other earlier Christian communities had propagated its faith. Down through centuries the Thomas Christians have remained an evangelizing agency although their missionary zeal as well as the outcome of their missionary efforts varied considerably from century to century. In the first part of this study we will make an analytical overview of the missionary consciousness and activity of the Thomas Christians. Naturally, the second part will look into the salient features of their mission theology.

I. Historical Overview of Evangelization

The communities established by St Thomas, not only did survive, but spread to other parts growing into a flourishing Church. The very fact that this ancient Christian community living amidst the vast majority of non-Christians down through centuries, could preserve their Christian faith attest to their authentic spirit of evangelization. Missionary activity is an inner exigency of the Church. The accusation that the Thomas Christians had hidden the lamp of faith under a bushel is groundless. It arises from a sheer misunderstanding as regards the meaning of the Church's missionary activity.

Understanding Mission

Vatican II has re-discovered the missionary nature of the Church that it declared in the decree *Ad Gentes*: “the Church is missionary by her very nature” (AG 2). Though mission had been a concern of the Church right from the start, it had never been given a theological foundation. It was believed that the Church engages in missionary activity, because of the so called “missionary command”. Now Vatican II has given a theological basis to this activity of the Church often conceived as the diffusion of Christian faith in foreign countries or mission territories. The Church's missionary activity is a sharing in the mission *ad extra* of the Second and Third Persons of the Holy Trinity. Mission is grounded in the Mystery of the Holy Trinity. The Church itself is founded on the sending into the world the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church then continues in time and space the very same mission of the Son, bearing witness to God's fountain love. The Church cannot but continue the mission of Jesus and she is in a state of mission always and everywhere. So mission by definition is an ecclesial action. Mission is not merely one among the different aspects of the Church. “She (the Church) exists by mission as fire exists by burning”.¹ Hence everything done by the Church to sustain and propagate its faith is to be understood as its mission.

Post Vatican II mission theology has substituted this term mission with a new term, evangelization. In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI wrote: “evangelization is the grace and vocation of the Church. The Church exists in order to evangelize” (EN 14). It is bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new (EN 18). It is not simply saving individual souls. Evangelization is a multi-dimensional reality that it aims at the renewal of humanity and integral salvation which means undertaking works on behalf of human promotion and liberation. Mission is a single but complex reality and it develops in a variety of ways (RM 41). Hence as mentioned already any attempt to preserve and transmit the faith to other communities

or to the coming generation may be called evangelization. It need not be equated to numerical growth and territorial expansion of the Church. To those who doubt about the missionary consciousness of the Thomas Christians, we have the following arguments.

Existence and Survival of the Community

The very existence and survival of the community down through centuries is the best proof of a sound evangelization. The Portuguese missionaries who have landed here in the beginning of the 16th century have borne witness to the existence of a flourishing Christian community here. They had high status in the society, equal to that of the Hindu higher castes. They seemed to have possessed a very high degree of moral standard, as a result of which they were esteemed and loved by their non-Christian countrymen. They were very faithful and trustworthy. A community that possesses such moral standard evidently shows its religious and moral maturity. It is nothing other than Christian faith put into action, it is faith-communication; it is evangelization proper.

The Missionary Zeal of the East Syrian Church

The missionary zeal of the East Syrian Church with which the Thomas Christians were hierarchically related from the 4th century is another proof of their missionary mindedness. The hierarchical relationship with the Church of the East had given an added impetus to the missionary zeal of the Thomas Christians. The East Syrian Church was the most missionary-minded Church of the Christendom till the 13th century. The East Syrian preachers had brought the faith to remote regions of Turkistan, Mongolia, Siberia, China, Japan and India. Such was the missionary charism of this Church that it was known in history as a “Church on Fire”.² The number of their followers during the 12th and 13th centuries out-numbered those of the Latin and Byzantine Churches put together and geographically they were more spread out than the Roman Church.³

The East Syrian concept and approach of evangelization were quite different. Their approach consisted in communicating the living faith from a believing community to another community (non-Christian), that it may form and develop into a community of living faith.⁴ The entire Church was involved in disseminating faith. Not only the missionary preachers or monks, but also traders, merchants and travelers were propagating faith. Even in exile, they were enthusiastic missionaries. The missionary work was mainly centered on monasteries headed by bishops who were monks. Their monasteries were centers of biblical scholarship and erudition. Monasticism was the main contributive factor of the success of their mission.⁵ They could present the Christian doctrines in an idiom understood by the people. They could combine education and medical services to missionary work with great effect.⁶ Thus the East Syrians had a glorious tradition of missionary expansion and a noble way of propagating the faith. As the Thomas Christians were hierarchically related to this highly zealous missionary Church, we conclude with certainty that the East Syrians have influenced them in propagating the faith in the Indian subcontinent.

Christians outside Kerala

The presence of Christian communities in other parts of India prior to 16th century argues in favor of an earlier evangelization. There are historical and archaeological evidences regarding the existence of some pre 16th century Christian communities outside Kerala.⁷ There were Christian communities in Kalliana,⁸ Coromandal Coast, Mylapore,⁹ Thana, Supera, Broach,¹⁰ Vijayanagar¹¹ and Goa.¹² There were also Christian settlers in various other parts of India such as Cape Comorin,¹³ Sind, Punjab, Patna etc. Moreover tradition holds that the Metropolitan and the Archdeacon of the Thomas Christians had All India jurisdiction in those days. There are also evidences to prove the Christian presence in Maldives, Ceylon and Java in the pre 16th century. Now these communities were the fruits of the missionary work either of the Thomas Christians or

of the East Syrians or of their combined effort. The recent studies and discoveries on the North Indian apostolate of Apostle St Thomas should not be considered as simple inventions of some pious souls. The well documented study of Dr. Kurikilamkatt, argues in favor of the first voyage of St. Thomas from AD 35 to 49 to North Indian kingdoms.¹⁴

Further there are references to Indian missionaries working in China in the pre sixteenth century period¹⁵ and of the Indian Metropolitan having suffragans in China and Socotra.¹⁶ There are historians who attribute the early work of evangelization in China to the Indian missionaries.¹⁷ Further the inclusion of some Indian names among the list of priests, monks and deacons on the Syriac portion of the Hsianfu monument argues in favor of the missionary work of the Thomas Christians as far as China.¹⁸

Plausible Arguments

The most plausible argument is that the Indian Church just like any other Church might have propagated its faith. Christianity by nature is a missionary religion. The Indian subcontinent had been very tolerant to all religions and they all found their way in India. It is very probable that these Christians have made use of this favorable situation. Tradition points to the conversion that took place after the arrival of Thomas Can in the 4th century and of the two saintly brothers Mar Sabor and Mar Prot in the 9th century. Genuine and spontaneous conversions are reported during the time of Mar Joseph and Mar Jacob in the 16th century. This is an indication that there has been an ongoing process of missionary work in India. Without such a missionary activity it would be impossible to justify the numerical growth of the community that counted about 30,000 families at the arrival of the Portuguese. All of them could not be the possible descendents of a few original converts. Nor were they the descendents of the occasional immigrants from Persia. Surely there have been conversions in Malabar. And inspired by the Buddhist monks and East Syrian missionaries, the

Thomas Christians too, might have carried the Gospel to other parts of India. More than a supposition, it is a probability.

Second Phase of Evangelization

The second phase of evangelization begins with the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries in the beginning of the 16th century. There are two Churches in the field of evangelization during this period lasting up to 1896: the Latin Church divided under the Padroado and the Propaganda and the Eastern Church of St Thomas under the leadership of the Indian Archdeacon in the beginning and later under the leadership of the Latin prelates. Evangelization signified above all implantation of the Church. In fact there were three distinct Christian communities: the Thomas Christians, the Padroado Christians and the Propaganda Christians.

Evangelization of the missionaries among the Thomas Christians meant nothing but latinization of the ancient Church. As Bede Griffiths notes, the Thomas Christians have suffered severely from latinization and the case of the Malabar Church is one of the great scandals of Church history.¹⁹ Much of the time and energy of the community was spent for self defense and protection of its own identity and individuality. They were as such unable to engage in missionary work in the sense of Church expansion and conversion. But we notice that they had not totally given up their missionary interest. They still continued their work among the low caste Hindus. Ofcourse the high castes were more attracted to the Thomas Christians than the Portuguese.²⁰ Further they were helping the missionaries in their work among different communities. During the 18th and 19th centuries there were Syrian priests serving in the Latin parishes as far as Madras.²¹

Padroado was responsible for the spread of Christianity in many parts of India during the 16th century. By the end of the 16th century Christian communities were established through out Portuguese India which was almost one fifth of the sub-

continent.²² The Padroado mission was centered on three different types of communities: fishermen folk of the Coromandel Coast, the Hindus of Goa and Madurai, the Thomas Christians. The growth of the Church under Propaganda was marvelous. The Church expanded geographically to the regions of Surrat, Madras, Pondicherry, Coromandel, Tibet, Nepal, Hindustan etc. and grew numerically.²³ The big religious Congregations and Orders founded missions all over the country. Missionary work in India was mainly the work of the religious who took charge of a particular territory, where they tried to implant the Church. We have been reviewing the missions of the Padroado and the Propaganda. Now it is our turn to study the salient features of the evangelizing mission of the Thomas Christians developed during this second phase of history and that continues even today

II. The Missiology of the Thomas Christians

A theological awakening is evident today among the Christian community in general and among the St. Thomas Christians in particular. There has been great deal of thinking going on in India especially during the past forty five years on the missionary activity of the Church. While examining the role and responsibility of the Syro Malabar Church and affirming its genuine right of evangelization in the whole of India, we have to answer the question whether there is any difference between the mission theology of the Syro Malabar Church and that of the Latin Church. Here follows the theological rationale for a specific mission theology of the Syro Malabar Church.

Thoma Marga of Evangelization

And the Church formed out of the apostolic preaching and sharing of Christ experience of St Thomas in the Indian subcontinent was known as the Church of St Thomas or simply the community as the Thomas Christians. It is worth mentioning here that this Church is the only one *ecclesia sui iuris* known after the name of its founder-Apostle. All other early

Churches are known by the place of their origin such as the Church of Rome, the Church of Corinth, and the Church of Ephesus etc. Some of the early Churches are known on the basis of their liturgical traditions such as the Alexandrian Church or Antiochean Church. The Thomas Christians were always preserving this appellation and were proud in tracing their origin with the early places of Gospel preaching by St Thomas and the communities thus formed. It may be noted that the nomenclature “Syrian Christians” was thrust upon this community by the Dutch and English colonial powers, to satisfy their own colonial need to the extent of disproving the apostolic origin of the Church of the Thomas Christians. This new labeling could create an impression that the community took shape from the Syriac speaking Christian merchants who arrived here at a later period of history.²⁴ So also the present appellation “Syro Malabar Church” in no way does justice to the ecclesial identity of this community.

The apostolic Christ experience shared by St Thomas the Apostle had its own uniqueness. Everything that took place in the community was always and everywhere linked with the person of St Thomas. Thus the customs, practices, and ritual traditions that developed from time to time in the community were generally known as “the Law of Thomas”. This was quite distinct from the law of St Peter. The Thomas Christians had their own distinctive features of spirituality, discipline, worship, theology and organizational structures. The uniqueness of the missionary dynamism of this Church has its origin in this apostolic experience as well as the particular Indian cultural milieu.

Christ-centeredness in Proclamation

The core of all missionary preaching or evangelization proper is to present Jesus of Nazareth as the way, and the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6). “There can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as the Lord” (EA 9).²⁵ This good news was communicated to the disciples while answering Apostle Thomas, our Father in faith (Jn 14:5). The Gospel of St. John vividly presents

before us three distinctive characteristics of Apostle Thomas' Christ experience. It was Thomas the theologian who asked the Lord about the way to the Father (Jn 14:5). Jesus rightly answers that He is not only the way but also the truth and the life. According to the fourth Gospel, St. Thomas was evidently the most courageous Apostle (Jn 11:6) who dared even to die with the Lord. Following Christ means following Him to Golgotha. Martyrdom is witness. And finally we see Thomas as the one having personal encounter with the risen Lord confessing in public the Lord's divinity and humanity (Jn 20: 28). "My Lord and My God", Mar w-Alah, is the summary of the Mar Toma Marga of Evangelization.

We have already noticed that there existed a hierarchical relationship between the East Syrian Church and the Church of Thomas Christians. The Christological vision of the former had naturally great influence on the Thomas Christians. The whole theology of the East Syrian Church can be summarized in the phrase *mdabranutha damsia*, the economy of salvation. Its uniqueness consists in the central position that it accords to the mystery of Christ, experienced and celebrated in the liturgical seasons. Theological thinking and formulations were centered on the life of Christ. Now the Church is called to perpetuate this central event of God's action in Jesus through word and deed. This Christ event is the object of the Church's proclamation.

The Thomas Christians were also known as Nazranis, meaning the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The name of Jesus was held in high esteem and veneration. Even today the faithful greet others especially the elders, teachers and priests with a genuine Christo-centric greeting: praised be Jesus Christ, for ever and ever. Missionary activity consists in sharing one's own Christ experience and making others convinced that Jesus is the Lord and Savior. History attests to the ways and means of handing on of the Christian values and message from generation to generation. One of such practices was the "semi-scholarly" way of instruction by the village school

teachers. The children of Thomas Christians used to attend these village schools for four years. They were taught the basics of religion, morning and evening prayers, written on palm leaves. Very often the village school teachers who taught these things were high caste Hindus. The condition put forward by the Christian community, was that their children be taught the elementary prayers by these village school masters. Now a community that is well aware of the need of handing on the faith to coming generations evidently possesses missionary spirit.

A Unique Mode of Evangelization

Today the Syro Malabar Church is by far missionary minded than any other individual Churches of Christendom. The mere fact that a community, for several centuries, preserved the faith and lived and flourished in it in cordial relationship with all is a clear proof for evangelization by Thomas Christians. Now coming to the salient features our mission theology we notice that "the Mission Policy of the Syro Malabar Church"²⁶ vividly summarizes the same in its sub-title "To be the salt of the earth and light of the world." This evidently highlights one of the most important traits of the individuality of the ancient Thomas Christians who "shone like lights amidst the darkness that surrounded them".

The Thomas Christians had their own unique mode of evangelization. Any attempt to preserve and transmit the faith to other communities or the coming generations may be called evangelization. And it need not be equated to the numerical growth and territorial expansion of the Church. Expansion of God's kingdom of love and life should always remain as the primary concern of evangelization. Forcible conversions had no place in the evangelizing mission of the Thomas Christians. To them the Cross of Christ was the symbol of tolerance, understanding and co-habitation.

Missiology not only examines the history of the evangelizing activity of the Church, it also studies the ways in which it is carried out. An analytical

overview of the history of the missions by the Western missionaries during the great missionary era helps us to appreciate the uniqueness of the missionary method of the Thomas Christians. While the former were having royal protection and military support from the colonial powers, the Thomas Christians were deprived of all such privileges. They were a tiny minority amidst the vast majority of non-Christians. Their way of bearing witness to their faith among the non-Christians had helped them to be at home with their countrymen and to be authentically Indian.²⁷

The Portuguese missionaries were following a method of *compelle intrare*, to compel to enter.²⁸ It is an undeniable fact that there was an unholy association between the colonial might and the Western missionaries. The missionary activity by the Portuguese was very often characterized by coercion, enticing, and favoritism towards the new converts. R.H.S. Boyd observes: "Roman Catholic mission which began in the beginning of the 16th century was closely linked with the outreach of Portuguese imperialism."²⁹ From the very start of the Portuguese missions to the East the Cross was accompanied by the sword.³⁰ The Jesuits were sometimes using improper methods to make people become Christians. Even the runaways from the new converts were not spared. They were condemned by the ecclesiastical courts. It was further intensified by the establishment of "inquisition" and the *auto de Fe* in 1563.

Conversions to Christianity were achieved through strange ways. The encounter between Christianity and Hinduism was tarnished with cruelties committed against the later.³¹ Christianity is still considered as Western imperialism in a religious garb. So Christianity in general remains a foreign religion which it is difficult for them to place in the socio-cultural context of India. And if at all there is an exception to what has been said above regarding the Christian-Hindu encounter in India, it was in Kerala before the 16th century. They never forced the non-Christians to join them, instead only proposed the Gospel. We may note here that Vatican II has

strictly forbidden all concerned in presenting the faith to people not to compel, force or entice them to accept the same. So also we have to avoid all kinds of triumphalistic attitudes and compulsions. Pope Paul VI too shares the same view when he says that the evangelizers are to avoid coercion and persuasion of all sorts in presenting the Gospel to non-Christians (EN 80). The Thomas Christian community considered itself as one of the high castes of Hinduism and had very cordial relationship with the Hindus. Hence even today, the Thomas Christians are well accepted and recognized as authentically Indian. They are never accused of having converted their non-Christian counterparts with the sword. This is one of the noblest features of the Thomas Margam of evangelization.

A Life of Witness

Witness of life is of prime importance in evangelization. According to the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI, witness is the first stage or initial act in the process of Evangelization (EN 21). Vatican Second has proposed it as the best means of diffusing the Christian message among the non-Christians. "Closely united with men in their life and work, Christ's disciples hope to render to others true witness of Christ, and to work for their salvation, even where they are not able to proclaim Christ fully" (AG 12). There is almost unanimous accord among historians that the Thomas Christians were a believing community. Keeping intact one's Christian faith and bearing witness to it amidst the vast majority of non-Christians is evangelization in its proper sense. Any further attempt of preaching, propagation, conversion, founding of the Church etc. has its origin in this basic conviction. Christianity has never been the official religion of any of the ancient Indian kingdoms. Hence it would be quite inopportune to expect a tiny community bereft of royal patronage and proper ecclesiastical organization to make gigantic strides in the field of evangelization. In addition to this, we notice that the Indian cultural background, though very tolerant, was not conducive to evangelization aimed at conversion.

The Hindu way of tolerance is a guarantee for existence with one's own proper religious faith and it abhors all sorts of proselytism.

Thus the Thomas Christians were like people caught up in a lagoon. They could live peacefully, keeping up their own proper identity and their own faith. And thus they remained for centuries. Yet, they had positive influence in the society in which they were living. They had high status in society equal to that of the Hindu higher castes. They had their own military force and were efficient merchants, traders and proprietors of pepper. According to reliable sources their life and behavior were attuned to the Christian faith they possessed. F. Day observes that "they were very faithful and trustworthy".³² Historians are united in attesting the fact that the Thomas Christian community "shone like lights amidst the darkness that surrounded them".³³ We know for certain that fidelity, regard for truth, trustworthiness etc. are religious and moral values. A community that possesses great moral values and bears witness to its faith amidst the non-Christian majority is evidently an evangelizing agency, i.e. a Church with an evangelizing mission.

On the other hand, had the Thomas Christians attempted a forced conversion, the community would not have survived long. Moreover, living among a people who showed an extraordinary sense of tolerance, the Thomas Christians too have imbibed that spirit. Traditional Hinduism does not proselytize, because religion comes with the free gift of existence. It is meaningless to insist on total conversion of a person to something that he is not. Conversion to Christianity was unthinkable to the caste-ridden Hindus.

Ecclesial Dimension

Another key element in evangelization is the local liturgical assembly, the Church. Missionary activity is not an isolated act. It is an ecclesial act. Missionaries are sent by the Church. The local liturgical community is the basis of evangelization and

mission. The Church is the visible and concrete expression of God's revealing work in the world. Therefore to be true to its nature the whole Church and every local congregation must be active in mission and evangelism. The pre 16th century Church had some theological visions as regards its relations with the non-Christians. The evangelizing mission depends very much on our doctrines on non-Christian religions. At present the Church and missionaries are led by the teachings of Vatican II as well as the recent documents on non Christian religions. Prior to the arrival of Western missionaries there existed a sort of "lived dialogue" between the followers of different religions in India. The Thomas Christians are said to have had the vision that each one would be saved according to his or her margam, namely way or faith. That means they held the Vatican Council's view that there is possibility of salvation outside the Church (LG 16).

Community-oriented Theology

The East Syrian theology was also closely associated with the life of the people. It was a community oriented faith reflection. The Church reflected on the events of each individual's life looking at the same events in the life of Christ. They fostered a deep communitarian experience of faith. The individual is considered not in isolation but as a member of a community. And one becomes a member of the community not merely by sociological, political or external factors, but by the internal experience of faith and through the work of the Holy Spirit. This communitarian aspect of their faith reflection had its own effects in their missionary enterprise. The Indian religions as Hinduism and Buddhism also were not considering the individuals as isolated entities. The East Syrians had a holistic view of man. There was no separation between the spiritual world and the material world of ordinary life in their concept of man. There was no contrast between soul and body according to this way of thinking. Human being was considered as tri-dimensional rather than bi-dimensional.

This community oriented approach has something unique to contribute to a theology of mission of the Syro Malabar Church. There exists a sharp contrast between East and West in the concept of community of believers. In the East the emphasis was on the assembly of believers gathered around the Word. But in the West due to many influences the Church lost its character of a living community of faithful. Instead the Church was institutionalized. The Thomas Christian concept of the Church was different. Church for them was really the People of God. They had a community oriented mission too. Thomas Christians had given decisive role to the laity. The institution called '*palliyogam*' is the best example of lay participation in the Church. A yogam (assembly) consisted of representatives of families and the clergy of a parish. This assembly was always presided over by the parish priest. It was an effective means for maintaining communion and solidarity in the community.³⁴ This parish assembly enjoyed legislative, juridical and administrative powers so to say it had even power to excommunicate public sinners from the parish community. There were regional and general assemblies too. And as Prof. Dr. Koodapuzha notes, their bishops were not involved in the administration. They were spiritual heads spending their time in prayer, study, fasting, celebration of the holy mysteries, and other ascetic practices. All important decisions concerning the community were taken by the general assembly.

Thus we see that the community in general was interested in preserving its genuine Eastern heritage. The vehement protest by the community under the leadership of its Archdeacon against the Portuguese authorities in 1653, known as the Kunan Kuriz Oath is the best example of the ecclesial consciousness and evangelizing spirit of the Thomas Christians. They were even ready to sacrifice their lives for keeping intact their own faith traditions enshrined in the law of Thomas. Preserving one's legitimate liturgical and spiritual heritage is the first step towards propagating one's faith tradition. Until today the Church has kept up some of her eastern ecclesial heritage. In our own

days we have noble examples of lay persons doing genuine missionary work.

Lay Associations, Organizations

The whole Church is missionary and the work of evangelization is the fundamental task of the People of God (AG 35). All baptized persons have the obligation to spread the Gospel and work for the building up of the Body of Christ. Mission-oriented lay associations are our own specific contributions to the Church's spirit of universal evangelism. We see lay persons like Thomas Puthenparampil of Edathua among the pioneers in the mission field of Kerala. A very zealous lay apostle Thommachan was instrumental in founding the Franciscan III Order Secular in Kerala towards the end of the 19th century. It is reported that that by 1888 there were 50 units and over 3000 members in different parishes of the diocese of Verapoly.

Another pioneer lay missionary of our times was P.C. Abraham Pallattukunnel, better known as Mission League Kunjettan. Today Cherupuzhpa Mission League (CML) remains as Asia's largest lay organization. This lay organization was founded in 1947 at Bharananganam by Fr. Joseph Maliparampil and Sri P.C. Abraham Pallattukunnel. CML is a forum of children and young people in parishes that helps missions by raising funds and offering prayers. It has some 1.7 million members and about 41,500 of its former members are now missionaries serving the Church throughout the world. Among them there are 37 bishops. Mission League Kunjettan was one of the inspiring personalities behind this exodus of Kerala youngsters to the far regions of India and abroad to do missionary work. This unique missionary who always led a very simple life has nurtured this organization for about six decades. He has been on a great mission: teaching young people about the Church, its mission, and vocation to religious life and priesthood. Kunjumissionary, a children's magazine, was instrumental in giving first hand information about missionary activities to children attending Sunday Schools. His regular visits to parishes and his

inspirational letters to children were another means of fostering missionary vocations. He is recognized as “the lay missionary of the century”. No doubt Kunjettan will be remembered in history as one of the most illustrious missionaries of the Syro Malabar Church.

To this we add the charismatic movement and the hundreds of lay-persons involved in direct proclamation of the Word of God all over India and even abroad. The Syro Malabar being the majority catholic community has provided larger number lay leaders to Church’s evangelizing mission. The Thomas Christians had a unique mode of handing on the deposit of faith. Today large numbers of lay persons are involved very actively in this area of faith formation. The Sunday School System among the Syro Malabar Christians is one of the best of its kind in the whole of Christendom. Handing on the deposit of faith from generation to generation is one of essential aspects of Church’s mission. The Catholic Thomas Christians have come of age such that there are number of laity in the Church with proper theological biblical catechetical and liturgical formation. They are and true missionaries disseminating the Gospel in their own families, in the community and in spheres of their profession.

Liturgical Dimension of Mission

The liturgy is seen in the Eastern traditions as the basis of all theological reflections. Liturgy itself has great missiological value. The Eucharist transforms the Church into what it is, transforms it into mission. According to the Eastern tradition, the Church is the ‘heaven on earth’. Its most sublime representation is the Eucharist. In the Eucharist there are two movements, one ascending and other descending. Making the Church present is the exercise of Church’s priestly function. It is her first mission. Those who are nourished by the body of Christ are the best ‘witnesses to the Christ event’. Their mission is to go out and bear witness to what they themselves have experienced. Without this mystical experience nobody can be a true witness, a true missionary.

Liturgical witness is a key element in the missionary witness of the Eastern Churches. Liturgy has got both internal and external dimensions of mission. The internal aspect pertains to the life and sustenance of the Church. Liturgy is the motivating factor for mission by providing both the content and the context of mission. The context is the return from the presence of God to the need of the people. It is impossible to participate in Christian worship without reference to the world mission, and it is impossible to engage in real mission without a living participation in the Eucharist. The Church is primarily a worshipping community. The liturgy is central to the Church. But how can liturgy be a method of mission? According to the Oriental perspectives, liturgy is the faith expression of the Church. It is what the Church believes and professes that she prays and proclaims in the liturgy. The sacred liturgy in the Church is the expression and means to strengthen the faithful in matters of faith. Through the Eucharist the Church proclaims the salvific event of Christ. And at the end of every Eucharistic celebration the worshippers are sent out on a mission to proclaim what they themselves have experienced. Thus the worshippers are not only strengthened in their own faith but also are made missionaries.

The missionary thrust of the Syro Malabar Liturgy is self evident. There are a number of prayers that remind the worshipping community of their missionary vocation. This missionary call present in the prayers is a motivating factor for the spread of the gospel. Missionary activity in India by the Syro Malabar Church aims at the formation of liturgical basic communities. The missionary activity of the Church should be the proclamation and sharing of the faith experience of this particular Church handed down to us through its genuine liturgical traditions. Christian faith was conveyed from generation to generation mainly through the public worship of the Eucharistic liturgy that unfolded Sunday after Sunday in every parish. Celebration of the liturgy and sacraments are constitutive of evangelization according to Pope Paul VI Evangelization cannot be

fully achieved by sermons or communication of doctrines alone (EN 47). It needs further grace which comes from the sacraments (EN 23). In this case too the ancient Thomas Christians have given an exemplary model that is specific of their concept of mission.

Mission ad gentes

In the first part of our study it was made clear that the Thomas Christians were having a true missionary spirit all through their existence in India. Of course in the caste-ridden society in which they found themselves had dissuaded them from converting the low-castes to their Church-fold. Yet we point out that they have never given up their enthusiasm to spread the Gospel that they do not miss any chance of missionary work. For example, with the extension of our jurisdiction to the neighboring districts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka we were focusing very much on missionary work. The ad gentes mission by the Archdiocese of Changanacherry in the Kanyakumari district was very successful. As a result of this evangelizing mission among the Nadars we have today the diocese of Thalalay with a total of 30,000 faithful. The erection of the diocese of Thalsserry in 1953 for the Syro Malabar migrants has now proved to be a very successful mission undertaken by our Church. The Metropolitan province of Thalasserry has now the dioceses of Mananthavady (1973), Thamaraseery (1986), Balthangady (1999), Bhadravathi (2007) and Mandya (2009) as suffragan dioceses. Pastoral care extended by the diocese of Trichur and later of Plakkad to the Syro Malabar migrants in Tamil Nadu has now resulted in the formation of the diocese of Ramanathapuram. Very often Church historians ignore these facts and figures.

Mission outside Kerala

One of the striking features of the Syro Malabar Church is the number of its priests and religious.

Already from the second quarter of the 19th century we had our own religious congregations. Due to the jurisdictional confinement to a geographically narrow strip of land within the subcontinent of India, the Syro Malabar clergy both diocesan and religious remained at home. It was only in 1930s that a new possibility of missionary work was offered to the Syro Malabarians. They could now join the Latin dioceses or Congregations anywhere in India. Thereupon we notice a steady increase in the missionary vocations in Kerala. Thousands of young men and women began to flow to outside Kerala missions. A majority of the earlier missionaries from our Church have joined the Visakhapatanam diocese at the request of Bishop Peter Rossi Lon of happy memory. He was highly appreciative of the extraordinarily great missionary dynamism of the Thomas Christians. Already by 1948 about 150 priests were their in different Latin dioceses of India apart from the hundreds who have joined the religious congregations.³⁵

The vast majority of missionaries working in the Latin dioceses of India originally hail from the Syro Malabar community. Today there is hardly any religious Congregation of some importance which does not have some sisters of the Syro Malabar Church. Nor is there any diocese in India which does not have a few Syro Malabar clergy. Unfortunately we do not have the exact number of our missionary personnel working in the Latin dioceses of India. According to a study made in 1985, there were some 2000 priests and 8000 sisters of the Syro Malabar Church working in different dioceses and congregations of the Latin Church in India.³⁶ The diocese of Pala alone provides 10,331 missionary personnel (440 diocesan priests, 1284 religious priests, 147 religious brothers and 8460 sisters) to different mission regions of our country.

Very often people accuse the Southists among the Syro Malabarians for not converting anyone to their community. Conversion alone is not the yardstick of the missionary enthusiasm of a community. According to a recent study while there are around

250 priests working in the Archdiocese of Kottayam, there are about 350 of them working in the missions. There are more almost 1500 sisters of the same community working in different missions of our country and abroad. It may be noted that there are three bishops from this Southist community working in the North Indian missions. Altogether there are 20 Syro Malabarians among the Latin hierarchs of India. There are still Syro Malabar diocesan priests working in the Latin dioceses of Vijayapuram, Kannur and Kozhikode in Kerala. This missionary co-operation of the Syro Malabar Church is something unique. We may not find another community in the whole of Christendom, which gives so many religious and priests to another Church.

Religious Congregations and Missionary Institutes

The role of the religious congregations and missionary institutes in the mission of the Church has been very well brought out in the Decree on the Church's Mission, AG 40. Further, the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, states: "The missionary spirit must absolutely be preserved in religious institutes and must be adapted to modern conditions, in keeping with the character of each, so that the preaching of the Gospel to all nations be more effective" (PC 20). They form an important element in the life of an Individual Church. There are authors who attest that there was religious and monastic life among the Thomas Christians before the advent of the Portuguese. The Recollects of Edapally belonging to the Congregation of St Thomas the Apostle was founded in 1626. But this was short lived owing to the strong opposition from Archbishop Garcia.³⁷

Religious Congregations for men and women flourished vigorously under the patronage of the indigenous bishops. Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are today the backbones of our missionary activity in India. It is due to them that all our mission eparchies could flourish to their present condition. The Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) founded by three priests,

Fr. Thomas Porukkara, Fr. Thomas Palackal and Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the year 1831 at Mannanam, continues to be the largest religious congregation of the Oriental Churches with 2768 members. Blessed Chavara was the first one to initiate organized mission work in our Church in the modern period. He insisted that all monasteries should open a catechumenate for the formation of the new converts. Right from the beginning the members of the Congregation were involved in the conversion of Harijans (Dalits), namely the Parayas and the Pulayas. There were such itinerant preachers like Fr. Alexander Kattakayam, one of the first eleven professed members of the congregation, who earned the title, "Missionary Apostolic" from Pope Pius X. Again history will attest to the missionary zeal of Fr. Xavier Pulparampil CMI (Souriarachan) better known as "the missionary of High Ranges", who was behind the formation of a number of parish communities in the diocese of Kanjirapally in 1960s.

In 1920s and 30s CMI missionaries had organized special mission work in connection with the reunion movement in Trivandrum and Thiruvalla. When the jurisdictional restrictions were bit relaxed by Rome in 1953 the Congregation started taking care of the migrants of the Syrian community in the northern parts of Kerala, especially in the Latin diocese of Kozhikode. Between 1860 and 1960, 48,700 baptisms were reported as a result of the missionary work of the members of CMI Congregation. The mission territory of Chanda carved out from the archdiocese of Nagpur in the State of Maharashtra was entrusted to the CMI Congregation in 1962. Thus the Church of Thomas Christians entered into a new and decisive era of organized missionary work outside Kerala.

Ever since Chanda was given as a mission territory for the Syro Malabar Church and the work was found to be fruitful, a number of mission eparchies were created in central and northern parts of India. The CMI Congregation has at present eight bishops and its members are looking after six north Indian mission dioceses. The Vincentian

Congregation founded in 1927 looks after the diocese of Satna in Madhya Pradesh. The Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament (MCBS) was born in 1933 as result of the Eucharistic centered reawakening in the life of the Church begun by Pope Pius X in the beginning of the 20th century. Today they too are in the mission field and are in charge of the newly formed diocese of Bhadravathi in Karnataka, apart from the missions of Solapur and Satara. The Congregation of St. Theresa of Lisieux (the Little Flower Congregation) begun in March 1931 at Mookkannur near Angamaly, has been allotted the diocese of Gorakpur in 1984. Further we have the Missionary Society of St. Thomas. A missionary society of indigenous priests, MST is canonically a "Society of Apostolic Life". It is first of its kind in our Church as well as in India. The Society has to its credit over 300 priests and hundreds of candidates. MST takes care of the diocese of Ujjain and missions of Mandya and Sangli, in India. All these religious Congregations and Institutes have overseas missions too.

The first indigenous religious congregation for women in Kerala is the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) founded in 1866 at Koonammavu by Blessed Chavara and Fr. Leopold Boccoaro OCD. They are also in the forefront of missionary work all over India in several dioceses both Latin and Oriental and also abroad in Africa, America and Europe. The religious sisters of the Thomas Christians are gathered into 29 different congregations, five pious unions and five secular institutes. There is only one western based order that has a Syro Malabar Province, the Medical Mission Sisters. The Syro Malabar Church has over 35,000 religious sisters and the four major congregations alone have a total of 21,063 members. All of them are instrumental in evangelizing India, our motherland. Apart from these religious sisters there are 6836 religious brothers, 9121 priests and 45 bishops in the Syro Malabar Church with around 4 million (397,396)³⁸ of faithful.

Migration as means of Evangelization

Today migration is a world-wide phenomenon. Following the footsteps of St Thomas, their Father in faith, the Thomas Christians have migrated to different corners of the world. The faithful of the Syro Malabar Church are spread all over the world. They have of late migrated to various cities of India to Gulf countries to Europe, America, Canada, Australia, Singapore, and Hong Kong etc. in large numbers. The exodus from Kerala began a few decades ago has acquired momentum in the post-independent era. There are a number of reasons for this world wide phenomenon. Of late the Holy has directed all concerned to render proper pastoral care to these migrants.³⁹

We have illustrious examples of Thomas Christians such as Joseph the Indian, Paremmakkal Governador, Archbishop Joseph Kariatty traveling abroad spreading the wonderful story of the origin and growth of the Church of St Thomas in India. In 1490 Joseph the Indian went to Mesopotamia to fetch bishops for the Indian Church. Joseph was representing the entire community. Further he had traveled to Rome where he met the Holy Father to give him first hand information about the Church in India. The testimony of Joseph was highly expressive of the faith of the Thomas Christians of the 15th century, i.e. before the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries. So too the travelogue of Paremmakkal bears witness to the true doctrines as well the ecumenical attitude of the community of the 18th century. Even abroad Thomas Christians were proud of their ecclesial and apostolic heritage. A true missionary is always a man of the Church.

Coming to our own days we see that the Syro Malabar emigrants are deprived of all ecclesial and spiritual assistance from their mother Church, since she has no jurisdiction or proper mandate to give them pastoral care. Cut from their own proper ecclesial traditions they lose the sense of oneness with the Church. However we notice that those emigrants were by far better missionaries than anybody else. It is a historical fact that the eparchy

of Thalassery was established in 1953 to meet the pastoral needs of the Syro Malabar migrants from erstwhile Travancore to the northern districts of Kerala. We have already made mention of the services rendered by the religious of Carmelite Congregation from 1950s onwards. Now this eparchy has grown into a Metropolitan province with Mananthavady, Thamarassery, Belthangady, Bhadravathi and Mandya as suffragan-eparchies.

Because of the exclusive claim of the Latin Church for jurisdiction all over India, the Orientals are denied their right to pastoral care in their own Rite. This unjust and unchristian situation has to be changed. It goes against the teachings of Vatican II and further directives of Holy See. To our credit we could proudly point out that even in such situations the faithful of the Syro Malabar Church do exhibit a genuine missionary spirit and work for the implantation of the Church. The eparchy of Kalyan was created in 1988 for the Syro Malabar faithful living in the Archdiocese of Bombay, in the dioceses of Vasai, Pune and Nazik. In 2001 the eparchy of Chicago for the Syro Malabar faithful in USA was created. This has given the Syro Malabar Church a universal vocation to evangelize the de-Christianized continents of Europe and America. Work of new evangelization is everybody's obligation and not the hobby of a few.

The aim of missionary activity is the formation of local ecclesial communities. Those communities should follow the same liturgy theology spirituality and discipline of the Syro Malabar Church. To teach western theology or to celebrate the Latin liturgy, there is no need of any special Syro Malabar mission. Hence before making any attempt towards evangelization, the Church has to make sure of her own identity and individuality. The Syro Malabar Church has been missionary from the very beginning. The present Church has much to learn from its past history. The mission theology of the Church has to be based on her own proper ecclesial traditions and

theological insights. But at the same time it has to follow the general guidelines given by the Church Universal.

Eastern Tradition of Asceticism and Mysticism

Another common trait of the missiology of the Thomas Christians is their outlook on asceticism and mysticism. Both in the Indian and Oriental traditions contemplative life has great importance. The central place of contemplation in the evangelization effort is self evident. The ascetics of the ancient religions of India were in fact monk-missionaries. The same was true of Eastern Christianity, especially of the East Syrian Church which had an excellent monastic tradition. There is close resemblance between the oriental and Indian outlook on asceticism. Asceticism consists in leading a hard and austere life of continuous fast and voluntary and self inflicted punishments. Penance is absolutely necessary to reach the final status of perfect union with the Supreme Being. Asceticism was a constitutive element of Syrian spirituality. The Syrian monasticism was instrumental in the religious, social and cultural domains of the East. The Syrian ascetics were great missionaries going beyond the boundaries of Syria. Monasteries contributed in a special way to the growth and development of intellectual and spiritual culture.

The influence of Syrian monasticism can be traced to the Thomas Christians of Kerala. This was mainly due to the influence of the monk-missionaries of the East Syrian Church who brought into closer contact both communities in India and Persia. The route from Persia to India was covered with monasteries. These monasteries were great centers of evangelization. The influence of both Hindu and Syrian traditions in the spiritual, ascetic and monastic practices could be noticed among the Thomas Christians. They were leading a very austere life. Basically they were vegetarians. They used to observe different categories of fast such as a three day fast (moonunnuimbu in honor of Jonas who spent

three days in the belly of a whale), an eight day fast (ettunoimbu as preparation for celebrating the feast of Nativity of Blessed Virgin Mary), a fifteen day fast in preparation for the feast of Assumption, a 25 days fast in preparation for Christmas and the Great Lent consisting of fifty days of fast. During Lent they did not eat even fish and milk products and did not drink wine and refrained from sexual intercourse.⁴⁰ During Lent they used to pray thrice in the Church. People with such austerity towards religion and religious practices would never hide the light of faith under a bushel. Their life itself was a clear proof of their missionary spirit.

Mission: A Three Fold Dialogue

Over against what has been said about the theology of the mission of the Thomas Christians let us suggest a few points in view of an up to date formulation of Missiology by the Syro Malabar Church in India. Any attempt of missionary work in India has to consider the particular context of the nation, that is, take into account the rich religious and cultural heritage of the nation as well as the pathetic socio-economic conditions of the masses. The success or failure of mission depends on the capability of the evangelizing agency in penetrating this particular context. The specific nature of such an evangelization by the Syro Malabar church comes from its ecclesial identity as an individual Church.

In India the Gospel is never preached in a vacuum. It is addressed to a people with deep religious faith. In presenting the faith to the non-Christians of India, the ancient Thomas Christians had their own unique ways and means. Through their life witness they tried to diffuse the gospel of Christ among their non-Christian brethren. There had been “a life of dialogue” between the non-Christians and the Christians of India. The term inter religious dialogue is quite new. What we mean here is the dialogue in life and this is typically an eastern approach. It is very rich in its theological sense. It is the community's identification with the socio-cultural

milieu and awareness that Christ in becoming man has assumed everything human and redeemed all social and cultural values. The oriental heritage that the Church possesses does not permit her to consider the other religions as simply ‘non-Christians’, as if only the Judeo-Christian cultural context has been enriched by the Christ event and the rest of the world is totally unaffected by Christ's incarnation. Eastern theology upholds the principle of ‘*logos spermatikos*’.⁴¹ Where there is God's Word there is salvation. God's saving act and presence have been operative in time and space even before the foundation of the Church by Christ. That is to say, the religions of the world too are included in God's universal plan of salvation. The recognition of positive values in other religions in no way undermines the uniqueness of Christianity, nor does the uniqueness of Christianity undermine the importance of dialogue.

Mission aims at a dialogue between the Word of God and human community to which that Word is addressed as a call to conversion. What is special about eastern theology is that it does not consider any culture as impure or devoid of the Word of God. The Gospel is not considered as a ‘supra cultural ideology’.⁴² The East Syrians and the Greeks were well known for their appreciation of the local cultures. This is also true of the Syro Malabar Church. Gospel-culture encounter is something that happens naturally. It is the by-product of an involvement with a people rather than the conscious target of a program of action. It is actually the people that create a culture. So, only when the Syro Malabar Church involves herself in the life and struggles of people around her that she begins to acquire and understand new cultural elements. Inculturation from below is the only valid form of inculturation.

Again inculturation attempts should not be restricted to the Brahminic religion and culture alone. The claim that 80 percent of the Indian population is Hindu is only a game of numbers. The Church has to meet not only the Brahminic Hinduism but also the vast majority of the Dalits and the Tribals. Though

Hinduism is very profound and rich in itself its Scriptures do have elements which Christianity can never accept as they are. The Syro Malabar Church is in a better position to make further encounter with the Indian cultures, as her style of life has become part of the Indian heritage.

Modern international culture is sweeping across the whole world submerging local cultures. The identity of a national culture should help us to relate ourselves to the other national or international cultures. The Syro Malabar Church which has its own cultural systems and life style attuned to the Indian context can and must place itself in a greater cultural context of the world and the Universal Church. The Church has to think of its world wide mission. What the Church needs is going beyond its own proper cultural traditions and facing the universal culture which is in the making. An overstress on national culture would only do harm to the work of evangelization. The Church should try to express her spiritual liturgical traditions in a language and medium which could be understood by those who are outside India also. When adapted too much to the Indian culture, it may not be able to evangelize other cultures properly.

The Church has to consider all efforts to humanization as integral part of her mission. The good news of liberation announced by the Word of God cannot be isolated from the good news of human efforts of development and humanization. Action on behalf of justice and participating in the transformation of the world fully appears as a constitutive dimension of preaching the gospel. The Syro Malabar missionaries have to go and stand along side the oppressed in the struggle for a better future. Perhaps the best part of the liberating mission of the Church in India would be in the field of conscientisation. The vast majority of the masses are unaware of the evil structures which protect them and which are being protected by them. The religious and other missionaries could be employed by the Church in

her mission to conscientise the people. The Church should be the champion of the cause of the low castes and outcastes. In this attempt she can follow her own tradition of protecting the low caste.⁴³

In summary, the Missiology of the Thomas Christians has its theological foundation in her ecclesial identity as a sui juris Church having specific apostolic experience lived and witnessed down through ages.

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Mary in the Early Syriac Tradition

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Introduction

Early Syriac Christianity has certain specific insights and convictions regarding the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the whole history of salvation. Rather than as an individual in the history of salvation, the role and the life of the Blessed Virgin are seen as types and symbols of human cooperation in the broader history of salvation. These factors are all the more substantiated through many biblical and natural analogies through prophetic words and deeds. Hence, the mystery of the Blessed Virgin Mary is described in and through biblical, salvation historical and pneumatological goals and realities. If a conclusion is to be anticipated, in the life of Mary, one finds a fuller depiction of the needed human cooperation in the Trinitarian mysteries of salvation. She is the faithful daughter of the Father, a perfect vessel of the Son and a fulfilled human person by the fuller indwelling of the Spirit. The Syriac Mariological concern is not to analyse and define the person of Mary. It is to understand experientially and intuitively the mysterious power that worked in Mary that enabled her to respond to the divine call and thus bring about life in the fullness in Christ to herself and

the world. Mary is the model for the full consummation of the divine-human engagement in body and soul in the historical sphere.

The animating and active role of Mary as described in the early Syriac Christian authors can be summed up in three broader aspects. (1) Mary is a dynamic creature in the created world that travels to fuller life and perfection. In this aspect she is seen as fully cooperating with the divine plan, of course, with all possible human chances of doubts and anxieties on the road of perfection. Thus she is seen as fulfilling the course of salvation history as envisaged by the Father. In her all potentials are seen fulfilled. (2) Mary in her commitment to fulfill the course of salvation history, cooperates perfectly with the economy of the Son. It began its consummation in the mode of the incarnation of the Word, in the world, in view of bringing light and life to the whole creation. (3) Mary is an animating and actualizing model as well as a representative of the whole world of humanity in attaining the needed pneumatological realization through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the whole creation. This article is an exposition of

the above mentioned aspects of the role and life of the Blessed Virgin Mary through a survey of the early Syriac Christian literature. Such an exposition would bring to light the deeper insights and convictions of the Syriac Christianity regarding Mariology and Soteriology focused through Christology. One finds some unique factors for more complementary and comprehensive teachings and doctrines of the universal Church on Mariology.

1. Blessed Virgin Mary in the Totality of the History of Salvation

In this section the Blessed Virgin Mary is described as a model and type of human cooperation in the divine economy at all levels of salvation history. Early Syriac authors draw the Marian picture in the broader canvas of the totality of the history of salvation. Mary's life and actions are seen as types of an ideal human cooperation towards the divine economy. In the typological exegesis in proportion to the types of Christ in the Bible, the types of Mary are also abundant. All such types of Mary are measured and valued in proportion to the amount of cooperation to the divine plan of salvation at a given stage of history. Hence, Mary is not only a second Eve, but also a second Sarah, Rachel, Anna and others (cf. Nat 8:13-15; 13:2-5). Mary is compared in certain aspects to Tamar, Ruth and Rahab (cf. Nat 9:7-16; 15:8; 16:12). Mary has typical connection with the 'Tablet of Law' and 'the Ark of the Covenant' (Nat 16:16-17; 4:113; 12:3).¹

The biblical types of Mary and the Mariological titles employed by the early Syriac writers present the specific theological vision of Syriac Christianity guided by a sense of a corporate personality, a process of salvation as a healing, purification, rectification for reaching fulfillment and consummation under the path, truth and light of the saving economy of the Word actualized in the incarnate Son. A pattern of complementarity can be seen between the first Adam and the Second Adam, humanity's corporateness with the fallen Adam and the New

Adam, the Life-giver, Eve and Mary, and so on. Our attention here is to the Eve-Mary (antithetic) parallelism that reminds and teaches all regarding the pattern of salvation that attained actualized consummation through the right behaviour of Mary against the deviant (stumbling) behaviour of Eve. Ephrem depicts the matter by way of contrast:

Mary gave us the Bread of Rest,
instead of that bread of toil which Eve gave.
Mary gave us the refreshing bread,
Instead of the fatiguing bread that Eve
procured for us.

(Unleavened Bread 6:6-7).

The truth and functions of a corporate personality are very much evident. The economy of salvation has potential figures and realizing figures tuned for fulfillment. The realization path is a journey through history. In the journey through history one has to see with the 'luminous eye of faith'. Only such a 'luminous eye' guided by faith can see the path between the promised world of potentials and the realities of the goal as the fulfilled state. Mary had that eye of faith and that served her for her proper behaviour in agreement with the divine economy for rectifying and perfecting the earlier wrong way inaugurated by Eve.

It is clear that Mary is the land that receives the source of light;
through her it has illumined the whole world, with its inhabitants,
which had grown dark through Eve, the source of all misfortunes.

[Mary and Eve] in their symbols resemble a body, one of whose eyes is blind and darkened, while the other is clear and bright, providing light for the whole.

The world, you see, has two eyes fixed in it:
Eve was its left eye, blind,
while the right eye, illumined, is Mary.

Through the eye that was darkened the whole world was darkened,
and people groped and thought that every stone they stumbled upon was a god, calling falsehood truth.

But when it was illumined by the other eye and the heavenly Light
that resided in its midst, humanity became reconciled once again,
realizing that the discovery they had made was destroying their very life.

(On the Church, 37:3-7)²

The interpretation of Gen 3:21 in terms of ‘the Robe of Glory’ with which Adam was clothed before the fall is a common heritage of the Jewish and Christian interpretations, and it was prominent in the early Syriac tradition. The Targumic traditions speak of the vestments God had provided for Adam and Eve as not of skin but of glory/light which refers to the state before the fall. Early Syriac Christianity, as it stands in closer correspondence with many Judeo-Christian perspectives, took up many Haggadic elements and Rabbinic features in the exegesis of the early chapters of Genesis³.

The serpent gave deceitful advice to Eve in the garden so as to take away the ‘garment of glory’ and wove a tunic of iniquity in which the first parents remained naked and they felt shame. The fig leaves came as a clothing of shame. Ephrem describes in his usual contrasting imagery:

Eve in her virginity put on leaves of shame,
but Your mother, Lord, in her virginity
has put on a robe of glory
that encompasses all people,
while to Him who covers all
she gave a body as a tiny garment

(Nativity 17:4)⁴

Jacob of Serugh finds the clothing of Adam and Eve with the leaves of shame as a punishment as

well as a promise regarding the return of the expelled Adam into Paradise (*QHC III 993–1040*). But the angel Gabriel spoke the truth to Mary and, by contrast, he was not weaving a ‘garment of shame’ but ‘a garment of glory’ to clothe the stripped and naked Adam/humanity (*SMS 733,4/FHI 278*).

2. Mary and the Mysteries of Incarnation

Mary’s faithful cooperation in the mystery of incarnation made her the most successful human being in realizing the divine economy of salvation in the new dispensation. As a result she became instrumental in the fulfillment of the types and symbols of the Old Testament and a model for all Christians and the whole Church.

2.1. Mary’s Humility and the Mystery of Incarnation

Mary’s humility is a typical model for all humans. Aphrahat clarifies that magnificence and exaltedness belongs to the divinity and divine elements. But humility is the most suitable aspect of humans (Dem IX, 6). The fear of God in humans should make them humble with all the fruits emerging from humility (Dem IX,4). It was this humility in Mary that prepared her for the perfect obedience to the Word (instruction) of God. Aphrahat describes elaborately:

The humble are the sons of the Exalted One and the brothers of Christ, who when he was announced came to us on account of peace. Mary received him because of her humility. For when Gabriel announced to the blessed Mary, he said to her as follows, “Peace to you, blessed among women” (Lk 1:28). Gabriel carried the peace and brought the Blessed Fruit; the beloved child was sown in Mary. She praised and magnified the Lord who was pleased with the humility of his maid-servant; however he was not pleased with the proud and the exalted ones. The Exalted One lifted up all the humble

(Lk 1:48, 51-52; Dem IX,5)⁵.

It was such a humble receptivity of Mary that made the Word assume body and dwell with all (Jn 1:14). Again it is through that assumed body He made all raise up and sit with Him in heaven (Dem VI,10). The body received from Mary is the beginning of human resurrection through liberation from slavery. Moreover, the received body is made exalted in glory as a gift, pledge (as a hostage). Such an exalted body is far greater, more glorious than the enfeebled and fallen Adam (Dem XXIII,50,51).

2.2. The Virginity of Mary and the Birth of Christ

According to Syriac theological approaches all divine-human engagements could not be handled through rational norms and conceptual terms. There are certain mysteries that need suprarational approaches made possible through analogies and symbols of the natural world and scriptural types. The virginal conception of Mary has to be seen in a suprarational way. It was through the hearing of the Word that Mary conceived. In a contrasting comparison Ephrem writes:

Just as from the small womb of Eve's ear
death entered and was poured out,
so through a new ear, that was Mary's,
Life entered and was poured out

(*On the Church*, 49:7)⁶.

Narsai explains the same with other imageries with biblical connotations:

'New tidings of Gabriel sowed in the ears of Mary'.

(Narsai, *Homily on Nativity*, 179)⁷.

Without the pigments of human seed, He depicted him in the womb.

(Narsai, *Homily on Nativity*, 179)⁸.

Mary is the mother of the Second Adam, not of the (Divine) Essence;

And like the earth, she has also given birth

without intercourse.

....

By Mary, He abrogated that word (spoken) in the ears of Eve;

There, death; and here, a life that gives life to the universe.

In the ears of Eve, the rebel sowed the bitterness of death;

and in the ears of Mary, a vigilant one proclaimed a hymn of thanksgiving.

In the prison of birth pangs, He confined Eve;

and by (His) blessings to Mary, He set aside (His) rebuke.

(Narsai, *Homily on the Nativity*, 455-456; 463-468)⁹.

Like light that falls into the eye and it sees, the Word came to the womb of Mary and she conceived (cf. *On Faith*, 73:15; 36:2). It was the conception of Mary that opened the way to Paradise (cf. CH 26:6; Nat 5:20). By incarnation humanity became sealed with divinity.

Today the Deity imprinted itself on humanity, so that humanity might also cut into the seal of Deity (*Nativity*, 1: 99)¹⁰.

The sealed womb and the sealed tomb were all working according to the plan unknown to the human intellect (cf. Nat 10:2-10; 12:2-3).

The birth of the Son from the Father is eternal. The Son has a second birth from Mary, the 'Daughter of David'. 'The Fashioner of babes' became born corporeally as an overflow of divine mercy on Adam (*SMS 759,9/FH I 828*; *SMS 725,15-18/FH I 117-120*). The young girl carried the Lord of kings and ascended to Ephrathah and as he recognized his own, the town of David, he entered and dwelt in it. The Fashioner of Babes¹¹ himself was born. The 'young ewe'¹² gave birth to the Lion's Whelp¹³ (*SMS 759,16/FH I 835*), the young dove gave birth to the young Eagle, and the beloved heifer to the Fatted Ox¹⁴ (*SMS 759,21/FH I 840*) for the sacrifice on behalf of sinners. The Begetter of Babes became

begotten corporeally, yet the seal of virginity remained intact. His birth is a wonder as it is divine and human. He is from the divine essence and from humanity, Son of the Majesty and of Mary. The knees of Mary carried the Valiant One, the Bearer of creation¹⁵. Here is the new scene, the Sun in the manger, the Fire girded round in swaddling clothes, the Flame sucking milk and the virgin Mary carrying the Old Child¹⁶. The field that gives a heap of corn without any sower is the young girl who gives birth. The mystery of the Son is beyond words and discourses. Amidst all these ‘the learned’ swim as in a sea. In fact one is able neither to be silent nor to speak of this marvel (*SMS 793,3–794,3/FH III 55–76*).

2.3. Mary’s Free Ascent to the Plan of Incarnation and Redemption (Nat 5:20)

In the Nativity the Son is seen dwelling in Mary while not departing from his Father. The Son remains hidden and revealed at the same time. Jacob of Serugh argues on the basis of the scriptural revelation that heaven is the throne of the Son and earth his footstool (Is 66:1), so whither has he migrated (*SMS 726,8/FH I 132*). Jacob of Serugh describes the mystery of the Son’s Incarnation:

He manifested himself from the Father and Mary was illumined from His fullness.
 The Flash of Light descended but did not cut off His root from His emissary.
 He dwelt in the pure woman while remaining glorious in the bosom of His Father.
 He had entered into the womb but heaven was filled with His glory.
 He shone forth in the young girl but his light was bright over the chariot.
 In the womb is His conception but the wings of the watchers are set on fire from Him.
 He is totally in Mary and He is fully in His Father and He is in all.
 He stirs the Cherubim, He is clothed with the members [of the body], He is found with all.

(*SMS 740,12–741,8/FH I 431–438*)¹⁷

God in his mercy performed a great wonder in the “New Sign” at the nativity of his Son who came to redeem the world through his feebleness. The eternal Son came to a second birth¹⁸ according to the flesh from the Daughter of David. The nativity of the Son is the overflowing of the Father’s compassion upon Adam in order to bring him back to Eden¹⁹ which he had lost. So the Word was sent to the womb of the Virgin and from there emerged the revelation full of wonder:

The compassion of the Father that is with Him eternally,
 welled up over Adam so that he should return to Eden which he had lost.
 And the Father sent His Word to the womb of the virgin
 and it went out with the revelation that is full of wonder to the world.

(*SMS 794,14–17/FH III 87–90*)²⁰

The words of Isaiah became fulfilled. The plant from the thirsty earth (Is 11:1), Mary, not sown or planted, has shot up. A young girl gave birth in her virginity to the Light, the great Sun of righteousness that has overthrown darkness. The Offspring that has come out openly cannot be explained clearly. He is a ‘Marvel’ as Isaiah has called him (Is 9:6) and nothing beyond that could be said, because everything regarding him is a marvel (*SMS 800,19–801,15/FH III 215–232*). By the fact that the story of Immanuel is a marvel, it is beyond human explanation.

The journey of Christ began with his birth from the virgin. In the context of the Nativity of the Son, after having learned and became convinced of the truth, Mary gives testimonies regarding the road of virgin-birth of the Son from the Nature (*SMS 750,10–19/FH I 639–648*) and the Scriptures (*SMS 750,20–751,3/FH I 649–654*). She points out how the various wombs of Nature gave birth without union

of bodies so as to serve as types of the road of the Son. Hence, Mary speaks to Joseph in a dramatic dialogue setting within the structure of a homily:

Mary said: “If you seek testimony for my words it is easy for you to hear both from Nature and from the Scripture.

Who was united [in marriage] to the virgin earth that gave birth to Adam (Gen 2:7), and even Adam, with whom was he joined for the birth of Eve (Gen 2:20–23)?

Who was united [in marriage] with the tree when it gave birth to the lamb (Gen 22:13), or who knew the rock when it gave birth to rivers (Ex 17:5–7)

By what spirit did the staff sprout forth in an unusual manner²¹ (Num 17:8; Heb 9:4), or by what marital union did a lifeless jawbone bring out water (Judg 15:15–19)?

In these wombs who has generated these offsprings, for, is this alone, that which happened in me, untrue?”

(SMS 750,10–19/FH I 639–648)²²

Elizabeth, the daughter of Levites, became filled with the Holy Spirit and sang praises to the mysteries that came to pass through Mary, the Daughter of David

(SMS 743,21–745,5/FH I 503–530).

As though on an eye that Light settled in Mary; It polished her mind, clarified her thought and made pure her understanding, causing her virginity to shine²³.

(*On the Church*, 36:2)

He sprinkled dew and life-giving rain

On Mary, the thirsty earth.

Like a seed of wheat He fell again to Sheol

To spring up as a sheaf, as the new Bread.

Blessed is His offering!

(*On Resurrection*, 1:3)²⁴.

The Light that settled in Mary enlightened and purified her. The seed that fell into her came up as the new Bread. All those who partake of the new Bread would be transformed as Mary herself got transformed in her relationship with the Word in the incarnation. Incarnation is an imprinting of God to the creation like a seal (Nat 1:97–99; 2:21; 3:5, 17).

3. Mary and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Humanity and in the World

In the total economy of salvation one finds several levels of the indwelling of the Spirit beginning with creation as the Spirit hovered over the waters and thus emerged the created world.

3.1. Indwelling of the Spirit in Mary

In the progress of the history of salvation there was the indwelling of the Spirit on the patriarchs, kings and prophets as well as selected people like Samson, Job and others. They all depict the indwelling of the Spirit for the realization of salvific activities in the history of humanity. All such indwellings could be seen as preparatory stages for the decisive indwelling of the Spirit in Mary that inaugurates the incarnate ministry of the Son.

Narsai writes regarding the divine indwelling in Mary:

The vigilant one (Gabriel) announced a new message in ‘the ears of flesh’.

In the sign of peace, He sowed His (good) pleasure in a land of flesh,

In order to uproot error and sow hope for those without hope.

(A greeting of) peace the vigilant one gave Mary at the beginning of his words,

In order to loosen the bonds of that condemnatory sentence (imposed in Paradise).

Peace He mingled (together) with grace and gave (it) to the pure one,

In order to wash away the bitterness that the evil one sowed in the ears of Eve.

“Peace to you, Mary, kinswoman of Eve, the mother of death,
 Because the fruit that (will come forth) from you (will) loosen the bonds of mortality!
 Peace to you, woman, palace of flesh that (is to become) an edifice for a man,
 Because the King has willed to establish His image within your limbs!
 By the power of the Spirit, He has willed to construct a temple in your womb,
 So that it might become (His) dwelling place and He might dwell therein through (His) good pleasure.
 Without the pigments (of human seed), He depicts an image on the tablet of your body,
 So that He might thereby signify the authority of His hidden Offspring.

(Narsai, *Homily on the Nativity*, 105-118)²⁵.
 New tidings Gabriel sowed in the ears of Mary, (announcing) a new conception not according to the usual way from human seed.
 The pure virgin carried the fruit which the (angel’s) voice had sowed;
 And the Spirit sounded on the harp of her soul a hymn of praise.
 A hymn of confession she offered as a requital for her new conception, (saying):
 “Blessed is He Who chose a dwelling place for His love within my limbs!
 Worthy of praise from all mouths is the Fashioner of the universe,
 Because by my humility He has willed to exalt the dust of Adam”!

(Narsai, *Homily on the Nativity*, 189-196)²⁶.

Mary’s conception (Lk 1:35) and birth giving are to be seen in close connection to the biblical episodes of overshadowing (*aggen*) of the Spirit. Later this term became a Syriac technical term to denote the activities of the Spirit in the salvific economy, liturgical epiclesis, overshadowing of the Spirit in Christians and the ‘birth-giving’. Another Syriac term used to denote the working of the Spirit

is *shra* (take up residence, reside) for indicating the divine indwelling in human persons and in the history of salvation (cf. Jn 1:14)²⁷. In the month of Nisan the Lord resided in Mary and a temple was built for the residence of the Lord. Ephrem describes, “In Nisan the Lord of thunder in His mercy modified His might, descended and took up residence in Mary’s womb” (*Resurrection* 4:10).

‘Who has gathered up water in a veil’

(Prov 30:4)

Here is a fountain in a veil – Mary’s bosom.
 And your maidservants receive, within a veil,
 The drop of salvation from Salvation’s cup

.....
 See, Fire and Spirit are in the womb of her who bore You,
 See, Fire and Spirit are in the river in which You were baptized.
 Fire and Spirit are in our baptismal font,
 In the Bread and Cup are Fire and Holy Spirit
 (*On Faith*, 10:15, 17)²⁸.

Mary is a model for an ideal pattern of divine-human relationships. Her life was a realization of all promises envisaged through her. Such an attainment set her as the model for all human beings. This sets her in contrast with Eve who failed to attain the given promises. Thus Mary became a model and reality of the realized eschatological state. By her human cooperation to the divine economy what has been willed by God has been made realized and that inaugurated the realized eschatology.

3.2. Mary and the Christian

In the divine economy of salvation, humanity is given the choice. There is the possibility of the meritorious gaining of the promise of eternal life by faith and obedience. At the same time, there can be foolish disobedience and losing of the life, leading to mortality. Proper exercise of free will and obedience is the life giving path. It was such a path chosen by Mary that made her a model for all and as the mother of all redeemed. Mary is a perfect model for all

Christians in their divine-human engagements. As the Word came to Mary through the angel she overcame her doubts and accepted the mission of giving birth to the Word. This has to be seen in contrast to the foolish behaviour of Eve before the ‘tempter’ and the culpable doubting of Zachariah in the holy of the holies of the temple. She gave birth to the Word and accompanied the Incarnate Son till the end of his physical ministry. Even beyond she remained with Apostles, the ‘body of the Church’, on the day of the Pentecost and further. All through out the history of salvation the common factor is the different modes of Word becoming incarnate in the Old and New Testaments. The risen Lord gave the power of the Word (command) and the promised the Holy Spirit apart from his continued presence with all who believe in him (Mt 28:20). In this process of Word coming down from the Father and becoming flesh, according to the stages of the history of salvation, Mary’s role is highlighted by the Syriac Fathers. Ephrem writes:

The Word came forth from the Father’s womb,
He put on the body in another womb;
From one womb to another did He proceed,
And chaste wombs are filled with Him.
Blessed is He who has resided in us
*(On Resurrection, 1:7)*²⁹.

Many ‘wombs’ of created Nature and Scriptures by their symbols gave birth to the Son as revelation to the world. Ephrem clarifies:

The creation conceived His symbols; Mary
conceived His limbs.
Therefore many wombs brought forth the Only-
Begotten.
The belly brought Him forth by travail,
and the creation also brought him forth by
symbols *(Virginity, 6:7-8)*.³⁰

Jacob of Serugh calls Mary, ‘the Believing Woman’ (cf. Lk 1:45) who committed herself to the message of the angel in contrast with Zachariah who refused to believe the word of the angel (Lk 1:20) and suffered punishment (cf. SMS 736,9-10/FHI, 345-

46)³¹. When a believing Christian does something out of his faith that would become an incarnation of the Word he would become a full fledged Christian witness to the world.

3.3. Mary, Eucharist and the Church

Mary’s obedient life is a model of journeying with faith and obedience from the promised (primordial) paradise to the realized (eschatological) paradise. Through Eve’s hearing and disobedience death entered. But Mary’s hearing and obedience brought out life to the whole humanity. An antithetical parallelism is seen between the fruits gained by Eve and Mary. ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed’ (Gen 3:15), refers to Mary and her seed, Christ. The fruit of Eden spread disease and death; but Christ, his body, the Eucharist, spread life. The tree of Eden symbolized the Cross. The tree of paradise was for the fall and the wood of the Cross was for salvation/ life. We thus find here the relationship between Eden, Eve, Egypt, Mary, Cenacle, Eucharist and the Church. Ephrem explains the deeper significations and relationships so vividly and beautifully in mere four lines:

The Church gave us the living bread
for that unleavened bread which Egypt gave
Mary gave us the bread of refreshment
for the bread of weariness which Eve gave
*(Unleavened Bread 6:6,7)*³².

The unseen transformation taking place in a Christian through faith in Christ and the Eucharistic participation is explained by Ephrem. :

The two things you asked, we have by Your birth.
You put on our visible body; let us put on Your
hidden power.
Our body became Your garment, Your Spirit
became our robe.
Blessed is He who was adorned and adorned
us ! *(Nativity, 22:39)*.³³

Behold Your image is portrayed with the blood
of the grapes
Upon the bread and portrayed upon the heart
By the finger of love with the pigments of faith.
Blessed is He who made graven images pass
way by His true image (*Nativity*, 16:7).¹

When a Christian lives as a member of the Church, the mystical body of Christ, and partakes in the Eucharist, it results in the continued incarnation of the Word and salvation in the world. It is in the final act of Christ on the Cross, i.e., the mutual entrusting of Mary and John, the beloved disciple, that Mary becomes mother to all the faithful and all faithful disciples of Christ become sons of the Virgin Mary.

Conclusion

In Syriac Christianity theological approaches and conceptions go beyond rational and juridical norms in order to embrace the totality of the faith-horizon through the inspiration of the biblical history and Christian traditions. The mystery of the Blessed Virgin Mary is thus described from a salvation historical background, incorporating many biblical episodes. The totality of the history of salvation is the broader picture in which Mary's role is discovered with the proper Christocentric vision of the salvific history. The all pervading net-work of divine-human engagements under the inspiration and indwelling of the Holy Spirit is another mode of rediscovering and describing the role of Mary. In the Syriac vision Mary's role is seen as a perfect functionary in the context of the corporate relationship between the old Adam and the New Adam; old Israel and the new Israel, the Church; the mystical body of Christ, the Church and the individual Christians. Thus Mary is rather seen as a perfect representative of humanity than a mere individual, who by her faith and obedience became an animating mystery to the Church and to Christians of all ages.

Some abbreviations: Dem= Demonstrations of Aphrahat; FH = T. Kollamparampil, Jacob of

Serugh: Select Festal Homilies, Rome/Bangalore, 1997; HS = *Homiliae selectae Mar Jacobi Sarugensis*, Vols I–V, ed. P. Bedjan, Paris/Leipzig, 1905–1910; Cf. Also a few published Fascicles from Texts from Christian Late Antiquity, on *The Metrical Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarugh*, in bilingual edition with ET, General Editor, Sebastian P. Brock, Gorgias Press, NJ, USA, 2008; QHC = *Quatre Homélie Métriques sur La Création*, ed. K. Alwan. CSCO, 508/9 (syri 214/5); SHF = *Jacques de Saroug: Six Homélie Festales en Prose*, ed. F. Rilliet, PO 43; SMS = *S. Martyrii, qui et Saldona, quae supersunt omnia*, ed. P. Bedjan. Paris, 1902.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cf. K. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 32–33.
- 2 S. Brock & G. Kiraz, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems* (Provo, Utah, 2006) 66–67.
- 3 Cf. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis*, 215–24.
- 4 S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 89–90.
- 5 K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, 206.
- 6 S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 33.
- 7 F.G. McLeod, PO, XL, *Narsai's Metrical Homilies*, 49.
- 8 F.G. McLeod, PO, XL, *Narsai's Metrical Homilies*, 49.
- 9 F.G. McLeod, PO, XL, *Narsai's Metrical Homilies*, 67.
- 10 K. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 74.
- 11 'Fashioner of Babes' is a symbolic title of Christ that stresses the role of the Son in creation and in the continued creation as well as in the procreation of human beings (cf. SMS 733,9. 743,7. 759,9/FHI 283, 489, 828; SMS 807,5/FH III 350; HS V 447,16/FH V 3). For Jacob's use of this and other titles of Christ in his festal homilies see the section on 'Titles of Christ, the Saviour' in chapter four (section B,3,b).
- 12 'Young ewe', 'young dove', and 'beloved heifer' are significant epithets of Mary in the context of her virginal conception of the eternal Son, the heir of the Kingdom of David, the powerful redeemer and the sacrificial offering for the redemption of the world (cf. SMS 747,8–21/FH I 575–580).
- 13 'Lion's Whelp' is a title of Christ based on the 'blessings of Jacob' (cf. Gen 49:9) referring to the tribe of Judah from which the kingship and the ruler's staff

- would not leave, which have their fulfilment in Christ (cf. *SMS* 743,13. 745,16. 759,16/*FHI* 495, 541, 835; *HS V* 456,12. 463,4/*FHV* 185, 322; *HS I* 191,19/*FH VI* 502; *HS II* 611,18. 615,6/*FH XIII* 15, 83).
- 14 ‘Fatted Ox’ is a symbolic title of Christ in the OT background of the sacrifices of expiation in Lev 9. Christ is the ‘Fatted Ox’ offered for the redemption of the whole world.
- 15 These are a few symbolic titles of Christ depicting the role of the Son in the creation and in the sustenance (cf. *SMS* 793,9/*FH III* 61). Jacob calls Christ ‘the Power of the Father’ in line with 1 Cor 1:24. It is through the Son the Father created the world. See the section on ‘Titles of Christ, the Saviour’ in chapter four (section B,3,b) above; cf. Bou Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, Tome I, 18–20.
- 16 ‘Old Child’ is a title of Christ with reference to the eternal existence of the Son who is older and younger than Mary. In its symbolic content this title is intimately related to the title of Christ, ‘the Ancient of Days’ (cf. *HS V* 459,11–461,7/*FHV* 245–282).
- 17 T. Kollamparmpil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 61.
- 18 Only the Father knows about the hidden first birth of the Son in eternity. The latter birth according to the flesh from the Daughter of David is made manifest due to the divine compassion (cf. *SMS* 723,4–724,10/*FHI* 63–90).
- 19 Adam was expelled from Eden after the transgression of the commandment as a thief (cf. *QHC III* 1015) who dared to grab divinity in an unworthy manner. But God in his judgement has mercifully mixed his love as he wished to make Adam return to Eden, his heritage (cf. *QHC III* 1015–1080).
- 20 T. Kollamparmpil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 114.
- 21 Lit: ‘outside the custom’.
- 22 T. Kollamparmpil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, 70-71.
- 23 S. Brock & G. Kiraz, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems* (Provo, Utah, 2006), 71.
- 24 S. Brock & G. Kiraz, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems* (Provo, Utah, 2006), 83.
- 25 F.G. McLeod, PO, XL, *Narsai’s Metrical Homilies*, 45.
- 26 F.G. McLeod, PO, XL, *Narsai’s Metrical Homilies*, 49.
- 27 Cf. S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 110-14, for the technical details of *aggen* and *shra*.
- 28 S. Brock & G. Kiraz, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems* (Provo, Utah, 2006), 209, 211.
- 29 S. Brock & G. Kiraz, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems* (Provo, Utah, 2006), 85.
- 30 K. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 290.
- 31 Cf. T. Kollamparmpil, *Jacob of Serugh, Select Festal Homilies*, 57; cf. *CECI*, 11-17; *HFid* 9:8-10.
- 32 Murray R., *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 145.
- 33 K. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 185.
- 34 K. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 150.

18

Theology of Priesthood in the East Syrian Tradition a Re-Reading

Dr James Palackal

Introduction

In the catholic understanding, priesthood, eucharist and the Church are realities which are intimately and existentially related to each other. The doctrinal foundations of the Church laid down, especially, in the first three centuries of Christian existence bear ample testimony to this fact. The East Syrian Ecclesial Tradition is a true witness to the profound relationship between this triad, emphasizing the primacy of the role of ministerial priesthood (*Kahnuta*) in the life and mission of the church.

The church of the St. Thomas Christians in India, according to their living and long standing tradition, received the “Apostle’s hand of priesthood”¹, directly from the apostle St Thomas. The Malabar tradition about the apostolate of St Thomas in India bears testimony to it. All available information from the later centuries, however, point out that the order of priesthood in the Malabar Church, after the apostolic period, was kept alive

through her relationship with the Church of the East. The ministry of priesthood in the Malabar Church, exercised through the office of the Metropolitan, Archdeacon, priests and deacons, was at the very heart of the life and mission of this church which can be succinctly termed as ‘Law of Thomas’ or *Mar Thoma Margam*.²

The scope of this article is limited. It is an attempt to revisit the theological foundations of the order of priesthood as exercised in the Malabar Church from liturgical, theological and canonical perspectives. The study focuses attention on the primacy of priesthood in the Chaldean or East Syrian Ecclesial Tradition³, to which the Syro-Malabar Church belongs, where, priesthood is understood as continuing and making present the very ministry of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the church. Therefore, emphasis is given (only) to the christological, pneumatological and ecclesial dimensions of priesthood; the historical side of the question studied elsewhere.

1. Primacy of Priesthood in the Chaldean Ecclesial Tradition

In the Chaldean Ecclesial Tradition, priesthood is understood as an existential principle of the Church; it is at the very center of the life and mission of the Church. This Tradition accords a pride of place to priesthood among the mysteries (*raze*) of the Church and holds it in high esteem and veneration. The principal reason, as stated above, is the fact that it continues and makes present the very same ministry of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Church. The foundational character and the high esteem for the priesthood are abundantly clear in the liturgical, canonical and theological sources of this Ecclesial Tradition.

For instance, Narsai exhorts the priest: “Glorious is Gabriel, and mighty is Michael, as their name testifies: yet every moment they are bowed down under the mystery which is delivered into thy hand... With love they bow beneath the Will that is concealed in thy mysteries; and they give honour to thee for the office that is administered by thee... Let us marvel every moment at the exceeding greatness of thine order”.⁴ The Chaldean Pontifical also echoes the teachings of Narsai and compares the ministry of priesthood with that of the heavenly hosts and places it above their ministry: glorious is Gabriel, great is Michael, as their names testify, but when compared to priesthood, their rank is much inferior.⁵ The reason for the exalted position of the priest lies in his ministerial power and mission to remit sins, administer baptism and offer the Eucharistic sacrifice which set him to continue the very ministry of Christ and the Spirit.

Priesthood has a foundational character in this Tradition because every sacramental action in the Church is performed and perfected through the intervention of the priestly ministry.⁶ For instance, the *Syriac Didascalia* testifies that the order of priesthood is indispensable in the Church for the laying on of hands, for the celebration of the Eucharist, of baptism, and for the administration of

unction. East Syrian writers and commentators also underscore the primacy and foundational nature of priesthood as it is necessary to administer other mysteries.⁷ Theodore of Mopsuestia also understands priesthood as a foundational Mystery.⁸ Narsai discusses the mysteries of the church and priesthood as basic and foundational mysteries in his memre 21, 22 and 32 before discussing baptism and eucharist.⁹ In the 17th homily, which is generally attributed to Narsai,¹⁰ it is said: “The Mysteries of the Church are not celebrated without a priest, for the Holy Spirit has not permitted (any other) to celebrate them”.¹¹ Both Abdisho and Timothy II, while giving the list of the sacraments (*raze*), treat priesthood first to show its precedence over other mysteries.¹²

2. Uniqueness and Identity of Christian Priesthood: Christological Dimensions

The letter to the Hebrews, speaking about the priesthood of Christ, underlines the uniqueness of Christian priesthood by emphasizing that there is only ‘one’ priest in the New Testament in opposition to the ‘many’ priests of the Old Testament (Hb 7: 23); that the sacrifice of the New Testament is a ‘once for all’ (*ephapax*) sacrifice instead of the ‘many’ sacrifices of the Old Law (Hb 7:27), and that there is only ‘one’ victim, Christ, in the New Testament (Hb 7: 27) in comparison to the ‘many’ in the Old Law (Hb 10: 11-12). The uniqueness of Christian priesthood, therefore, cannot be understood apart from the mystery of Christ and, specifically, the paschal mysteries through which human redemption is achieved. In other words, Christian priesthood is the prolongation of the priesthood of Christ in activity, efficacy and identity.¹³

The East Syrian tradition establishes, as expressed in its Pontifical, the uniqueness and identity of Christian priesthood by presenting Christ as the supreme pontiff of our faith who has sanctified us

through his pontificate and also by requesting Christ, the only priest of the New Testament, to elect the candidate to his priesthood at the rite of ordination: “crown him with the diadem of glorious and holy priesthood”.¹⁴ The eternal character and uniqueness of the priesthood of Christ is further brought out (Hb 7: 1-28) in the Pontifical by comparing it with the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament: “O Christ, Pontiff of justice, at the dawn of whose revelation the types and figures disappeared, and the priesthood of the house of Aaron serving symbols and likeness stopped, and your spiritual priesthood remitting sins and debts began”.¹⁵ The Pontifical underlines the superiority of the spiritual priesthood of Christ by stating that it has the power to forgive sins in contrast to the priesthood of Aaron which did not have the power to wipe away sins.¹⁶ Similarly, the text of the *Qurbana* of the Syro-Malabar Church also brings out the uniqueness and unicity of the priesthood of Christ in and through the repeated prayer requests of the celebrant which is to be always in the singular even when there are many concelebrants.¹⁷ In the East Syrian Tradition, therefore, the priesthood of Christ, which is the real, true, one, permanent and spiritual priesthood, is seen as prefigured and symbolized by the priesthood of the Old Testament. They are inter-related as ‘shadow’ and ‘reality’; ‘promise’ and ‘fulfillment’.

2.1. Jesus, the High Priest

The Christological dimension of Christian priesthood is emphasized in the East Syrian Tradition by presenting Jesus as the High Priest. Theodore of Mopsuestia projects Jesus as our High Priest who became the minister of the sanctuary and true tabernacle, that through them He might manifest the heavenly things. Exposing the theology of priesthood in the book of Hebrews, Theodore explains that Jesus “performs a real high priesthood and offers to God no other sacrifice than himself ... for all”.¹⁸ Jesus, who was obedient unto death, became our

High priest through his saving death and resurrection and continues his ministry as High priest for our sake in heaven: Jesus “performs the priestly service in heaven and not on earth, because He died, rose, ascended into heaven in order to raise us all up and cause us to ascend into heaven”.¹⁹

The high priests of the Old Testament symbolically entered the holy of holies once a year while Christ our High Priest really entered heaven and through him the favour of entering heaven was bestowed upon us. According to Theodore, the work of the high priest is that he should draw near to God first and then after him and through him the rest should draw near.²⁰ In contrast to the high priests of the Old Law, who were serving the shadow of heavenly things, Jesus is the “minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which God pitched and not man”.²¹ Christ, our High Priest, offering himself in sacrifice, sanctified and redeemed our race through his own blood.

The Chaldean Pontifical, taking cue from the Anonymous Author and *Liber Patrum*, elegantly presents Christ as the chief priest and arche-type in all different grades of the order of Christian priesthood:

Christ was lector when he took up the book and read in the synagogue, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Lk 4:16). He was sub-deacon when he made a scourge of little cords and drove out all who were buying and selling in the temple (Mt 21:12f; Jn 2:15); He exercised his powers as deacon when, having taken a towel, he girded himself, poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples (Jn 13:4ff); Christ exercised these orders fulfilling the ancient Testament. He exercised the presbyterate when he divided His Body and Blood to his disciples (Mt 26:26ff): He was periodont when he said to his disciples: “peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” (Jn 14:27). He exercised his

powers as chorbishop when he said to his disciples in prayer: “Father, sanctify them in thy truth” (Jn 17:17); Christ was bishop when he rose from the sepulcher and came to the disciples and said: “All power is given to me in heaven and on earth” (Mt 28:18), and when He breathed on the disciples and said: “receive the Holy Spirit: whose sins you remit, they shall be remitted” (Jn 20:22-23). He exercised the grade of metropolitan when he showed himself at the sea of Tiberias and said to Cepha: feed my lambs, feed my sheep (Jn 21:15-17). He acted as Catholicos when raising the hands he blessed the disciples and separating himself from them he ascended into heaven (Lk 24: 50-51); he exercised his powers of patriarch when he sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles in the cenacle (Act 2:1-4).²²

2.2. Priesthood as Continuing the Ministry of Christ

East Syrian theological and liturgical sources understand priest as the sacrament of Christ because he represents Christ, the eternal High Priest. In the liturgical celebration, the priest represents Christ, the true offerer, the true victim and the head of the mystical body.²³ Theodore reiterates the inevitable and necessary role of the ministers in the Church who function as the figure of Christ, the High Priest: “it follows that the role of a high priest must [needs] be filled, and it is found in those who are appointed for the service of these symbols”.²⁴ Through the priest the faithful are able to visualize Christ in their minds and in him they see the One who saved them from the tyranny of sin by the sacrifice on the cross. Pointing to the sacramentality of the order of priesthood *Syriac Didascalia* says that they are the types of those things heavenly.²⁵ According to this document, the bishop represents God the Father and those in the presbyterate represent the apostles. In the exposition of Narsai, “The priest who is selected to be celebrating this

sacrifice, bears in himself the image of our Lord in that hour”.²⁶ Because the priest represents Christ, the priesthood of the Church continues the very same ministry of Christ and it is placed above the ministry of angels.²⁷ The prophetic, priestly and kingly ministry of Christ is continued in the Church principally through the ministry of priesthood.

2.2.1. Teaching Ministry

Christ has received all authority from his Father, and, instituting the college of the apostles and the order of priesthood, passed on this authority to them by the gift of the Holy Spirit.²⁸ The priesthood, continuing the same ministry of Christ and the apostles, is the order of teaching that removes the chaos of ignorance in the Church. Jesus, the light of the world, showed the primacy of priesthood in the Church by comparing it with the salt of the earth, which brings genuine taste, and with the light of the world, which dispels the darkness of error, through its teaching office.²⁹ As Narsai points out, through their ministry of the word and sacraments, the priests uproot error and sow the truth of the name of the creator.³⁰ The *onita d-qanke* of the third Friday after Epiphany acclaims the apostles as pillars of the Church because they taught the true faith.³¹ The synod of Isoyab I (585) understands the priest as the teacher of the community of the faithful.³² Bishops, as teachers of faith par excellence, and priests are called to be teachers of the true catholic faith without blemish.³³ They are, therefore, to speak at all times the correct word of faith in teaching the community so that their hearers may know the truth of Christianity and hold on to it firmly.³⁴ Their teaching office in the Church derives from the need of the faithful for correction and also from the necessity of renewal in the Church. The variety and extent of human weakness demands that those who are designated by divine grace for the direction of souls should take care to effect helpful corrections both orally and in writing in those matters which increase recollection of the spirit.³⁵ The methods which are to be employed in this teaching office in the Church are enumerated by Patriarch

Isoyab I (581-595) in his letter to the bishop Yaqob of the island of Darrai: instruction, reproof and correction.³⁶

2.2.2. *Shepherding Ministry*

Christ's leadership ministry is exercised by the priesthood in the shepherding or guiding of the people of God.³⁷ For Aphrahat, the priest is the image of Christ the good shepherd and is set over the flock to give the sheep the food of life. He exhorts the pastors of the Church to imitate Christ the good shepherd, who "brought near the distant, brought back the strayed, visited the sick, strengthened the weak, bound up the broken and kept the fatlings (Ez. 34:2-4). He handed over himself for the sake of the sheep".³⁸ According to Narsai, the priest is a guide who shows the travelers the way³⁹ and he addresses the priests as the "shepherds of the reasonable sheep"⁴⁰ of Christ. "His Lord has given him [priest] reasonable sheep to control, that he may pasture them in the living meadows of spiritual words".⁴¹ The synod of Mar Aba (544 AD) understands the ministry of priesthood, which holds the keys of the Kingdom, in terms of guiding and directing "the rational flock of Christ".⁴² As shepherds of the flock and as those who hold the keys of the Kingdom, they have to apply themselves heart and soul to the ministry of priesthood and have at heart the Church's canons and definitions of faith.⁴³ The guiding function of priesthood in the Church is also brought out by the imagery of a pilot, who with prudence and diligence, brings the ship through storm and tempest to the harbour of tranquility.⁴⁴

2.2.3 *Sanctifying Ministry*

The order of priesthood shares in the sanctifying work of Christ which is primarily liturgical in character. In the sanctifying ministry, the priest acts as the mediator between God and man⁴⁵, because it is through the mediation of priesthood that heavenly gifts are given to the children of the Church.⁴⁶ As mediators, the priests are called to trade with the

possessions of spiritual life.⁴⁷ The priests are called to distribute the gifts and graces of God authoritatively to the people of God. In the language of the Qurbana, priests are appointed in the Church "to administer spiritual help to the faithful".⁴⁸ The first prayer of the imposition of hands for priestly ordination recounts the 'spiritual help' given to the faithful and clearly mentions that this ministry is a ministry in the Church and for the Church.⁴⁹ They are called to lay their hands on the sick, to minister at the holy altar, to offer up oblations of prayers and sacrifices of praise in the Church, to consecrate the sin-forgiving bosom of holy baptism and to absolve and to enrich the children of the holy Catholic Church.⁵⁰ Christ has entrusted to the priests of the Church the medicine of penance which cures the wounds of sin.⁵¹ By performing these spiritual functions the priest reconciles man with God and effects the sanctification of the community. According to Narsai, the very purpose of the establishment of priesthood on earth is "for the forgiveness of iniquity ... among mortals",⁵² for mortal man is in need of pardon every hour. By participating in the Body and Blood of the Lord in the Eucharist, the faithful "receive from it the medicine that is meet for our bruises"⁵³ caused by sin. In the opinion of Patriarch Timothy II, Christ has established priesthood to grant sinners real forgiveness of sins.⁵⁴ The synod of Isoyab I (587 AD) sees priesthood as participating in the ministry and mission of Christ by appeasing God and by reconciling and teaching God's people.⁵⁵

The sacramental character of the priest obliges him to be holy like the High priest whom he represents and whose mysteries he celebrates: "Priests He [Christ] has chosen for it [the mysteries of Baptism and Eucharist] that they may minister therein holily and instead of sacrifices offer the sacrifice of the Mystery of His Son".⁵⁶ Narsai also points out the quality of life that is expected of one in priesthood: "When the conduct of a priest is good, it is a gain to the body of the Church, and when the conduct of the priest is unholy, it is a loss to all".⁵⁷ An

unworthy minister will be judged and punished by the Lord for he “hast not fittingly administered the order allotted”⁵⁸ to him. The sacramentality of the priest is, therefore, intimately connected to the virtuous life of the one who represents Christ. However, the efficacy of the sacramental action is not dependent on the quality of the minister. It is provided by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes down and broods over the mysteries at the invocation of the priest, not because of the worthiness of the priest, but because of the fact that the mysteries are set on the altar by the Church through her ministers.⁵⁹

2.3. Priesthood in the Place of the Ministry of the Apostles

The East Syrian liturgical and patristic sources present the apostles as the betrothers of the engagement between Christ and the Church.⁶⁰ For instance, the period of *Qudash 'edta* speaks of the betrothal of the Church to Christ and the apostles as the betrothers.⁶¹ Ephrem also understands baptism of Jesus at Jordan as the marriage engagement of Christ with the Church and the apostles are the betrothers.

In the East Syrian Tradition, priesthood is intimately bound up with the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. In the sacrament of baptism, the priest is the betrother who mediates between Christ and the Christian, between the Church and Christ. As the agent or betrother, the priest stands in the role of the apostles.⁶² Aphrahat is also fond of this theme and while referring to those who are in the order of priesthood he says: “you are apostles, ‘betrothers’ of the bride adorned”.⁶³ Narsai, alluding to the celebration of the eucharist, says that “All the priests who are in the sanctuary bear the image of those apostles who met together at the sepulchre”.⁶⁴

According to the synod of Mar Ezekiel (576), the nobility of priesthood derives from the fact that it fills the place of the apostles and continues their ministry in the Church.⁶⁵ This

synod in canon 17 affirms that the priesthood, to which belongs everything that is great and noble, is higher and more honourable than all other orders and degrees in the Church. This synod goes so far as to regard the synods in the Church, the gathering of the bishops, the true successors of the apostles, as the “joyous feast of the Church”.⁶⁶

3. Pneumatological Dimension of Priesthood

The ministry of priesthood is seen as the very ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of priesthood and the priest is an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁷ It is “through the grace of the Holy Spirit”⁶⁸ that priesthood is established as the order of the Church. Canon 13 of the synod of Mar Ezekiel (576 AD) states that all things in the Church are regulated and established by the Holy Spirit according to order and rank for discipline and for the good of all.⁶⁹ And precisely, it is the Holy Spirit who regulates and establishes the order of priesthood in the Church.⁷⁰

The second prayer of imposition of hands, at the ordination to priesthood, reminds us that it is through the special descent of the Holy Spirit that a person is elected to the order of priesthood: “elect them with a holy election through the descent of the Holy Spirit”.⁷¹ The priest, being called to carry out the ministry of the Spirit, is elected by God through the special overshadowing or indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The rite of ordination to priesthood in the various liturgical traditions and the patristic tradition in general, are eloquent about the transformation that is brought about in the person through the imposition of hands and the descent of the Holy Spirit. For instance, Gregory of Nyssa writes: “The same power which operates in baptism and eucharist makes the priest august and to be revered, transforming him through some invisible power and grace”.⁷² Narsai even calls the priest as “the priest of the Spirit”.⁷³ Because, “it is He [the Spirit] that has made hidden power to dwell in thee and has strengthened thy

faculties... By His assistance thou hast gotten the gift to give life and thou, being earthly, holdest the treasure of spiritual things".⁷⁴

Not only the divine election but also the perfection of the candidate for the sacerdotal ministry is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is clearly seen in the prayer of the first imposition of hand: "And we all pray in his behalf, that the grace of the Holy Spirit may descend upon him and make him perfect and fully formed for the work of the sacerdotal ministry for which he is presented, through the grace and mercy of thy Only Begotten Son".⁷⁵ Although the apostles were ordained priests and given power over the Eucharist during the Last Supper (Lk 22: 19), yet, they had to wait in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4) where they were brought to perfection through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 1-13). After his ascension into heaven Jesus exercises his priestly office in heaven and the apostles, as priests, continue it on earth mystically in the power of the Spirit.⁷⁶

It is the Holy Spirit who distributes different spiritual talents and thereby establishes ranks in the priesthood through the imposition of hands. The talents are the spiritual gifts of the Spirit. Thus the deacon is given one talent for serving like the angels at the altar, the priest three talents and the bishop five talents.⁷⁷ The two additional talents received in the priesthood, with one talent of the deacon, are for the offering up of the oblation and for conferring baptism; the bishop receives two more talents in addition by virtue of which he confers the various orders in priesthood and consecrates the altar.⁷⁸

According to the 17th homily attributed to Narsai, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the priest perfects all mysteries in the Church.⁷⁹ In a similar tone Timothy II says that all the mysteries of the Church are perfected through the ministry of priesthood under the grace of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁰ The Holy Spirit comes down, sanctifies and perfects the mysteries through the mediation of the priest. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the priest to prepare

"the living sacrifice"⁸¹ of the Body and Blood of the Lord; it is through the Spirit that the priest becomes the minister of unction, "sanctifying the uncleanness of men by its holiness";⁸² through the power of the Spirit; in the mystery of baptism, the priest re-casts mortals "in the furnace of the waters and the heat of the Spirit".⁸³

By sending the Holy Spirit on his apostles, Christ made them ministers of reconciliation in the Church.⁸⁴ It is the Holy Spirit who establishes priests as the physicians of souls in the Church. Through his ministry of teaching, prayers and pardoning of sins, the priest becomes the physician of souls.⁸⁵ According to Narsai:

For the forgiveness of iniquity was the priesthood (set) among mortals; for mortal man has need every hour of pardon... Man is not able to travel in the way without stumbling; and when he stumbles he has need of mercy to heal his iniquity... In body and soul mortals lie sick with diseases of iniquity; and there is need of a physician who understands internal and external diseases... The priest is a physician for hidden and open (diseases); ... By the drug of the Spirit he purges iniquity from the mind.⁸⁶

In the East Syrian tradition, therefore, priesthood is understood as the very instrument of the Holy Spirit through which the Spirit builds up the Church as the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit. For instance, the priest is regarded in this tradition as a pen to the hidden power of the Spirit.⁸⁷ The priest is also considered as the "treasure-keeper of the treasury of the Spirit".⁸⁸ Though the priests are formed out of clay, they are entrusted with the boundless wealth of the Spirit to be distributed. They are stewards and ministers entrusted with the treasury of the Spirit to dispense for the work of the renovation of all.⁸⁹ The fruitfulness of the priestly ministry, therefore, depends on the co-operation of the priest with the Holy Spirit. Like Jesus he is called to be

“full of the Holy Spirit” (Lk 4:1) and has to carry out his ministry “filled with the power of the Spirit” (Lk 4:14). The abiding presence of the Spirit in the Church is brought to fruition in the lives of the faithful through priesthood, since it is the very ministry of the Spirit of God.

4. Ecclesial Dimension of Priesthood

The Chaldean ecclesial tradition keeps a proper balance between the christological, pneumatological and anthropological dimensions of ecclesiology. The priest, though unworthy, in his person and ministry, not only represents Christ and the Spirit but also the church because he is chosen from and for the community of believers. Narsai, in homily 32, underscores the intimate relationship between the church and priesthood. The priest is established as a “guide”, “trumpet”, “steersman”, “tongue”, “limb”, “mirror”, “head” and “shepherd” in the church. According to Narsai, a priest is a man of the church who, as a steersman, leads the church to the harbour of life:

As a limb he is chosen from the body of the sons of his race; and as the head he is commanded to direct his fellow-servants... As a tongue he interprets truth before learners; As a trumpet he cries every hour in the ears of men: ‘hear, O men, and let not go the promises’... In the ship of the Church he stands and gives warning night and day; and he keeps it from the harms of the wind of evil-doers.⁹⁰

Thus priesthood, as Vatican II teaches, shares in Christ’s ministry of unceasingly building up the Church on earth into the people of God, the Body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.⁹¹

Church is a community of those who are ‘called together’ by God (*ekklesia*) and it is, precisely, the divine call and election of a person that sets him apart for ministry in the church. Priesthood, in other words, is a ‘call’ to serve those who are ‘called together’.

The prayer for the presentation of the candidate to divine election in the rite of priestly ordination brings out this ecclesial dimension of priesthood: “We present to thee these thy servants that they may be priests elect in thy holy Church.”⁹² Priesthood, therefore, is to be understood as an order ‘in the Church’, ‘for the Church’ and priestly ministry is to be exercised ‘with the Church’.

The Church is the custodian and dispenser of the mysteries that are entrusted to her by Christ. She guards and dispenses them in the power of the Spirit through the ministry of priesthood. Therefore, priesthood is dependent on the Church. However, one is able to say, from the other side of the spectrum, that the Church is also dependent on the priesthood or is at the ‘mercy’ of the priest who invokes the Holy Spirit to come down and brood over the mysteries and on the people.⁹³ Christ has reconciled the universe with the Lord of all through the mediation of the priest and thus secured through his Church the peace and the renewal of our race. Hence the Church cannot exist without the order of priesthood and vice versa. There is, therefore, a fundamental complementarity between the nature of the Church and priesthood.⁹⁴

Because of his mystical identification with Christ, the spouse of the Church, the Pontifical alludes to the dignity of the priest as the spouse of the Church: “... adorn him with the glory of the Queen of Kings, the Catholic Church”.⁹⁵ The Church is called “Queen of Kings” and the prayer is a request to adorn the ordained with the glory of the Church and it implies the mystical espousal by which the priest becomes the spouse of the Church through ordination and thereby becomes the image of Christ.⁹⁶

4.1. Priesthood as the “Order” of the Church

The East Syrian tradition emphasizes the ecclesial dimension of priesthood by presenting it as the ‘order’ of the Church. The identity of Christian priesthood as the order of the church is derived from

the high priesthood of Christ (Hb 9: 9-11).⁹⁷ Priesthood is understood as a precious gift of Christ to his bride, the Church, through the ministry of which the Bridegroom assures her of his living and saving presence till the end of the age (Mt 28: 19). As stated above, Christ continues his saving ministry in the church through the order of priesthood as the shepherd, king and prophet. The “children of the Church”⁹⁸ participate in the ministerial priesthood and in the three-fold ministry of Christ by divine election through the descent of the Holy Spirit and by the imposition of hands.

In the rite of ordination to priesthood, the prayer of the second imposition of hands makes clear that the order of priesthood is primarily the order of the church. It summarizes the purpose of setting up the priestly ministry in the church as the building up of the ecclesiastical body: “for setting up in the Church prophets, apostles, doctors and priests for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry and for the building up of the ecclesiastical body”⁹⁹ This building up process of the Church is done through the perfecting of the saints for the work of service. Further, the bishop prays to anoint the candidates to the priesthood with the oil of sanctity and to strengthen them that “they may exercise their priesthood in the holy Church”.¹⁰⁰ The ordaining hierarch presents the candidates before God that they may be “priests elect in Thy holy Church”.¹⁰¹ The text of the Syro-Malabar *Qurbana* states that the priests are, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, made worthy to “become recognized members in the great body of the holy Catholic Church”¹⁰² to serve the church. Narsai addresses priests as “priests of the Church”.¹⁰³ Patriarch Timothy II qualifies priesthood as the “priesthood of the Church”¹⁰⁴ and the priesthood, standing in Christ’s place, perfects the sons of the Church.¹⁰⁵ The ministry of priesthood, therefore, is to be regarded as the order of the Church at the service of the community of believers.

4.2. Mediatory Role of Priest

The mystery of priesthood can only be understood from the perspective of an encounter between divinity and humanity which is perfectly realized and fully expressed in the person of Christ. It is through his incarnation and paschal mysteries that the second person of the Holy Trinity could become our eternal high priest. Without becoming fully human Christ could not have been the mediator between God and man (Hb 4:14-16). In the biblical tradition, a priest, by very definition, is a mediator between God and man.

The ecclesial dimension of priesthood can be further understood through the mediatory role of priesthood. The priest becomes a mediator through ordination because he is called to represent both Christ and his church. Before the Lord he stands for the church as its “eye”, “tongue” and “attorney”¹⁰⁶; and before the church he stands as the agent of his Lord who dispenses, in the power of the Spirit, the spiritual gifts from the Lord. The ministry of priesthood, therefore, has an essential Christological and ecclesiological meaning: it represents the church because it represents Christ, the head, and it represents Christ because it represents the church, the body. The liturgical and patristic traditions are very eloquent about it. Narsai elaborates:

He (the priest) is a mediator between God and men; and by him spiritual sacrifices are offered before the Lord of all. By him spiritual wealth is distributed to them of earth; ... Every hour he opens the door of mercy before the beholders... With the waters of the Spirit he casts them, as in a furnace; and he puts off (from them) iniquity, and puts on the garments of righteousness. He calls and entreats the hidden Power to come down unto him and bestow visible power to give life. The waters become fruitful, as a womb; and the power of grace is like the seed that begets life. Body and soul go down together into the bosom of water and are born again, being sanctified from defilement... The keys of His mercies He gave

to them of earth, as to trusted officers (or *Sharrirs*); and every hour they open by faith the treasury of His mercies... With the food of the Spirit he nourishes bodily men and according to the birth is also the food for them that are born... The table of life he prepares, he sets before their eyes; and he depicts a mystery of life and death with the Bread and the Wine... The priest stands as a tongue to interpret; and his voice preaches death and life to men.¹⁰⁷

In the opinion of Yohannan bar Zo'bi, the threefold signings in the eucharistic liturgy, clearly manifest the mediatory function of priesthood.¹⁰⁸ According to Abdisho, "Priesthood is the ministry of mediation between God and men in those things which impart forgiveness of sins, acquisition of good things (blessings) and mitigation of divine wrath".¹⁰⁹ Timothy II meaningfully presents the ecclesial dimension of priestly mediation by stating that all priesthood on heaven and earth come from Christ, the High Priest, and Christ does in heaven what the priest does for the children of the church in his name.¹¹⁰ According to the Pontifical the priest is the mediator of peace between heaven and earth. They are called to "offer up unto God sacrifices of reconciliation".¹¹¹ Just like Christ, who appeases God incessantly for the sins of the world, the priests are called to continue the mission of Christ as the mediator of peace between heaven and earth. Christ has willed to use the instrumentality of Christian priesthood for making present the effects of his reconciling sacrifice in and through the celebration of the eucharist. Ministerial priesthood in the church is that organ par excellence of mediation associated with the ministry of Christ.¹¹²

Conclusion

The East Syrian tradition has a profound theology of priesthood which can be studied from various perspectives such as the anthropological and eucharistic dimensions which we have not undertaken. Our limited survey of sources demonstrates the ontological and sacramental character of priesthood. The priest, in his person and

ministry, projects the image of the Father, Son, Spirit and the Church. He is elected and perfected by God through the descent of the Holy Spirit to continue the same ministry of His Son in the church. The Christological, Pneumatological and ecclesiological dimensions of priesthood are realized and manifested excellently in the celebration of the Eucharist where the Church 'becomes' what she is: the creation of the Father, the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit; in other words, the Church of the Trinity. Therefore, both the "being" and "exercise" of priesthood are Trinitarian and ecclesial as well.

The liturgical, patristic and canonical sources also reveal the in-depth spiritual vision of priesthood peculiar to this tradition. Here, priesthood is understood as the manifestation of God's unmerited love and approaches it with a sense of wonder and thanksgiving. The priest is invited to understand the exalted position of the order of priesthood because of its sacramental character and is exhorted to lead a life of perfect charity and holiness. The sacramental character of priestly ministry is eminently expressed through presidency in the liturgical assembly. As the head of the liturgical assembly, the one in the order of priesthood becomes the image of Christ - the mediator par excellence, and the bridge between 'this world' and the 'world to come'. The primacy of priesthood and its authority in this tradition do not, therefore, derive from a mere sociological, juridical or cultic understanding of priesthood, but from a balanced christo-pneumatological and ecclesiological perspective.

The Syro-Malabar Church is counted among the Oriental Churches today because it belongs to Chaldean Ecclesial Tradition. The available liturgical, spiritual, historical, patristic and canonical sources of the pre-Diamper Malabar Church explain the *raison d'être* for such a consideration. The theology of priesthood that was prevalent among the St. Thomas Christians of that period could not have been anything other than the East Syrian one. The restored Pontifical published from Rome (1957) and the recently published Syro-Malabar Pontifical (2010)

are witnesses to this truth. A glance into the life and history of the Malabar Church before the period of latinization would definitely throw light on the primacy of priesthood in the life of the St. Thomas Christians of India which could not have merely come from a pure sociological or juridical understanding of priesthood but more from its theological and spiritual perspectives.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "India and all its own countries and those bordering on it, even to the farthest sea received the Apostle's hand of priesthood from Judas Thomas, who was guide and ruler in the church which he built and ministered there", cf. Coureton (ed.), *Ancient Syriac Documents*, London, 1864, 32.
- 2 For studies on Marthomamargam, P. Podipara, 'Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion and Oriental in Worship', *Ostkirchliche Studien* 4 (1959) 89-104; V. Pathikulangara, *Mar Thomma Margam: A New Catechism for the Saint Thomas Christians of India*, Kottayam, 1993; P. Vazheeparampil, "The Mar Thoma Margâ: Icon of the Indo-Oriental Identity of the Thomas Christians of India", *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 43 (1994) 187-210.
- 3 For useful studies on the theology of priesthood in the East Syrian Tradition, cf. I. Alencherry, *An Eastern Theology of Priesthood*, Intercultural Publications, New Delhi, 1994 (Henceforth, I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*); Lonappan Arangaserry, *Orders of Priesthood and Orders of Service*, OIRSI, Kottayam, 2008 (henceforth, Arangaserry, *Orders*); G. Valiamattam, *Episcopacy: A Theological Study on Episcopal Consecration according to the Chaldean Rite*, UDD, Rome, 1967; J. Poovannikunnel, *Role of the Priest in the Celebration of the Holy Qurbana*, Kottayam, 1996.
- 4 R. H. Connolly (ed.), *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai, Text and Studies* 8, Cambridge, 1909, 48 (henceforth, Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*).
- 5 J. M. Voste (ed.), *Pontificale iuxta ritum ecclesiae Syrorum Orientalium id est Chaldaeorum* (henceforth: Pontificale), Romae, 1937-1938, 32.
- 6 Bawai Soro, "Understanding Church of the East Sacramental Theology: The Theodorian Perspective" in *Pro Oriente, Syriac Dialogue*, 4, Vienna, 2001, 22-52, 33 (henceforth, "Sacramental Theology").
- 7 Cf. Abdisho, *Marganitha*, (IV, 2) 45, 48-50; De Vries, "Sieben Gründe", 45; see, Arangassry, *Orders*, 5.
- 8 Theodore, *Commentary*, 18, 45, 64, 73, 98, 104, 118-123; see, Arangassry, *Orders*, 4.
- 9 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 33-45, 46-61, 62-74.
- 10 The 17th homily, though very close to Narsai in literary style, exegesis etc, cannot come from him because in this homily we find the interpretation of a developed Eucharistic liturgy which contains the final "Our Father". It means that this homily is later than Timothy the Great (+825) who introduced the final "Our Father". Cf. Arangaserry, *Orders*, 57.
- 11 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 21.
- 12 Abdisho, *Marganitha*, (IV, 2) 45, 48-50; De Vries, "Sieben Gründe", 45; see, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 5.
- 13 I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 129-132.
- 14 Pontificale, 32, I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 16-17.
- 15 Pontificale, 32.
- 16 Pontificale, 32.
- 17 S. H. Jammo, "Gabriel Qatraya et son commentaire", *OCP* 32 (1966) 39-52, 40.
- 18 Theodore, *Commentary: Eucharist*, (memra 5); see, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 45.
- 19 Theodore, *Commentary: Eucharist* (memra 5); see, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 45-46.
- 20 Theodore, *Commentary: Baptism*, (memra 2); Soro, "Sacramental Theology", 22-23; see also, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 46.
- 21 Theodore, *Commentary: Eucharist*, (memra 5); see, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 46.
- 22 Pontificale, 153-155; R. H. Connolly (ed.), *Anonymi Auctoris Expositio officiorum Ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta. Interpretatus est*, CSCO Scr. Syri, series II, Vol. 91 and 92, Rome, 1913-1915, I, 113-116. Citation from, I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 107.
- 23 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 62-63; see also Arangaserry, *Orders*, 133.
- 24 Theodore, *Commentary: Eucharist*, (memra 5), 82 (Syr.218); Eucharist, (memra 5), 85 (Syr.222); see, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 46-47.
- 25 A. Vööbus (ed.), *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, III, 6, CSCO 402, 30-31; see, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 34.
- 26 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 4.
- 27 Pontificale, 31; Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 47.
- 28 Timothy II, "Causes", 51. For a detailed analysis of

- the functional aspects of the ministry of priesthood as seen in the Pontificale of the Chaldean and Syro-Malabar Churches, cf. I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 187-226.
- 29 J. B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale ou Recueil de Synodes Nestoriens*, Paris, 1902, 141/403 (henceforth; Synodicon); cf. also, Pontificale, 31.
- 30 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 63.
- 31 Supplementum Mysteriorum sive Proprium Missarum de Tempore et de Sanctis juxta Ritum Ecclesiae Syro-Malabaricae (henceforth = Supplementum Mysteriorum), Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Romae, 1960, 26.
- 32 Synodicon, 171/431; 175/435.
- 33 Pontificale, 33, 73-74.
- 34 Synodicon, 217/482.
- 35 Synodicon, 216/481.
- 36 Synodicon, 190/449.
- 37 Supplementum Mysteriorum, 24.
- 38 Aphrahat, *Demonstration X*, 4; K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat Demonstrations I*, Introduction and tr. Of Dem., 1-10, Catholic Theological Studies of India 3, Changanaserry, 1999, 184; Arangaserry, *Orders*, 42.
- 39 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 65, 68.
- 40 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 69.
- 41 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 65.
- 42 Synodicon, 90/346.
- 43 Synodicon, 90/346.
- 44 Synodicon, 97/354-355; cf. also Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 65.
- 45 In the ordination to the priesthood, in the first prayer of the imposition of hands, the priest is depicted as the mediator of divine gifts in the Church, Pontificale, 40. Priests are also designated as mediators of peace, Pontificale, 34; Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 48.
- 46 Synodicon, 122-123/382. The second prayer of the imposition of hands at the priestly ordination clearly mentions the spiritual ministries, especially the sanctifying ministry, of the priest, cf. Pontificale, 40-41. In the Holy Qurbana, at the end of the rite of fraction, the priest prays: "O our Lord Jesus Christ ... you have in your grace appointed me a minister and mediator of your holy, glorious, life-giving mysteries", OR, 56.
- 47 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 55-56.
- 48 OR, 31.
- 49 Pontificale, 40.
- 50 Pontificale 41; see also, Pontificale, 33, 35; Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 48-49.
- 51 *Supplementum Mysteriorum*, 134.
- 52 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 64.
- 53 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 61.
- 54 Timothy II, "Causes", 50.
- 55 Synodicon, 141/402-403; Pontificale, 40-41.
- 56 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 54.
- 57 Theodore, *Commentary: Eucharist*, (memra 5); 92 (Syr. 229). Cited from Arangaserry, *Orders*, 47.
- 58 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 22.
- 59 Arangaserry, *Orders*, 59.
- 60 P. Bedjan & G. Khayat (eds.), *Breviarium iuxta Ritum Syrorum Orientalium id est Chaldaeorum* (henceforth = Breviarium), Vols. III, Romae 1938, Vol. III, 421.
- 61 Cf. P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, Vol. III, 394, 421, 424, 432; see also, S. Rose, *Church as Mystery and Communion*, OIRSI, Kottayam, 1998, 268-274.
- 62 Armenian Hymns, 3:17; P. Yousif, *L'Eucharistie chez saint Éphrem de Nisibe*, OCA 224, Rome, 1984, 243-246; see, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 43.
- 63 Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, XIV. 680: 10-11; R. Murray, *Symbols*, 131.
- 64 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 4.
- 65 Synodicon, 123/382.
- 66 Synodicon, 129/388.
- 67 Pontificale, 40; Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 47.
- 68 OR, 31; Synodicon, 160/419.
- 69 Synodicon, 119-120/379.
- 70 Synodicon, 120/379.
- 71 Citation from I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 145.
- 72 Citation from I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 146.
- 73 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 68.
- 74 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 68.
- 75 Pontificale, 38; citation from I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 148.
- 76 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 63.
- 77 Synodicon, 187/446; also cf. Ebed Jesu, *Collectio Canonum*, tractus vi, 23-338, 105-106, in A. Mai (ed.), *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio*, Vol. X, Romae, 1838.
- 78 Synodicon, 187/446; Pontificale, 38, 40.
- 79 *Liturgical Homilies*, 22.
- 80 Timothy II, "Causes", 68.
- 81 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 55.

- 82 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 42.
- 83 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 41.
- 84 Timothy II, “Causes”, 59.
- 85 Synodicon, 174/434.
- 86 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 64.
- 87 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 47.
- 88 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 68.
- 89 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 73; see also, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 49.
- 90 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 64-65.
- 91 PO, 1; AG, 39, LG, 28.
- 92 English translation of the prayer cited from, I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 143.
- 93 Narsai, Ascension, vv 304-308; McLeod, Narsai's Metrical Homilies, 180; Soro, “Sacramental Theology”, 32; see also, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 48.
- 94 J. Kallarangatt, “Priesthood in the Syriac Tradition”, in *Reflections on Theology and Church*, OIRSI, Kottayam, 2001, 41-52, 45.
- 95 This text is a later addition since it is not seen in the first codices of the Pontificale, cf. I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 180.
- 96 I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 180.
- 97 Cf. Timothy II, “Causes”, 48-49.
- 98 Pontificale, 40; OR, 31.
- 99 Pontificale 41, E. J. Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice*, London, 1988, 324.
- 100 Pontificale, 32, 37, 43.
- 101 Pontificale, 40.
- 102 OR 31.
- 103 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 49, 69.
- 104 Timothy II, “Causes”, 49.
- 105 Timothy II, “Causes”, 50.
- 106 See homily XVII, *Liturgical Homilies*, 7.
- 107 Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies*, 65-67.
- 108 Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation of the Divine Mysteries*, T. Mannoorampampil (Et.), OIRSI, Kottayam, 1992, 73; cf. also, Arangaserry, *Orders*, 74-75.
- 109 Ebedjesu, “Liber Margaritae de veritate Christianae religionis”, in A. Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio*, Vol. X, 2, 317-366, 356. Citation from I. Alencherry, *Eastern Theology*, 178.
- 110 De Vries, “Sieben Gründe”, 68; Arangaserry, *Orders*, 89.
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19

Ecumenical Endeavors among the St Thomas Christians

Mar Joseph Powathil

Introduction

In his encyclical letter on ecumenism, *ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II stated that “it is absolutely clear that ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian unity, is not just some sort of ‘appendix’, which is added to the Church’s traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that She is and does”¹. The Syro Malabar Church, as an Oriental Catholic Church of the East Syrian liturgical family, has always been trying to fulfill her responsibility to be ecumenical in what She is and what She does. Our study deals with both these important obligations of the Syro Malabar Church. We are explaining how She has responded and is responding to the ecumenical challenge. In fact, it is by preserving and promoting the common elements of the Mar Thoma Marga that the Syro Malabar Church in her being could be ecumenical in Her relation to the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the Jacobite Syrian

Christian Church. It is obvious that these Churches remain faithful to their identity in the Syriac family, even though the Orthodox Churches have accepted gradually the West Syrian liturgy and traditions which were not their heritage till the 17th century.

The Orthodox Churches in India has had the same heritage, patrimony and tradition as that of the Syro Malabar Church for a period of 1600 years. During these long centuries, since its apostolic foundation, the Malabar Church maintained her unity intact. There was only one Church in India. The arrival of the Portuguese missionaries at the end of the fifteenth century and the subsequent intolerance they showed to the Oriental and Indian character of this ancient Church of St Thomas led to a real division in the Church. The struggle to preserve the identity of the St Thomas Christians, i.e., Mar Thoma Marga, was clearly visible in this conflict between the St Thomas Christians and the Portuguese authorities. However even after the division in the Church, there

have been also movements for reconciliation, both successful and not so successful.

Holy See's Policy

It is important to note that the Holy See sometimes gave strong directives against the latinisation efforts of the Jesuits. With a false understanding that only the Latin Church is Catholic, the missionaries started a systematic latinisation to make the Malabar Church to be in uniformity to the Roman Church. The best means they found for this purpose was the priestly formation in the Latin pattern. Therefore, a Seminary was opened at Vaipincotta in 1587 with Latin rite training. However, all the Jesuits were not of the same mind as to what discipline –Chaldean or Latin- was to be followed by the students and staff of the seminary in matters like fasting, abstinence, and Divine Office. Finally the question was submitted to Rome proposing that Syriac be taught no more at the Seminary so that all might conform themselves to the Latin Rite. The Holy See's answer was an emphatic 'no' directing the missionaries to work harder for the preservation of Syriac correcting only errors and abuses, if any. The strong argument for it was that the variety made the Church beautiful.²

For more than a century, from the start of the schism, almost all the 'pseudo-bishops' of the dissident group – except the second one who remained in power only a week – insistently requested the Holy See to admit them and their followers to the Catholic Church, conserving however, their Episcopal dignity. The Catholic Syrians, who were then divided between the Portuguese Padroado see of Crangannore and the Propaganda Vicariate Apostolic of Malabar, joined their efforts with those of their separated brethren.

Mar Thoma I

The letter of the archdeacon, Mar Thoma I, to the Goan Inquisition would shed light on the events that led to the schism. On 30 June 1656 he wrote to Goa "As all the Churches admit the Church of Rome

as the mother and head, we also admit the same as her little children and be ever obedient to the successors of St. Peter sitting on Peter's throne. We know that all those who received baptism should be obedient to the Church of Rome and its Pope. Therefore, when we were told that the above mentioned Patriarch (Ahathalla) was sent by Pope Innocent, we followed him according to that letter. It was not separating us from the Roman Church"³ Mar Thoma I and his followers gathered in Edapally and informed Joseph Mary Sebastiany, the Apostolic Commissiory, that they would be ready to come back to the Catholic Church under certain conditions. They insisted that the first step to reconciliation should be the consecration of the Archdeacon as the bishop of the St. Thomas Christians. But it was not acceptable to the Apostolic Commissiory.

Mar Thoma IV

Mar Thoma IV (1688-1728) also had a strong desire for reconciliation with the Catholic Church. Therefore he wrote a letter, seeking reconciliation, to Pope Urban VIII in 1704. This letter included the signatures of representatives of 29 parishes and 12 priests under his jurisdiction. In this letter, Mar Thoma IV and his followers stated that they were sending the Carmelite priest Augustine to present their cause to His Holiness. The reason for the division in the Church, as they state, was the humiliation and oppression their predecessors had to suffer from the Jesuit Missionaries. They thanked the Holy Father for sending the Carmelite Missionaries to help them. He and his followers asked the Pope for the favor of helping them to continue to follow their traditions and customs. For this purpose, they even suggested that they would be satisfied even if the Mar Thoma IV would be made a co-bishop with the Carmelite bishop of the time, Bishop Angelo Francis of Verapoly⁴. Along with the petition of the dissident group, the Catholics of Malabar also sent petitions to the Pope requesting him to consider the cause of reunion favorably⁵. The letter is from Kaduthurithy with the signatures of the Catholic Archdeacon and the thirty

priests. Interestingly, they too had expressed their desire of having a bishop from their own Church to preserve their rite. Unfortunately, they did not receive a proper reply from Rome even though on 5 November 1706, Fr. Arzenius sent a letter to the Congregation.⁶ Discontented and discouraged by the attitude of Rome, in 1709, Mar Thoma IV wrote a letter to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch asking for bishops from Antioch, in which he showed readiness to enter into communion with the Antiochean Patriarchate.

Mar Thoma V

Though the Holy See was passive towards the previous proposals of reconciliation, Mar Thoma V also made a similar request for reconciliation to Pope Benedict XIV on 16th August 1748⁷. He stated in his letter he and his followers had been Syrians using the Syrian rites and traditions and these, when changed by force by the missionaries, resulted in confusion and trials. As a condition for reconciliation he sought permission to use the leavened bread for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. In the request he expressed his deep suffering which resulted from the imposition of western practices introduced by the Latin prelates⁸. The Holy See did not give a favorable reply to this application. Meanwhile, the Vicar Apostolic had written to Rome that the proposals and promises made by the separated group were all fraudulent and incorrect⁹. Responding to the letter of Mar Thoma V, the Congregation wrote to him on 19 September 1750 of the unfavorable decisions on his proposal, referring to a letter written to the Vicar Apostolic.¹⁰ Later in spite of all the difficulties, the Congregation finally decided to confer Holy Orders on Mar Thoma V, at some opportune time, provided he showed true repentance. He was also told that he would not be given any Episcopal jurisdiction but had to be content with the Episcopal character and title.¹¹ The Holy See seemed to think that the jurisdiction granted to the Archdeacon (Mar Thoma V) would be a threat to the authority of the Vicar Apostolic who had jurisdiction over the Catholic Syrians.

Mar Thoma VI

Mar Thoma VI who received valid consecration from the Jacobite Metropolitan sent by the Patriarch of Antioch in 1772, had applied for reconciliation even before and also even after his consecration. Like his predecessors, he also claimed recognition of the Syrians' right to preserve their rite and to have their own bishops in making a reunion with the Catholic Church. With these conditions, he approached Bishop Florence, Vicar Apostolic of Malabar, to discuss the possibility of reconciliation with the Catholic Church. The Vicar Apostolic wrote to Rome on 3 November 1768 about the proposals of Mar Thoma VI¹². Though Mar Thoma VI had received valid consecration and named as Mar Dionysius he was troubled by the thought that he was in schism. Therefore, he tried again to contact Rome for reconciliation with the Catholic Church. Therefore, he contacted Bishop Francis Sales, the Vicar Apostolic of Cochin. While the Vicar Apostolic and the missionaries were not in favor of this proposal, the Syrian Catholics decided to bring the matter directly to the Holy See through a deputation headed by Rev. Dr. Joseph Kariattil¹³. It is important to note that the expense to go to Rome for this sacred purpose was collected from the parishes. As it is stated in the letter to the Queen of Portugal, it was collected even by selling the sacred vessels of the parishes. It is a very good example of the ecumenical enthusiasm of the St. Thomas Christians.

In his letter to Pope Pious VI Mar Dionysius states "Hence I, the weak Metropolitan Dionysius, implore Your Holiness to receive the petitions which the priests (Fr. Joseph Kariattil and Fr. Thomas Paremackal) who are thus sent will submit to Your Throne, to forgive my sins and shortcomings, to receive and unite into the fold of the Roman Church me and the people under me, to send with these four doctors who know Syriac well so that they may teach us our Syriac language, removing errors from them. . . therefore, Oh Our Father, Lord of Lords, Pastor of Pastors, since we are like sheep without a shepherd and like servants without a master, I again implore

you to have mercy on us and to render us all the help we have asked for...¹⁴

Rev. Dr. Kariattil reported in his explanatory petition to the Holy Father that his deputation was from 72 Syrian Catholic Churches of Malabar and that the reunion of Mar Thoma and his numerous followers would be a great triumph for the Church of Malabar. Moreover, he recommended that Mar Thoma, who was a true son of the Church in his early years and was validly consecrated later should be given jurisdiction over his flock¹⁵. But the Propagandist and Padroadist missionaries did not favor this idea of granting jurisdiction to Mar Dionysius¹⁶.

After the death of Mar Kariattil, who was consecrated on 17th February 1783 at Lisbon, there was a change in the policy of Rome. The general congregation of 18 February 1788 made decisions to satisfy the demands of reuniting the people of the Malankara Church. Rome only insisted that the uniting party make their profession of faith according to the formula of Pope Urban VIII. The Congregation also decided that the matter should be handled directly by the Holy See and not by the Catholic dignitaries in Malabar. The Syrians should be allowed to retain their episcopacy and their rites and rituals under the vigilance of Rome¹⁷.

At this stage, the Malabar Syrian community expressed its desire to remain as one fold under the same metropolitan as it had been for centuries. Thus in April 1791, Mar Thoma VI made arrangements with Bishop Soledado of Cochin for a united Catholic Community¹⁸. It is important to note that he and his community were even prepared to make reforms in their rite so that they could easily be incorporated in to the community of their Catholic brethren. But, these negotiations with the Bishop of Cochin were suspended due to the intervention of the Vicar Apostolic of Malabar.

Mar Dionysius V

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Fr. Emmanuel Nidhiri, the Vicar General of the

Vicariat of Kottayam, took Mar Dionysius to Msgr Andrews Ajutthi, the then Apostolic Delegate of India. Mar Dionysius expressed his desire to be in communion with the Catholic Church. He also swore before the delegate that he would embrace the Catholic faith even at the risk of losing his attractive possessions and influential position. He enquired if their hierarchy would be preserved, leaving respectively the sees to himself and to the other bishops, and if the married priests would be allowed to continue their family life and if they would be able to retain their Catholic Maronite Rite¹⁹. The Holy See was lenient to the question of using leavened bread in the Holy Mass and the married clergy. However, it seemed that Mar Dionysius was not firm in his resolution.

Mar Ivanios and the Malankara Catholic Church

Bishop Mar Ivanios who received the Episcopal consecration on 1 May 1925 was the leader of a new reconciliation movement. Even the first speech after his Episcopal consecration was an obvious proof for it²⁰. He was asked to make enquiry about the scope of the reconciliation with the Catholic Church by the Synod of the Malankara Church itself.²¹ There was certain communication between the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church in Malankara and Mar Aphrem Rahmani, the Patriarch of the Antiochean Syrian Catholic Church in 1926. The Patriarch requested Mar Ivanios to keep the Antiochean Syrian liturgical tradition that remain as a common bond²².

In 1926, Mar Ivanios sent a letter for reconciliation with the Catholic Church, to Rome. In his letter he asked that their ancient liturgical traditions and customs be preserved. He also asked for jurisdiction of the bishops over their faithful who would reconcile together with them²³. In response to this letter the Holy See asked six basic questions to Mar Ivanios. He also wrote to the Apostolic Delegate in India, Most Rev. Edward Moony on 21 July 1928. In his reply Mar Ivanios demonstrated

the orthodoxy of the Canon Law and the liturgical books of the Church which accepted the supremacy of Peter and his successors²⁴.

The Holy See responded on 5 August 1929 to the letter of Mar Ivanios sent in 1927. According to this letter, the Holy See permitted them to use the Antiochean liturgical traditions and customs if they were not against the Catholic faith and morals. The bishops could join the Catholic Church with a notable number of faithful and priests, if they had an orthodox faith, valid consecration and personal qualities, could be given the Episcopal authority and jurisdiction over the faithful. Those who came to the Catholic communion would not be under the Syrian Catholic Patriarch of Antioch. If one bishop returns with a considerable part of his clergy and flock, the Holy See will be inclined to retain him under Rome's immediate jurisdiction.

Responding to this letter of the Apostolic Delegate, Mar Ivanios, the Metropolitan of Bethany wrote to him on 17 September 1929. He put forward certain requests for a fruitful reconciliation such as permission to say certain prayers in the vernacular, using the Niceo – Constantinopolitan Creed and about the importance of keeping the Catholicate structure of the Church.²⁵ The Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches made the necessary decisions on the application for the reunion in July 1930 at its plenary session. The Holy See confirmed their right to keep their Antiochean Rite intact without mixing it up with the Syro Malabar Rite. However, it did not permit an ecclesial authority such as Catholicos, since the then Catholicos was not ready to reconcile²⁶.

Mar Ivanios, Metropolitan of Bethany and his Suffragan Mar Theophilos accepted the decision of the Holy See and thus on 20 September 1930, together with the representatives of their followers, were received into the Catholic Church after having made their Profession of Faith before Bishop Benziger OCD of Quilon. Through the Apostolic Constitution *Magnum Nobis* issued on 13 February

1932, a special provision was made for the new community assigning Mar Ivanios the title See of 'Phasiensis' with his residence at Trivandrum and Bishop Mar Theophilose the title See of 'Aradenis' with residence at Thiruvalla²⁷.

Ecumenical Movements in the Second Half of the 20th Century

As we said earlier, ever since the division among the St. Thomas Christians in 1653, there have been attempts for reconciliation between the Churches. The St Thomas Christians who remained in the Catholic communion were always encouraging these attempts with their own recommendations and delegations. But due to the negative attitudes of the Latin missionaries of the time, who were generally afraid of losing their authority in Malabar, and also sometimes due to the scrupulous attitudes of the Orthodox Church leadership, these attempts were futile. Later the reunion movement under the leadership of Mar Ivanios and the subsequent formation of the Malankara Catholic Church changed the ecumenical climate in Kerala. For the Orthodox community, this reunion move by a few bishops, priests and a group of faithful was a kind of sheep stealing²⁸.

Most of the reconciliation attempts in the past had ended in failure, while some were partially successful. The negation by the Europeans of the oriental system of administration in the Church, both in the spiritual and the temporal realms of the St Thomas Christians was the chief cause of division in the Church. Therefore, as a condition for reconciliation, the dissident group always requested for the acceptance of their oriental way of temporal administration and the sacramental administration in their Church. So they were hesitant to have any further ecumenical conversation and collaboration. On the part of the Catholic Churches there was a feeling of self sufficiency which tied them to passivity. Even after the Vatican II Council, this ecumenical frigidity continued among the Churches. A break through to

this passivity and suspicion seemed to take place in the early 1980's with a joint move of the Christian Churches for a church in Nilackal, where St. Thomas the Apostle, their Father in Faith is believed to have founded a Christian community.

In fact it was this coming together for the cause of a church at Nilackal that drew the Churches together. In the beginning it was a common desire by some bishops to have a church at Nilackal to revive the memory of the apostolate of St. Thomas in that place. A radical religious group objected to this. So the Bishops from different Churches rallied together and through dialogue the bishops were able to find a place for the church at Nilackal. All the Churches, which have jurisdiction in that area got together and established a common Church and founded Trust to administer the church and to develop new programmes for a common Christian witness. It was this event in early 1980's that created a favorable atmosphere for ecumenical dialogue and common witness in later years.

Relations with the Malankara Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite Syrian Christian) Church

The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, now known as the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church, is an autocephalous Church with the Patriarch of Antioch as its supreme head. Therefore, the agreements between the Patriarch of Antioch and the Catholic Church are also applicable for this Church. The official visit of the Syrian Patriarch Ignatius Yacoub III to Pope Paul VI and the consequent Common Declaration in 1971 was the first important opening in the ecumenical relation between the Syrian Church of Antioch and the Catholic Church in the 20th century²⁹.

In the common declaration, the Pope and the Patriarch acknowledged the deep spiritual communion already existing between their Churches. The Churches have the same sacraments, the common profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,

the apostolic tradition which forms part of the common heritage of both the Churches and the great Fathers and Doctors of the Church including St. Cyril of Alexandria who are common teachers in the faith. These common factors show the action of the Holy Spirit that works in the Church even amidst the human weaknesses and failures. After about fifteen centuries, the common agreement between the heads of these two Churches cleared the Christological confusions between the Churches which was the chief cause of division in the Church at the Council of Chalcedon.

In order to strengthen the bonds that exist between the Church of Rome and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, and thus to progress further towards full communion, Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of the Antiochean Syrian Orthodox Church came on pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul and visited Pope John Paul II and the Church of Rome from 20-23 June 1984³⁰. A common declaration was signed by both the heads of the Churches at the end of the Patriarch's visit to Rome on 23 June 1984. Pope John Paul II and the Patriarch professed the faith of their two Churches as formulated at the Council of Nicea and acknowledged that the confusions and schisms of the subsequent years stemmed from the misunderstanding of the terminology, culture and different formulae used by different theological schools. They admitted that today these differences do not affect the substance of faith. They also denied that there was any difference in the faith they confessed in the Mystery of the Word of God made flesh and became truly man. Regarding Christology the statement says "we confess that Our Lord and Our God, Our Savior and the King of all, Jesus Christ, is perfect God as to His Divinity and perfect man as to His humanity. The union is real, perfect, without blending or mingling, without confusion, without alteration without division, without the least separation³¹.

In the second part, the Declaration dealt with the pastoral collaboration and authorized those faithful who were unable to find a minister of their

own Church, to request the sacraments from a minister of the other Church. The theological basis for this sacramental sharing, as the declaration presented was “the identity of faith, though not yet complete” and “to meet their needs and with their spiritual benefit”. It is also limited to the situation of when the ‘faithful find access to a priest of their own Church materially or morally impossible... which now a days are frequent both because of the dispersion of our faithful throughout the world and because of the precarious conditions of these difficult times’ In all the seven sacraments, the sacrament of Penance, Eucharist and anointing of the Sick could be shared in such a way³²

Pope John Paul II met His Beatitude Mar Baselios Paulos II, Catholicos of Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, on 7 February 1986 during his pastoral visit to India. The Pope remarked that his declaration with His Holiness Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas with its doctrinal and pastoral implications an important step in relations between the two Churches and affirmed that it was ‘a decisive step in relations between our two Churches as we move towards unity’. Pope John Paul II expressed his hope that the Church would find a new and effective means of going forward together in theological dialogue and in pastoral collaboration.³³

Official Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church

As a part of the official dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, a Joint Commission was set up by his holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas. The first meeting of the Commission was held at the Spirituality Centre, Manganam, Kottayam on Saturday 15 December 1990. In the meeting it was decided to set up three sub committees to discuss the following issues; (i) Pastoral Problems (ii) Inter Marriage, and (iii) Historical background of the division. In the second meeting at

St Thomas Minor Seminary, Kurichy in 1991 a draft of the agreement for the mixed marriage was prepared and it was reviewed in the next meeting in 1992 in the light of the remarks of the authorities of both the Churches³⁴. Later on 19 November 1993, the meeting held at the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary at Mulanthuruthy gave a final shape to the Agreement on Mixed Marriages and the project for Pastoral Guidelines for the same. The two documents were, then submitted to the competent authorities of both Churches for their final approval and for joint publication³⁵. Finally the agreement between the Churches on Inter Church Marriages with Pastoral Guidelines was jointly published on 25 January 1994. The Pastoral Guidelines, prepared by a few Catholic Bishops in agreement with the Syrian Orthodox members of the Joint Commission for Dialogue had been approved by the Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council (KCBC)³⁶.

According to the agreement “our two Churches desire to foster marriages within the same ecclesial communion and consider this as the norm. However, we have to accept the pastoral reality that inter Church marriages do take place. When such occasions arise, both Churches should facilitate the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony in either Church, allowing the bride/bridegroom the right and freedom to retain his/her own ecclesial communion, by providing necessary information and documents. On the occasion of these celebrations, the couples as well as their family members belonging to these two Churches are allowed to participate in the Holy Eucharist in the church where the sacrament of matrimony is celebrated. We consider it also the great responsibility of the parents to pay special attention to impart to the extent possible and in mutual accord proper ecclesial formation to their children in full harmony with the tradition of the ecclesial communion to which they have to belong”³⁷.

The joint statement on Petrine Primacy in 2002 was an important achievement of the dialogue. Both the Churches in fact agree on the Petrine primacy

and the historical development of it. The authority exercised by the successor of St. Peter in the person of the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Antioch was also somewhat similar. The difference arises only while dealing with the question as to whether the Pope of Rome or the Patriarch of Antioch is the true successor of Peter. Therefore, the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church or the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church is nearly in full communion. In the same year the Joint Theological Commission also published a Joint Statement on Common Witness.

As a natural consequence of the closeness of the Churches and of the agreement on Christology, sharing of the sacraments and also of the mixed marriage led to the sharing of sacred places such as the church building and the cemeteries. The agreement states “Churches are consecrated buildings which have an important theological and liturgical significance for both the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church. However, if one of these two Churches do not have a place or the liturgical objects necessary for celebrating worthily the Eucharistic liturgy, the diocesan bishop of the other Church may allow them the use of a church building of their Church and also lend them what may be necessary for their services. Under similar circumstances permission may be given on sharing of the cemeteries”³⁸. Regarding the minister of the funeral the agreement states “Minister of the funeral must be the minister of the person concerned. But when the minister of one’s own Church is not available, the minister of the other Church is entitled to officiate the ceremony. He has to do it using his own liturgical text and liturgical vestments for the same”³⁹.

Relation with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

The new era in ecumenical relation, after the establishment of the Catholicate, begins with the visit of the Catholicos of the Church His Holiness Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews I’s visit to the Holy Father

and the Church of Rome in 1983. During that historic visit, the Catholicos requested for the creation of a commission for dialogue between his Church and the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II’s meeting with the Catholicos during his pastoral visit to India in 1986 stimulated the ecumenical relations between these two Churches.

Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

The desire expressed by the Holy Father Pope John Paul II and the Catholicos, Moran Mor Baselios Mar Thomas Mathews I was realized in 1988⁴⁰. A joint commission for dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church had been established. In the first meeting of the Joint Commission held at Kottayam from 22 to 25 October 1989 the members wished that the doctrinal difference between the two Churches in Christology could be overcome and resolved like what had happened between the Catholic Church and Coptic Church as well as the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch⁴¹. At the conclusion of their work, the members of the commission drafted a joint text of Christology and were able to express the common faith of their two Churches in the mystery of Christ. The text drafted by the members of the Commission was submitted to the respective authorities of the two Churches for approval. They approved it and made public on 3 June 1990 on the feasts of Pentecost⁴².

The agreement affirms the common faith in Christ, with the same content “but in formulating that content in the course of history, differences have arisen in terminology and emphasis” It also expresses the conviction “that these differences are such as can co-exist in the same communion and therefore need not and should not divide us, especially when we proclaim Him to our brothers and sisters in the world in terms which they can more easily understand”⁴³.

Different subcommittees formed to study

various theological, historical and pastoral questions and the findings of these committees were presented in the Joint Meeting of International Theological Commissions. The discussion to come to an agreement between the Churches on Mixed marriages has not yet been successful. But regarding the sharing of the sacrament of anointing of the sick the Churches reached an agreement that permits in a special occasion when one cannot find a minister of one's own Church he can approach the minister of the other Church for receiving the sacrament. The agreement states "we agree that in the event of an emergency and in the absence of the celebrant of one Church, the faithful can approach the minister of the other Church to receive the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, who may administer the sacrament in his own liturgical rite."⁴⁴

Another important development in this dialogue is the agreement reached on the sharing of the sacred places. The agreement states "Churches are consecrated buildings which have an important theological and liturgical significance for both the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. However, if one of these two Churches does not have a place or the liturgical objects necessary for celebrating worthily the Eucharistic liturgy, the diocesan bishop of the other Church may allow them the use of a church building of their Church and also lend them what may be necessary for their services. Under similar circumstances permission may be given on sharing of the cemeteries"⁴⁵ It gives the terms and conditions before such a funeral. Besides the agreement says "the minister of the funeral must be the minister of the deceased person. When the minister of his/her own Church is not available, the minister of the other Church is entitled to officiate the ceremony. The celebrant has to follow the liturgical rites of his Church"⁴⁶

Joint Ventures of the Episcopal Churches

The Syrian Churches in India, both the Catholic

and the non Catholic, have strong theological, spiritual, social and cultural bonds that unite them. In fact, as we have seen earlier, the Nilackal event brought many bishops of different Churches in close friendship and a new favorable atmosphere was created for joint efforts. Therefore, a few joint ventures came up in the 1980's and 1990's. They are, the Nilackal Ecumenical Trust, the Inter Church Council for Education, the Annual Christian Bishops' meet, and Joint Temperance Movement, etc.

The Ecumenical church at Nilackal is a unique endeavor of all the Episcopal Churches in Kerala. It is a common church for worship built in 1982 by all the Episcopal Churches. It was dedicated by the bishops from all the Churches in Kerala, i.e., Syro Malabar, Syro Malankara and the Latin Catholics Churches, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the Malankara Syrian Orthodox or Jacobite Syrian Christian Church, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and the CSI Church. There is a dialogue center, inaugurated in 1996, for ecumenical dialogue and dialogue with other religious. It also functions as the centre for retreat, study camps and prayer. Besides, the Ecumenical Trust and Committee organize the annual regional gathering of priests of all the Episcopal Churches.

Since 1993, every year the bishops of the Episcopal Churches in Kerala come together for a day of discussion and planning. The meetings discuss the issues that affect the Churches in common. It has published a Joint Pastoral Letter on the subject of "corruption" in the country in 1995.

The Inter Church Council for Education is another joint endeavor of the Churches in Kerala to protect their constitutional rights as a religious minority to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. It also works for promoting Christian values through quality education and to coordinate the Christian educational institutions for the same. The Joint Temperance Movement of the Christian Churches fight against the social evil of increasing alcoholism in the Kerala Society. It also organizes seminars and counseling for the alcohol addicts. The

Syro Malabar Synodal Commission for Ecumenism also promotes the observance of Church Unity Octave encouraging ecumenical priests gathering and ecumenical Christmas celebrations in various places.

Conclusion

After the polemics of the late XIX century and the early XX century, the Churches in Kerala have come closer and have learnt to call others' Churches as 'sister Churches'. There are many more meetings together and more cooperation with each other in different matters. The Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church are in official dialogue. These Churches are happy with the dialogue process.

Truly, the Christian Churches in Kerala (and in India) are together on an ecumenical Journey. All our Churches yearn for a true Christian unity to meet the challenges of the times and to be faithful to the Lord's commandment for unity. But the journey will be long and arduous. We all need God's grace. Spiritual ecumenism is the need of the hour.

We, Catholics also have the obligation to demonstrate to our sister Churches that it is possible to maintain each Church's full identity and be within the Catholic communion. The Syro Malabar Church has the duty to foster elements common to all the oriental Churches. The Orthodox Churches want to preserve their full patrimony in any scheme of unity of the Churches. If the Syro Malabar Church has to be truly ecumenical, she must make herself a true Oriental Church preserving her full patrimony. Only then we can say, as Pope John Paul II wanted, that the Syro Malabar Church is fully ecumenical in what She is. And what she is is more important than what she does.

ENDNOTES

1. *Ut unum sint*, 20
2. ARSI, Goa, f 241 as quoted in Nelpurapampil, *Ecumenical Obligations of the Syro Malabar Church in Relation to the Orthodox Churches in Inida: A Historico Juridical Study*, Rome, 1999.
3. APF, SOCG 233, f.286v. See Nelpurapampil, *Ecumenical Obligations of the Syro Malabar Church*, 165
4. Cf. AOCD, Rome, Plut.226, ff. 122rv; APF, CP., 67v-68v. It is the Italian translation of the original letter.
5. Cf. APF, SOC (IOC), Vol. 23, f.182.
6. Cf. APF, SOCG 562, f.301v.
7. The petition is written in East Syriac and it is found in APF, SOCP., vol. 109, f.114. this application was sent through Fr. Bonifacius a Bambino Gesu, OCD, who was in fact deputed by the Vicar Apostolic and the Syrian Catholics to give information to the Propaganda Fide on the affairs of the Church in Malabar and to persuade the Austrian Emperor to plead before the Dutch authorities in favour of the Catholic Syrians in Malabar.
8. Cf. APF, SOCP., Vol.109f.114; APF, CP., 7-14; APF, Acta, vol.127, ff. 290-300.
9. Cf. APF, SOC (IOC) vol.26, ff.718-719
10. Cf. APF, (Lettera 1750) vol. 175, ff. 164v-165.
11. Cf. APF, (Lettera 1750) vol. 175, 158v-159. To prove his repentance he was asked to abjure all errors he taught and to abdicate all Episcopal rights and powers.
12. Cf. APF, SOCG, (a.1770/1771), vol. 60, f.33v. This letter also verifies the negative attitude of the missionaries of the time towards the separated group among the St. Thomas Christians.
13. The whole story is narrated in Paremackal, *Varthamanapusthakam*.
14. Translation of the Malayalam letter written on 19th March 1778. Cf. Mackenzie, *Christianity in Travancore*, note 46. See also Podipara, "The Efforts of reunion in Malankara", 89.
15. Cf. APF, SOC (IOC) vol. 39, ff. 6-9. Mar Dionysius was born and brought up in the Catholic family of Pakalomattam.
16. Cf. APF, SOCG, vol. 867, ff. 154-181.
17. Cf. APF, I Lettere, (a.1788) vol.252, ff. 145v-146v.
18. It is the information gathered from the letter of Bishop Aloysius on 12 April 1791 cited in Malancharuvil, *The Syro Malankara Church*, 118. Cf. APF, SO (IOC) vol.39, ff.298-299.
19. Cf. APF, Acta (a1888) n.14 as quoted in Malancharuvil, *Malankara Church*, 120.

20. Cf. Reports in the monthly, Bethany, June 1925 as quoted in Kanjiramakalil, *Documents of Reunion*, 64-67.
- 21 “At the bishops’ synod held at Parumala, Thiruvalla on 1 November 1926, at which His Holiness Moran Mar Baselius, Catholicos the Most Rev. Mar Gregorios (titular) Metropolitan, Kundara and Rt. Rev. Mar Ivanios, Bishop of Bethany were present, it was decided that the Bishop of Bethany be authorized to make enquiries with the authorities of the Roman Church with a view of reunion.” AAT, A, 2/1927 as quoted in Malancharuvil, *The Syro Malankara Church*, 122.
- 22 Inchackalodi, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, 227-280. He wrote in his letter that he would never permit their liturgical tradition to become like the Chaldeans of Malabar that was hybrid or to become like the Latin liturgy. As proof for his Orthodoxy, he asked them to go through their liturgical texts.
- 23 Cf. AACT, A, 10/1926.
- 24 Cf. Inchackalodi, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, 319-324.
- 25 Cf. AAT, A, 13/1929.
- 26 Cf. Congregation for the Oriental Churches Prot No. 2035/30; AAT, A, 18/1930.
- 27 AAT, A, 18/1930.
- 28 Malancharuvil stated that “the non-Catholic sections of the Malankara Church look down up on it (the reunion) as a betrayal and desertion of their Mother Church perpetrated in favour of the Roman Church” Malancharuvil, “The Reunion Movement: Its goal and significance”, 186.
- 29 This declaration was made on 27 October 1971 signed by the Pope and the Patriarch. AAS 63 (1971)814-815.
- 30 See *Information Service* 55(1984) 59-63.
- 31 Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas n.4.
- 32 Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas n.9.
- 33 Cf. *Information Service* 60 (1986) 12-13.
- 34 Cf. *Information Service* 77 (1991) 68 and *Information Service* 83 (1993) 91.
- 35 Cf. *Information Service* 85 (1994) 52
- 36 Cf. *Information Service* 84 (1993) 159
37. *Information Service* 84 (1993) 160
38. Agreement reached was signed by His Beatitude, Aboon Baselios Mar Thomas Catholicos and His Excellency ,Bishop Brian Farrell on 6th December 2011.
39. Agreement on sharing of sacred places n.2.1
40. The Joint International Commission for Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church was set up in 1988 and the first meeting was held in October 1989. See *Information Service* 77 (1991) 103.
41. Cf. G. Daucourt, “Joint Commission for Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 27 November 1989.
42. It can be found in *Information Service* 73 (1990) 39.
43. Christological Agreement. n.8.
44. Statement on the sharing of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick n.2. The agreement was signed on 9 December 2010 and approved by both the Churches.
45. The agreement is signed by the Co Chairmen of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the Churches on 9 December 2010 and approved by the Churches .
46. The Agreement Between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Church on the sharing of Sacred Places, n.6.

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Ecumenical Relationship of the Malankara Catholic Church with the Malankara Orthodox Churches

Dr Geevarghese Chediath

Introduction

The Malankara Apostolic Church of the Thomas Christians passed through several vicissitudes down through the centuries. Ever since the Coonan Cross Oath in 1653, there were serious attempts to reunite the two factions, *the Puthenkur* and *the Pazhayakur*. Special mention should be made of the reunion attempts of Marthoma I, Marthoma IV, Marthoma VI, and Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius VI. The earnest desire of the Thomas Christians to get reunited was crowned with success, at least partially, on the 20th September 1930, when Mar Ivanios with four others entered into full, visible and canonical communion with the Pope, the successor of St. Peter in the ancient See of Rome. The communion established in 1930 was based on the ecclesiology of those days. With the Second Vatican Council there is a change and development in the Catholic ecclesiology.

The Pre-Vatican Mentality

The Christian Church in the Western Patriarchate considered itself as the Catholic Church, and all the rest as non-Catholic. That is, the Catholic Church identified itself with the Church of Christ. This was, in fact, the claim of all the Churches. There was a one-sided growth in ecclesiology in every Church. Owing to a one-sided growth in ecclesiology a very centralised administrative system developed in the West. As a result of the formation of the Papal States, the Bishop of Rome had absolute authority in all the affairs of the Papal States. As the Patriarch of the West and as the ruler of the Papal States during the middle Ages, he had a very prestigious position among the European rulers and the faithful. With the colonialism of the 16th century, the Western missionaries went to the Asian, African, and American countries where the Latin Church established its own

dioceses. Thus geographically the Latin Church became a global entity. But still it was a Church, following one ecclesial tradition, namely Roman or Latin.

The Western missionaries carried on vigorous missionary activity among the Orientals, “in order to convert them to the *true Church* for the salvation of their souls”. The missionaries of those days believed in uniformity and tried to merge the non-Latin Churches into the Latin Church, keeping the bare minimum of external liturgical diversities. They appeared to be Orientals, but their priestly formation was in the hands of these missionaries who introduced the Western pious practices and created a mentality among the Oriental Catholics, which upheld everything Western. In general latinization was the general policy in those days. The Church was viewed in a monolithic pattern in which Eastern mentality was not at all taken into consideration nor given its due honour and status.

These Eastern Churches were dubbed as *Rites*, which were part of one monolithic Church, having slight liturgical diversities. The autonomy and individuality of these Particular Churches was not at all given credit. This lopsided thinking prevailed till the Second Vatican Council. Many of the theologians, since the General Synod of Lyons held in 1274 were uniformists. They believed that unity is uniformity and plurality or diversity is the root cause of all evils in the Church. One typical example is the expression, “*Varietas mater est et initium discordiae*” (Variety is the mother and beginning of disunity) coined by the Dominican Master General Cardinal Humbert, who dominated the General Synod of 1274. The autonomy of the Eastern Churches was foreign to the Western thinking at that time.

The Post-Vatican Catholic Ecclesiology

There is a marked difference in the outlook of the Catholic Church towards the other Christian Churches in its ecumenical relationship in the post-Vatican period. The Catholic Church does no more

identify itself with the Church of Christ. On the contrary, it claims that the Church of Christ *subsists* in the Catholic Church. It avoids any exclusive claim that it alone is the Church of Christ. The other Churches which were called heretical or schismatic are now called Sister Churches. Latin theology is no longer the norm and criterion to judge other theologies. Instead of demanding uniformity, it accepts legitimate diversity and plurality in the forms of expression in Liturgy, Catechesis, Church life, Church administration, Spirituality and Canonical discipline. It makes a distinction between the content of faith and the formulation of faith. It acknowledges that there is a Hierarchy of Truths. It publicly confesses its mistakes in its treatment of the other Churches and asks pardon for its faults. It assured that the mistakes of the past *would not be repeated in the future*. It clarified that unity consists not in the merging of any Church in the communion of Churches.

It believes firmly that division in the body of Christ is a grave sin, whence unity is the gift of God for His Church. We prepare ourselves through a *dialogue of love and theological dialogue*, a change of attitudes, a conversion of hearts and through personal and common prayer. The Catholic Church believes that for the full, visible and canonical communion, the ecumenical relationship which existed at the time of separation should be taken into account. Even though the Churches can no longer go back fully to the original state because of changed circumstances, that goal cannot be discarded. All the Churches should have a will to pardon others and to re-evaluate their ecclesiologies, which they had developed in isolation.

Moreover, the Catholic Church firmly believes that on basic tenets of faith, the Eastern Churches uphold the Orthodox faith. Even those remaining apparent differences could be considered as diverse formulations of the one faith and could be solved under divine providence. They are no more sound reasons for remaining isolated and separated. The Catholic Church is in almost full communion with the Eastern Apostolic Churches. The Catholic Church

does not persuade anybody from the Eastern Church to join it for the sake of salvation. The Orthodox Churches are not mission fields for the Catholic Church. At the same time, the Catholic Church, respecting the freedom of conscience of the individuals, does not hinder anybody who wants to join it. But the Churches are invited to become united because it is the will of Christ whereas division is sinful and counter witnessing.

The Catholic Church makes a distinction between full communion and partial communion. With the Eastern Apostolic Churches, it is in almost full communion; i.e., it recognizes the basic faith, Holy Orders and other Sacraments and the apostolic succession of these Churches. The Western protestant Churches are also related to the Catholic Church in varying degrees. There are more uniting elements among the Churches than separating ones. But at the same time, it realizes that there are weighty differences in doctrine still existing between the Catholic Church and the Western Protestant Churches. The Catholic Church is today even prepared to discuss the ministry of unity of the bishop of Rome. It is trying to solve all the remaining problems through fraternal discussions and dialogue. It upholds that unity is necessary only in the essential things. It is trying to understand the varying formulations and terminologies of the other Churches and is examining whether they are complementary.

Relation with the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church

Between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) Church there is a very good ecumenical relationship. Since this group accepts fully the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, there is dogmatic agreement in Christology, and agreement for Inter-Church marriage and co-operation in other matters such as confession, communion and anointing of the sick and sharing of Seminaries, theological faculties, churches and cemeteries. There is a common declaration between the pope and the Patriarch in 1984 and

another one in 1994. Both the Churches encourage common witnessing in common ecumenical undertakings. There are often common Christmas celebrations.

Relation with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

The relationship between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Church has yet to be further developed and improved. There are ample occasions and opportunities for further co-operation and common witnessing. There is a joint international theological commission among these Churches since 1988, just as there is a similar one with the Jacobite group. In 1990 a Christological agreement was signed by the heads of these two Churches. Since 1990 every year there is a theological meeting and some tangible results has yet to be emerged. However there is occasional common witnessing and co-operation during Christmas celebrations and regional meetings.

Evaluation

Even before the Second Vatican Council, the Malankara Catholic bishops were ecumenically oriented. Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorios maintained a very broad ecumenical attitude towards the other Churches. Mar Gregorios took the initiative to settle the dispute and unresolved problems with the Orthodox regarding some schools. Throughout his life he maintained an open mind towards all people, especially towards the Orthodox. He was a friend of everybody.

With the Second Vatican Council, the Malankara Catholic Church follows the new ecumenical attitude and outlook of the Catholic Church. We give priority to the communion of Churches. We stand for communion, but with the post-Vatican attitude. We stand for unity and peaceful co-existence. More than that, as Christians we believe, that we must go forward to co-operate in every possible endeavour, we must be committed to

the cause of Christian unity and we must enter into visible unity. We must prepare ourselves to the visible communion, as God wills in His time and in the manner He determines.

As members of the Malankara Catholic Church, we realize that division is a grave sin against the body of Christ. In the vast Indian sub-continent, the Christians must be united to bear witness to Christ in one voice and concertedly to preach the Gospel. We no longer are in the apologetical period. We believe in the already existing communion of the various Churches. We work for the perfecting of this communion. The Nilackal Trust and the Nilackal Church are symbols of this new attitude. It is the earnest desire of the Malankara Catholic Church that all the St. Thomas Christians should be reunited in

the Lord. The leadership of the Malankara Catholic Church is constantly exhorting its members to pray for the same and prepare themselves through the renewal of their personal life. Mar Gregorios could effect a change from the pre-Vatican apologetical attitude to the post Vatican ecumenical attitude. He encouraged the faithful for intense cooperation among the members of the Episcopal Churches.

In the light of the new ecclesiological vision of the Catholic Church, the leaders of the Orthodox Churches, who are still not in full, visible communion with the Catholic Church, can enter into new dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church for a new way of Communion. We hope that at the time prepared by the Lord, it will take place, so that all the children of St. Thomas could glorify the Lord and proclaim his message in one voice for the witnessing in the sub-continent.

