

Introduction to Liturgy

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I. What is Liturgy?

1. Etymological Meaning

The English word liturgy comes from the Latin word *Liturgia* which in turn has its origin from the Greek word *leitourgia* (from the Greek verb *leitourgein*). For the Greek people *leitourgia* meant “public work” or “a service in the name of or on behalf of the people”. In the Greek Churches this term was used to designate the public worship, especially the divine liturgy. Once the term is applied to the Christian worship its original meaning as service is retained to certain extent. This term was popularized in the nineteenth century. Before the 20th century this term hardly occurs in the official Church documents. (The other terms in vogue in the Middle Ages: Divine Office or Ecclesiastical Office; From 16th century terms like Ecclesiastical rites or Sacred Rites were preferred.)

In the NT the word liturgy is used to mean the celebration of Divine worship and also the proclamation of the Gospel and active charity. (Cf. Lk 1.23; Acts 13.2; Rom 15.16,27; 2 Cor 9.12; Phil 2.25,30.) At all these occasions liturgy is a question of the service of God and neighbour. CCC 1070.

Therefore, Christian liturgy is the service of love. **Liturgy = Service = Love**

The Malayalam word *ārāadhanakramam* does not convey properly the reality of liturgy. The word *kramam* refers to the order to be kept in the celebration and in that sense it suits more for the text of the liturgy. The expression Divine Worship is a substitute for liturgy. However, the notion of service and love lacks here. If the words worship or adoration are taken to mean also service and love, then only they can mean the true reality of liturgy. (If it is adoration that which takes place in liturgy, then it is God who adores men and men adore God only as a response.)

2. Liturgy according to *Mediator Dei*; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, CCC

a.) “The Sacred Liturgy is the public worship which our Redeemer as the head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its founder and through him to the heavenly Father. In short, it is the public worship rendered by the mystical body of Christ in entirety of its head and members.” (*Mediator Dei*, Para 20, Encyclical of Pope Pius XII, Nov. 20, 1947).

b.) “The liturgy is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. It involves the presentation of man’s sanctification under the guise of signs perceptible by the senses and its accomplishment in ways appropriate to each of these signs. In it full public worship is performed by the mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members.” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* -7, Para 3: in Vatican II Documents)

Through the liturgy Christ, our Redeemer and High Priest continues the work of redemption in, with and through his Church.

Liturgy is for the experience of salvation. In liturgy the Church celebrates above all the paschal mystery by which Christ accomplished the work of salvation. CCC 1067.

“For it is the liturgy through which, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, “the work of our redemption is accomplished”, and 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 Church. SC 2.

“Nevertheless the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows.” SC 10

“In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle. (Rev 21.2; Col 3.1; Heb 8.2) SC 8.

In Christian tradition liturgy means the “participation of the people of God in the Work of God” (Jn 17.4) CCC 1069.

3. Contents of Liturgy

a. Sacraments: Liturgy consists essentially of sacraments among which Eucharistic celebration is the most important one. Eucharist is the sacrament of sacraments.

b. Liturgy of Hours: It is devised to make the whole course of the day and night holy by the praise of God. It is truly the voice of the Bride (Church) addressed to her Bridegroom (Christ). It is the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to his Father. In the liturgy of Hours Christ continues his priestly work through his Church. CCC 1174, 1175.

c. Sacramentals: Blessing of persons (eg. blessing of the abbot or abbess of a monastery, the consecration of virgins, the rite of the religious profession, and blessing of certain ministries of the Church -minor orders-); of meals, objects and places (dedication or blessing of the church or an altar, the blessing of holy oils, vessels and vestments, bells etc.)

4. Popular Piety (Devotions)

Expressions of popular piety like adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, veneration of relics, visit to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the stations of the cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals etc. extend the liturgical life of the Church. They do not replace liturgy. Expressions of piety should harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy and in some way derived from it and lead the people to it. Liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them. SC 13, 3. CCC 1674, 1675

- What is the real difference between liturgy and devotions? (See class notes.)

II. Liturgy as the Work of the Holy Trinity (CCC 1077-1109)

a. Work of the Father

Father is the source and goal of liturgy. He takes the initiative for the liturgy. From the part of the believers liturgy is only a response of participation in the blessings offered by the Father. Liturgy may be seen as the exchange of blessings between the Father and the believers. Father bestows his blessings upon us. From the beginning until the end of time the whole of God's work is a blessing. His blessings include the creation, the Word and the Gift. Thus creation, redemption and ongoing sanctification is the blessing of the Father. Concretely the redemption and sanctification are the main work of God towards the humankind. From the part of man liturgy means acknowledging the work of creation, redemption and sanctification. The Father is acknowledged and adored as the source and end of all the blessings of creation and salvation.

In the Eucharistic liturgy we can find this exchange of the blessings. Father sends His Son and Holy Spirit to the believers. In His Word who became incarnate, died, and rose for us, he fills us with his blessings. Through his Word, he pours into our hearts the Gift that contains all gifts. The believers praise and thank the Father through the prayers (mainly the g'hanta prayers) of the Qudaša. The historical Qurbana that the Father offered to us in Jesus Christ is sacramentally enacted in the Eucharist.

- (See class notes for the details.)

b. Work of Christ

Jesus is re-enacting the work of salvation in the liturgy. Christ makes present his paschal mystery. His paschal mystery transcends the time and participates in the divine eternity. In liturgy Christ makes present this eternal reality of the salvific event. It is through the liturgical space-time that the mystery of Christ is made present. (See the details on liturgical space-time below.)

In liturgy Christ plays a double role. On the one hand he represents the Father and offers the salvation and sanctification in the Spirit. On the other, he remains the head of the Church and hence turns to the Father along with the community of the faithful. Christ offers himself to the Father. He offers us also along with him. He renders *eucharistia* to the Father on behalf of the Church. In the commemoration of the Paschal mystery Christ is the protagonist.

c. Work of the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit prepares the Church to encounter her Lord. He recalls and makes Christ manifest to the faith of the assembly (CCC 1092). The grace of the Holy Spirit seeks to awaken faith, conversion of heart and adherence to the will of the Father. (CCC 1098) He awakens the memory of the Church and inspires her to thanksgiving and praise. Thus the Holy Spirit is the living memory of the Church. In every liturgical action the Holy Spirit is sent in order to bring us into communion with Christ and so to form his body. The Holy Spirit effects two kinds of sanctification in the liturgy: the sanctification of the mysteries and the sanctification of the assembly. It is through the communion of the mysteries that the Holy Spirit effects sanctification of the assembly. Communion with the Holy Trinity and fraternal communion are inseparably the fruit of the Spirit in the liturgy.

- How far is this function of the Spirit revealed in the Syriac name Ruha d' Qudša?

- Explain the concepts of Sanctification and Šawtaputha. (See class notes.)

III. Liturgy as the Work of the Church

As the work of Christ liturgy is also an action of his Church. Liturgy makes the Church present and manifests her as the visible sign of the communion in Christ between God and men. Church is made present in the liturgical assembly and especially in the eucharistic assembly. Therefore, it is said: Eucharist makes the Church. It is through celebrating the communion (both vertical and horizontal) that the liturgical assembly is constituting the Church.

Church makes the Eucharist. Liturgy is not a private affair. It is the work of the entire mystical body.

Leitourgia of the assembly (Vertical dimension): The eucharistia (*Qudasha*) and Qurbana offered to God from the part of the assembly.

Leitourgia of the assembly (Horizontal dimension): Horizontal reconciliation; Qurbana (of oneself) offered to the fellow beings.

IV. Liturgical Space-time

1. Sacred and Profane

In the history of religions there has always been a distinction between sacred and profane. Man, especially the primitive man, had a feeling of terror before the sacred, before the awe-inspiring mystery (*mysterium tremendum*), the majesty that emanates an overwhelming superiority of power. It is religious fear before the fascinating mystery. R. Otto characterizes all these experiences as *numinous* (in Latin *numen* -God). The numinous presents itself as the “wholly other”, something basically and totally different. It is like nothing human or cosmic. Confronted with it, man realizes his profound nothingness, feels that he is only a creature, or as Abraham said to the Lord, is “but dust and ashes” (Gen 18.27). The recognition of the distinction between the sacred and the profane constitutes the basis of religion.

Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. M. Eliade calls this act of manifestation of the sacred as ‘hierophany’. History of religion consists of a great number of theophanies, by manifestations of sacred realities.

2. Sacred Space-time

To the religious man space is not homogeneous. There are certain breaks in the continuity of space, distinguishing the sacred from the profane. He experiences interruptions and breaks in it. A church or temple constitutes a break in the profane space of a city. Some parts of the space are qualitatively different from others. Ex 3.5: "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Thus there is the holy or sacred space. It is strong and significant. The religious man finds it as the only real and really existing space. All other space is "not sacred" or "profane". According to Mircea Eliade, ordinary or profane space is without structure or consistency, and is, therefore, amorphous. Eliade makes another distinction in the conception of space: cosmos and chaos. Cosmos is an inhabited territory, the work of the gods. It is ordered space. But on the other hand the outside territory is chaos, having no order or limits.

For the religious man, time, too, is neither homogeneous nor continuous. There are intervals of sacred time. Just as a church or temple constitutes a break in the profane space of a city, the service celebrated inside it marks a break in the profane duration of time.

The believing man experiences two types of sacred space-time: one is sacred in its origin itself, the other is his own creation. He sees the cosmic phenomena such as stars, planets, solar and lunar eclipses, sunrise, air, fire, water, mountains, stones, trees, etc. as sacred. Sometimes he creates sacred space-time by consecrating ordinary space and time. Sanctuaries, and the time of offerings, feasts, etc. are examples of such consecrated space and time. The enclosure, wall, or circle of stones surrounding a sacred place constitute the most ancient known forms of man-made sanctuaries. The most primitive sacred places, a landscape of stones, water and trees, constituted a microcosm. Sacred place in its primitive form is a microcosm, because it reproduces the natural landscape; because it is a reflection of the whole. The altar and the temple, later developments of the sacred place, are microcosms because they are the centres of the world, because they stand at the very heart of the universe and constitute an *imago mundi*.

3. The Function of Sacred Space-time: Divine-Human Communication

Why is there sacred space-time? As regards the sanctuaries, we get an answer from Chaldean cosmogony, which holds that the very creation of humanity was for constructing

an abode for the gods. The history of religion tells us that man has always had the desire for an ordered space where communication with the divine is possible. Consecration is cosmicization or creation of a cosmic region which is always in communication with the world of the gods. The sacred establishes order, fixes the limits, and founds the world. With the creation of sacred space-time, this communication with the world of gods is ensured. The most ancient sanctuaries were hypaethral or built with an aperture in the roof - the 'eye of the dome' - symbolizing the breakthrough from plane to plane, communication with the transcendent. Sacred space-time thus constitutes the entrance to non-space-time.

4. Space-time of Christian Liturgy: Signs and Symbols of Liturgy

Sacred space, sacred time, sacred persons, sacred objects, sacred words and music, sacred gestures and actions are all symbols which realize the celebration of the paschal mystery and the salvific encounter with Christ. It is through these signs and symbols that Christ accomplishes the work of our redemption

The sacramental celebration is the mystery of Christ celebrated in space and time. A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. Their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and human culture, specified by the events of Old Testament and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ (CCC 1145). As a social being man needs signs and symbols to communicate with others, through language, gestures, and actions. The same holds true for his relationship with God. (Signs and symbols of creation: candles, water, fire; signs and symbols of human life: washing, anointing, breaking bread; and signs and symbols of the history of salvation (rites of Passover).

The sacraments of the Church do not abolish but purify and integrate all the richness of the signs and symbols of the cosmos and of social life. Further, they fulfil the types and figures of the Old Covenant, they signify and make present the salvation wrought by Christ, and prefigure and anticipate the glory of heaven. In sacramental symbolism the signs effect what they signify. The word sign is the word used in classical theology. Modern anthropologists prefer the term symbol.

- Christian liturgical space-time is a symbolic whole.

The entire liturgy is made up of the signs and symbols of space-time. Therefore, liturgy may be considered as a symbolic whole. The unity of symbols is much emphasized for a proper liturgical celebration. It is more appropriate to consider the

liturgical space-time as a symbolic whole rather than speaking of different symbols in the liturgy.

Liturgy is celebration or commemoration of the paschal mystery of Christ. Participation in it would enable the participant attain salvation. The symbols serve like windows or doors to the saving reality of the salvific event. They make one experience the eternal reality of salvation, here and now. Without properly recognizing the worth of the symbols one cannot practise properly the religion.

- Liturgical space-time is the paschal mystery of Christ in space-time; Its purpose is sanctification of God and sanctification of man through space-time.

V. Liturgy: Source of Theology and Spirituality

1. Theology of Liturgy and Liturgical Theology

What is theology of liturgy? Is it a scientific understanding of liturgy, dealing with the theological principles governing liturgy? Does it aim at providing liturgy with a theological basis? There has been the tendency to consider liturgy as devoid of theological content, and hence a theology of liturgy would be striving to discover some theological basis for liturgy. Is it the theology which emerges from liturgy, like a babe detaching itself from the womb? Theology of liturgy is neither that which serves as a theological treatment of liturgy nor that which is born from liturgy. It is the theology that is found in the very action of liturgy. Therefore, it is liturgical theology or worshipping theology.

Liturgical theology does not come from liturgy: It arises in and as liturgy. Theology which is liturgical arises in the liturgical structures and does not detach from liturgical rite. Liturgy is theology in action, it is not merely a rubrical resource for the allegedly real theologians to rummage through. (Fagerberg pp.14-15). Liturgical action is theological act. It is in this sense that Aidan Kavanagh calls liturgical theology as *theologia prima* and theological reflections on liturgy as *theologia secunda*. (Kavanagh 74-75).

The liturgical rite is the ontological condition for what is itself a genuine theology. (Fagerberg p.14). Encounter with God precedes reflection upon that encounter. Liturgical theology originates and resides in the communal rite. This theology, the one that is liturgical, does not originate and reside in individual minds but is by definition

found in the structure of the rite. The only starting point for uncovering liturgical theology is to investigate concrete liturgical rites.

- ***Lex orandi, lex credendi***

This axiom ***Lex orandi, lex credendi*** means that law of prayer is law of belief. The law of prayer (*lex orandi*) establishes the law of belief (*lex credendi*). Liturgy is the source of the faith. Liturgy is the celebration of the faith. The faith is formally declared and celebrated in liturgy. The Eastern Churches especially look to the liturgy for the proper formulation of faith. Changes of the formulae in liturgy can change the faith itself.

2. Christian spirituality as Liturgical Spirituality

Spirituality is living the faith which is celebrated in liturgy. It is a life according to the celebration. It is living the experience of vertical communion in life. Life becomes a 'new liturgical space-time' in which *quddaša* of God (*eucharistia*) and *quddaša* of man (communion with God and fellow beings) are celebrated through the signs and symbols of life. Life becomes the new altar on which the anabatic and katabatic Qurbana are celebrated. Spirituality is a life of horizontal *leitourgia*. It is one of continuous horizontal '*eucharistia*', *quddaša* and *Qurbana*. In fact the spirituality of the Christian is centered on the Eucharist. (SC10; LG 11). Hence it may be called a eucharistic spirituality.

VI. Rite and Liturgy

The word 'rite' in common parlance means a ceremony. It is the mode of performing something. In this sense the mode of performing a liturgical act is called liturgical rite of that function. (e.g. rite of fraction and consignation, rite of Communion.). The complex of the modes of performing all the liturgical items or functions is often called rite. In this sense liturgy and Rite may be seen as synonymous. Sometimes, a liturgical tradition as a whole is called a Rite. In the canonical sense 'Rite', sometimes, denotes a particular Church. In *Orientalium Ecclesiarum 2* we find the expression Particular Church or Rite. Here the word Rite includes the liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline and spiritual patrimony of particular Churches. According to Code of Canons for the Oriental Churches (CCEO) "Rite is the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstances of history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested in each Church sui juris." (can. 28 § 1).

1. Families of Eastern Liturgies

I. Antiochene

- a. **West Syrian:** Used by the Catholic Syrians and Jacobites in the Middle East and elsewhere. Language: West Syriac and Arabic.
- b. **Malankara:** Used by the Malankara Catholic Church, Orthodox Syrian and Syrian Orthodox Churches in India and elsewhere. Language: West Syriac and Malayalam.
- c. **Maronite:** Used by the Maronites in Lebanon and elsewhere. Language: West Syriac and Arabic.

II. East Syrian (Mesopotamian or Persian)

- a. **Assyrian:** Used by the Assyrian Church of the East (non-Catholic) in the Middle East, India (Trichur) and elsewhere. Language: East Syriac, Surath (dialect of Syriac), and Arabic.
- b. **Chaldean:** Used by the Chaldean Church (Catholic) in the Middle East and elsewhere. Language: East Syriac, Surath (dialect of Syriac), and Arabic.
- c. **Syro-Malabar:** Used by the Syro-Malabar Church in India and elsewhere. Language: Malayalam.

III. Alexandrian Liturgies

- a. **Coptic:** Used by the Catholic and non-Catholic Copts in Egypt and elsewhere. Language: Old Coptic and Arabic.
- b. **Ethiopian:** Used by Catholic and non-Catholic Ethiopians in Ethiopia, Asmara, and elsewhere. It is also used by the Catholic and non-Catholic Eritreans in Eritrea. Language: Ge'ez.

IV. Byzantine (Constantinopolitan)

The places where the different liturgies of Byzantine tradition are used, and the languages in which they are used, are evident from the very names of the liturgies.

- a. Albanian
- b. Bulgarian

- c. Greek Orthodox
- d. Hungarian
- e. Italo-Albanian
- f. Melkite (Used in the Middle East and elsewhere)
- g. Romanian
- h. Russian
- i. Ruthenian
- j. Slovak
- k. Ukrainian
- l. Yugoslavian
- m. Byelorussian

V. Armenian

Used by the Catholic and non-Catholic Armenians in Armenia, Lebanon and elsewhere.

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Model Questions

1. What is liturgy according to *Mediator Dei* 20; *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7 and CCC 1069. (14 marks).

Answer any one of the following. (20 marks)

2. Explain the importance of liturgy on the basis of SC 2, SC 8, SC 10, CCC 1067.
3. Explain liturgy as the work of the Holy Trinity.

Answer any two of the following in one page. (2x8 =16 marks)

4. What is the relevance of liturgical space-time?
5. How is liturgy related to theology and spirituality?
6. What are the main contents of liturgy?
7. What is the relation between liturgy and devotions?
8. Which are the main divisions of the liturgical families?