

ANTIOCHIAN EUCHARISTIC LITURGY: STRUCTURE AND CHARACTERISTICS

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INTRODUCTION

The liturgical services of the Church are oriented towards the celebration of the Holy *Qurbano*.¹ It is the heart of the liturgy, which re-enacts and re-presents the redemptive mystery of faith through signs and symbols. As Powathil writes, “It is in the celebration of the Eucharist that the faithful share in a pre-eminent way in the apostolic experiences of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.”² In the Holy *Qurbano*, the Church experiences the Christ-event through signs and symbols. The West Syrian *Qurbano* insists on the commemoration of the paschal mysteries of Jesus Christ. The entire space-time of liturgy becomes the medium of this commemoration. One of the basic features of the *Malankara* liturgy is the “Order (Anaphora) of the *Qurbano* of James,” and is believed that it was formulated by St. James, the brother of our Lord and the first Bishop of the Church of Jerusalem.

1. The Structure of the Eucharistic Liturgy

Eucharist is the ‘thanksgiving’ for all God has done in and through Jesus Christ. The *Anamnesis* has a wider meaning in the Eucharistic liturgy. It is to commemorate, celebrate, and announce what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ. It is this saving act of God that is presented, enacted, and announced in the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy so that all may share and grow in the divine life communicated to us.³ In the liturgy, the prayers are mostly addressed to the Father, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit. The following are the stages of Jesus’ life represented in the *Malankara* Eucharistic liturgy and those in which the faithful are joined with Jesus Christ. They are; 1) the conception of Jesus 2) birth and Baptism 3) the public

¹ Francis Pittappillil, *The Celebration of the Holy Mysteries* (Vadavathoor: OIRSI, 2011), 1.

² Joseph Powathil, *The Ecclesial Milieu: Ecclesial Vision and Historical Interventions*, ed. Thomas Padiyath (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2009), 26.

³ Kanjiramukalil, *The Liturgical Theology of the West Syrian Holy Qurbano*, 78.

ministry of Jesus especially his preaching of the Gospel 4) the Last Supper 5) the death and Resurrection of Jesus 6) the service of Ascension 7) the service of the second coming.⁴

The whole Eucharistic liturgy is divided into four different parts. They are The preparation and offering of the bread and wine, the liturgy of the Word, the liturgy of the sacrifice, and finally, the communion.

1.1. The Preparation and Offering of the Bread and Wine

The preparatory services in the West Syrian liturgy are known as *Thuyobo*. The public service of the Holy *Qurbono* is preceded by the service of preparation, performed by the celebrant behind the sanctuary veil. It consists of two parts, which are the service of Melchizedek and the service of Aaron. In the first part, the celebrant arranges the bread and wine on the altar recalling Melchizedek, who brought out bread and wine at his meeting with Abraham (Gen. 14: 18). In this tradition, the priest offers leavened bread (*Ramiro*) for the Holy *Qurbono* and not unleavened bread (*patiro*).

In the second part, the celebrant puts on sacred vestments and burns incense. This recalls the service of Aaron, who was the chief priest (Ex. 28: 4).⁵ The preparatory service in secret behind the veil is mostly Trinitarian and during this time, there are prayers intermingled, either addressed to the Trinity or Jesus Christ alone.⁶

The service opens by recalling the memory of the Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. “Mary, who gave birth to you and John, who baptised you, shall be intercessors on our behalf; have mercy on us, O Lord.”⁷ In this part, the celebrant presents Jesus Christ, who began his public ministry after Baptism, among the faithful. This prayer is the transitional point between the preparatory service and the public service of the Holy Eucharist. With this prayer, the *Qurbono* begins. Mar Severus of Antioch wrote this prayer and the Christological aspects in this acclamation are clear. According to Chediathu, “The response (*Manitho*) was that of Mar Severus of Antioch. It contains the complete Christology, the full Orthodox faith of the apostolic Church: Jesus Christ is called, my Lord, the King, the Only Begotten Son, and the Word of the

⁴Philip Chempakassery, “Christ Experience through the Celebration of the Liturgy of St. James,” in *Liturgy of St. James: Its Impact on Theologizing in India*, 300-307.

⁵ Kanjiramukalil, *The Liturgical Theology of the West Syrian Holy Qurbono*, 79.

⁶ Chediath, *Christology*, 178.

⁷ Baselios Cleemis, *The Order of the Holy Qurbono of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church*, (Trivandrum: The Synodal Commission for Liturgy, 2012), 15.

Heavenly Father.”⁸ This is followed by the *Trisagion*⁹ addressed to Jesus Christ, who is immortal and at the same time crucified for us, and the threefold *Kyrie Eleison*. It can be considered as an adoration of Jesus Christ the King.¹⁰ It is introduced here as a preparation for the liturgy of the Word of God.

1.2. The Liturgy of the Word

The liturgy of the Word is the second part of the Holy Eucharist and it is mostly Christocentric. It consists of six readings from the Scriptures, three from the OT three from the NT and the homily. The OT passages are read after the canonical hours. The three NT passages are read in this part of the Holy Eucharist. It is the proclamation of the redemptive mysteries, which are commemorated, in the Holy Eucharist.¹¹

The NT lessons are read after the *Trisagion*. There is one reading from the *Catholic Epistles* or *the Acts of the Apostles*, a second reading, a lesson from the Pauline Epistles and finally a reading from the Holy Gospel. The Catholic Epistles or *the Acts of the Apostles* is read by the lector standing on the step of the sanctuary on the northern side, and the Pauline Epistles is read from the southern side of the sanctuary. Reading from the northern side is symbolic of the preaching of the Word of God to the Jews first and reading from the southern side is symbolic of the mission to the nations of the world.¹² The Gospel is read at the centre of the sanctuary because it is the doctrine of life and the Good News of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The priest then leads the people in a long prayer for pardon and grace, which is divided into three sections: *Promion*, *Husoyo*, and *Sedro*. The *Promion* is a short preface, which is a variable prayer following the *Sedro*. The *Husoyo* (atonement)¹³ is an invariable prayer, that asks for forgiveness of sins for all the faithful, both the living and the dead. The *Sedro* refers to a set form of prayer, which contains petitions for God’s graces to be given to the people. These long prayers end with a general absolution. After the general absolution, there comes the solemn blessing of the censer. This solemn blessing is a declaration of faith in the Holy Trinity. This ceremony is the most stirring glorification of the Holy Trinity and it is a very solemn movement in the liturgy.

⁸ Chediath, *Christology*, 179.

⁹ Kanjiramukalil, *The Liturgical Theology of the West Syrian Holy Qurbano*, 107-110.

¹⁰ Geevarghese Panicker, “West Syrian Anaphora,” in *The Harp*, Vol. VI, 31-43.

¹¹ Kanjiramukalil, *The Liturgical Theology of the West Syrian Holy Qurbano*, 113.

¹² Panicker, *The Holy Qurbano in the Syro-Malankara Church*, 40.

¹³ Vijayanand, “Penitential Dimension of the Liturgy of St. James,” 343.

It recalls the Baptism of Jesus Christ in the river Jordan.¹⁴ The Nicene Creed is then recited by the faithful. Here ends the second part of the Holy Eucharist.

1.3. The Liturgy of the Sacrifice

In the West Syrian tradition, the *anaphora* then begins. The term *anaphora* is a Greek word, which refers to the elevation of the offering presented to God. It is a prayer comprising essentially of the account of the Institution of the supper and the words of consecration.¹⁵ It is a solemn prayer of thanksgiving, which recalls the prayer of thanksgiving our Lord spoke at the last supper and the words and actions he used when he instituted the Eucharist. According to Kanjiramukalil, “The celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy in the West Syrian tradition has its basis in the *anaphora* of St. James¹⁶ and it carries all the classical characteristics of the West Syrian *anaphora*. It has given birth to a good number of *anaphora* in the Syrian tradition and all these have the same structure of the *anaphora* of St. James.”¹⁷

In the West Syrian tradition, the *anaphora* starts with the prayer of peace and ends with the prayers after the communion. Most of the prayers in *anaphora* are all addressed to the Father, together with the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The *anaphora* starts with the prayers, such as the prayer of peace, the imposition of hands, and the prayer over the Veil.

In the liturgy, the first three prayers in the *anaphora*, the prayer of peace, the prayer of inclination and the prayer of the veil, are certainly the prayers of reconciliation.¹⁸ The first prayer of the *anaphora* is called the prayer of peace. The West Syrian tradition has always connected peace with the salvific events of Jesus Christ. In the Eucharist, the celebrant greets the faithful with the prayer, “Peace be with you all,” seven times. Besides these greetings, the faithful are dismissed with the words, “Go in peace” in the final blessing of the Eucharist. It is a characteristic, common to the Oriental liturgies that the kiss of peace is done at the beginning of the *anaphora*. It reminds us that the love of neighbour is a necessary part of our participation in the Holy Eucharist.

¹⁴ Kanjiramukalil, *The Liturgical Theology of the West Syrian Holy Qurbono*, 81-142.

¹⁵ Panicker, “West Syrian Anaphora,” in *The Harp: A Review of Syriac and Oriental Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. VI, 29.

¹⁶ Jacob Parappally, “The Trinitarian Worship in the Liturgy of St. James and its Relevance for the Church in India,” in *Liturgy of St. James*, 281-82.

¹⁷ Kanjiramukalil, *The Liturgical Theology of the West Syrian Holy Qurbono*, 76.

¹⁸ Varghese Vijayanand, “Penitential Dimension in the Liturgy of St. James,” in *Liturgy of St. James*, 335-36.

The celebrant then gives the first blessing and here the Eucharistic prayers start proper. There are three blessings within the *anaphora*. The first and the third blessings are Trinitarian, while the second blessing is Christological.¹⁹ The Words of Institution are said here as the continuation and culmination of the redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ. The sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ is sacramentally celebrated here. In the liturgy, importance is given not to the Words of Institution but to the actions. It is in the Institution Narrative that the Christological content of the *anaphora* finds its concrete expression.

Now follows the *Anamnesis*. The Anamnesis is an integral part of the narration of God's loving-kindness towards humanity. The whole economy of salvation, beginning with the creation and its fulfilment in the *Parousia*, has been evoked. In the *Anamnesis*, the whole economy of salvation is recalled, celebrated, and re-presented.²⁰

Then comes the *Epiclesis*. The invocation of the Holy Spirit completes and perfects the Holy Eucharist. The Holy Spirit is asked to descend upon the gifts and transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Following the *Epiclesis*, there are six prayers of intercession; three for the living and three for the dead and departed.

The third part of the Eucharistic liturgy ends with a Trinitarian praise called a doxology. "May your all glorious and blessed name be praised and glorified with that of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, by us and because of us, now and forever."²¹ Then follows the second blessing, which is in the name of the Son.

1.4. The Communion

This part of communion is composed mainly of the fraction, the prayer of the Lord, the third blessing, the elevation of the Holy Mysteries, the hymns of commemoration, the procession of the Holy Mysteries, the distribution of the Holy Mysteries, and the prayers of thanksgiving.

The first step of this section is the liturgical ceremony of fraction in which the crucifixion, the death of Christ, and the Resurrection are commemorated symbolically. In this service of separation and conjoining, the celebrant remembers the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and he concludes the service with a prayer that expresses the hope of attaining eternal life.²²

¹⁹ Chediath, *Christology*, 180.

²⁰ Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology*, 65-67.

²¹ Cleemis, *The Order of the Holy Qurbano of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church*, 42.

²² Vineeth Koodappattu, "Mar Ivanios a prophet of Hope," in *The Theological Visions of Mar Ivanios*, ed. Antony Valiyavilayil (Pune: Bethany Veda Vijnana Peeth Publications, 2004), 193.

In the *anaphora*, then follows the Lord's Prayer. The third solemn blessing is given, here invoking the Holy Trinity with seven-fold attributes. "May the grace and the mercy of the Holy and Glorious Trinity, Uncreated, Self-existent, Eternal, Worshipful, and Consubstantial be with you all, my brethren, forever."²³

The Elevation of Mysteries is the next part of the liturgy. After the elevation, commemorations of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, and the faithful departed are made with solemn hymns, but these are not part of the *anaphora*. Soon after the commemoration, the priest receives the Holy Eucharist and prepares for the solemn procession of the Holy Mysteries. This solemn procession signifies the anticipated second coming of our Lord from the East.²⁴

In Malankara Church Communion²⁵ is given to the faithful as both species on their tongues. After the communion of the faithful, there is another solemn procession of the Holy Mysteries, which shows that the elect will be taken by Jesus Christ to his Father's house after the judgement.

Then there are two prayers of thanksgiving. The first prayer is addressed to the Father and it is a prayer of gratitude for the heavenly gifts as well as for further blessings. The second prayer is addressed to the Son that at his second coming we may receive mercy.²⁶ The celebrant dismisses the people with a three-fold blessing, speaking of the provisions they have received for life's pilgrimage. The celebrant blesses the faithful in the name of the most Holy Trinity and he commemorates once again the redemption achieved by the victorious cross of our Lord. This Trinitarian blessing is the final prayer in the *anaphora*. The Holy Eucharist is concluded, behind the sanctuary veil, with the post-communion prayers of the priest. The priest takes leave of the table of life with a prayer by kissing the table of life.²⁷ The last part of the Eucharistic liturgy is a public thanksgiving service for the whole redemptive act of the Holy Trinity.

This is the structure of the West Syrian Eucharistic liturgy. The structure of the Holy Eucharist is arranged in such a way that it contains all the aspects of the saving acts of God. The West Syrian Eucharistic liturgy is the commemoration and celebration of the whole saving act of God, fully

²³ Cleemis, *The Order of the Holy Qurbono of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church*, 46.

²⁴ Mani K. Rajan, *Queen of the Sacraments* (Udayagiri: Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary Publications, 1994), 164.

²⁵ Thadikkatt Geo, "Celebration of Eucharistic Liturgy," in *The Harp*, Vol. XVI, 324-25.

²⁶ Vineeth Koodappattu, "Mar Ivanios a Prophet of Hope," in *The Theological Visions of Mar Ivanios*, 194-195.

²⁷ Panicker, "West Syrian Anaphora," in *The Harp*, Vol. VI, 40.

manifested and executed in Jesus Christ, looking forward to its theological fulfilment in the eschatological second coming of our Lord.

Conclusion

The Eucharistic celebration of the Malankara Church is one of the outstanding examples of the re-enactment of salvation history, starting with creation and ending with the second coming of Jesus Christ. The Eucharistic liturgy is the celebration of the salvation history realised and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This Christ event is proclaimed, celebrated, and actualised in and through the West Syrian liturgy. The West Syrian liturgy is the gold mine for theology because of its richness and variety. Liturgy is the supreme faith expression and at the same time, the public worship of the Church.

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