

Basic Features of the Liturgy with Especial Reference to the East Syrian Eucharistic Liturgy

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Introduction

Theology as the living dialogue with Christ, or as a coordinator of church faith reflection: While Spirituality is 'living the faith' in the Church, evidently, liturgy becomes the faith experience of the Church. 'Living the faith' is taking place mostly in the liturgical celebration. The Church is built up by the very act of her worship and her life and grace are realized through her liturgical settings. Liturgy is not only the common work of the people of God constituting the Church, but it is also a divine operation transforming and sanctifying mankind and the whole of creation. In fact, it is God's work in which people of God participate.

This paper can be divided into two main parts: First, I shall attempt to underline the basic understanding of the liturgy by underlying its meaning, providing the elements for an authentic liturgical celebration and underline its stage of developments. The second part, I shall focus on the rite of the Church of the East, named by most liturgiologist as 'East Syrian Rite', with special reference to its Eucharistic liturgy. I shall explore the historical traces of the rite in general, the structural frame work of church edifice, the principle stages of evolution of the Eucharistic liturgy, the general theological principles of the Eucharistic liturgy, its main commentators, and the elements of the Eucharist.

What Does Liturgy (الخدمة) Mean?

The liturgy¹ is the official prayer of the whole Church, the sacred rites according to the official liturgical texts. It is the way in which the Body of Christ (the entire assembly) expresses itself in a particular way. It is the sacred rite where the whole Mystical Body of Christ offers glorification to God the Father in the Spirit for its sanctification and salvation.

Liturgy derived from an ancient Greek term *leitourgia*, which is composed of two roots *leit* (public or pertaining to the people) and *ergon* (action or work). Hence, the term can have two meanings: i) work or action for the people; ii) public action or work. The term liturgy means also "service", in the sense of serving God with public and communal worship.²

Moreover, liturgy often translated as 'worship.' However, one might ask: what is the difference between worship and liturgy? Worship signifies the honor and praise that are given to God communally or individually in public activity; while liturgy is done publically in derivation even if it is a ministration extended to those absent from the assembly.

Liturgy is also called a 'divine liturgy' or 'divine service.' It is God works through these rites of word and sacrament, praise and prayer to make them means of grace. Liturgy is not assembly public worship or service to God; it is God's public work or service to the assembly.

¹ The New Testament speaks of John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, fulfilling the time of his priestly "service" in the Temple. St. Luke uses the Greek word 'leitourgeios' to describe this, Luke 1:23.

² St. Paul uses the term liturgy in 2 Cor 9:12 to designate his voluntary effort at gathering an offering from his congregations in Macedonia and Greece for the poor in Jerusalem. Hence the English word service means liturgy.

Hence, liturgy is an action which involves ascending and descending dimensions. In the descending line is an action of God on the Church, which is the work of sanctification. In the ascending, is the act of worship of God. Sanctification occurs when man comes in contact with the works of redemption, the liturgy of the Risen Lord and participates in the Trinitarian life. The act of glorification, through worship, is the knowledge of God that we are loved by Him together with the praise of Him. God sanctifies man in and through Christ and the Church worships God in and through Christ. Therefore, the work of the sanctification of man and the glorification of God find their unity in the person of Christ.

We might then be tempted to think of liturgy simply meaning "rituals" or ceremony (കർമ്മം) some people preferring this more formal expression of faith (e.g. Apostolic Churches) and others a more spontaneous one (Protestants). However, whilst liturgy certainly includes ritual it is something much deeper than mere ritualism or ceremonial, and it is more than just the communal expression of our personal feelings of devotion. Liturgy is central to Christianity and is an integral part of our family relationship with God. The signs, symbols and sacred actions which form our public prayer and worship spring from the language and events of God's own self-revelation to us. Our liturgical celebrations arise directly out of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ and are part of the very means by which we enter into that mystery.

Aristotle says the best activity is the most 'useless.' This is because such activity is not simply means to a further end but is done for its own sake. So having a conversation with a friend is more important than having a budget meeting. Scrape for money, fame and work are useful but don't get us somewhere. They are just means to an end; way to get to other things. Hence for Aristotle, rejoicing in the beauty of sunset and cultivating a friendship are not means to an end but good to be sought in themselves.

The best example of useless activities is love. Love is not a means to an end. If it ever becomes a means to something else, it's no longer love for "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way.. but rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor 13: 4-6).

In similar way, the most useless activity of all is the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, which is in fact, the most pivotal act we could possibly do. In the Eucharist, we encounter Jesus Himself, emptying Himself in Gift to His Father. The liturgy is then not a means to something else, but rather as an end. In the Eucharist we are having an intimate union with Christ and Abidsho's beautifully describes: "Whenever we approach these sacraments we meet with Christ Himself, and his very self we take into our hands and kiss, and thereby we are joined with Christ, His Holy body mixing with our bodies, and his pure blood mingling with our blood..."³ Since Eucharist is a sacrament of love and since love desires union; hence Eucharist is obviously a sacrament of union. As a foretaste, Eucharist draws us into the entire purpose of our live: union with and communion with God. Every good comes from God, reflects God, and leads back to God and therefore, all value is summed up in the celebration of the Liturgy, the supreme act by which we commune with God.

Liturgy is a play that makes us to find our interior order since the more we give ourselves to God the more we are rightly ordered. Indeed, the only real reason for performing a liturgy is that we offer ourselves in the eschatological liturgy. The ultimate worship enacts and celebrates

³Abdisho', *The Book of Marganith (the Pearl): On the Truth of Christianity*, Mar E. Shimun. SHIMUN (Introd. & ET), Kerala 1965; reprinted, Chicago 1988.

the outgoing of all things from God and the return of all things to God through the mystery of the divine descent and human elevation.⁴

Elements of Eucharistic Liturgy

For having an authentic liturgical worship particularly, Eucharistic liturgy requires three elements: i) priest; ii) people (assembly); iii) rituals.

Priesthood

An authentic Eucharistic liturgy needs a priest. We acknowledge Christian people who are gathered together in good will, reading the Scripture, share their faith and pray... All these elements are good and there's nothing wrong with that. We need a priest in order to have a Eucharistic liturgy. Is it good and helpful to uplifting the spiritual aspect of each Christian believer? Yes but it is not a Eucharistic liturgy, why? Because there is no priest. A priest is an essential element for the following reasons:

1. It is the priest who links the community of faith (assembly) to the Bishop and through the Bishop to the Patriarch and thereby to the entire community of the world. The priest is highlighting the centrality of the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church. The mystical body of Christ is stretched, for example, way beyond this community here at Mar Sargis to the entire world; and even by the world to the realm of saints and angels of heavenly liturgy. The priest is the ecclesial agent that signals and makes that connection.
2. The priest is the dispenser of the Sacraments. In the Assyrian Church of the East, a valid ordained priest is essential to administer the rite of Eucharistic liturgy. 'Abidsho' (d. 1318) asserts that the priesthood of the Church is the proper administrator of all mysteries of the Church.⁵ For him, priesthood is not the efficient cause of the holiness and the spiritual power of the mysteries, rather, it is "the ministry of mediation between God and man in those things which impart forgiveness of sins, convey blessings, and put away wrath."⁶ Being a son of a priest, Abidsho' views John the Baptist as a priest and through his mediation, the holy Church was betrothed to the heavenly King at the baptism of Jesus (Cf. Mt.3:17; Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22.) in the Jordan River.
3. During the Eucharist, the Priest calls down the Holy Spirit (in Greek: *epiklesis*) upon the gifts (the bread and the wine). They then change into the actual body and blood of Christ. The precise way in which this happens is divine. Epiclesis is an invocation prayer recited by the priest and addressed to God to send the Holy Spirit or directly calls upon the Holy Spirit to come upon the Eucharistic oblation to consecrate them.

⁴R. Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Ada Lane (trans.), New York 1934, 176-184. See John Milbank, Slavoj Zizek, Creston Davis, *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids, 2010.

⁵ The validity of the mysteries for 'Abd š ' is based on three essential elements: they must be constituted by Christ; they *must be administered by a valid priestly minister* and there must be a right intention on the part of the receiver. While for Timothy the mysteries should be constituted by Christ, who operates in every mystery, the presence of the Holy Spirit effectively consecrating the sacramental material and *a validly ordained priest* are essential.

⁶Abdisho', *Marganitha (The Pearl) = The Book of Marganith (the Pearl): On the Truth of Christianity*, MAR E. SHIMUN (Introd. & ET), Kerala 1965; reprinted, Chicago 1988, p. 48.

4. The priest is acting in the person of Christ during the Eucharistic celebration. In Syriac, he is called (*Nawsha d-ishō* = ܢܘܫܬܐ ܕܝܫܘܗ). We read in the Gospel of Luke: 'When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.' (Lk 24:30). Thus the four sections of the Eucharistic Rite of the Church follow the four actions of the Lord as described in this narrative: He took, blessed, broke and gave. Hence the priest is participating in the four actions of the Lord by **taking, blessing, breaking and giving** of the Eucharistic elements. Hence, these acts operated by a proper ordained priest confect the Eucharist; they affect the Eucharistic change from the ordinary bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. That is the function of the priest ordained by the Bishop, linked to the Bishop and eventually to patriarch and wider Church. Hence the priest is indispensable.

People (Assembly)

The Greek word for *leiturgia* means more than common prayer; it means corporate action in which everyone takes an active part, is a participant and not only an attendant. The assembly, through the mediation of ministers, glorifies God's name along with the heavenly Church. The one sacrifice of Christ is a permanent praise before God's throne. The liturgy can be defined as the "communion of saints" in two senses: we are holy as the faithful of Christ and his body (people present during liturgy), and also the gifts which we receive are holy. Liturgy is not a personal piety but the work of the whole People of God.

The nature of the worship is corporate and personal. It is corporate because through the unity and faith of its participants it realizes and fulfils the reality of Church i.e. the presence of Christ among those who believe in Him. It is personal because this reality is every time conveyed to me, given me for my personal edification for my own growth in grace. Thus in worship: I am both an active builder of the Church and to be this Christian duty and I am also its beneficiary for the whole of the Church's treasures is offered to me.

For an authentic Eucharistic liturgy we need people (the assembly). The Church is for the people; the priest is for the people. He is ordained to bring Christ to them. If you take away people, there is no point. Every Mass is related to the people, for the people and on their behalf. Hence the essential task of the Church is to bring the laity into the rhythm of Qurbana. We don't want to see the priest as putting on his own show, where the priest is performing his ritual while people watch him from a distance. While the priest is reciting the prayers, people are reading Gospel passages or praying in private, watching the priest from a distance as a spectator watching a sport. The laity ought to be involved in the gestures and rhythms of the Divine Liturgy. They ought not watch but actively participate. As liturgiologists say 'we need the active participation in the Eucharistic celebration.' So as lay people *stand, pray, sit, listen, kneel, adore, receive gift of peace, gesture, response, bow and process*. Is the laity participating in a different way from the priest? Yes. In the Eucharistic celebration, we all have different flavors and roles during the celebration: clergy and laity will do different things which adds flavor in the Mass –unity in diversity of the mystical body of Christ.

Rituals

The Divine Liturgy is a ritual. It is made up of a series of prescribed prayers, words and hymns. Liturgy is a ritual meant to be familiar and repetitive otherwise we don't enter into it effortlessly. If we improvise every moment, we cannot enter into the liturgy. The liturgy is structured by this densely textured and beautiful ritual.

The Mystery of Salvation and Symbols

The concept of mystery is central to understand Syriac thought and liturgy. According to Syriac fathers, nothing of God could be known by man if God had not taken the initiative to reveal Himself through types and symbols. Ephrem says: "Lord Your symbols are everywhere, yet You are hidden from everywhere." Symbolic language is the language of mystery and helps the human spirit go deeper into deeper reality of God. How? By providing the awareness of the immanence as well as the transcendence of God.

Mystery is a reality of eternal order that manifesting itself in power in time through a visible corporate action of the Church to those already initiated the mystery and living by it. The idea of mystery conveys the meaning of "mysterious symbols." of a superior world, which are able to introduce us in an efficacious way to that world. For example, Baptism and Eucharist are made up of matter informed by spirit.

The mystery of salvation is always present among us because Christ (who is the mystery of salvation itself) is forever and really present among us. Symbols refers to the mode of presence among us—it doesn't go against reality. Since we cannot be present historically at the mysteries of salvation (for example at Calvary) we are made present sacramentally/symbolically by means of cult. The presence of Christ is the same, only the mode is different. To say 'symbolically present' does not mean to say "unreal." Christ's mode of presence, historical or symbolical, is different yet equal. Symbolism has to represent the reality present, otherwise we would fall into a destructive nominalism. According to Assyrian fathers like Narsai (5th century), symbols points and participate in the reality. To properly understand what a sacrament is, we need to recognize what we mean by a symbol and the various ways in which a symbol can be used.

Symbols and signs stand for something not present. They point the way. A wedding ring, for example, is a sign of marital love—but it is not the love itself. A lighted candle in church may be a sign of personal devotion, but it is not the devotion itself. A box of chocolates given on Mother's Day may be a symbol of a child's love for his or her mother, but it is not the love itself. *Symbols serve a purpose. They speak to us of something beyond the symbol itself.*

A sacrament is a very special kind of symbol or sign. *What is unique about a sacrament is that it not only points to what is beyond it but also realizes what it symbolizes.* In the sacrament of baptism, for example, the water symbolizes the washing away of sin and the restoration of new life, the dying with Christ and rising to share in his resurrection. At the same time, it also begins to accomplish what it indicates.

Liturgy is composed of certain signs and symbols that are constituted by Christ and Church and reflect a cultural milieu in the past and in the present. So to understand the very meaning of the liturgical elements we must go back to their originating reality. Since Eucharist is a sacrifice of Thanksgiving for divine dispensation and since Christ is the centre of this dispensation, it is a representation of Christ's life. For example, the Liturgy of the Word represents Nativity, Epiphany and Christ's predication. The liturgy of offering till epiclesis represents his Passion. Epiclesis represents Christ's resurrection and communion symbolizes and realities our participation in it.

The Eucharist is not just a reminder of Christ's sacrifice or of its enactment, but it is a real sacrifice. On the other hand, however, it is not a new sacrifice, nor a repetition of the Sacrifice of the Cross upon Golgotha. The events of Christ's Sacrifice the Incarnation, the Institution of the Eucharist, the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven, are not repeated during the Eucharist, yet they become a present reality. The Eucharist is the actualization of one, single,

unrepeatable event. St. Paul says: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16). During the Liturgy we are projected in time to that place where eternity and time intersect, and then we become the contemporaries of these events that we are calling to mind. Thus the Eucharist and all the Holy Liturgy is, in structure, a sacrificial service.

Does Christian worship a type of mythology?

Myth is a traditional story that typically explains how the world and humankind came into existence. They are sacred tales, usually involve. It is an anthropological term referring to an interpreted event or story.

<i>The Rite of Natural Religions</i>	<i>The Rite of Christian Religion</i>
<p>i. The natural religions are based on nature and the recurring cycles of life.</p>	<p>i. Christian rite is based on Sacred Scripture (just as that of the Hebrews), which is therefore is a sacred history.</p>
<p>ii. In the natural religions, rite is cosmogonic in nature that is based on the story of genesis of the cosmos. Hence, it is only vertical in dimension and <u>static</u> because it lacks the horizontal aspect.</p>	<p>ii. Christian rite is not personal piety, but the work of the whole People of God. Hence it involves the two aspects <i>vertical</i> (in our relationship with God) and <i>horizontal</i> (in our relationship with neighbor).</p>
<p>iii. It is characterized by nostalgia—that in the beginning human life was pure and much better than what we have today. The rite takes us back to the mythical state of the good past of human history (Genesis 1).</p>	<p>iii. In the rite Christian initiation (baptism), however, we become a new creation in the new Adam who is Jesus Christ. It is not a mythological rite of nostalgia for the pure/better past of human history. Christian initiation talks about the new creation (in the present), not a nostalgic retune to the past by way of myth.</p>
<p>iv. For natural religions, rite is the attempt of man to come into contact with an unknown, fearful God.</p>	<p>iv. The Christian tradition says that God (on his own initiative) has come down toward us, is revealed and has finally sent his own Son to us. Thus liturgy is God gift toward us</p>

What are the Five Stages of Liturgical Development

1. Scholars divides the development of the liturgical families into five stages:**Period One () - ‘The Primitive Church (first three centuries):** It is the first three centuries of the early Church. It is markedly the period of the formation and synthesis of the early elements of rite. It is characterized as a period of “creativity.”
 -) ***In the first century***, Christians had gathered in one another's homes to share the Eucharist; hence, it has a domestic setting. The evening gathering of the first century was moved to the morning gathering in the second century due to an imperial ban on supper gathering.⁷
 -) ***In the second century***, Christians the first day of the week (Sunday), which they called the Lord's Day, to read from the Old Testament and the New Testament and the presider preaches on Scripture readings, pray for one another and for the entire world, offer the bread and wine, share the bread and cup and distribute the elements. There was also a collection for the poor and needy.
 -) ***By the third century***, the rite of penance and reconciliation was developed. At this period, the Roman authority launched a missive confiscating of religious properties and the church was also acquiring the title to houses and houses for assembly were becoming houses of the church. Such a house church has been excavated at Dura-Europas on the Roman-Persioan border in Syria.⁸ The first liturgical texts appear before the time of Constantine (312 AD) at the beginning of the third century (+200 AD). There is no evidence that shows the differentiation between East and West. There was only one Christian culture. There are no external influences in this period. The only influence in the Apostolic age is that of Judaism. Already in the NT we find many liturgical indications:
 - A theology of the Eucharist found in John 6: 11.
 - The Eucharistic meals of the Risen Lord with his disciples (cf. John 21: 13).
 - The Institution Narrative and the command, “Do this in memory of Me.”
 - Hymns chanted by Christian to Christ (cf. Ephesians 5: 19-20; Colossians 4: 2-4).
 - Paul and the Eucharist (cf. 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26) read also 27.
 - The breaking of the bread
 - Reciting Lord’s Prayer
 - The disciples attended the temple/synagogue services (cf. Acts 2: 46).
 - The agape meal and followed with Eucharistic celebration. Afterward, the separation of the Eucharistic celebration with the agape meal.⁹

⁷ F.C. Senn, *Introduction to Christian Liturgy*, 24.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ In the early Church , the Lord's Supper was celebrated at the end of the Agape (love) or fellowship meal. This was an extension of the Passover supper tradition, and was a means for believers to show each other the love and unity they shared together in Christ. All gathered, each bringing what they were able. At the conclusion of the meal was the Eucharist, the "thanks-giving" for the grace of Jesus Christ. St. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for being selfish, causing some to go hungry, and for drunkenness at the meal which became so pervasive that it even prevented the Eucharist from being celebrated (I Cor. 11:20-21).

- The kiss of peace (cf. 1 Corinthians 16; 19; 1 Peter 5: 14).
- The change the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday.
- The Jewish feast changed into Christian ideas (e.g. the Pascha)
- Baptism (cf. Mt 28)
- Conference of the Holy Spirit through ordination.
- Intercessions of the community during worship.
- The first rules concerning the liturgy can be found in 1 Corinthians 10.

2. **Period Two:** In the fourth century, the liturgical assembly moved into public ministry (basilicas), where the emperor granted to the church. Due to the larger space along with the large crowd required more attention at the entrance of the bishop, at the offertory when the people offer their offertory and when the faithful went to stations to receive the communion.

Moreover, this period is the stage of the differentiation and formation of liturgical families. It spans roughly from the Edict of Milan (312 Ad) by the emperor Constantine to the end of the seventh century. This is the age of 'late antiquity' and it also includes the patristic period. There are various liturgical families (rites):

- i. East Syrian Rite: It is used by Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholic Church and Syro Malabar Catholic Church of India
- ii. West Syrian Rite (Syro Antiochene): It is used by Syrian Orthodox Church and Syro Malankara of India.
- iii. Maronite Rite: it is an influence of West Syrian and East Syrian Rites.
- iv. Alexandrian Rite is sub-grouped into two rites: Coptic Rite and Ge'ez (Ehtiopian) Rite.
- v. Byzantine Rite: It is used by all Eastern Orthodox Churches e.g. Greek Orthodox Church, Russian Church, Malkite Orthodox Church, Serbian Church, Bulgarian Church, Romanian Church and others...
- vi. Armenian Rite: It is used by Armenian Church.
- vii. Roman/Latin Rite: It is used by Roman Catholic Church

3. **Period Three:** It characterizes the interior development and evolution of the liturgical families. It is a period of the "survival of the fittest." Many rites, such as the Jerusalemite and Georgian disappeared by the seventh century, though some of their elements/parts may be assimilated by other families.
4. **Period Fourth:** The Period of Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. It traces the simplification of the liturgy on the Protestant side, and the uniformity of the catholic usages.
5. **Period Five:** It discusses the modern epoch. It is characterized by scientific study of the liturgy, whose momentum comes from the "liturgical movement" in the West, which also

By the second century, the Lord's Supper (or Eucharist) began to be separated from the Agape meal. Differing opinions exist as to whether this was due to problems such as those in Corinth, or the growing Gentile expansion in the Church with a lack of Jewish perspective. The result was the celebration of the Eucharist without the Agape meal.

influenced the East. It came as a reaction against the Enlightenment¹⁰ of the eighteenth century, which was really a return to Romanticism (rich in symbolism and splendor. Romanticism is something ‘romantic’ (and not in the erotic sense) about seeing a beautiful liturgy. What we say is this: the Holy Qurbana is so far beyond us that we cannot take it upon ourselves to reduce it to something which we can understand wholly. For it is impossible to “wholly understand” the Holy Sacrifice, and any sentiment that we can is flawed beyond measure. The Divine Liturgy must reflect the mystery and majesty of what it truly does reflect – the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is nothing less than that.

¹⁰ The age of enlightenment (18th century) sought the almightiness of human knowledge. The Enlightenment insinuated into the stream of consciousness of practical liturgist such ambiguous notions as didacticism (instructional format in term of educational, political and moral issues), naturalism, anti-devotionalism and promoting for the simplification of the liturgy.

East Syrian Rite (= The Rite of the Church of the East)

What is today conventionally referred to by most modern liturgiologists as the "East Syrian Rite" is the particular rite of the Church of the East. Variouslly called it 'Nestorian',¹¹ 'Persian'¹² or 'Chaldean'.¹³ It is the liturgy celebrated now by Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholic Church and Syro-Malabar Church. It is "the product of a fusion of Judeo-Christianity with the Assyro-Babylonian and Iranian cultures. The predominant element of this fusion was undoubtedly Judeo Christianity"¹⁴ and it's language has always been Syriac. It develops in the Judeo-Christian atmosphere in the Semitic cultural context without any impact from Roman legalism and Greek philosophical distinctions.

The origins of the early stages of the East Syrian Rite are shrouded in obscurity since predominantly the primary sources are of the later period. Most of the scholars attribute two major cities for the development of the East Syrian Rite in Edessa which is considered the birth place of East Syrian Rite and Mesopotamia, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the traditional See of Mari. Duchesne indicates: "It is somewhat difficult to differentiate here between Edessa and Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The Nestorian communities of the ancient Sassanid kingdom have preserved liturgies, the original *provenance* of which may be either of these two metropolitan cities."¹⁵

¹¹ It is considered a pejorative term according to the current understanding of the "Christology" of the Church of the East. Since this ancient church never held a heresy of "nestorianism" condemned at the Council of Ephesus 431 AD.

¹² Brightman calls it the 'Persian Rite' since the Church which celebrates the rite was located within the confine of Sassanian Empire of Persia. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, vol. I, Eastern Liturgies (Oxford 1896) lxxvii-lxxxii and 245-305. Moreover, the term "Persian" denotes to the ancient rite that was used by the Church of the East before the unification of liturgical rites in Persia according to the primatial see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in the Synod of Mar Isaac 410 AD. The canon 13 of the synod decreed: "we will all with one accord celebrate the liturgy according to the 'western rite,' which the bishops Isaac and Marutha have taught us which we have be seen them celebrate here in the church of Seleucisa." *Synodoicon Orientale*, 266. According to Macomber by "western rite of Isaac and Marutha was the common rite of Edessa (Aramaic-speaking parts of what is now Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran) and through decree of canon 13, they were able to supplanting any local rites that diverged from it substantially. Macomber, "A History of Chaldean Mass," in *Journal of Assyrian Academic Society* 11, no. 2 (1997), p. 73. Due to the lack of literary evidence, it is unknown exactly what was the rite of the Persian Church was celebrating prior to the Synod of Mar Isaac in 410. Macomber notes in his article of 1977, that till 400 AD, the Persian Church was following a 'fourth rite' different from those of Antioch, Jerusalem and Edessa, but this rite has been abandoned it in the Synod of 410. However, the differences between the '*rite of Edessa*' and '*ancient Persian rite= fourth rite*' were no greater than what one would characterize as purely local variants. Macomber, "A History of Chaldean Mass," *Worship* 51 (1977) 110. He calls the ancient Persian rite a 'fourth rite' because he indicated in 1973 in another article that in greater Syrian around 400 AD, there were three major rites centered in Antioch, Jerusalem and Edessa the first two in Greek and the last in Syriac: 1) the Syriac rite, which is basically 'Antiochene' its anaphoral structure borrowed from Jerusalem while the metrical hymns borrowed or inspired from Edessa; 2) Maronite rite; 3) East Syrian which was independent development of the ancient Edessan rite. William Macomber was the first who made a strong case that a Maronite rite is a distinct rite. Macomber, "A Theory of Origins of the Syrian, Maronite and Chaldean Rites," *OCP* 39 (1973) 235-242.

¹³ The name "Chaldean" has used by the Roman ecclesiastical authorities at the Council of Florence when a small community of "Nestorians" sought to obtain full communion with the bishop of Rome during the council. The name 'Chaldean' was designated to this community in avoiding the use a problematic title ("Nestorians") for the Roman Church. Moreover the Chaldean was considered the language of the Aramaic parts of the Old Testament, a language closely akin to Syriac, the liturgical language of the rite, which is merely another Aramaic dialect. In the Roman Circle Syriac was often called Chaldean in Roman circles as late as the eighteenth century.

¹⁴ Macomber, "A History of Chaldean Mass," *JAAS* 11, no 2, 71.

¹⁵ L. DUCHESNE, *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution. A Study of the Latin Liturgy up to the Time of Charlemagne*, p. 69.

The Antiquity of the East Syrian Rite

It can be traced a good historical evidences indicating the antiquity of East Syrian Rite: liturgical compositions, and chronicles of ancient cities prelude in some way or another the existence of churches and liturgy from 2nd/3rd centuries.¹⁶

1. The Anaphora of Addai and Mari (2nd/3rd century)

The most ancient liturgical literary of the East Syrian rite is the anaphora. Of which can be attributed to traditional apostles of the East, Addai and Mari. It is considered one of the most ancient extant anaphora, existed *ab immemorabili*, in the Eucharistic liturgies of East Syrian Rite. General opinion of scholars dated this anaphora between the second and fourth centuries and they underscore its Semitic character and antiquity and originally composed in Syriac.¹⁷ The anaphora preserves the mark of the apostolic reflecting similar basic structure of Birkat Ha-Mazon and Eucharist of Ch. 10 of the *Didache*.¹⁸ On the other hand, the earliest credible accounts on Edessa points out to the existence of the churches and liturgy.

2. Old Testament Pshitta (2nd Century)

Modern scholars connect Peshitta to the city of Edessa the cultural centre of Syriac literature. There was a presence of Jews in Edessa and based on the funerary inscriptions found close to Edessa, it appears that Edessan Jews did use more or less the same dialect of Aramaic. The use of the Syriac script, however, points solely in the direction that the translation of the Peshitta was done by Jews Christian. The origins of the Peshitta translation are very obscure and Syriac authors had no clear memory of how and when the work was carried out (a few implausible guesses were nevertheless circulated). A close study of the translation itself can throw a little light; from such a study we can deduce the following: The work of translation of

¹⁶ Church tradition based her apostolicity on Scriptural references (Matt 2 and Acts 2) and apostolic tradition and apocryphal documents that are generated according to scholarly work around 3th-4th. According to the tradition, the Apostle Thomas, Thaddeus (Addai) and Mari (one of the seventy) who brought the good news to Mesopotamia. According to scholars, although these sources ascribed to apocryphal and church traditions, it retains scholarly value. Such accounts are significantly important they throw considerable light on otherwise very obscure information that we have about the history and culture of the origin of Church of the East, especially in regions outside of the Roman Empire. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, Volume 1: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature*, 1983, 129. Brock states: "While no serious scholar would accept it at face value, there is the possibility that this legen (for such it must classed) might contain some grains of histoical valuse. On this point Scholrs generally fall into one of two camps: thus some consider the entire narrative to be a fabrication dating from about 300, while others prefer to see the narrative as reflecting the supposedly historical conversion of King Abgar VIII, "the Great" at the end of the second century, but transposed to Abgar V, "the Black," in order to take back the conversion of the royal house to apostolic times. The first view was propounded by W. Bauer in 1934, while the second was argued by F.C. Burkitt in his influential book *Early Easter Christianity* (1904); subsequent scholars have generally followed either Baur or Burkitt in their basic attitude to the account. Brock, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," in Attridge and Gohei Hata, eds., *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism* (Detroit 1992), p. 221.

¹⁷ Spinks, "The Quest for the 'Original Form,' of the Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari," in IDEM., *Prayer from the East*, Washington D.C., 1993, p. 2.

¹⁸ JAMMO, *The Mesopotamian Anaphora of Addai & Mari: The Organic Dialectic between its Aostolic Core and Ecuhalogical Growth*, Acts of the International Liturgy Congress (Rome, 25-26 October 2011), *Orientalia Christiana Analeca* 295, Roma 2013, p. 403.

OT Peshitta was carried out by many different translators, perhaps during a considerable span of time. The translators all worked basically from the Hebrew text in the 2nd century AD.¹⁹

3. Diatessaron by Tatian (2nd century)

Before the birth of the New Testament Peshitta, the Diatessaron was considered a standard Syriac Gospel text in Edessa in the third quarter of the fourth century. St. Ephrem (d. 373) who wrote a commentary on it in the fourth century. The oldest Syriac translation of the Gospels was made the form of a harmony of the four Gospels known as the Diatessaron, a Greek work meaning 'through four,' that is a single Gospel text derived from the four Gospels. It is usually thought to have been completed by Tatian, a native of Mesopotamia (born in Assyria from pagan parents) who studied in Rome under Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century AD, and then returned to his homeland. Only quotations of the original form of this survive, and much uncertainty surrounds its authorship and origin.²⁰

4. Attesting the Account of Flood in Edessa (Nov 201) in the Chronicle of Edessa (6th century)

The *Chronicle of Edessa* dating (mid 6th century) describes the account of a flood in Edessa in November 201 AD, during the reign of Abgar VIII. In the course of this narrative, derived from the town archives, it is mentioned the flood damaged "the sanctuary of the church of Christians."²¹ Although it has been suggested the words are an interpolations; however, Brock clearly states "the passage should be accepted as original since the account in the other chronicle probably refers to another flood."²² The reference to the sanctuary is a clear evidence of the existence of liturgy in that era. The *Chronicle of Edessa* recounts about the account of laying the foundation of the church of Edessa in 312/313 by bishop Qoona.²³

5. The Syriac Book of the Laws of the Countries (3rd century)

It was composed in the early third century by a pupil of Bardaisan. He attested to the presence of in Edessa, Parthia, Geli and Cushans, Fars, Media and Hatra. He states:

"... we assemble on the same one day of Sunday, and on fixed says we abstain from food. Our brothers in Gallia do not take males as consorts, nor do those in Parthia marry two wives, nor are those of Judaea circumcised nor do our sisters among the the Geli and Cushans sleep with strangers; those in Persia do not marry their daughters, and those in Media do not run away from their dead, or bury people alive, or give them as food for dogs; and those in Edessa do not kill their wives or sisters who commit adultery, but they simply distance themselves from them, handing them over to the judgment of God; nor do those in Hatra stone to deal thieves. In every place they happen to be, the local customs do not cause them to depart from the law of their Christ."²⁴

¹⁹ Brock, Sebastian, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*. Second Revised Edition. Gorgias Handbooks, no. 7. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006, 23.

²⁰ Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations*, Oxford 1977, pp. 10-12; Brock, Sebastian, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*. 31.

²¹ Segal, *Edessa the Blessed City*, Oxford 1974, pp. 24-25; Brock, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," in Attridge and Gohei Hata, eds., *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism* (Detroit 1992), pp. 221-222.

²² Brock, "Syriac Christianity," p. 222.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa*, ed. & trans. Drijvers, vol. 3, Assen/Van Gorcum 1965, 61.

The author mentions the church of Edessa and the customs of gathering on the first day of the week (Sunday). Hence people were assembled for a liturgical celebration. The scan fragments of Bardaisan's works preserved by later polemicists from Ephrem onward.

6. The Presence of Christianity in Arbela

The earliest documents that trace the Christian evangelization of Adiabene are Syriac *Didasclia Apostolorum*, the *Acts of Mari* and more later time *the Chronicle of Arbela*. Acts of Mari is considered an apocryphal text. While the Chronicle of Arbela turns out to be a medieval compilation rather than a modern a forgery. However, there are traces that Christianity reached Adiabene at early date, as a result of the conversion of the Jewish ruling family and that the Edessene Abgar legend really had its origin in Arbela and was only adapted to Edessa at the later date. Moreover, it is agreed by scholars on the account of Christianity in the Parthian period (up to 226).

According to De Villar, although not much is known regarding the actual architectural style of this church, nevertheless, the churches in Adiabene during the second century were certainly not constructed in the form of a basilica. In fact, it is most likely that the pagan temples existent in Adiabene served as models for the Christian structures. The major adaptation made to the pagan-temple model made by the Christian worshippers was the addition of an apse.²⁵ He adds:

...it is certain that that such an architectural structure, essentially Hellenistic, could not have been noticed in Adiabene, and what's more, it could not have been selected as a model for the Christian churches except during the Constantinian epic, and in the type of courtly construction. It is true that there are not few documents which prove the existence of churches in the East, before such epoch, and it should not be forgotten that Christianity was the religion of state in Edessa before the beginning of the third century, and that a church existed there before the year 201.²⁶

7. The House-Church at Dura-Europos (3rd century)

The excavation of what has been styled a 'house-church' in the basin of the Tigris and Euphrates river has brought further light on the development of the Mesopotamian church structures. This house-church, dating from the mid-third century AD, is quite unique in its form and differs from the church plan described by the East Syrian liturgical commentators. The building is basically a rectangular hall, a feature common to the houses of that age, with a raised platform at the eastern end where the presider of the liturgical celebration might have stood or sat,²⁷ considered by Kraeling to be a '*bem*'.²⁸ Kraeling states that the house-church at Dura is "typical of the Christian *domus ecclesiae* of the Tigris-Euphrates basin in pre-Constantine times and thus as normative for a whole province of church architecture about whose earliest antecedents we have as yet no other direct information."²⁹

²⁵ DE VILLARD, *Chiese della Mesopotamia*, 62.

²⁶ DE VILLARD, *Chiese della Mesopotamia*, 62. Cf. BAUMSTARK, "Vorjustinianische Kirchliche," 164-183; KARUTHEIMER, *Early Architecture*, 215.

²⁷ KREALING, *Excavations at Dura-Europos*, 4.

²⁸ KREALING, *Excavations at Dura-Europos*, 142-143.

²⁹ KREALING, *Excavations at Dura-Europos*, 139. Cf. SESTON, *Église et baptistère*, 166.

8. The Church Edifice During the Seleucia-Ctesiphon Period (4th century)

An expedition of German archeologists in 1928-1929 made a marvelous discovery of two churches, one built over the other, at the royal city of Ctesiphon; this is what came to be known as the 'great church of Kokhe.' The ruins of the patriarchal cathedral date back to the time of the Sassanids, and we know that the church was destroyed and rebuilt many times, especially during the reign of Sapor II (309-379), and again under Bahram V during the first half of the fifth century. This would date the older church building to at least the fourth century. In fact, the *Chronicle of Seert* recounts the event of the construction of the church in Ctesiphon according to the style of the palaces of the Sassanids.³⁰

9. Inscription by Zoroastrian Mobad Kartir (3rd Century)

Moban (Magian priest) Kartir who was active in the reign of Bahram II (276-293); in this inscription he boasts how he was suppressed various non-Zoroastrian religions, among which are the *nasara* and *kristiyan*. Although the precise identification of these two groups, almost certainly, almost certainly both Christians, is not clear, it is possible that the *nasara* are the native Christian community in the Sasanian Empire (*nasraye* is the term used of Christians by Sasanian authorities in the Martyr Acts), while the *kristiyan* are Christians (Syriac *krestyane*) from the eastern Roman Empire (Primary Syria) deported in large numbers by Shapur I as a result of his successful campaigns against the Roman Empire,³¹ during which he even captured the Roman Emperor Valerian in 260.

10. The Acts of Thomas (3rd Century)

It is considered an apocryphal composition written in Syriac written in Edessa. One can glimpse an idea and practices of early Syriac rite of initiation. It gives a brief the early account to the Eucharistic liturgy where the document gives light on a nascent theology of the Eucharist. It also provides an understanding of liturgical practices in the Syrian Churches.³² The *Acts of Thomas* speaks about space and time in the eschatological life where the Christian mysteries are the bridge between earthly and heavenly life. It refers to the traditional practice of administering baptism, anointing and Eucharist.³³

11. *Didascalia Apostolorum* (3rd century)

The *Didascalia Apostolorum*, from the first half of the third century, is another important source for the study of the early Christian worship.³⁴ Although originally written in Greek,³⁵ the

³⁰ According to the *Chronicle*, the sister of the emperor Sapor II (309-379), Š r n, had converted to Christianity by Mar Simon bar-Sabb 'e (d. 341). The princess had been exiled to Merw and the people there accepted Christianity. She had a church built there, and not knowing in what form to construct it, she ordered that it be built according to the Sassanid palace. From that it had received its name Ctesiphon *Chronique de Séert*, vol. 5, 254-256; DE VILLARD, *Chiese della Mesopotamia*, 28. However, it seems that the *Chronicle* may have confused Š r n as being the sister of Sapor II rather than—more probably—the wife of Khusrau II.

³¹ S. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, ch. IV pp 91-96 ch. V, 6.

³² Klijn examines the *Acts of Judas Thomas* in relation to the ancient Syrian Church in general. Cf. KLIJN, *Acts of Thomas*, 7.

³³ AJT, 77,78,79,80,84,90,130,136,146,149,154.

³⁴ GALTIER, "Date de la Didascalie," 351; BROCK & VASEY, *Liturgical Portions*, 3; ALTANER, *Patrologia*, 87; *Didascalie*, ixxxix-xci; *Syriac Didascalia*, 23; MIKLOSHAZY, *Pneumatology*, 59.

³⁵ MIKLOSHAZY, *Pneumatology*, 59; MURRAY, "Characteristics," 4.

Greek text, apart from minor fragments, is lost. The complete document survives only in Syriac³⁶ and appears to have been translated into Syriac in the fourth century.³⁷ Internal evidence shows that it was most probably composed in North Syria. Its Semitic influence is all pervasive.³⁸ The *Didascalia* is not a theological treatise but rather a canonical and liturgical manual of early Syriac-speaking Church.³⁹ This document is comprised of 26 chapters, some of which deal with: Admonitions to married couples; rules; norms for the election and consecration of bishops, the ordination of priests and deacons, and the administration of property; regulations for deacons and deaconesses, baptism, church services and penance.

12. *Liber Graduum* (4th Century)

The *Liber Graduum* is the Latin title of an ancient Syriac work, *Kt bâ d-massq tâ*.⁴⁰ It was probably written in the late fourth century by an anonymous member of the Persian Church. It consists of thirty homilies on the advanced stages of growth in the spiritual life, which also takes into account the cultural milieu of the authors day.⁴¹ It places great importance on the visible Church and her sacraments. These furnish the Syrian concepts of the liturgy.⁴²

13. The Evidences of Christian Church of 4th Century

i) Emerging Primate Episcopal See

We find the emergence of the episcopal see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (the Sasanian winter capital) as the primate see during Sasanian Empire. The hints we receive in our sources concerning opposition to bishop of Seleucia Ctesiphon (c. 310-329) named Papa, suggest that previously several bishoprics (notably that of Fars [south-west of Iran]) had had a more or less autonomous existence. The first major Christian writer from outside the Roman Empire named Aphrahat reported the disputes among the bishops in his work called *Demonstrations* (23 *Demos*. written ca 336/7-345).⁴³ Scholars agreed on the authenticity of this work.

ii) Persecution of Christian in Persia:

a) **Aphrahat recounted** about the persecution of Christians of the 4th century that lasted for almost 40 years (341-379) during Shapur II (Sasanian King). It is important to recognize political situation behind these persecutions; hostilities had recently broken out between the Sasanian and Roman Empire. This difficult situation continued until the accession to the Persian throne of the emperor Yazdgerd I and his proclamation of toleration in 410.

³⁶ Cf. CONNOLLY, "Didascalia Introduction," xi.

³⁷ Cf. BROCK & VASEY, *Liturgical Portions*, 5.

³⁸ BROCK & VASEY, *Liturgical Portions*, 4.

³⁹ MIKLOSHAZY, *Pneumatology*, 60.

⁴⁰ Kmosko prepared the critical edition of the Syriac text with a Latin translation. It was published in *Patrologia Syriaca* in 1926. Hereafter we make references to the *Liber Graduum* according to the Syriac column number in Kmosko's edition.

⁴¹ MURRAY, "Characteristics," 4.

⁴² MURRAY, *Symbols*, 35-36; VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism* I, 178-184; KOWLASKI, *Perfezione e giustizia*, 217-218; BROCK, *Syriac Father*, 42; MURRAY, "Characteristics," 4.

⁴³ Aphrahat whose *Demonstrations* are given the precise dates 336/7 (I-X), 343/4 (XII-XXII) and August 345 (XXIII), is our first major Christian writer from outside the Roman Empire and thus a source of greatest importance.

b) Eusebius reported about the letter written by Constantine to Shapur II, where he urges Shapur to protect his Christian subjects and thus experience the good will of Constantine's own deity.

b) Martyr Acts: Greater number of martyrdoms under Shapur II was well recorded. Although the acts of martyrdoms had taken on legendary proportions, these nevertheless remains much of incidental interest for our understanding of Christianity in the Sasanian Empire.

iii) Acts of Synods (410-775): Alongside the martyr acts, the other for our knowledge of the Church of the East is the collection of synods covering the period 410 to 775.

The Appellation of the Eucharistic Rite

In reference to Eucharistic Liturgy, the rite is "marked out as being participation, that is, with God and divine things, through the mediation of the communion of the Body and Blood."⁴⁴ Timothy gives five appellations for the rite of Holy Mysteries:

1) The rite is *knušya*/assembly (church) because the rite gathers many into unity toward divine things since "we are all one in Christ" (Gal 3: 28). Through Eucharist we all united and joined to Christ's sacrifice. In the *Acts of Thomas*, we read that "those who believe in Christ are coming to the assembly of the Messiah."⁴⁵ Hence, the Eucharist rite is linking of human and divine Dimensions.

2) The rite is called communion on the account of the reception of these Mysteries we become the members of Christ.⁴⁶ For Timothy, through Eucharist we become part of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. On the other hand, Timothy adopts St. Paul understanding of unity of the ecclesial body, whom he seeks it through Eucharistic body of Christ. "The bread which we break", he asks, "is it not the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (I Cor 10:16-17). We all communicate from one Bread which is the "Bread of Life" and we become on body, namely the Body of Christ. We become what we eat that's why Eucharist is called the sacrament of realism. *Acts of Thomas* describes breaking of the bread and communion as the culmination of the rite of initiation.⁴⁷

3) The rite is oblation (*qurbana*) which is Christ offering on our behalf for our sinful humanity. St. Paul says: "walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Eph 5: 2). The term offering (*qurbana*) is often used in the East Syriac tradition such as in *Acts of Thomas*⁴⁸ as well as in the Synodal canons of the Church of the East.⁴⁹

4) The rite is called mysteries (*'raze*) because Christ offered himself to the Father on our behalf and mysteriously has handed down to His disciple in the Last Supper.⁵⁰ East Syriac

⁴⁴ Timothy II, *Mystery of the Church*, p. 42

⁴⁵ Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas* (ET, intro. & comm.), Leiden 1962, ch. 37, p. 84.

⁴⁶ Timothy II, *Mystery of the Church*, 43.

⁴⁷ Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, ch. 157-158, p. 148-150.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 50, p. 91.

⁴⁹ *Synodicon Orientale*, J.B. Chabot (ed. & FT), Paris 1902, p. 265.

⁵⁰ Timothy II, *Mystery of the Church*, 43.

commentators such as Psuedo Narsai, Qatraya and Anonymous Author, Bar Zo'bi and Abidsho' call it as the rite of the "Holy Mysetries".⁵¹

5) The final appellation of the Rite of the Mysteries (*Holy Qurbana*) is sanctification (*qudaša*) because it purifies the recipients through its effectiveness by out our sins. The Eucharist has a sanctification role which clearly elaborated in the early literature. Speaking about the action of the Holy Spirit in Eucharistic bread Ephrem says: "Instead of the fire that destroyed man, we have consumed the fire in the bread and have been invigorated The fire came down with anger to destroy sinners, but the fire of grace descends on the bread and settles in it. Instead of the fire that destroyed man, we have consumed the fire in the bread and have been invigorated."⁵²

Principles stages of the Evolution of Eucharistic Liturgy

According to Baumstark's law of the evolution of the liturgy, we can distinguish different stages of evolution: i) initial period of diversification to unification; ii) stage of further development; iii) stage of standardization in the Eucharistic liturgy.

- J) Prior to 410 AD, based on some literal evidences, we find basic structure of the Eucharistic liturgy as well as ample of Eucharistic theological writings. The oldest piece of Syriac literature referring to the liturgy is *The Acts of Thomas* (3rd Century). It represents the Eucharist as the anamnestic celebration of the paschal mystery. It provides various steps of Eucharistic celebration; for example, offering, primitive form of Eucharistic prayer, breaking of the bread and mingling of the cup. This leads us to conclude that a theological thinking on the Eucharistic had already then begun in the Church of the East with the early East Syriac anaphora namely Addai and Mari (AM).
- J) In 410 AD, we see the first synodal act of the Church of the East under the Catholicos Mar Isaac towards the unification of the liturgy according to the usage of the primatial see. He established the prescribed liturgical usage for the Church.⁵³
- J) There is the great school of Edessa which as transferred to Nisibis, inside the confines of the Persian Empire, under Bar Sauma and Narsai.
- J) Mar Aba I (540-552) introduced the Greek anaphoras of Theodore (AT) and Nestorius (AN) into the East Syriac liturgy along with Byzantine Litanies (*Anglel of Peace*) and *Trisagion*.
- J) Isho' Yahb III (650-658) reduced the number of anaphoras to three which are AM, AT and AN. There were anaphoras attributed to Mar Aprem,⁵⁴ Mar Barsauma,⁵⁵ Chrysostom⁵⁶ and Diodore.⁵⁷ Isho'Yahb also arranged the liturgical seasons.

⁵¹ Narsai, "The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai. An Exposition of the Mysteries: Homily 17," CONNOLLY (ET), p. 1-3; Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation of the Offices," Podipara (ET), p. 87-89; *Expositio Officiorum Ecclesiae*, vol 2, R.H. CONNOLLY (ed. & LT), p. 2-3' Abidisho', *Ordo Iudiciorum Ecclesiasticorum*, Voste', Fonti, serie II, fasc. 15, p. 93.

⁵² Ibid., 10, 8-10.

⁵³ *Synodicon orientale ou recueil des synods nestoriens*, J.B. CHABOT (ed. & FT), Paris 1902, 27/266-267.

⁵⁴ Scher & Perier (ed. & tr.), *Histoire nestorienne inedite* (Chronicle of Seert), p. 112.

⁵⁵ Assemani, *Bibliothecae Orientalis Clementino Vaticana*, vol 3/1, Rome 1725, p. 65.

⁵⁶ Ibn at-Taiyib, IBN AT-TAIYIB, *Fiqh An- Nasraniya*, W. Hoenebrach & O. Spies (eds. & GT), (CSCO 161-162, 167-168 = SA 16-17,18-19) Louvain 1956, 1957, p. 93.

⁵⁷ *Acts of the Synod of Diamper*, session 5, decree 2.

-) In the late eighth/early ninth century Patriarch Timothy I added the Lord's Prayer to the beginning and end of the liturgy.
-) Mar Eliya III Abu Halim (1176-1190) and Mar Yahbalaha II (1190-1222) enriched the prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours.
-) In the middle ages, begins decadence: Bem falls into desuetude due to the persecution.

General Theological Principles of East Syriac Eucharistic Liturgy

First, it is the biblical principle linking both the Old and New Covenants as the place of worship and cult. The Christian church is a figure of the Old Testament temple, and the prefiguration of the heavenly temple, the Jerusalem of above in which Christ eternally ministers as the perfect high priest. The Church is a continuation of Jewish tradition in the recitation of the Psalms and meditating on the Scripture which are considered the main aspects of the first part of the Divine Liturgy. Liturgy has a sacramental power where it makes presence God's word that is inseparable from His Word. The reading of the Scripture in the Liturgy of the Word was already part of the liturgical tradition in the synagogue. However, the liturgy does not stop at the literal sense of the Old Testament covenant since the Old Testament has always an orientation toward Christ. The Old Covenant foreshadowed and prefigured the New Covenant. The Old is a foreshadow of the reality to us in Jesus. In speaking of Eucharist, Aphrahat sees of the Eucharist as a Christian Passover. He notes Manna as a type of Eucharist, and the Church as the fulfillment of the 'one house,' in which Jews ate the Paschal Lamb.⁵⁸

The second important theme is the theological premise much cherished by the East Syriacs of the 'two worlds,' namely, the heavenly and the earthly. The theological concept of the existence of the two worlds is already in place in the *Acts of Thomas*. Klijn states: "On the one hand the Eucharist is related with Christ's offering, on the other hand it appears to be no more than a way to come into contact with the heavenly world. In these cases the elements are vehicles of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁹ The Eucharist, therefore, is not only representative of Christ's Passion, but it becomes a means for contact with the heavenly realm by the Holy Spirit's working through the elements. According to the *Liber Patrum*, the heavenly and the earthly character of the Church is intelligibly integrated and symbolized in the very structure of the Church building and the liturgical functions that are celebrated in it. This canonical work describes the places, time and objects of liturgical celebration as symbols of the heavenly liturgy:

The Church is the type of both worlds. The temple is the present world, and is like the outer sanctuary of the tabernacle of the covenant into which the priests, deacons and the assembly of the people always enter. The altar or the sanctuary is indeed the type of the future world, and of the 'holy of holies' of the tabernacle of the covenant into which once a year the high priest entered.⁶⁰

A third theological principle of importance is the influence of the holy sites at Jerusalem and their symbolic significance in the Christian liturgy and churches. Consequently, the earthly life of Jesus and both the historical and salvific acts connected to it and it came to be played out in the liturgy by means of the disposition of the sacred space. For instance, *bema* represents Jerusalem and Baptism font represents Jordan river, etc.

⁵⁸ APHRAHAT, *Aphraatis Sapiientis Persae Demonstrationes*, PS I, Dem. XII, p. 9

⁵⁹ KLIJN, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, Commentary*, p. 61.

⁶⁰ *Liber Patrum*, J.M. Voste' (ed. & LT), fonti, serie II, fasc. XVI, Caldei-Diritto antico III, CCO, Vatican City 1940, p. 36. English Translation cited from Maniyattu, *Heaven on Eearth*, 124.

A fourth theme of equal importance is the impact of the christianization of the older Mesopotamian palace motifs and the borrowing from the Old Testament temple themes. For instance, the ancient and famous Cathedral of our Church in Ctesiphon church was modeled after the Sassanid palace of Sarvistan by having one element of tripartite structure of the Church on the eastern side—the apse (Diaconicon, Sanctuary and Baptistry).

The Structural Framework of the Church Building

In the East Syriac tradition, the symbolic understanding of the sanctuary as heaven, nave (*haykla*) as earth, central *bem* as the earthly Jerusalem and pass way called *Shqaqona* as the way to heaven has contributed in a substantial way to the Eucharistic theology. St. Ephrem (d. 375) viewed liturgical space as the very presence of Christ himself in space. It is in fact the presence of Christ which makes possible the real encounter between heaven and earth in the liturgical space.

- i. **The Sanctuary (*Beth Qanke*)** represents the heaven and is separated from the nave by veil. In the middle of the sanctuary stood the lamp of olive oil which was lit perpetually, day and night. It divides the sanctuary into two parts. The place between the lamp and the door of sanctuary is designated to subdeacons who have no right to go further. There are niches in the north and south walls for the paten and the chalice which is called also *beth gazze*.
- ii. **Altar (*madbha*):** The altar almost always was rectangular in shape and some of the more modern churches had three rows of steps projecting above it and forming part of it; this was symbolic of the mount of Golgotha. In the East Syrian Rite, the altar is attached to the eastern wall. The only wooden altar is called *dappa* (portable altar). Upon the altar stood the Cross and Gospel that are the symbols of our Lord Jesus. For Anonymous Author (attributed to Georg of Arbela) around 9th century, altar symbolizes the sepulcher of Christ and His resurrection. The veil over the mysteries symbolizes the tombstone. The altar is the throne of God. Narsai (d. ca. 502AD) indicates: “The adorable altar thereof is a symbol of that throne of the Great and Glorious, upon which He will be seen by watchers and men in the day of His revelation.”⁶¹ For Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), the linen that is spread/placed on the altar represents the figure of the linen clothes of the burial of our Lord. The altars which were not consecrated by the bishop with oil or by the archdeacon without oil had the *dapp* or altar slab. The altar slab was rectangular in shape, made of certain kinds of wood, generally of the male fruit tree, and kept in certain skins of animals. – deposed upon it in the middle. It is consecrated by a bishop according to the prescribed rites and kept in all churches and chapels. According to Gabriel Basrah (884-891) and Ibn Attayib (d. 1043), the wooden *dapp* originated during the persecution of Špor II (309-379). On either side of the altar were the *flabella* or ‘fans’ which the deacons used to agitate at certain points during the liturgy. According to Išo’yahb IV, the two *flabella* ‘fans’ symbolize the two angels Gabriel and Michael who were at the sepulcher of our Lord.

⁶¹ NARSAI, “An Exposition of the Mysteries,” R.H. CONNOLLY (ET), in *Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, vol. 8, p. 273.

- iii. **The Baptistry (*Beth 'M d*):** To the south of the sanctuary, and again separated by a pierced wall, was the baptistry, called the *beth 'm d* . This room too had a small door leading out to the nave proper and was provided with a curtain. Some place the baptistry also had an exterior door that led out into the courtyard of the church. Therein were found the stone font for infants, and possibly a larger one for adults. The baptistry should also contain a quasi-altar or credence like the one found on the diaconicon or *bem* for the consecration of the baptismal oil used for anointing the whole body during the baptismal liturgy. On the altar of the *baptistry*, a Cross and the Gospel Book should be placed during the baptismal ceremony.
- iv. **Diaconicon (*Beth Dy q n/Beth Gazz*)** To the immediate north of the sanctuary and separated by a pierced wall stood the sacristy known as diaconicon (sacristy) – the *beth dy q n*, or the ‘house of the deacons;’ other sources refer to it as the *beth gazz* or the ‘house of the treasury.’ It had a small door that lead out to the nave and was provided with curtains. It is here that bread and wine for the Eucharist are prepared. Many times the bishop rested here during the communion, and it served to contain the vestments and vessels that served for the celebration of the liturgy and for the preparation of the oblations. According to ‘Abd š ‘ of Nisibis (d. 1318), the ordination of the deaconesses took place in *beth dy q n*, before the door that led to the sanctuary since women were and are not allowed to enter the sanctuary. According to the rite of dedication, it seems that there was some sort of a quasi-altar known as the ‘altar of the *beth gazz* (house of the treasury) for the keeping of the holy Mysteries;’ it might have received its name from the fact that it was located in this compartment.
- v. **The Chancel Steps (*Qestr m*):** The *qestr m* is the elevated space between the sanctuary and the nave denoted by the three steps. These three steps led out to the nave from the foot of the sanctuary. The third step was extended out as a platform to be used by the lectors during the Eucharistic celebration, The clergy of lower rank such as the sub-deacons, readers and non-ordained monastics stood in this fenced area during the liturgy and the office. The *qestr m* was a symbolic representation of Paradise, by the mere fact that it stood in a position between heaven and earth, symbolized by the sanctuary and nave respectively. Thomas of Marga⁶² (around 840 AD) sees *qestr m* as the symbol of the place which extends from this earth to the firmament.
- vi. **The Nave (*Haykl*):** The nave in the East Syriac churches generally is symbolic of the earth; this is seen in the fact that it is one step lower than the level of the *qestr m* . The nave, besides being the place where the faithful stood, contained many subsections and various furnishings that served for the function of the liturgy. Among these structures were the *šq q n* , *bem* and the martyrium (*beth shade*).
- vii. **Šq q n (Pathway):** The pathway leading from the *qestr m* to the *bem* proper is known as the *šq q n* . This pathway, symbolically representing the pathway that leads from Jerusalem to Paradise and from Paradise into heaven. Here the Paradise is symbolized by *qestroma*. *Šq q n* symbolizes the way from the earthly Jerusalem to heaven via Paradise.
- viii. **Bem :** The central part of the nave or *haykl* was usually the elevated and fenced square structure known as the *bem* representing the earthly Jerusalem. Though the *bem* is presently almost non-existent, the 15th canon of the synod of Mar Isaac (410) already

⁶² Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors: The Historia Monastica of Thomas of Marga A.D. 840*, E.A.W. BUDGE (ed. & ET), 2 vols., London 1893; reprinted, Piscataway, NJ 2003.

prescribed that the deacon is to proclaim the litany on the *bem*, and that the archdeacon is to read the Gospel there as well. The main use for the *bem* was the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word during the Eucharistic liturgy. Furthermore, the washing of the priests' hands takes place here as well before the Creed. The East Syriac *bem* has an altar in the middle. In fact this altar, called the 'thronos,' is a credence like that of the baptism. On this are placed the cross and gospel. The altar of the *bem* implies the place of Golgotha, where the tomb of Adam is found. On the *bem* we find also the throne of the bishop, and its left seat of the archdeacon. The throne of the bishop symbolizes the place of the Supreme Pontiff, the son of Aaron, which was turned completely towards Jerusalem and towards the East. *Bem* is the place where the Scripture lessons are read. It is the in middle of the Church, represents Jerusalem, which is the in the middle of the earth according to Pseudo George of Arbela (10th Century). *Bem* is the place of the accomplishments of the dispensation of Christ. For example, the procession to the *bem* from the sanctuary as the coming of the Lord to the Jerusalem; the procession of the cross and the gospel back to the sanctuary is symbol of ascension. For Abraham Qatraya (6th century), the entry into the *bem* and the readings of the Scripture prepare the scene of the passion and death. The *bem*, according to Qatraya is the place where the passion begins. The removal of the Cross and the gospel from the throne of the *bem* marks the beginning of the passion proper.

- ix. **The Martyrium (*Beth S hde*):** The martyrium or *beth s hde* was usually located further north of the nave alongside the northern wall and quasi parallel to the *bem*; it was here that the procession ended after the liturgical prayer with the recitation of the martyrs' anthems. The 'house of the martyrs' usually took the form of a small chamber to which one gained access by a door in the middle of the northern wall. In the shrine of the martyrs, the relics of the martyrs or of the saints rested, and it might also have contained the relics of the patron saint of the church or of the prelates, and might have originally been the burial place of the martyr.

Main Commentators of the Fathers on Liturgy

During a span of nine centuries, we find number of fathers who made a comprehensive description and a commentary on the liturgy of the Church of the East (known as East Syrian Rite) starting from fifth century till fourteenth century. It has reached us the valuable work of the following writers on the liturgy: Theodore of Mopsuestia from Antioch (d. 428), Psuedo Narsai (d. 502), Isho'yahb I (d. 596), Gabriel Qatrya (ca. 615), Abraham bar Lipeh (7th century), Psuedo George of Arbela (9th century), Isho'yahb IV (d. 1025), John (Youkhana) bar Zo'bi (12th century), Abidisho bar Brikha (d. 1318) and Timothy II (1318-1332/5). They have a comprehensive commentary on the liturgy of the Church of the East. They have provided us a description of the Eucharistic liturgy prior plunge into dark ages where the Church was under constant persecution for centuries beginning early 14th century. Hence, through their valuable treatises we can get a glimpse of the liturgy that was celebrated at least till the middle of the second millennium.

Elements of the Eucharist

Prior to the beginning of the Liturgy, the priest will prepare the gifts (bread and wine) in a separate rite and they will be placed in the niches found in the sanctuary (northern and southern

walls of sanctuary). But why do we offer a bread or wine on the altar? For Syriac fathers, the Eucharist is given in the form of bread and wine in order to fulfill the OT type: It is the realization and perfection of Melchizedek offering of bread and wine (Gen 14:18),⁶³ the presentation of the bread of the presence or "shewbread,"⁶⁴ (Exod 25: 30; Lev 24:5-9) and for Timothy II the bread and libation was perfecting the sacrifices of animals⁶⁵ (Num 29:6-39).

To say bread and wine is to imply wheat and vine; and to say wheat and vine is to imply, soil, water, wind and sunshine; and to say earth, soil, water, wind and sunshine is to imply the solar system and indeed the cosmos itself. The tiny gifts are therefore symbolically representative of the entire creation.

Timothy further discusses the composition of the bread which is to be used for the Eucharist. First, there are four substances which are used for the dough: wheat flour, water, salt and oil. These four ingredients are likened to the four elements of earth, water, fire and air respectively. The addition of the leaven, according to the usage of almost all the Eastern Churches, is symbolic of the presence of the rational soul in Christ's body (through the movement of the leaven); this also denotes that Christ's body was lacking in nothing. The chalice must also be composed of wine mixed with water, according to a 'universal' custom where water is always mixed with wine.⁶⁶ Bar Hebraeus also mentions the four ingredients used in the Eucharistic bread, which are in accord with the tradition of the Church of the East.⁶⁷

The scope of this rite is to prepare the assembly for the Eucharistic liturgy, especially for the Liturgy of the Word. Its chief elements are the initial service of prayer, the entrance of the clergy, the veneration of the cross and the incensation. It worth mentioning that the gifts are prepared beforehand in a separate rite.

The Use of the Holy Leaven

According to the Assyrian Church of the East, the use of the Holy Leaven is held to be of apostolic origin and a necessary element to be added in the dough of the eucharistic bread prior baking. In discussion of the mystery of the Holy Leaven, it is essential to concentrate on the theological sense of the rite for the renewal of the Holy Leaven that takes place on Holy Thursday. It has two important roles: 1) It emphasizes on the unbroken continuing of the rite, indicating apostolicity (*diachronic dimension*). It connects us to the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper with the piercing of the side of Christ (John 19: 34). From side of Christ, is

⁶³ Aphrahat, Dem XI, PS I, 476; Ephrem, "Hymnen de Azymis," in E. BECK (ed. & GT), *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers: Paschahymnen: de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione* (CSCO 248-249 = SS 108-109) Louvain 1964 [GT 1-41; Syr. Text 1-33], p. 2, 2-6. MINGANA (ed. & ET), *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist* (WS 6, Cambridge 1933), p. 18.

⁶⁴ There was a ritual act to be performed inside the tabernacle that illustrated holiness was the ordinance of the preparation and presentation of the bread of the presence or 'showbread.' It was placed in two rows of six each on the specially designated table made of pure gold (Lev 24:5-9) on the north side of the tabernacle, or on the right side as one faced into the tabernacle; this was done once a week on the Sabbath. It was consumed by the priest the following week.

⁶⁵ Timothy II, *Mystery of the Eucharist*, 51.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 53; Toma, *The Mystery of the Church*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Rome 2007, 499.

⁶⁷ Bar Hebraeus, "Uber das irdische Priestertum," in Kohhaas, *Sakramententheologie*, p. 38-39/101. Bar Hebraeus asserts that the apostles, though not establishing the regulations for the composition of the bread and cup of the Eucharist, they did establish that those things of the OT have been abolished and the those of the New ushered in. For St. Paul also states in 2 Cor 5:17: "For anyone united to Christ, there is a new creation: the old order has gone; a new order has already begun."

born the second Eve which is the Church. We find this through Ephrem's symbolic interpretation of the piercing of Christ's side where blood and water are flowed. The water symbolizes baptism while the blood is symbol of Eucharist and both of them served to create and nurture Christians, incorporating and drawing them into conformity with Christ (*Ephrem Commentary on Diatesaron, 21:11*). 2) It serves as the mystery of unity of each parish to its bishop and eventually to the Catholicos Patriarch (*synchronic dimension*)—it emphasizes to link the Institution of the Eucharist with each individual celebration of the Eucharist (emphasizing on *ecclesial communion*).⁶⁸

General Perspectives on the structure of East Syrian Eucharistic Liturgy

First of all, we need to underline the particularity of the East Syriac Eucharistic liturgy, in which the Eucharistic liturgy makes no processional entrance into the Church. It begins with the clergy already in the sanctuary and the introit procession (entrance rite) doesn't go from the nave to Sanctuary as found in the Latin Rite but in reverse direction, from the sanctuary to the bema in the nave. However, due to the disappearances of the bema after the fourteenth century inevitably led to the suppression of the procession rite. But the ancient liturgical structure showed a fine sense of ceremonial clarity eminently suited to cathedral office.

Second, the Divine Liturgy begins with gathering of people. They come from both genders, different social, educational and economic strata with various levels of moral excellence. They all form one They are all member of the mystical body of Christ and form one community gathered around the altar of Christ. In this diversity they form an eschatological sign of God's holy nation. This image harks back the words of St. Paul who told us, in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female." (Gal 3: 28).

Third, the liturgy of the Holy Mysteries consists of two main parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In every Sunday liturgy there is an intense form of encounter. In almost every culture, particularly in ours, a formal encounter with another person involves, typically two basic things: conversing and eating. At a part, reception, or banquet we greet guests and spend a substantial amount of time talking with them, and then we usually sit down to share a meal. The Holy Qurbana is an encounter with Jesus Christ, a formal and ritualized act of 'staying with him.'

In the Liturgy of the Word, we listen to him in the Scripture and we speak back to him in the response and prayers. Moreover, Liturgy of the Word is not merely an occasion of the communication of the Word of God, having a predominant pedagogic function. As the title of the part of the liturgy says, it is the leitourgia, that is, service or ministry, by the Word of God. It is, nothing but the ministry of salvation accomplished by Christ the Word of God.

Then in the Liturgy of the Eucharist we eat a meal that He prepares for us. In another perspective on the two sections of the Liturgy of the Mystery is that the Liturgy of the Word corresponds to the Jewish synagogue service, which centered on the reading and explaining of the Torah while the Liturgy of the Eucharist corresponds to the Temple service at which grain

⁶⁸ Ephrem Commentary on Diatesaron, 21:11 in C. McCarthy (tran. & intro.), *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diastessaron*, (*Journal of Semitic Studies Supplements 2*, Oxfodt 1993), 322. Brock, "The Mysteries Hidden in the Side of Christ," *Sobornost* 7 (1978): 464-472. The Joint Communiqué of the Fifth Non-official Consultatio in J. P. HOFRRICHTER & G. WILFLINGER (eds.), *Syriac Dialogue V: Non-Official Consultation on Dialgue within the Syriac Tradition* (Vienna 2003), 150; Cf. W. Toma, *Sacramental Theology of the Assyrian Church of the East*, 6.

and animal sacrifices were performed. The second part, which is the Liturgy of the Eucharist can be compared to both a meal and a sacrifice. Hence every Divine liturgy participates in both dimensions.

Since *Qurbana Qadisha* is a sacrifice of thanksgiving for divine dispensation and since Christ is the centre of this dispensation, Eucharistic celebration is a representation of Christ's life. For example, the Liturgy of the Word represents Nativity, Epiphany and Christ's predication. The liturgy of offering till epiclesis represents his Passion. Epiclesis represents Christ's resurrection and communion symbolizes and realities our participation in it.

Conclusion

Liturgy is the medium by which the public worship of God is performed. Rituals are not just human interactions but they serve as the means of establishing a relationship with a divine agency, as well as with other participants in the liturgy. Liturgy is what rightly orders the personality, since we find interior order in the measure that we surrender everything in us to God. Liturgy is not only a public worship or service of the assembly to God, but God's work through sacraments and prayers and praises to be a means of grace to the assembly. Liturgy is the act of sanctification of man from the part of God in and through Jesus Christ, and the act of glorification to God by the Church through and in Christ.

East Syriac liturgy developed in the Judeo-Christian environment, in the Semitic cultural context, in which the whole of Christian revelation is given. The architecture of the East Syriac churches has undergone a steady development from the earliest period of the Christian era. The house-church or *domus ecclesiae* of third-century Dura is the prime example of the earliest Mesopotamian church edifice. The more elaborate churches excavated at Seleucia-Ctesiphon are demonstrative of the influences of the Sassanid royal palaces and the Babylonian-Assyrian temple upon the Mesopotamian church style. The later development of the mountain-churches of northern Mesopotamia, exhibit the adaptation of this type of architecture to the various political and geographic circumstances. They were churches generally smaller in size, and many important architectural features, such as the *bem* , were lost in their construction.

The study of the historical development of liturgy of the Church of the East and its liturgical space aimed for contextualizing the East Syrian Rite in its historical and liturgical perspectives. The survey of various ancient literary evidences of the existence of the Church of Mesopotamia in the early four centuries, the stages of its liturgical evolution and division of its pivotal Eucharistic theological principles reveal that the present living tradition of the Church of the East is the heir of a long-standing liturgical and theological tradition.