

## STRUCTURE AND THEOLOGY OF LITURGICAL HOURS IN THE MALANKARA TRADITION

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### Introduction

Prayer during the liturgical hours is like an immovable rock that nourishes one's spiritual life. Prayer may be done privately and individually, or it may be done corporately in the presence of fellow believers. The Antiochian liturgy, followed by the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, understands liturgical hours with a special concern. The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church follows the Israel community's liturgical tradition, who pray seven times a day. All the liturgical services start in the time of evening, the common prayer begins with the hour of evening (*Ramsho*) and it is considered the opening of the day

### 1. Evolution of Daily Prayers

Every liturgical celebration is an action of Christ the Priest and of His Body which is the church. In the earthly liturgy, we take part in a foretaste of that 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, a minister of the holies and the true tabernacle.<sup>1</sup> By tradition going back to early Christian times, the "liturgy of the hours", also called, "divine office" or "canonical prayers" is devised so that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praises of God.

There are two orders of the liturgy of the hours in the tradition of the West Syrian Church—the *Penkeeso*, the liturgy of the hours of feast days, and *S'himo*, the liturgy of the hours of ordinary days. The Canonical prayers were first published in its original Syriac language in the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church. It was printed in 1943 at the St. Joseph's Printing House of the Diocese of Thiruvalla. Late Rev. Fr. Mathew Chempothinal Malpan translated the liturgy of the hours to Malayalam and the complete Malayalam translation was published in 1969. The prayer of hours in the *Kurbaanakramam* includes *psalms*, *both* and *kolos* from the *S'himo* text. The very rich and

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<sup>1</sup> The Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 8.

profound liturgy is the key factor of our Church and that helps the faithful to take active participation in the liturgy of the hours.

## **2. The Structure of the Prayer**

The basic structure of the liturgy of the hours is as follows; *Qaumo*, Introductory Prayer, *Masmoorakal* or Psalms, *Ekbo* or *Eniono*, *Prumion- Sedro*, *Qolo*, *Etro*, *Quqlion*, and *B'outho*. Even though this is the general structure, all these elements may not be there in the prayers of the short order of the liturgy of the hours.<sup>2</sup>

## **3. Days and their Themes**

The main theme and the focal point of the whole week are evaluated from the very resurrection of our Lord. The community constantly recalls great mysteries and ponders over the Pascal events of Christ.<sup>3</sup> Sunday is the centre of attraction of our daily liturgy because it is a day of our Lord. The Lord's Day, the original feast day and the matrix of all Christian worship, celebrates the passion, resurrection, and glorification of the Lord Jesus; in thanksgiving to God, who by His resurrection from the dead has given us a new birth unto a living hope for the inheritance that nothing can destroy.<sup>4</sup>

The striking topic for the meditation on Monday and Tuesday is consciousness about sin and repentance. God often hates the sin, not the sinner. Like a merciful father who vigilantly waits for the son as we see in the parable of the prodigal son, He patiently waits for the sinner to return to communion and paternal love.

The mother of our Lord is the momentous socket for meditation on Wednesday. The reverence and prospect of the Mother Mary are prerequisites for attaining the image of Christ. Because Mary is an exceptional means chosen by God for the definite purpose of salvation History.<sup>5</sup> So, we must remember and show our filial piety to her.

Thursday is blessed with the remembrances of Apostles, Saints, Martyrs, and doctors of the church. They were the pioneers of our Christian faith and their contributions and exemplary examples are

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<sup>2</sup> S'himo Intro, 7.

<sup>3</sup> S. Thaikkootathil, *S'heemoyile Tiruvachanasamapathu* (Trivandrum: M.S. Publications, 1987) 9.

<sup>4</sup> F. Acharya, *The Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit: The Prayer of Asian Churches* (Vagamon: Kurishumala Ashram, 1983) 15.

<sup>5</sup> S. Thaikkootathil, *S'heemoyile Tiruvachanasamapathu* (Trivandrum: M.S. Publications, 1987) 9.

effective in a sense to imbibe in our life. They were ardent witnesses to the Christian values in all sagacity.

The holy cross which resembles the sign and symbol of redemption is an element to think about on Friday. Once cross represented a sign of insult and anguish. Jesus by his emancipating and redeeming death assimilated the status of the cross into different dimensions such as victory and respect.<sup>6</sup> So, it is very important to bow and express owe to the holy cross on this respective day.

On Saturday we recall the very profane memories of the departed especially those who set apart their life for the service of the Lord and the faithful. The different dominions of the church particularly those who are on earth, in purgatory, and heaven are a matter of fact for the prayer and practice of the day.

#### **4. The Different Watches of the Day and their Significance**

The Canonical prayers in Syrian Liturgy are divided into seven hours. Beginning with the Evening Prayer (*Ramsho*), followed by the prayer at the end of the day (*Southaro*, meaning ‘protection’) from Psalm 91 which is sung at this prayer “He who sits under the protection of the Most High then the night prayer (*Lilio*), the morning prayer (*Sapro*) followed by the prayer of the third, sixth and ninth hour. The seven hours of prayer create a cycle that provides us with a foretaste of the eternal life we will spend in the presence of God worshipping Him.<sup>7</sup>

These seven watches are officially declared by the church for fruitful prayer and meditation and they fulfill the cycle of the day as well. According to the interpretation of Mor Ignatius Bar Vahib, the Evening prayer (*Ramso*) is the preparation of the field, *Suthro* is interpreted as the sowing of the seed, and the *Third watch* as the trashing the sheaf of paddy grains. The *Sixth watch* is interpreted as the gathering of grains in the shed and the *Ninth watch* is the distributing the wage and almsgiving.<sup>8</sup>

Concerning the implications centred on the sufferings of Our Lord, the evening prayer (*Ramso*) is defined as the time before his last hour in which Our Lord instituted holy Qurbono in the upper chamber of the house. He evoked the Passover with his disciples and familiarized them

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<sup>6</sup> S. Thaikkootathil, *S’heemoyileTiruvachanasamapathu*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Shehimo: The Book of Common Prayer*, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *S’himo*: Intro, iii.

with the abundant mystery and new mandate of love. The *Suthro* is defined as the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. The *Third watch* is interpreted as Jesus carrying his cross and heading towards Golgotha, and the *Sixth watch* as He is nailed to the cross at this hour and becomes the eternal sacrifice for the whole of humankind. He offered himself to his father as a living and vigorous sacrifice. The *Ninth watch* is defined as the tormented death of Jesus on the cross is the primordial paraphernalia of the hour. After his death according to rites and rituals, the body was buried in a rocky tomb by the leadership of Joseph the Arimathiya and Neccadamose. Then the cycle of the day comes to an end here and instigates again from the beginning.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Divine Liturgy and divine praises are the official form of worship that evolved from these gatherings of the early church period. The divisions of a day which elaborate the scope of prayer into different times or hours evolved from the practices of early church fathers. These timings and divisions into different liturgical hours show the depth of spirituality and it makes one more related to God through one's own life's situations. The relation of these divisions of divine praises or liturgical hours to the biblical contexts gives a much more profound view of what to pray and how to pray within the church as a community and a kind of integration and enthusiasm to grow in personal spirituality.

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<sup>9</sup> *S'himo*: Intro, ii.

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