

THE CONCEPT OF PARADISE IN THE RITES AND SYMBOLS OF SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION IN THE SYRO-MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of a Christian faithful is to reach God and be with Him in the Heavenly Paradise. The liturgy of Holy Baptism of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church is in a way a foretaste of Paradise. The hymn which is used in the Baptismal liturgy during the Holy Communion of the newly baptized reveals this; “the fruit that Adam could not taste in the Paradise is being placed with gladness, today in your mouth”¹

1. Structure of the Sacraments: Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist

Baptism has three rites in Malankara liturgy: immersion, anointing, and communion.² Baptism is administrated after the Eucharistic liturgy and is completed with Eucharistic Communion.³ The essential elements of the baptismal liturgy consist of exorcism, Pre-Baptismal anointing, the consecration of the water with an epiclesis, followed by the infusion of Holy Myron, Immersion, Chrismation, crowning, and finally communion.⁴

1.1 Facing towards the East

Facing the East is an important aspect of the liturgical celebration. This symbol has a strong Biblical foundation. In Genesis 2:8 we read, “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east.” The candidate always faces to the east during the Act of Insufflation, the Act of Anointing, the Exorcism, the Proclamation of Faith, the Immersion, Clothing with the white garment,

¹ Ordo of Holy Baptism and chrismation of Syro Malankara Catholic Church (Re-print, 2015), p. 36.

²B. VARGHESE, Baptism and Chrismation in the Syriac Tradition, 48

³B. VARGHESE, Baptism and Chrismation in the Syriac tradition, 48

⁴. B. VARGHESE, West Syrian Liturgical Theology, 148.

Crowning, and when receiving Holy Communion. The only exception is at the renunciation of Satan,⁵ at that time the candidate is facing the West.

1.2 The Act of Anointing

The act of Anointing is significant in the Bible. In the Old Testament, both the high priest (Ex 29:29) and the king of Israel 1 (Samuel 15:17) are anointed. During the act of the anointing, the candidate faces the east. After the profession of the Creed, the celebrant by using his thumb applies the oil of gladness to seal the forehead of the candidate, after which the child's clothes will be removed.⁶

1.3 Sanctification of the Water

Water is the primary symbol of Baptism. In the creation narrative in the book of Genesis, it is stated that the first creation came into being from water (Gen 1:2). In Jer 2:13, water is presented as the source of divine life. In Jn 4:10 Jesus is presented as the living water. In the baptismal liturgy, to sanctify the water, after the initial prayers and epiclesis, the celebrant pours the Holy Myron into it.⁷

1.4 The Act of Immersion and Baptism in the Name of the Trinity

We have Biblical evidence that the act of Baptism is preferably by complete immersion. When Jesus was baptized, “he came up from the water” (Mat 3:16). The celebrant baptizes the candidate in the name of the Trinity.⁸ In the baptismal liturgy of the Church, the importance given to the Trinity is evident. All the anointings and even baptism with water itself are administered in the name of the Holy Trinity.⁹

2. The Rites of Chrismation

To celebrate Chrismation, the celebrant goes back to the front table and facing to the East, begins the prayer. After the prayers, the Celebrant applies the Holy Myron on his thumb turns toward

⁵The Book of Holy Sacraments, English tr., SYRO MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH, 5-64

⁶Tukāsā: The Book of Rubrics, I: 89, 88

⁷ Tukāsā: The Book of Rubrics, I: 90-94, 89-92;

⁸ Tukāsā: The Book of Rubrics, I: 95, 92-93

⁹ Tukāsā: The Book of Rubrics. I: 98, 2, 94-95,

the candidate, and seals his or her forehead three times by drawing the sign of the cross on it with the Holy Myron¹⁰.

2.1 Clothing with the White Garment

The image of a garment comes from Genesis 3:21 “And the lord made garments of skins for the man and his wife, and clothed them.” Through the symbolism of removing the clothing the newly baptized signifies both renewal and one becoming God’s own. After Chrismation the child is vested with a white dress. This is the clothing imagery in the Syriac tradition, receiving the white garments in the baptismal liturgy of the Malankara church is the moment of regaining the lost robe of glory for the newly baptized.

2.2 The Entry into Sanctuary- A Symbol of Paradise

In the Old Testament background, the sanctuary is considered to be the dwelling place of God. This is where the tabernacle was kept (Ex 25:8-9). At the end of the baptismal liturgy, Holy Communion is given to the newly baptized and he/she is directed to move around the altar three times and kiss its corners.¹¹ This is interpreted as the representation of the re-entry of the newly baptized into the Paradise on earth, which is the Church. Here it is notable that the Church represents the first Paradise in Eden.

2.3 Crowning the Newly Baptized

In the Bible a crown is referred to as the reward given to those who overcome suffering and temptation (Jas1:12, Rev2:10). The crown is used as a symbol of truth, victory, and salvation.¹² It represents the glory, one receives through baptism.¹³ The baptized one is endowed with the crown which was lost by our first parents in Eden when the serpent tempted them.

3. Holy Communion

After the crowning, Holy Communion is given to the newly baptized.¹⁴ In John 6,51, Jesus says “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Ephrem Hymns addresses the

¹⁰ Tukāsā: The Book of Rubrics. I: 96, 93-94

¹¹ Tukāsā: The Book of Rubrics. I: 98, 2, 94-95,

¹² The Odes of Solomon; English tr., G. VLEUGELS – M. WEBBER, 9: 8-10, 45-47.

¹³ P. PUTHANANGADY, Baptism and Confirmation, 60.

¹⁴ Tukāsā: The Book of Rubrics, 98: I: 94,

baptized; he narrates “The fruit that Adam could not taste in Paradise, is being placed with gladness today on your tongue.”¹⁵ In the baptismal liturgy of the Malankara Church, these same words are used, while giving the Holy Communion to the newly baptized¹⁶. The cross in the church symbolizes the Tree of Life, and the Eucharist is the fruit of the tree of the Garden of Eden, which is a medicine of life. This is the fruit that Adam could not taste in Paradise. Hence, When Holy Communion is given to the newly baptized, this symbolizes receiving the fruit of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden.

Conclusion

Fundamental to the Christian life is looking forward to the heavenly Paradise. It can be concluded that the first Paradise was in Eden and our first parents were expelled from Paradise due to their sin. But Christ, through His Incarnation and by His Paschal mysteries, made it possible for humanity to re-enter Paradise, which is actualized through the Sacraments, especially in Baptism and the Eucharist in the Church, the Paradise here on the earth at the same time it directs us to look forward to the eschatological Paradise.

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¹⁵ EPHREM, Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania), E. BECK, ed., in CSCO 187/ Syr 83, VI:17. 226.

¹⁶ Tukāsā: The Book of Rubrics, 98: I: 94

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