

THE STRUCTURE COMMENTARY ON THE RITE OF MARRIAGE IN THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST

Introduction

Marriage is the solemn and public life-long commitment of the bride and the groom that becomes the occasion for divine presence. St. Paul teaches that the love of a man and woman in marriage is the manifestation of the love of Christ for His people, the Church.

The Syriac fathers look at the Scriptures for an understanding of the meaning of marriage. They comment on the rite of marriage by giving the symbolic meaning of the rite which outlines the economy of salvation brought about by Christ. They also affirm that marriage is a mystery of the unity between Christ and his Church. In referring to the classic text of St. Paul concerning marriage Ephesian 5, Timothy comments: "as Christ shows his love to his Church by suffering for her sake, likewise, you [husbands] ought to preserve the love of this adherence toward your wives."¹

The East Syrian rite of Marriage draws a direct parallel between marriage and the constant reality of God's love. The liturgical celebration is anamnetic because it recalls the salvific God's plan for the world through prayers and actions. It evokes the creation account of man and woman after God's own image, the salvific covenant of God with Israel initiating with providing Eve as a bride for Adam, and the declaration that they are to become two in one flesh in marriage and culminating by providing the Church as the bride of Christ and establishing a mystical union. Furthermore, the rite reveals the full reality, namely that each marriage is a reenactment of that ultimate union between Christ and His bride, the Church.

Although marriage is not one of the seven sacraments of the Church, it is considered to be rich and abounding in the symbolism and extremely archaic, as it is in its tone. In fact, the spiritual reality that is the conferring with God's grace has been manifested through the sensible, visible signs and symbols during the celebration of the sacred rite of marriage.

The Essential Role of the Priest in the Rite of Marriage

In the early Christian era, the spouses, after having gone through the formalities of civil registration in order to obtain validity in secular society, the joint couple would be present in the Church on Sunday for Eucharistic celebration to receive a blessing from the bishop. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 108 AD) testifies to this practice: "Those who get married must unite with the knowledge of the bishop, so that marriage may be according to the Lord, and not by human desire" (*Letter to Polycarp*, 5:2).² Similarly, in the

¹ Vat. Syr. 151, 142r-142v.

² BART D. EHRMAN (ed. & ET), *The Apostolic Fathers. Vol. I: I Clement, II Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Didache*. Loeb Classical Library, 24. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003, 317.

Assyrian Church of the East, marriage is seen as a Church ceremony and a sacred rite which normally requires an ordained priest. In canon 13th of the synod of George I (674), it speaks of the canonical form of celebration of marriage in which requires the consent of the parents, the mediation of the Holy Cross of salvation, and *the priestly presence*.³ For Isho'bokht (8th century), every liturgical celebration of marriage required the blessing of the priest and the exchange of the rings. He states that, "we believe that what is blessed by priest, it is blessed by God."⁴

A valid ordained priest is essential to administer the rite of marriage. '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. Hence, the presence of the priest is essential to bless the marriage of the betrothals by performing liturgical rite of the Church before the sanctuary with the presence of deacons and congregation.⁷

On the other hand, the Patriarch Timothy II (1318-1332/5) names five constitutive elements that are necessary for validly confecting the marriage rite in which a priest is considered the first essential constituent. For him, the Rite of Marriage should be i) administered by a valid priest; ii) the presence of the cup of wine mixed with water to be blessed by the priest; iii) the Cross; iv) the ring; and v) *khnana* (ܟܢܢܐ).⁸

Though stressing the importance and indispensability of the role of the priest in the marriage rite, Timothy nonetheless, affirms that the mystery of marriage has its own sanctifying effect. As with other mysteries, the priesthood is the proper administrator of the rite of marriage. He states that "the priest is the one who completes all the mysteries and without whose mediation none of the holy mysteries of our Church are fulfilled. For he is the one who by the holy invocation perfects all those who are brought near for completion, whatever they may be..."⁹

³ J.-B. CHABOT (ed. & FT), *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil des synodes nestoriens*, Paris 1902, 223/487.

⁴ E. SACHAU (ed. & GT), *Syrische Rechtsbücher III*, 3vols., Berlin 1907, 1908, 1914, 75.

⁵ The validity of the mysteries for 'Abdīšō' 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.

⁶ ABDISHO, *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.

⁷ Ibid, 48.

⁸ TIMOTHY II, *Mysteries of the Church* = Timothy II (Patriarch) *Book of the Seven Cusses of the Mysteries of the Church*, Vatican Syriac Manuscript 151, folios 147r.

⁹ Ibid, 147r.

Technical Syriac Terms for Bride and Bridegroom

Prior to giving an analysis of the rite of marriage itself, it is important to have the knowledge of certain Syriac terms used in the nuptial imagery. In Syriac, there are two words with different connotations that stand for bride: *mkhirta* (ܡܚܝܪܬܐ) and *kalta* (ܟܠܬܐ). The word *mkhirta* comes from the root *mkhar* (ܡܚܚ) which has a commercial significance. Though the word is limited to betrothal and marriage, it reflects a common Semitic background of buying and barter.¹⁰ This word points to the Oriental custom of buying the bride from her father. In marriage negotiations, either the father or the bridegroom himself used to estimate and evaluate the proposed bride in all her circumstances, and then only they determine the dowry or the bride-money to be paid by the bridegroom to marry her.¹¹ Hence, the negotiation process of agreeing on a specific dowry amount in order to marry the woman was considered business affairs. In the present day perspective, it might seem quite odd that the man buys the woman from her father. However, in the ancient time obviously it was a common practice in the Orient.

In the liturgical context, the question is then what Christ the Bridegroom had to pay to get the Church as his partner. From the same root comes the words *mkhira* (ܡܚܝܪܐ) which means the bridegroom and *makhora* (ܡܚܝܪܐ) which stands for the person who acts as the betrother or the intermediary in the marriage negotiations.

Another word for the bride is *kalta* (ܟܠܬܐ), which points to the important rite of marriage and the crowing of the bride. This crowing is practiced also in baptism; thus, the liturgical tradition links the imagery of the bride to baptism. The usual word for the bridegroom is *khatna* (ܟܬܢܐ) relating to an ancient Semitic custom of circumcision just before the marriage. *khatna* is also a title commonly used in early Syriac ascetics to indicate their intimate union with Christ ‘the Beloved.’ They looked forward to full communion with their Beloved at the eschatological marriage banquet called *meshtutha* (ܡܫܬܘܬܐ) and finally in the heavenly bridal chamber *gnuna* (ܓܢܘܢܐ).¹²

The Liturgy of Marriage as an Act of the whole Church

The Rite of Marriage is the official ritual of the entire Church, so the Church regulates its celebration. Hence, marriage in the Church is not a private celebration of the couple or their families and friends. Why?

1. The Church is built up by the very act of her worship. The Church life and grace is realized through her worship. The Greek word for worship-*leiturgia*- means more than common prayer; it is corporate action in which everyone takes an

¹⁰ Ibid, 132v.

¹¹ H. ENGBERDING, “Die Kirche als Braut in der ostsyrischen Liturgie,” OCP 3 (1937) p. 13.

¹² R. MURRAY, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, Cambridge 1975; reprinted Piscataway/New Jersey 2004, 132.

2. The wedding is not simply an exchange of vows but a blessing of the Church, through which we are united in the very act of Christ. The newly married couple is not just united to each other but joined together with Christ and Holy Church. It is not a private affair but one witnessed by the Church as the Body of Christ bringing the husband and wife in closer communion with all. Through marriage their lives are transfigured as together they seek salvation in this world. From the second century, we witness that the blessings of the spouses by the bishop took place during the celebration of Sunday liturgy in the presence of the entire Christian community.¹³

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regard to its structure; it could be viewed as primitive in its tone.¹⁷ Along with other liturgical rites of the Church of the East, the rite of marriage was most likely compiled in its present form in the Upper Monastery of Mar Gabriel and Mar Abraham around the 7th century by the Patriarch Isho'Yahb III (650-658).

The rite of marriage is composed of prayers that depict the bond of marriage and communal prayers for the couple, the Church and the world. The Church of the East views the wedding ceremony as a union that influences the whole community. The ceremony is composed of prayers and earthly materials (wine, water, ring etc.) that are interpreted in the context of marriage and which exemplify Christ's marriage with the Church.

The text is heavily reliant on the scriptural texts to support the themes of sanctity and inviolability that are associated with marriage (Matt 19: 6). It emphasizes the sacrificial love of Christ towards the Church as an example of how the husband's relationship should be with his wife (Eph 5: 25). It also recalls Old Testament teachings and the account of marriage by the patriarchs and holy people.

¹⁷ MURRAY, *Symbols*, p. 155; cf. P. YOUSIF, *Appunti sui sacramenti e sui riti apparentati nel rito caldeo e malabarese*, pro manuscripta, PIO, Rome 1999-2000, 65.

The Rite of Betrothal (*mkhūryā/tālībūā*)

The rite of matrimony (*zūwākhā*) is preceded by betrothal or engagement between the proposed marriage partners, which reflects the biblical tradition. The betrothal has a human and civil character while the rite of marriage is strictly liturgical. It consists of two simple steps.

In the first stage, the priest first sends the ring by a pious woman to the future bride: if she consents to marry the man then she chooses to accept the ring. In the *Nomocanon*, Mar Abisho (d. 1318) describes the procedure:

The priest sends four pious women or *bnath qyāme* (daughters of covenant)¹⁸ who are well-known by the girl. They will take her by the hand, place the ring on it, and say, “This is the ring of N., the son of N., whom your father—or your brother, or your paternal uncle, or your mother, or your maternal uncle, or N., your sponsor—has betrothed to you. If, then, your will is satisfied with him, be still and keep silence; but if it is not, cast off the ring. The matter will be over.”¹⁹

The second step is the exchange of the right hand of the procurators after the question of the curate. The procurators are representatives of the two families and this step will only take place if they agree on the conditions previously discussed. The agreement between the two families constitutes the first phase in the rite of marriage, which has a quasi-binding character. Either personal or social consent is the basic prerequisite for the initial impetus towards the marriage agreement. The priest takes their two right hands, reminding the prospective couple and the assembly that the communion of man and woman was established by the creator. He calls God, angels and saints to be witnesses to the agreement for the new partnership of life initiated by the spouses and prays for the betrothed. Afterward, the ceremony is concluded with the Lord’s Prayer.

Isho’boht (8th century), a Persian metropolitan of the Church of the East, explains why the Christians are obliged to contract the betrothal as a phase of preparation before celebrating matrimony. He compares this necessity to the work of creating of the first parents in the Bible, which also occurred in two phases. In the first phase, the Lord created Adam and in the second, God thought that it was not good that the man remains alone. Consequently, He created his equal. Likewise, Christians must agree to the promise of betrothal before they unite in matrimony.

According to Isho’boht, the betrothal is a necessary step before the matrimony. It is a period of trial and mutual recognition which leads the couples to a happy and lasting matrimony.

For Pseudo George of Author (10th century), the betrothal of a man and woman signifies the revelation of our Lord to this world, his preaching of salvation and the

¹⁸ Before the advent of proper monastic movement, there was a community of faithful in the Syriac churches a community focused around the members of the covenant: men and women who had committed themselves to sexual abstinence and the service of the church. This name is the English translation of the Syriac *bnay qyāmā* (ܒܢܝ ܩܝܡܐ), literally *sons of the covenant*. A male member of the covenant was called *bar qyāmā* (ܒܪ ܩܝܡܐ), or *son of the covenant*; a female member was *bat qyāmā* (ܒܬܐ ܩܝܡܐ), or *daughter of the covenant*.

¹⁹ ABDISHO, *Nomocanon*, p. 20.

guarantee of the Kingdom. Although future happiness in the marital union is guaranteed, the betrothed are not permitted to co-habit.²⁰

For Abdisho, the betrothal rite is a stage where the groom makes the covenant to his bride before the celebration of their marriage. He quotes the Genesis account of Eve's creation, indicating that God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make for him a helper like him."²¹ God then formed Eve from Adam's rib. Through this statement God points to the covenant, which man should make through betrothal. Abdisho states:

Since in the beginning, when God formed Eve from the rib of Adam, prior to her formation, God first spoke the word, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make for him a helper like him." By this God early indicated this covenant, which men ought to make through betrothal. Therefore Christians, the children of the wedding-feast of Jesus, the heavenly bridegroom, should have, prior to their intimacy, a contract.²²

The liturgical tradition speaks from the first moment of the betrothal of the Church to her Heavenly Bridegroom (which takes place at the River Jordan during the baptism of Jesus) to the ceremony of marriage (the marriage banquet and the interweaving of the couple with the children born of the Spirit). This theme is vividly seen during the season of the Consecration of the Church which is called the "Wedding feast of the Church."

The *madrasha*²³ on the first Sunday of the Consecration of the Church contains the theme of betrothal between Christ and the Church which took place at the River Jordan during Jesus' baptism: "Blessed be Christ who has betrothed you (the Church) to himself from the water of baptism."²⁴

The same theme is found in the diaconal litany that concludes the office of nocturne (*lelyā*) for the fourth Sunday of Consecration: "He [Christ] betrothed His Church through baptism and gave her a pledge of his kingdom and vested her with grace of the Spirit."²⁵

On the feast of Epiphany the role of water is stressed in the betrothal of Christ with the Church. St. Ephrem says:²⁶

At the well Eliesar betrothed Rebecca (Gen 24: 10) for Isaac; by the well Jacob took Rachel as bride to himself (Gen 29: 9) and in the same way Moses took Zipporah (Ex 2: 15). Thus he who gives us life took also the Church as his bride from the River Jordan through the mediation of John.

²⁰ George of Arbela (Pseudo), *Exposition of the Ecclesiastical Offices* (vol. II) = *Anonymi Auctoris Expositio Officiorum Ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta. Accedit Abrahæ Bar Lîpêh Interpretatio Officiorum*, R.H. CONNOLLY (ed. & LT), (CSCO 64, 71-72, 76 = SS 91-92) Paris, Rome 1913, 1915; reprinted Louvain 1960-1961, p. 158.

²¹ Gen. 2:18.

²² ABDISHO, *Nomocanon*, p. 20.

²³ *Madrashê* impart doctrine by means of poetry, and they are attributed to St. Ephrem the Syrian.

²⁴ *Hudra* III, p. 369.

²⁵ *Hudra* III, p. 614.

²⁶ THECKANATH, *Bride of Christ* = H.B. THECKANATH, *The Church Bride of Christ*, UDD, PIL, Rome 1987, P. 259.

For St. Ephrem, the accounts of the betrothal events in the Old Testament are representations of Christ. He says: “All these were types of our Lord who espoused his Church at his baptism in the Jordan.”²⁷

The act of betrothal requires a person to act as the betrother. This person will be an agent of the bridegroom. The East Syrian tradition speaks of and stresses on the role of betrothal. The *madrashe* of the third Sunday of the Consecration of the Church says: “O Church, gather your children, you who were barren formerly; now indeed, your children are multiplied. Rise and be lifted up from the dust, virgin betrothed through Apostles, bride who John preached.”²⁸

In which sense are the apostles the betrothers of the Church? Here, the tradition of the Church of the East passes from the ideal Church to the real Church where the apostles became an agent for the Heavenly Bridegroom and have begotten the Church through their preaching and suffering for Christ. This was the task of the apostles and the help that Christ demanded of them.²⁹ In addition to apostles, Moses also ascribes to him the role of betrother.

The *Gloria Patri* (ܓܠܪܝܐ ܡܪܝܬܐ) of the *mowtba* of the Fourth Sunday of the Consecration of the Church states: “The Son of God has made a great wedding feast for the Church which he betrothed. He has fixed her bride chamber on the Mount Sinai through the son Amram (Moses) with great celebration.”³⁰

Aphrahat (d. 345), while speaking on the role of the betrothers, comes near to the Pauline image in 2 Cor 11: 2, where Paul says, “For I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God, since I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” For Aphrahat, the apostles betrothed the faithful members of the Church to Christ by stating: “He (Christ) is the Bridegroom and the Apostles are the betrothers and we are the Bride; let us prepare our dowry.”³¹ Elsewhere he identifies the bishops and the clergy as the betrothers: “You are apostles,” ‘betrothers of the bride adorned.’³²

²⁷ MURRAY, *Symbols*, 135. See also Ephrem, *Commentarie de l'Evangile Concordant. Version armenienne* 3, 17. CSCO 137/Armeniacy 1, p. 45;

²⁸ *Hudra* III, p. 397.

²⁹ MURRAY, *Symbols*, p. 131

³⁰ *Hudra* III, p. 611-612.

³¹ APHRAHAT, *Demonstrations* XIX in J. PARISO (ed. & LT), *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*, (PS II) Paris 1907, cols. 681-684.

³² *Ibid*, col. 680.

The Liturgy of Christian Marriage (*zūwākhā*)

The ceremony of marriage can be divided into two main parts: The first part takes place within the confine of the Church that consists of two stages: i) the exhortation of the priest and the exchange of vows; ii) the liturgical celebration of marriage: first, the rite of wedding (*zūwākhā/būrākhā*) comprising the consecration of the elements and communion, second the rite of crowning and finally the recitation of the benediction.

The second part takes place in the house of the newly spouses and normally proceeds after the celebration at the nuptial banquet. The rite that follows after wedding banquet consists of the erection and dismantling of the bridal chamber (*beth gnona*). However, presently this rite is not in practice in the Assyrian Church of the East.

A. The Rite of Marriage (*zūwākhā/būrākhā*)

The spouses enter the Church through the southern doors of the Church according to old diagram of the Church. The bride stands at the right hand of the bridegroom during the celebration according to the symbolic meaning of Psalm 45:9 “daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor; at your right hand stands the queen.” By the way, in the Jewish marriage ceremony, the bride stands on the right of the husband when the rite is performed. From side of Christ, is 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. He states also that Christ’s right hand sustains the Church and protects it.

1. The Exhortation of the Priest and the Exchange of Vows

The priest begins the ceremony by giving a short reflection to the couple on the teachings of the Church on marriage that is rooted in the Scripture, teaching of Jesus Christ and apostles as well as of church fathers. He also might elaborate on the purpose of marriage and the necessity of the structure of the traditional family for its proper function. Afterwards, the couple performs the marriage covenant through the exchange of their vows. An official contract is signed by the couple in the presence of the priest and two witnesses.

2. Marriage Prayers and Blessings

The rite of *zūwākhā* called also *būrākhā* consists of three main stages: Introductory rite, consecration of the cup and communion (receiving from the cup). The sequence of marriage rituals in East Syrian rite has similarity to the Jewish marriage ceremony that might have influenced the early Syriac Christian tradition in the city of Edessa and Adiabene (Erbil). The actual Jewish nuptial ceremony has two basic parts: Consecration (*betrothal*) and Marriage. Both parts are introduced with the blessing over wine, the traditional symbol of joy and abundance. However, in the marriage part after

reciting the seven blessings over the full cup of wine; then the couple drinks the cup of wine then the groom breaks a glass by stamping on it as to recall and share with the sorrow of the destruction of Jerusalem temple and Jewish exile. In the Jewish customs, we find that on the day of the wedding, it is customary for the bride and groom to fast. They also recite psalms and ask God for forgiveness for their transgressions. Thus the couple enters into their marriage fully cleansed. We may deduce that many of liturgical elements and materials that are used in the Assyrian marriage rituals might have their traces back to Jewish customs.

Early Christian fathers made clear connection of marriage celebration to Eucharist and eventually it might have influenced also the rite of marriage in the East Syrian rite. For instance, Ignatius of Antioch (d. 108 AD) mentions that ecclesial marriage takes place on Sunday liturgy (*Letter to Polycarp*, 5:2). Moreover, Tertullian (2nd century) clearly states that marriage “is arranged by the church, confirmed by the oblation [Eucharist] sealed by the blessing, and inscribed in heaven by the angels.”³³

On the other hand, for Syriac fathers, Eucharist is recognized as the bridal price that Christ (*bridegroom*) gave to his Church (*bride*). Hence, despite the absence of the Eucharistic celebration in marriage as found in the Antiochene and Byzantine rites, we still observe parallel character of marriage rituals to the Eucharist.

First, the presence of the chalice, cross and cup mixed with wine and water which can be evoked to the Eucharist. In regard to the cup, which is one of the necessary part of the ceremony, its presence found its way through the influence of Jewish custom on the early Christian community in the East, where the first of the ‘seven blessings’ in the marriage ritual was the blessing of wine. **Secondly**, with regard to the blessing of the cup, we find the following elements: i) a consignation (mixing water with wine) which evokes to the rite of fraction and consignation in the Eucharist; ii) signing over the marriage cup, though it lacks any explicit epiclesis, recalls the signing over the bread and wine; iii) the recitation of *qanona* (Pauline salutation = 2 Cor 13: 14) prior receiving from the cup echoes the *qanona* which marks the end of fraction and consignation which eventually turns to the immediate preparation for communion. **Thirdly**, marriage rites were celebrated early morning till mid of 20th century and there was a rule that the cup must be received by the spouses ‘while fasting;’ such observations are identical to the rules that apply to the Eucharist.

i. The Introductory Rite

The first section acts as a sort of spiritual preparation of the clergy and the worshipping community for the sacred act of celebration of wedding upon which the divine sacrifice is offered, and of the Church as whole. The introductory rite can be further divided into five sections: The Angelic Hymn, the Lord’s Prayer, the Opening Prayer, the Psalmody, and Anthems. These are common elements which are seen to open almost all of the offices, whether those of the liturgy of the hours or of the sacramental celebrations, such as the Eucharistic liturgy, baptism, penance and the rite of consecration of altar.

³³ TERTULLIAN, *Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage: To His Wife, An Exhortation to Chastity, Monogamy* (Ancient Christian Writers 13), W.P. Le Saint (ET), New Jersey 1951, book II, 8: 6-9.

The priest begins with sign of the cross to be strengthened with all power to celebrate the wedding ceremony. The sign of the cross is a confession of faith, mini-creed, by which we are professing our belief in the Father, and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Some scholars interpret St. Paul's saying that he bears the marks of Christ on his body, in Galatians 6:17, as his referring to the sign of the cross.

The priest then recites the angelic hymn "*Glory to God in the Highest* (*Teshbukhta l'alaha bamrome* = ܬܝܫܒܚܬܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܒܡܪܝܡܐ)" which corresponds to the *Diatessaron*³⁴ 2: 15; Luke 2:14, as given by Ephrem, which reflects the work of salvation of the triune God has given to us, through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is called an angelic hymn because it was expressed as the praise of God by the heavenly hosts at the birth of Christ. The triple recitation of the doxology implies the invocation of the persons of the Trinity.

Afterwards, the *Lord's Prayer* with *qanona* is recited. Glory to God in the highest, together with the *Lord's Prayer*, gives the celebration a heavenly dimension because the earthly liturgy is joining the heavenly liturgy.

The *qanona* (farcing) is borrowed from the Sanctus (Isaiah 6:3; Rev. 4:8) and joined after "your kingdom come." The *qanona* extends the glorification of God that began already with the '*Glory to God in the Highest*.'³⁵ According to Pseudo George of Arbela, the Lord's Prayer was not recited in the beginning of the offices at the time of liturgical reform made by Isho'yahb III (7th century). It was Timothy I (780-823) who ordered the Lord's Prayer to be recited in the beginning of offices and for this reason he also added farcing (*qanona*) for this prayer.³⁶ In the casuistic liturgical treatise, Isho'yahb IV (1020-1025) gives the reason which made the Patriarch Timothy I add the Lord's Prayer at the beginning as well as at the end of the offices. He states:

There was once a Jacobite monk who began to dispute with a Catholicos of ours in the East, and that (M. 28a) monk wrote in one of his books (V.32a) words of insult against us, saying: "You Nestorians do not recite in your services the prayer which our Lord has taught His disciples, as we recite it at the end of our services." And when the Patriarch heard the insult of the heretic, the Catholicos ordered that this prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven..." should be recited at the beginning and at the end of our services: a thing which is more than the Jacobites do, because they recite it only at the end of their services.³⁷

Furthermore, Isho'yahb attested that Timothy I was the one who added the *qanona* ('Holy, holy, holy art Thou) before and after Our Father.³⁸

Traditionally, the Lord's Prayer was not recited in the rites of Betrothal and Marriage at least till 11th century since Isho'yahb IV testifies to its absence in these two rites. He explains the reason for not reciting it:

The Lord's prayer comes from the mouth of the Savior and must be recited by the mouth of the whole congregation, when they are calling for help, hallowing

³⁴ Diatessaron is gospel harmony created by Tatian around (c 160 - 175). Diatessaron is a Greek word dia-tessaron. *Dia* = 'out of or interval of'; *tessaron* = 'four.'

³⁵ P. YOUSIF, "The Divine Liturgy according to the Rite of the Assyro-Chaldean Church," in J. MADEY (ed.), *The Eucharistic Liturgy in the Christian East*, (Kottaym-Paderborn 1983), p. 198.

³⁶ George of Arbela (Pseudo), *Exposition of the Ecclesiastical Offices*, vol. II, p. 151.

³⁷ VAN UNNIK, *Nestorian Questions*, p. 181.

³⁸ Ibid.

His name, magnifying His heavenly kingdom and asking for food for the sustenance of their lives and deliverance from evil. But in the Betrothal and Marriage services every prayer and supplication is for two persons, that their doing may be blessed and their drinking-cup may be blessed and their bed consecrated and their conjugal intercourse perfected. They do not ask at that time for the forgiveness of sins nor for the abundance of food. But others say that they do not recite the Lord's Prayer because of the laziness of the priests.³⁹

Ish'yahb also states that Lord's Prayer was not recited during the wedding ceremony since it was already recited at the betrothal service. He witnesses that the betrothal ritual was taking place on Sunday service. He states that "after morning-psalms they recited the Lord's Prayer and immediately after this they performed the Ritual of Betrothal while the Lord's Prayer had already been recited."⁴⁰ Hence, the morning office concludes with the Lord's Prayer and the proper sacerdotal prayers. When there is a betrothal service on Sunday, after reciting the Our Father and before the recital the concluding priestly prayers, the rite of betrothal initiates immediately.

The betrothal and wedding are considered one compound service. The patriarch Isho'yahb IV in his casuistic questions on the liturgy of the church compares the above two services with Sunday vigil and morning prayers. He poses the following question and answers it:

Question. But if [the] wedding takes place after days or months [from the betrothal], will they be without the participation of the Lord's Prayer? *Answer.* The Betrothal and Wedding is one act. As the clergy recite one Mautbha at night, in the time of the Evening-service, and sleep the rest of the night, and arise at the end of the night and finish their service without the recitation of the Lord's Prayer having been said, but praying and intoning the Hulala, so also at the Wedding-service. Because the Lord's Prayer, once said, does not need to be repeated.⁴¹

The Our Father would have been recited during the session of the previous evening and is not necessarily repeated at the beginning of the morning service.

The earliest witness of the liturgical use of the Lord's Prayer is Didache 8, 2-using Mathean Our Father,⁴² which stipulates its recital with doxology three times a day. The recitation of Lord's Prayer becomes a constituent element of Christian worship and the pattern for Christian prayer in the entire Christendom by the end of the fourth century.⁴³ The oldest reference to the Lord's Prayer in Syriac in literature is found in the Acts of Thomas where it appears in the personal prayer of Apostle Thomas when he was in prison.⁴⁴ Raes notes that the every liturgical rite began with the Our Father at least by the time of the author of Psuedo Gewargis d-Atour.⁴⁵

³⁹ Ibid 182.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 183.

⁴¹ Ibid, 183.

⁴² R. TAFT, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The origins of the Divine Office and its Meaning for Today*, Minnesota 1986, p. 215.

⁴³ R. TAFT, "The Lord's Prayer in the Eucharistic Liturgy: When and Why?," *Ecclesia Orans* 14 (1997), p. 139.

⁴⁴ A.F.J. KLIJN, *The Acts of Thomas* (ET, intro. & comm.), Leiden 1962, p. 144, 142.

⁴⁵ A. REAS, *An Explanation of the Syro-Malabar Holy Mass*, Kottayam 1957, 8.

The *qanona* (farcings) of Lord's Prayer is known as the "Thrice-Holy hymn", continues the glorification of God, after, which resumes the glorification of God begun in the "Glory in the Highest." According to Theodore of Mopsuestia⁴⁶ (d. 428) thrice holy hymn manifests the characteristic element of the divine vision of Isaiah: the great service which was being performed on high, the mystery of the Trinity revealed by the spiritual hosts repeating holy three times and a sign of the economy of Christ our Lord, by which all the earth was filled with divine glory.⁴⁷ Thus the glorification of God envisioned in the *qanona* has also a Christological meaning. Sebastian Brock (Syriac scholar) states: "... Heaven one would expect to be filled with the divine glory, but the reference to the presence of His Glory on earth as well must point to some future theophany—in another word, the incarnation."⁴⁸

The Church celebrates this as her most cherished prayer. She gives it a central place at the Eucharistic celebration and in all her liturgical worship comprising wedding ceremony, and commends it to all. For in this prayer, which has been called by biblical scholars 'summary of the whole Gospel,' Christ teaches us two things: the spirit in which we should pray, and the things for which we must ask.

Priestly Prayer: Priestly prayer is preceded with deacon's invitation to prayer 'let us pray, peace be with us.' This acclamation is found in all liturgical celebrations.

The prayer of the priest asks the divine assistance for accomplishing the commandments of God. It is a formula that is unique to begin the celebration where the priest beseeches God's help as to perform the ceremony.

"In union which is indivisible (inseparable), my Lord, join your servants and in love which altogether inseparable bind your worshipers..." The fundamental principle that unites a husband and wife is love. The appeal of St. Paul to the husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her should be the essence for binding a husband and wife in sacred marriage by which the image of the heavenly reality is expressed.

The Bible tells us that we came to know the meaning of "love" when God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to give Himself as an offering for our sins. Christ loves us so much that He died on the cross to save us. There is the essence of love: self-giving. We give ourselves away for the other person, even if it means (and especially when it means) sacrifice and suffering for us. The greatest symbol of love is not the heart; it is the crucifix! Another aspect of love by which Christ explored through his words and deeds is that love is basically the willing the good of other. Love is not primarily a feeling though it can be accompanied by feeling and emotion; it is a great act of the will thus it is a decision and determination made by one's life.

Hymn (Onitha): The chalice is brought and while the priest recites the hymn he adds drops of water into the cup as a symbol of the communion of the spouses shared by

⁴⁶ He was Greek father who has a great influence on the sacramental theology of the Church of the East.

⁴⁷ THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, A. MINGANA (ed. & ET), WS 6, Cambridge 1933. FT see TONNEAU & DEVREESSE; GT see BRUNS, 100-101.

⁴⁸ S. Brock, "The Thrice-Holy Hymn in the Liturgy", *Sobornost / Eastern Churches Review* 7:2 (1985): 27-28.

them thereafter.⁴⁹ The hymn highlights the theme of the Church as the bride. The messianic announcement of the restoration of the Israel (= becoming new Israel) is applied to the Church and is developed in reference to the passion of Christ. The hymn is followed by a series of hymns that seek divine help and God's graces and blessings bestow over the bridegroom, bride as well as the groomsman who figures John the Baptist and bridesmaid who symbolized kinswoman of the blessed Mary. It continues imploring God's grace over the cup, crown, *khnana* and ring.

Priestly Prayer: The priest asks for the mercy of God and makes a petition for the success of the undertaking of the spouses.

ii. Consecration of the Chalice

The Rite of Marriage (*mkhurya* = **مخوري**) has consecratory elements that are the sign of the actual mysteries, though it is not considered one of the seven sacraments of the Church. There are three prayers of blessings: the chalice, the ring, and of the chalice with the cross.

a. The Blessing of the Chalice (cup)

The priest takes the chalice in his hand and says a blessing. The prayer is addressed to the Trinity and the priest solicits a blessing for the couple and their happiness. The priest signs the chalice with the sign of the Cross. He says: "In Your name, O Lord of the ages, we take refuge... And upon this cup of Your servants and upon those who drink from it, and upon this entire congregation may Your mercies and compassion continually be poured out, now and at all times forever and ever Amen."

Regarding to the cup, St. Ephrem (d. 373) states: "By this wine the newly spouses are married... by his wine there is the communion of spouses." Hymn on Epiphany 3:22.

On the other hand, for Timothy II the material of the cup of blessing, namely wine, has not been established haphazardly but with a deliberate intention that is significant to the mystery itself: "...that [because] wine is more powerful than any other drink that enters the body, our spiritual fathers decided that it and no other material should be consecrated and drunk in the cup of the betrothal. For immediately upon its being drunk, the power of holiness enters the bodies of those who drink it..."⁵⁰ He further elaborates regarding the cup:

the cup which is mixed with wine and water and blessed and sanctified by the priest is for the sacred fellowship of the groom and bride, while two-thirds is given for him to drink and one-third for her [is]: first, that by his [Christ's] blood both the Old and New covenants have been signed, confirmed and sealed; but the other [reason] is that while we have communion in the Body by means of the

⁴⁹ Vat. Syr. 151, 147v.

⁵⁰ Vat. Syr. 151, 148r-148v.

partaking of that precious Blood, we become united to Christ and become one body with him...⁵¹

Timothy looks to the Scripture to underline the significance of the wine in the rite of marriage. He correlates the use of wine in a marriage ceremony to the blood sacrifice in the Scripture. After sin, there is no communion without sacrifice—without shedding of blood; it is a common Biblical theme that we see throughout the Bible (Gen. 12; Ex 28: 3-9; Sam 7: 12-16; Rom 5: 9; Heb 10: 19).

The first covenant (Old Testament) involved animal sacrifice aimed to launch communion with God, though it was not perfect. While the second covenant (New Testament), is a perfect covenant, since it was accompanied by the perfect sacrifice, through the blood of Jesus Christ. We read the letter of St. Paul to the Romans “Since we have now been justified by His [Christ’s] blood.” Also we read the letter to the Hebrews 10: 19 “Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the Blood of Jesus.” Through which we become members of the Body of Christ, the Church, and when we are baptized into death and resurrection of Christ.

On the same token, Timothy indicates that the cup, which is sanctified by the priest and from which the bride and groom are made to communicate, signifies their fellowship and union as husband and wife that ought not to be dissolved since “what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Mark 10: 19).

The Blessing of the Ring

The rings of the spouses are blessed with a prayer which is addressed to Christ, the true Bridegroom. The prayer for the blessing of the rings conveys the benevolence and mercy shown by God to the faithful in the history of salvation. A series of types of betrothal, from the Old Testament, is seen in the prayer of blessing the ring. The ring is the sign of recognition of Tamar by Juda, and that of the authority of Joseph in Egypt. It is a sign through which the Church, like Sara, Rebecca and Rachel, is betrothed to the heavenly Bridegroom and the sign of priesthood and kingship, and the instrument of betrothal. ***The ritual underlines the fact that the true protagonists of the nuptial liturgy are Christ and the Church.*** Christ, the bridegroom, showed his fidelity to the Church, his bride, through a ring.

The question might be asked, why does the prayer over the ring mentions so many personalities of Bible history? For Meyendorff, the recalling of many biblical personalities indicates in the fact that:

Marriage implies faithfulness, and the Biblical personalities and episodes enumerated in the prayers affirm the first and foremost truth: that God remains faithful to His people in spite of all historical vicissitudes and humans sins, as long as man has faith in God. The genealogy of Christ, going back to Abraham as reported by St. Matthew (1: 1-16), or to Adam, as we find it in St. Luke (3: 23-38), witness to the fact that the chain of generations was leading to a goal: the

⁵¹ Vat. Syr. 151, 147v.

coming of Christ, the Messiah; that, in the framework of God's plan for mankind's history human fertility was a means for bringing man back to God.⁵²

The ring has been a symbol of faithfulness from the earliest of *biblical* times. It is the sign of covenant between the spouses. This alludes to the covenant of God with Israel where the bridegroom took the initiative. ***It is the symbol of the bond of charity and peace that unites the spouses and accomplishes the truth of the promise of the spouses.*** The priest blesses the rings with the sign of the Cross; then, the sign of the Cross is made over the chalice with the rings and the rings are put into the chalice.

The ring is also an indispensable component of the marriage rite. Timothy paraphrases the priestly prayer over the ring, and equally recalls biblical events, where by a ring the betrothals of Old Testament patriarchs were sealed; God's complete grace and unconditioned love were realized, and the restoration of mankind to Gods' sonship was fulfilled.

... for by it the truth of the promises is completed, whatever and to whomever they may be. By [the ring] the kings fulfill the promises of those who fear to enter the jurisdiction of their kingdom and sealed their mandate. And by it those of ancient times realized their opinions. For Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, the father, carried the ring to the house of Laban, son of Bethuel, by which [Eliezer] betrothed Rebecca to Isaac, son of the promise (Gen 24); By it (the ring) the promise of Judah toward Tamar was fulfilled and by it the promise of king Pharaoh to Joseph was completed when he made him to be a ruler over the Egyptians. By the ring, it was said that King Solomon betrothed the queen of the South (Sheba)⁵³. By it (the ring) the legions [of the evils] are confined; by it Daniel was honored in the land of Babylonians (Dan 6: 17). And by the ring which was put for the prodigal son was confirmed once by faith and by [conferring] the power of sonship and turning back [to father's house], and he received the pledge of future life. (Luke 15: 11-32).⁵⁴

Thus for Timothy, the ring in the wedding ceremony is the sign of authority, connection, and restores a marriage relationship between God and man.

The ring, blessed by the priest, is like a seal or a signature in modern times. The ring is the symbol of truth; the truth of Christ with the people. The ring is also the sign of the covenant and bond of charity, and peace that unites the spouses, as it was with the patriarchs and their wives.⁵⁵

b. The Blessing of the Chalice with the Cross

The Cross is one of the necessary elements for the confection of the marriage rite. The priest recites a prayer for the blessing over the Cross. The prayers indicates the

⁵² MEYENDORFF, *Marriage*, 36.

⁵³ 1 Kings 10: 1-13. Sheba was probably a city of Arabia, situated to the south of Judea. Compare the notes at Isaiah 60:6. Read Matt 12: 42.

⁵⁴ Vat. Syr. 151, 148v-149r.

⁵⁵ BADGER, *Nestorians Rituals*, vol. 2, p. 251; J. G. van OVERSTRAETEN, "Les Liturgies nuptiales des eglises del langue syriaque et le mystere de l'eglise-epouse," *Parole de l'Orient* 8 (1977-1978), 304.

stereological and cosmic meaning of Cross. It chases away the demons, does miracles, saves the Church, and symbolizes the hands that Moses raised on the mountain top. The Cross is a sign of passion, resurrection and victory. Through the Cross, the Church is saved and betrothed to Christ. It bears witness to the pledge of the spouses and the sanctifier. The priest blesses the chalice with the sign of the Cross and puts the cross into the chalice.

Timothy affirms that “the holy cross is the pledge that bestows the heavenly blessings of the Kingdom. It is placed in the cup as a living witness, that by its holiness it may complete the intention at hand, and to be a sponsor of these things which are required, so that they may be completed well.”⁵⁶

c. *The Benediction of Hnānā*

The *hnānā* is a compound of oil, dust and water mixed with the relics of saints or with earth from holy places. It is used mainly in the rite of marriage and it was used for those who were sick. It symbolizes the mercy of God towards them. It is also considered as one of the elements in the completion of the rite, for by it the cup is signed. Timothy states that in signing of the cup with the holy earth, we are reminded that “God has worked all things towards us in mercy and compassion.”⁵⁷

The priest recites the blessing of *hnānā*, in which the prayer is addressed to God Almighty, by whom the woman is betrothed to man. The same significance can be noticed in the declaratory formula of the priest signing the forehead of the groom and bride with what is in the chalice.

iii. Receiving the Chalice

The following ritual refers to the consignation and commixture as in the Eucharistic celebration but does not mention the fruits contained in the chalice. The priest says: “This cup of espousal of our friends is separated and sanctified and perfected and fulfilled and mingled and sealed by the mediation of the glorious Simonian priesthood and the Solomonic ring and the Lordly Cross and the *hnānā* from the shrines of the saints, in the Name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit forever: Amen.”

We are at the culmination of the rite of betrothal. The communion of the couple follows. First, the priest recites the Pauline salutation: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of us, now and at all times and forever and ever, Amen.” He signs the chalice in the form of the cross.

In some old manuscripts the priest signs the forehead of the groom with the chalice that he carries stating: “By the adorable name of the glorious Trinity, the bride is betrothed to this bridegroom and is crowned in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, forever.” This is a declaratory formula carrying juridical force before the assembly and the Church. The priest then gives the chalice to the groom, who drinks two thirds of it. The priest likewise blesses the groomsman on the forehead, saying: “Let your groomsman be type of John the Baptist” (Jn 3: 29).

⁵⁶ Vat. Syr. 151, 148v.

⁵⁷ Vat. Syr. 151, 149r-149v.

Then the priest traditionally gives the chalice to the deacon, who takes it to the bride and blesses her therewith. The bride drinks what is left in the chalice (one third), and the deacon signs the bridesmaid on the forehead. No one except the couple should drink from this chalice, and those who act contrary will be excommunicated. Drinking from the same chalice implies the love and concord of the spouse.⁵⁸

The drinking from the consecrated cup mixed with wine and water and *hanana*, by the spouses, is an analogue to the communion in the Eucharist. By eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Christ, in the Eucharist, we become united to the person of Christ. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (Jn 6:56). The communion of the spouses from the cup of blessing formulates the spouses to become one body. As does the Eucharist with communion, in which we become one body in Christ. Timothy further asserts on the significance of drinking from the cup of blessing by the spouses:

[...] gives them to acquire oneness by the divine power which is in it, along with a pure and holy union. And because the groom is the head of the bride and she is taken from him, and he was created first then she, the law permits him to [to receive] two thirds according to the portion of his inheritance and she [to receive] one third.⁵⁹

We may assert that in the rite of 'communion' the analogy is clearly established between the Eucharistic communion and marriage communion where the partners only drink from the one chalice; and as we know both Eucharistic communion and marital union are expressed with the same Syriac term that is *shawtaputha* (communion).

In some traditions, the chalice is broken after it has been drunk by the spouses. The scholars differ on this point. With regard to the same ceremony followed in the Byzantine Church, De Meester says that is symbolic of the consent union of the spouses. He writes:

Drinking from the same chalice signifies the perfect communion of life and the indissoluble union of the marriage bond. The breaking of the glass serves to symbolize and to remind the spouses of their conjugal fidelity; it is not permitted to others to break that which God rendered one body.⁶⁰

It worth noting it that this custom is found also in the Jewish marriage ceremony in which the couple drink from a single cup of wine and later that cup is smashed under foot. This custom signifies as indicative of the indissoluble unity of the spouses.⁶¹

After the rite of communion, the ritual of exchange of the rings between the spouses takes place. The exchange of the rings gives expression to the fact that in marriage the spouses will constantly be complementing each other. Each will be enriched by the union. The exchange of rings represents a pledge to share and exchange both their physical and spiritual goods, a pledge of eternal love and devotion. However, in the early

⁵⁸ BADGER, *Nestorians Rituals*, vol. 2, p. 274.

⁵⁹ Vat. Syr. 151, 148r.

⁶⁰ DE MEESTER, *Studi sui sacramenti amministrati second il rito bizantino*, Roma 1947, p. 280.

⁶¹ VELLIAN, "Marriage Customs of the Knanites," *Christian Orient* 9 (1988), p. 37; cf. EDAKALATHUR, *The Theology of Marriage in the East Syrian Tradition*, Rome 1994, p. 160.

East Syrian marriage rite, the exchange of rings did not exist. Previously, the groom would give the bride a ring as a sign of his love and fidelity.

B. The Liturgy of Crowning

The use of crowns in the marriage rite is primarily a survival of pagan rituals. Tertullian (2nd century) prohibits the use of crown since it is a pagan ritual. However, the rite of marriage gradually modified and developed in the course of time and in fact the Church implemented the use of crown since it has biblical traces.⁶² For St. Paul crown is the symbol of victory in athletic completion. He said: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever" (1Cor 9: 4-25). In the New Testament, the crown is an eternal and divine reward for the righteous persons; hence, it is the sign of victory and glory. St. Paul in his Second letter to Timothy (4:8) speaks of the Crown of Righteousness to be awarded to all who long for the appearance of the Lord, "now there is in store for me the Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will award to me on that day –and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing." We read "and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (1 Pet 5:4) For John Chrysostom (d. 407), the crown is the symbol of victory over unregulated sexuality (*Homily 9 on 1 Tim.*)

The Syriac fathers considered the crowing as a sign of glory and joy. The placing of the crown refers to Psalm 21:3-4 "For you meet him with rich blessings; you set a crown of fine gold on his head. He asked you for life; you gave it to him length of days forever and ever." Traditionally, the crowns were used to be made of flowers, they are symbol of immortality and fecundity as it is expressed in the prayer of their consecration. This prayer echoes Ephrem's description of 'Bride adorned' at her wedding feast. She was betrothed to Christ and sat at the King's palace and attired with ornament and adorned with flower of glory. He states:

The King's Son, when he saw her wickedness, came and betrothed to himself the Church of Gentiles, whose love and trueness he had tested. He made her one with himself and himself with her, that there might be no separation. See, she sits in the King's palace, dressed in the ornaments of the King. The month of Nisan serves her, arrayed and adorned with flowers Glory to thee, Lord of Nisan.⁶³

⁶² MEYENDORFF, *Marriage*, 37.

⁶³ *Hymn on Faith*, 14, 6 (CSCO 154, Syr. 73, p. 62). The marriage of Christ and his church is more frequent theme in St. Ephrem's writings. He narrates that God delivered his bride from Egypt and espoused her at Sinai; but she committed adultery by worshiping false gods (*Hymn on Faith* 14, 6). Therefore God divorced her and chose her daughter, which is a post exilic Synagogue, instead and promised her to make her bride if she were faithful. The daughter came out with joy to meet her Spouse in Nisan and witnessed His miracles but she took offence at His mercy to sinners and rejected Him. Therefore He rejected her also, in Nisan, and stripped her of her ornaments and feasts.

Ephrem links the traditional nuptial imagery with the meaning of crowing. He meditates on the importance of the word *kaltha* 'Bride' in his hymns on Schechem (ܫܚܝܡ)⁶⁴ who is a personified symbol of the Church of Gentiles in favor of Church of Zion was rejected. He says: "Blessed art thou, Bride and crowned one to whom came the Bridegroom whom Zion hated."

The priest recites this prayer over the crowns and prays for the blessing and protection of the spouses. He recites: "*May God, who crowned heaven with stars and the earth with flowers and established all that He created in His commandment, by His blessing adorn your head with temporal crowns, and may He make you worthy to be crowned with imperishable crowns. And may He guard your lives graciously and increase tranquility and peace with you.*" Spouses' crown being a symbol that alludes to the eschatological joy, glory, peace, tranquility and immortality, which the bride of Christ, the Church, will be granted in the heavenly kingdom.

In the East Syrian Rite, while the hymn of crowing is recited the priest places the crown over the groom and bride without reciting any formula or particular prayer. While in the Byzantine Rite of Crowning, the priest will first place a crown on the groom's head and says: "The servant of God, *<groom's name>*, is crowned unto the handmaiden of God, *<bride's name>*, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. And then the priest will place a crown on the bride's head, and recites: "The handmaiden of God, *<bride's name>*, is crowned unto the servant of God, *<groom's name>*, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

The following hymn is recited while placing the crown over the groom and bride: "*Confess, O Church the queen, the Son of the King who espouses you and brings you to His bed chamber and gives you a dowry, the Blood which He shed for you from His side, and clothes you with a robe of brilliant light which is unceasing* (Isaiha 61: 10), *and places on your head a beautiful and glorious crown of praise...*" In Syriac tradition, the Church is the bride of Christ betrothed at the River Jordan but betrothed to the Lord on the Cross and gave her dowry, where the blood and water flowed from the pierced side of Christ (Jn 19: 34) representing the sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism respectively, and thereby inaugurating the era of the church.⁶⁵

The hymn of crowning evokes not only to the marriage service but to other sacraments such as Eucharist and Baptism. Christ has become the source of sanctification in the Church, through sacraments of dispensation. Buchan comments that for Ephrem "The Eucharist as spiritual food which sacramentally mingles Christ's presence into Christians and the Church, Christ's Body given for 'our body' which was 'consumed' by death and caused it to 'burst.' and baptism as the process by which the sinners' soul is washed in Christ's Blood and re-clothed in a 'garment of light.'"⁶⁶

⁶⁴ It was a Canaanite settlement located on the high road going from Jerusalem to the northern districts.

⁶⁵ S.J. BEGGIANI, "The Typological Approach of Syriac Sacramental Theology," *Theological Studies* 64, 555.

⁶⁶ T. Buchan, *Blessed is He who has brought Adam from Sheol: Christ's Descent to the Dead in the Theology of Saint Ephrem the Syrian*, Gorgias Dissertations in Early Christianity 13, ECS 2, Piscataway, NJ 2004, 230. Ephrem states: "His body was newly mixed with our bodies, and His pure blood has been poured into our veins, and His voice into our ears, and His brightness into our eyes. All of Him has been mixed into all of us by His compassion, and since He loves His church very much, He did not give her the manna of her rival. He had living bread for her to eat. All of Him has been mixed into all

For Ephrem, crown is the sign of glory; he comments on Isaiah 61: 10: James of Saroug indicates: "The Bridegrooms' side has been pierced, and from it the Bride has come forth, fulfilling the type provided by Adam and Eve. For from the beginning God knew and depicted Adam and Eve in the likeness of the image of his only-begotten; He slept on the cross as Adam had slept his deep sleep, his side was pierced and from it there came forth the Daughter of light, water and blood as the image of divine children to be heirs to the Father who love his Only-begotten... The stillness of the sleep of death fell upon him on the cross and from him came forth the Mother who gives birth to all spiritual beings."⁶⁷

For Ephrem, crown is the sign of glory; he comments on Isaiah 61: 10:

That is, the robe of glory of Baptism, for that is in truth the garment of salvation and the shining robe of glory. And he has made me like a glorious bridegroom, by absolution, and like a bride adorned. The Bride is the Church which is adorned with the beauty of all nations.⁶⁸

After post-baptismal anointing, the priest recites a prayer of the crown: "*Glory to Your name, adoration to your dominion which you prepared for your servants by the holy orders of your gratis. You filled them with your grace so they would be sincere worshipers – for your honor. O Lord of all....*" It reveals the sign of joy and glory of the baptized person. It is given because they have to live then as a pure temple for the honor of the Lord. This prayer recalls the verses of St. Paul where he compares the Christian life to a race where the winner will be awarded with the crown (1 Cor 9: 24-26; Gal 2:2; 2 Tim 4: 7-8). In the Old Testament, we find various references to the crown as a sign of kingship, glory and victory (Is 28: 5; 62; Ps 21: 3). Ephrem states: "Your vesture is shining and goodly your crowns, which the Firstborn has bound for you, by the priest's hand this day."⁶⁹ He adds "Crowns that fade not away, are set on your hands, hymns of praise hourly, let your mouths sing."⁷⁰

The theme of crowning evokes also martyrdom. It also symbolizes an allocation in the Kingship of Christ, the same allocation which martyrs (*klīlā d-sahdūtā*) have, by their heroic and total decree to His Love and Resurrection.⁷¹ As the epistle of James declares, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the Crown of Life that God has promised to those who love Him." (James 1: 12). The Church prays for the happiness and prosperity over the spouses but through the crowns that are placed on their heads, they are reminded of the condition of suffering and self-giving. The Bible tells us that we came to know the meaning of "love" when God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to give Himself as an offering for our sins. Christ loves us so much that He died on the cross to save us. Thus, the essence of love is self-giving. We give ourselves away for the other person, even if it means (and especially

of us by His compassion." EPHREM, *Hymn on the Nativity*, 21: 19. See K. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, New York 1989, 177.

⁶⁷ S. Brock, "The Mysteries Hidden in the Side of Christ", *Sobornost* 7, 6 (1978), 463.

⁶⁸ Vat. Syr. 501, fol. 45a; Syr. Borg. 82, fol. 12; see MURRAY, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 139.

⁶⁹ *Hymn on Epiphany* 13, 5, CSCO 186, Syr. 82, 189; A.E. JOHNSTON, *Hymns on Epiphany*, p. 283.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ MEYENDORFF, *Marriage*, p. 123.

when it means) sacrifice and suffering for us. The greatest symbol of love is not the heart; it is the crucifix. The vocation of marriage is a participation in the Self-Sacrificing and Life-Creating Love, Passion, and Resurrection of the Christ.

Also the rite itself demonstrates an eschatological dimension of the vocation of marriage. The Prophet Isaiah (28:5) prophesies that in the Day of the Lord, "the Lord Almighty will be a glorious Crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of His people." Likewise the wisdom of the book of Proverbs (12:4a) has it that "a wife of noble character is her husband's crown". Finally St. Peter in his First Catholic Epistle (5:4) states that, "when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the Crown of Glory that will never fade away."

C. The Concluding Part of the Rite of Marriage

Prayer of Praising (*Teshbukhta*): It is a hymn of praise which is prayed so that the spouses are blessed by the blessing with which Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca were blessed.

Litany (*Nqum Shapir*): It is a diaconal prayer in the form of supplication and petition (*ba'utha*). In this litanical prayer, the principal theological theme of Christian marriage as an image of the relation between Christ and the Church are reflected.

Trisagion (*Qadisha Alaha* = "Holy God, Holy Might One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us.") Trisagion is a Greek term, which literally means thrice holy (triple acclamation). Trisagion reflects the biblical hymn of Isaiah 6:3, and has become a common feature in various liturgical offices of East Syrian rite. The oldest reference to the prayer of *Trisagion* is of the Council of Chalcedon (451), in which the bishops from the "Orient" chanted it.⁷² It is believed that Mar Aba (540-552)⁷³ brought the prayer of Trisagion when he visited Constantinople.⁷⁴ It gradually came to be accepted in the Persian Church by the time of Isho'yahb I of Arzon (582-595) who is considered to be the first who mentioned it in his tractate.⁷⁵ We may presume that Trisagion was incorporated in the East Syrian rite between the time of Mar Aba I and Isho'yahb in the sixth century.⁷⁶ The main purpose of Trisagion is to close the Rite of Marriage as well as the morning and evening cathedral offices. On the other hand, it serves as a spiritual preparation for the Liturgy of the Word in the Eucharistic and Baptismal celebrations.

⁷² E. SCHWARTZ, J. STRAUB (eds.) *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, vol. 1:1, 195/vol 3:1, p. 259.

⁷³ It is worth mentioning that Mar Aba Mar aba also introduces the first part of litany named Ba'utha (*petition*) that is recited for short intentions with the response 'have mercy on us.' As well as, the last part, or the *Angelus Pacis*, which begins for asking the protection of the angle of peace and of mercy and then continues praying for peace, love, forgiveness of sins and God's mercy. It is recited while the people stand up and respond 'to you O Lord' and the people reply 'from you O Lord.'

⁷⁴ S. JAMMO, "L'office du soir chaldéen au temps de Gabriel Qatraya," OS 12 (1967), p. 208-209.

⁷⁵ G. FURLANI, "Il Trattato di Yešo'yahb d'Arzon sul ΤΡΙΣΑΓΙΟΝ," *Rivista degli Studi orientali* 7 (1917) 687-715.

⁷⁶ S.H. JAMMO, *La structure de la messe chaldéenne du début jusqu'à l'anaphore: étude historique* (OCA 207) Rome 1979, p. 93.

Trisagion can be divided into two parts: an acclamation (*Holy God, Holy Almighty*) and supplication (*have mercy on us*). It addresses the Divine nature and expresses His nature in His positive (*holy and mighty*) and negative (*immortal*) attributes. The Assyrian fathers such as Qatraya, Bar Lipeh, Bar Zo'bi and Abidisho' consider Trisagion a Trinitarian hymn, as it appears from the prayer that follows it, in the Eucharistic celebration, (*You who are holy, glorious, mighty, and immortal, who dwell in the saints and whose will has been satisfied, turn, O my Lord, and pity and have mercy upon us, as you are accustomed to do at every hour, O Lord of all, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever.*). However, Timothy II gives a Christological interpretation as the ministry of the angels who were constantly following Christ (Mk 4: 11; Lk 2:13-14; and Lk 22: 43-44). General speaking, Trisagion is addressed to the Trinity. While in the West Syrian and Alexandrian rites, it is an Christological prayer which is addressed to Christ.

D. The Reciting of Benedictions

It proceeds with the rite of crowning and concludes with reciting the benediction over the spouses and final dismissal.

There are two priestly prayers imploring God's benediction and peace on the wedding party and glorifying God in His deeds and mysteries. We have special formula for the blessing of the groom and bride, groomsman and bridesmaid, and assembly.

The Benediction of the Groom: This prayer is attributed to St. Ephrem (4th Century). The prayer asks God's blessing on the spouses, prays for success and holiness, fecundity and good offspring and above all for the protection of God. The priest approaches the groom and places his right hand on his head and blesses him with a prayer ending in a doxology. After every stanza the assembly answers: Amen.

The Benediction of the Bride: This prayer is also attributed to St. Ephrem. The priest, placing his right hand upon the head of the bride, blesses her. In the prayer he asks for the blessing of God upon the bride, her house, her health, and that she may have abundant offspring, like the happiness enjoyed by the women in the Bible. The concluding prayer is a *doxology*.

The Benediction of the Groomsman: The role of the groomsman is like that of John the Baptist (John 3:9). The priest asks for Divine protection and long life for the spouses.

The Benediction of the Bridesmaid: The role of bridesmaid is symbolized by holy women in the Old Testament such as Judith, Esher, Debora, etc. Also Martha and Mary, the servants of Jesus. The bridesmaid is obliged to give good example and assistance as a good companion to the bride.

The Benediction of the Assembly (Huttama): At the conclusion, the priest prays over the couple and the assembly and makes the sign of the Cross. This prayer is seen in the rite: "Upon you, O glorious bridegroom and pleasant blossom, crowned with the crown of the heavenly bridegroom; and upon you, O fair bride, pure in virginity and adorned with the graces of the Church; and upon you, O honored groomsman, representing a type of John the Baptist; and upon you, O comely and honored bride's maid and upon all our congregation entirely, may there be an abundance of the compassion and mercies and blessings and grace of our worshipful God, now and at all times and forever and ever: Amen"

E. The Wedding Banquet

The liturgical tradition symbolizes the earthly wedding banquet to that of glorious and delightful joy of heavenly banquet with the real bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The season of the Consecration of the Church describes in details the guests that are invited by the host and Bridegroom for the wedding banquet in order to share the joy and happiness of the bride and the bridegroom. According to St. Ephrem, undoubtedly it is reserved for Christ's bride "God has called me to his wedding feast, says the Church to the wedding guests I shall enter with him into the bride chamber."⁷⁷ Besides the bride there are many who are invited for the feast: "He [Christ] has invited the prophets, He has called all the Apostles, the teachers and the Shepherds for the day of the wedding feast."⁷⁸ Liturgical tradition mentions about other invited guests that are the angels and men, as well as all the generations together with the baptized and the children of the Church are the guests at the dinner: "And the heavenly choirs with the earthly he has called to her wedding feast, so that they may attend at her feast... He has invited and called all the generations to come and give their marriage gifts at the wedding feast of the Church, the bride of the King..."⁷⁹ The liturgical tradition stresses that nobody should come for the wedding feast without bringing the gift symbolizing their own life:

The priests came and set before her their ranks, and the prophets placed alongside their revelations, and the Apostles placed alongside their preaching, and the martyrs set before the blood of their neck and the heavenly hosts their 'Holy, Holy, Holy' and all the peoples their adorations.⁸⁰

When all the invited guests have arrived and have presented their gifts to the bride and the Bridegroom, the dinner begins. The banquet which is served is very glorious and festive.⁸¹ The liturgical texts describe the items which are served for the dinner. Mainly are manna, quails and flesh which take one back to the wonderful food or nourishment poured from heaven by God for his people during their wanderings in the desert. In the rite of marriage, the prayers speak about the drink served at the wedding banquet, which is the blood of the divine bridegroom. The liturgical tradition is very earnest and careful to describe even the minute details of the marriage, as in the case of the cooks. The cooks serving at the dinner table are heavenly beings: "The vigilantes on high were the cooks and they brought out manna and flesh and quail which were the food of her childhood."⁸²

The festivity of the marriage banquet is doubled by the music during the dinner. The musician is nobody else, but David himself: "King David served at her banquet with his compositions of songs and with chants: 'All the glory of the daughter of the kings is from within, and her clothing is adorned in fine gold.'"⁸³ Thus in great festivity the bride

⁷⁷ *Hudra* III, 586.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 611-612.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 611.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 612.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 585.

⁸² *Ibid*, 612.

⁸³ *Ibid*.

enjoys the company of her bridegroom inseparably and eternally in the bridal chamber of the heavenly kingdom together with her children born of the Spirit.

Pseudo George of Arbela attested by Timothy II states that the wedding banquet can be celebrated for three days or seven days. The three days celebration signifies the mystery of the Trinity through which the resurrection is perfected. If the banquet is prepared for seven days, it typifies the eternal joy which will remain always and forever. Timothy quotes St. Ephrem: “the nuptial banquet of mortal bridegroom is three days and it would end while the wedding feast of the Church will last forever.”⁸⁴

For Syriac fathers the wedding banquet and the communion into which the bride and the bridegroom enter symbolize resurrection.⁸⁵ The priest places the spouses on the right and bridal friends on the left to signify the separation of the righteous on the right from the wicked on the left. Timothy quoting Gewargis word for word:

We prepare a wedding banquet along with guests and they bring forth prepared meals for it symbolizes the resurrection which would come to be with the help (intervention) of angels whom they separate the weed from the wheat. In like manner those who are gathered from everywhere that are worthy and zealous for the kingdom they will be gathered on the right side. The priest and deacons stand at the side of ‘before’ choir symbolize reign of our Lord [Jesus] Christ who sits [on the throne] and all the angels stands before him. The one who [priest] places the bridegroom and bride at his right side and groomsman and bridesmaid at his left side resembles the heavenly bridegroom who places the sheep at his right side and the goat at his left side.⁸⁶ (cf. Matt 13: 30, 39; 25: 32-34).

F. The Bridal Chamber

After the celebration of the nuptial banquet, traditionally the bride and groom will be lead to the bridal chamber that was promised by the groom to the bride; and it is considered the climax of the celebration.⁸⁷ The rite that is subsequent to the celebration of wedding is *the erection and the dismantling of the bridal chamber* (*beth gnona*).

i. The Erection of Bridal Chamber

The preparation of the *beth gnona* recalls us of the bridal canopy (*chuppah*) among Jews (Ps 19: 5; Heb 19: 6). In the Jewish time, Bridal chamber symbolizes the groom's home, and the bride's new domain. More specifically, the *chuppah* symbolizes the bridal chamber, where the marital act was consummated in ancient times.

This ceremony symbolizes the marriage between Christ and the Church; the bridal chamber is the spiritual and eternal one. It is a glorious and delightful dwelling place in heaven in which St. Ephrem calls it the bridal chamber of light.⁸⁸ An antiphon describes it as the one that was fashioned by the power of the Holy Spirit: “O glorious bridal

⁸⁴ Vat. Syr. 151, 146v.

⁸⁵ George of Arbela (Pseudo), *Exposition of the Ecclesiastical Offices* (vol. II), 158/143.

⁸⁶ Vat Syr. 151, 145v.

⁸⁷ THECKANATH, *Bride of Christ*, 403.

⁸⁸ Hudra, 569.

chamber which the Holy Spirit has interwoven for you.”⁸⁹ Bridal chamber is also meant for beseeching God’s grace for fecundity.

Syriac fathers comments on the entrance of the spouses into the bridal chamber that symbolized the heavenly banquet that are prepared for the just. However, they make no reference to the ceremony of dismantling of the bridal chamber. It is worth noting it that both rituals are not in practice presently in the Assyrian Church of the East.

The erecting of bridal chamber is a custom that consists constructing of a wickerwork screen in the large family room to fence off the nuptial chamber. The service is usually conducted in the evening before the spouses retire for the night.⁹⁰

The liturgical prayers portray the Church edifice as the temple of God and a bridal chamber on earth which is a prefiguration of the heavenly bridal chamber. The Church is also described as a bride that is awaiting the second coming of the bridegroom (Our Lord) when he will take her to the heavenly bridal chamber. We read the following hymn in the first Sunday of the Consecration of the Church: “O glorious Church, exult and rejoice in the true and real bridegroom, Jesus the King of Glory, who redeemed you from the yoke of error, and made you the spring of curing, and invited you to the bridal chamber of the Kingdom and to great blessings from the Word.”⁹¹

However, the figure of the earthly Church as the bride of Christ is still limited because she is not yet to earn merits for heaven. However, the Church has absolute hope since Christ has promised her that that he would raise her when He comes in His Kingdom. Hence, the liturgical tradition describes the image of the Church as the bride of Christ is *already* realized and given the pledge for her children but *not yet* perfected. In the rite of marriage and the fourth Tuesday of the season of dedication of the Church, it is recited the following hymn: “O holy Church sing praise to your Bridegroom who has betrothed you and led you to His bedchamber, and has given out his mysteries as a pledge and pardon for your children. He has pardoned and sanctified you in his grace from the defilement of the demons.”⁹² When the Church will be led to the heavenly bridal chamber will be granted an eternal joy.⁹³

The rite commences with reciting of the Lord’s Prayer and followed with priestly prayer where he prays for the indissoluble union of the couple. It proceeds with Psalm 121 with a refrain. Afterward, the priest recites a prayer and incenses the bridal chamber. An antiphon is changed for the benediction of the house and of the spouses. It beseeches the intercession of the St. Mary, Cross and the saints. The antiphon is followed with a priestly prayer seeks to benedicts the spouses and another three hymns are recited. The first one refers to Christ as the sun which is mentioned also in St. Ephrem’s writings.⁹⁴ After priestly prayer Psalm 67 is recited with refrain where it asks for the blessing of bridal chamber. After the chanting of the hymn, the liturgy says “Here the bridal chamber is closed.” It is followed with reciting of *Teshbukha* and priestly prayers for the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of the saints. Then follow the litany and *Trisagion* reciting of the Lord’s Prayer and concluded with two prayers and final benediction.

⁸⁹ Hudra III, 612.

⁹⁰ J. MACLEAN & W. BROWNE, *The Catholicos of the East and his People*, London 1892, 152.

⁹¹ Hudra III, 564; St. Ephrem speaks about this theme.

⁹² Ibid., 619.

⁹³ Ibid, 588.

⁹⁴ St. Ephrem, *Hymn on Nativity*, 27: 16, 21-22; 5: 13:-15.

The blessing given to the spouses signifies the words of the King, to the righteous. No blessing is given to the bridal's friends as they do not enter into the Joy. Timothy states: "the blessings that are recited by priest resemble the words of the King who says: "Come, ye, blessed of my Father"⁹⁵ (Matt 24: 35).

The closing of the bridal chamber after the spouses have entered into it signifies the closing of the heavenly room after the entry of the bridegroom (Matt 25: 10). The blows with which the groomsman and bridesmaid strike at the door signify the torments of the impious.⁹⁶

ii. The Dismantling of the Bridal Chamber

The dismantling of the bridal chamber generally took place one week after the marriage. It is intended to implore the blessings of the Lord for procreation and the good education of the children. The liturgical service commences when the nuptial bed, in which the crowns and the nuptial attire have placed, is carried away. The Lord's Prayer is recited followed with priestly prayer. It proceeds with Psalm 89: 15 (16 -36 (37). An antiphon is recited after reciting a priestly prayer. Then litany and *Trisagion* recited and the final benediction.

Conclusion

Syriac fathers explain marriage as the symbol of the second coming of Christ. Furthermore, it is permeated with strong eschatological types and imageries and presented as an anticipation of man's future happiness and for a Christian it's a type of eschatological life and heavenly bliss. Although the Assyrian Church of the East didn't enumerate marriage among the seven sacraments, marriage is conceived as a sacred ritual of the Church that is made of forms and customs drawn from the Semitic culture in which they developed and went through gradual growth of its liturgical elements. Marriage in the Assyrian Church of the East evolves into two stages: First, betrothal which has a civil character that can be called a contractual agreement or social arrangement; while marriage is strictly a liturgical event of the Church. The ceremony is composed set of prayers, actions and material signs interpreted in the context of marriage and find its foundation in the Scripture and especially are founded explicitly on the exemplarity of Christ's marriage, the bridegroom, with the Church, the bride. Through mediation of the priest the holy cross, and the cup and with the seal of the ring with the presence of deacons and Christian communities the gift of God is bestowed whereby bride and groom are united and made a living representation of the heavenly reality.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 145v-146r.

⁹⁶ Vat Syr. 151, 146r.