

## EVOLUTION OF THE EAST SYRIAC INITIATION SETUP WITH STRUCTURE AND THEOLOGY

**John Moolan<sup>♦</sup>**

*Emeritus, Paurastya Vidyapitham, Vadavathoor*

### **Abstract**

East Syrians are Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Syro-Malabarites.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, up to the fourth century, the whole Christendom kept up the integrity of the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist) intact. Later, the West abandoned the integral administration of them due to historical and cultural reasons; but the East has always kept up their strict link. East Syrians up to the sixth century had the practice of adult initiation where the chrismatic anointing was done before baptism and Eucharist. This was in imitation of the ancient apostolic tradition of conferring the Holy Spirit first and then the baptism without any post-baptismal anointing (Acts 2:37-42; 10:44-48). Clear evidences to this effect are found in the Acts of Thomas (3<sup>rd</sup> c.) and in the works of Aphrahat (280-345), Ephrem (306-373), and Narsai (399-502). When the child initiation became very common in 6<sup>th</sup> century, Patriarch Iso-Yahb III in 7<sup>th</sup> century introduced the present child initiation rite with three anointing. In 9<sup>th</sup> century, Patriarch Elia I

---

<sup>♦</sup>**John Moolan, D.Sc.E.O.**, Professor emeritus in liturgy at *Paurastya Vidyapitham* (Pontifical Oriental Institute for Religious Studies), teaches liturgy in many other Major Seminaries and Theological Institutes in Kerala, and holds his doctorate in liturgy from the faculty of ecclesiastical oriental sciences, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome. He is the author of many articles in Malayalam and English published in national and international periodicals. His major works are *Introduction to Oriental Liturgy and Its Theology: Syro-Malabar Church, Sacraments of Initiation: Syro-Malabar Church, Liturgical Year; Syro-Malabar Church, Liturgy of the Hours: Syro-Malabar Church, Paurastya Suriyani Sabha Kalendar* (Malayalam); *Deyvalayathile Deyvanubhavam* (Malayalam) and *Kudasakal Oru Amugha Padhanam* (Malayalam). Email: johnmoolan@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup>The present restored child initiation text of Syro-Malabar Church published in 2005 has made many changes in the original text of East Syrian tradition. See *The Sacraments of the Syro-Malabar Church*, Kakkannad, 2005, 1-55.

reformed the initiation rite of Iso-Yahb III, integrating it with the celebration of the Eucharist. Later, they developed the adult initiation in the model of child initiation, but had no much usage. This rite included a catechumenate part during the period of Great Fast and an initiation part during the paschal vigil.

**Keywords:** Acts of Thomas, Aphrahat, Assyrians, Baptism, Chaldeans, Chrismation, East Syrian, Elia I, Ephrem, Eucharist, Iso-Yahb III, Narsai, Riez, Orange

## Introduction

The East Syriac baptism, known as the sacraments of initiation to Christian faith, includes baptism, chrismation, and Eucharist. These three sacraments as the foundations of Christian life and the passages of entry to Christian faith incorporate the candidates to Christ and to His Church.<sup>2</sup> The link between these three sacraments is so strong that in many contexts the term "Baptism" includes all the three sacraments as the three phases of Christian initiation.<sup>3</sup> Though the West abandoned the integrity due to historical and cultural reasons, the East always kept up their strict link due to the urgent necessity of providing new strength and nourishment to the newly born in baptism.<sup>4</sup>

### 1. General Setup

Until 4<sup>th</sup> century, the integrity of the sacraments of initiation was intact everywhere as the door to the Church<sup>5</sup> for a holistic growth of the baptised to Christian faith.<sup>6</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> century manifold conversions after the independence of the Church, made bishops difficult to chrismatise the baptised in different places on the same day. Then, the two options were: 1) To reserve chrismation to bishop alone to a later time, 2) To delegate the whole rite to priests. The West followed the first option and disrupted the integrity; whereas the East followed the second option and kept up the integrity.

The development of the theology of confirmation in the West during the fifth century substituted 'chrismation' with confirmation. The term confirmation was used first liturgically in canon 3 of the

---

<sup>2</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995, 238, no. 1212.

<sup>3</sup>*Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Kottayam: OIRSI Publications, 1992, 343-344, 347, 353, canons 686, 692, 695, 710.

<sup>4</sup>*Instructions for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Rome: Oriental Congregation, 1996, 38-52.

<sup>5</sup>Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, 7.

<sup>6</sup>J. Moolan, "Integrity of the Sacraments of Initiation," *Christian Orient* 31, 2 (2010) 74-94.

council of Riez (439), and the canon 2 of the Council of Orange (441) repeated it.<sup>7</sup> Then the confirmation became the final intervention of the bishop to confirm the neophytes in baptismal faith and grace. Around 460 on Whitsunday (the Sunday following Easter), Faustus of Riez (490-500) in Gaul preached first on the relevance of confirmation as a distinct sacrament, which theologically supported the separation of confirmation from baptism in the West. His teaching that the baptism completes innocence, declares regeneration, and confers purity, while the chrismation completes grace, declares combat, and confers strength caused the complete separation of confirmation from baptism by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, but even then the Eucharist was given with baptism. Thus, the order became baptism, Eucharist and later Chrismation.

The idea of separating Eucharist also from baptism occurred in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Lateran IV (1215) stressed the need of confession before the Holy Communion, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1275) endorsed it, and the Trent (1546) approved it. As a result, the West lost the complete integrity of the sacraments of initiation. For them the law is the baptism within a few weeks of birth, Holy Communion at the age of knowledge, and confirmation at the age of adulthood.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. East Syriac Adult Initiation before 7<sup>th</sup> Century

Among the East Syrians up to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the common practice was the adult initiation with one chrismatic anointing<sup>9</sup> before baptism followed by the Eucharist as the ancient apostolic tradition of conferring the Holy Spirit first and then the baptism without any post-baptismal anointing (Acts 2:37-42; 10:44-48) in imitation of Pentecost events where the Spirit came first and then followed other things. The orderly sequence of witnessing by Spirit, water, and blood (1 Jn 5:8) are kept up here intact to indicate the greatness of the witness of God than that of the people. Clear evidences to this effect, though the actual order of this rite is not available, are found in the Acts of Thomas and the works of Aphrahat (280-345), Ephrem (306-373), and Narsai (399-502) as follows.

### 2.1. Acts of Thomas (3<sup>rd</sup> c.)

The Acts of Thomas, an East Syrian apocryphal document written likely in Edessa around 220/230 contains the conversion activities of

---

<sup>7</sup>Mansi, J.D., ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, vols 5, 6, Florence / Paris: Akademische Druck, 1904, 1905, 1092, 432.

<sup>8</sup>*The Code of Canon Law*, London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 2001, 160, 163, 164, 167, canons 867, 883, 891, 913.

<sup>9</sup>G. Winkler, "The Original Meaning of the Pre-Baptismal Anointing and its Implications," *Worship* 52 (1978) 24-45.

Thomas in India.<sup>10</sup> The five accounts of baptism by the Apostle, 1. Baptism of the King Gundaphar and his brother Gad, the royal brothers (chs. 25-27); 2. Baptism of a woman possessed by devil, and of others (chs. 48-50); 3. Baptism of Mygdonia (the wife of Karish) and of Narkia (chs. 120-121); 4. Baptism of the General Sifur/Siphor, his wife, and daughter (chs. 131-133); 5. Baptism of Vizan/Vazan/Luzanes and certain women called Tertia and Manashar (chs.156-158) provide the details of the initiation process as anointing, baptism, and Eucharist.<sup>11</sup>

### **2.1.1. Anointing**

The apostle by laying hands on the candidates pours oil on their heads and invokes Holy Spirit to seal the candidates in the name of the Holy Trinity. This follows the anointing of bodies of men by deacons and of women by deaconess. This only one anointing in the whole rite, equal to the chrismation today, indicates the setting apart of candidates to Christ and to His flock as true servants of the Lord.

### **2.1.2. Baptism**

Baptism of immersion takes place in rivers or large pools (vat), since there were no baptismal fonts. The effects of baptism are forgiveness, new birth, enlightenment, and renewal to form a true Bride to the true Groom.

### **2.1.3. Eucharist**

Eucharist completes the rite of initiation incorporating the baptised to the body of Christ as the full members of the Church. The effects of the Eucharist are forgiveness, immortality, and eternal life.

## **2.2. Aphrahat (d. after 345)**

Aphrahat the first Syrian Father has witnessed the earliest Syrian literature in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, which is purely Semitic in character without any Greek (Hellenic) or Roman influence. His twenty three demonstrations of instructions on (1) Faith, (2) Charity, (3) Fasting, (4) Prayer, (5) Wars, (6) Sons of the Covenant, (7) Penitents, (8) Resurrection of the Dead, (9) Humility, (10) Pastors, (11)

---

<sup>10</sup>*The Acts of Thomas*, Leiden: Brill, 1962; A.F.J. Klijn, "Baptism in the Acts of Thomas," in J. Vellian, ed., *Studies on Syrian Baptismal Rites*, Syrian Churches Series 6, Kottayam: CMS Press, 1973, 57-62; E. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 429-435.

<sup>11</sup>For the English translations of the concerned accounts, see E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, ed. M.E. Johnson, Colledgeville: Liturgical Press, 2003, 16-21.

Circumcision, (12) Paschal Feast, (13) Sabbath, (14) Exhortation, (15) Distinction between Foods, (16) Election of the Peoples, (17) Christ, the Son of God, (18) Virginity and Sanctity (19) Un-gathered Jews, (20) Support of the Poor, (21) Persecution, (22) Death and the Latter Times, and (23) Grape Cluster were written during 336-345.<sup>12</sup>

Though none of his demonstrations contain the administration of Christian initiation as such, he refers to it in some of them. Penitential acts like fasting, prayer, and singing of Psalms are the means of purification (*Demonstration* 12.13) before the candidates' confession of faith in baptism (*Demonstration* 1.19). Paschal Sunday is devoted to the solemnity of initiation, because on that night Jesus instituted the true baptism by washing the feet of the apostles (*Demonstration* 12.10). Since the washing of the feet purified all before the institution of the Eucharist, it is the right of the baptised to be nourished with the eucharist immediately after baptism. The order of initiation is chrismation, baptism, and eucharist (*Demonstration* 4.5, 19; 6.14; 12.10).<sup>13</sup>

### **2.2.1. Anointing**

The pre-baptismal anointing as chrismation is the only one anointing of this rite. It is equal to Jacob's pouring of the oil on the stone top at Bethel (Gen 28:18-19), indicating the anointed as the stone-like strong believers in Christ (*Demonstration* 4.5). Anointing provides consecration to Christ and freedom from God's anger.

### **2.2.2. Baptism**

The invocation of the Holy Spirit on the water makes the baptismal font, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and the womb of the Church where the children of God are born. Baptism of immersion indicates the putting away of the old person and the putting on of the new person. Baptism is compared to the crossing of Jordan (Josh 3:14-17) by the people of Israel to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. The newly baptised crossing the water of the baptismal font enter the real Promised Land of heaven. Baptism signifies the new life, new birth, circumcision of heart (Jer 4:4), entrance to the Church, death to sin, and absolution (*Demonstrations* 4.14; 11.11, 12; 12.9, 10, 13; 14.16).

---

<sup>12</sup>E.J. Duncan, "The Administration of Baptism in the Demonstrations of Aprahat," in J. Vellian, ed., *Studies on Syrian Baptismal Rites*, 16-36; K. Valavanolical, ed. & trans., *Aphrahat Demonstrations I*, Catholic Theological Studies of India 3, Changanassery, Kerala: HIRS Publications, 1999, 1-17.

<sup>13</sup>E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 51-52; K. Valavanolical, *Aphrahat Demonstrations I*, 67-68, 80, 129-131.

### 2.2.3. Eucharist

Baptism is followed by the Eucharist, because Jesus the real Paschal Lamb nourishes the baptised with His paschal meal (Eucharist), which liberates the baptised from Satan's slavery with his works of destruction (*Demonstration* 4.19).

### 2.3. Ephrem (306-373)

Ephrem wrote many doctrinal discourses, homilies, and hymns of catechetical, biblical, theological, anthropological, philosophical, apologetic, and poetical character against the heresies of Marcion, Bardaisan and Mani in Edessa.<sup>14</sup>

For him the Easter season is the most suitable period for baptism, because fasting and prayers in the Great Fast prepare well the candidates for the initiation (*Hymns on virginity* 7.2). The effects of the initiation are the remission of sins, sanctification, new life in the Holy Trinity, membership in the Church, and right for the Holy Communion. Though he wrote no treatise on Christian initiation as such, he indicates the order of initiation as anointing, baptism, and Eucharist in his teaching on this subject.<sup>15</sup>

#### 2.3.1. Anointing

Anointing as chrismation before baptism (*Hymns on Epiphany* 3.16; *Virginity* 7.8), imprints the seal of the Spirit to set apart the candidate for Christ (*Hymns on Virginity* 7.6). Sealing as the circumcision of heart (Gen 17:11; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Josh 5:2, 4; Jer 4:4) separates the believers from the unbelievers (*Hymns on Epiphany* 3.2-4, 13) and the conferring of grace enriches the soul as the four rivers (Gen 2:10-15) that water the Paradise (*Hymns on Virginity* 4.14). There is no post-baptismal anointing.

#### 2.3.2. Baptism

Water sanctification takes place before baptism. Invocation of the Holy Spirit on baptismal font makes it a fiery furnace to purify the candidates to sing divine praises to the Lord just as the three youths in the fiery furnace (Dan 3:23ff) sang hymns to God (*Hymns on Epiphany* 8.5-6). Baptismal font symbolises also the womb of the Church to give birth to the children of God (*Hymns on Faith* 10.17).

---

<sup>14</sup>P. Schaff & H. Wace, eds. & trans., *Ephraim Hymns, Homilies*, NPNF 13, series 2, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964, 163-341; S. Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit*, London: Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, 1983; E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 53-54.

<sup>15</sup>*Hymns on Virginity* 4.9, 11; 7.6-9; *Epiphany* 3.1-5, 13-14, 16; 5.1-2; 5.5-6; 8.5-6. 9, 21; *on Faith* 10.17; *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 4.2; and *Homily on Our Lord* 2.

Just as Jeremiah (Jer1:5) and John the Baptist (Lk 1:41) were purified in their mothers' wombs, so also the baptised shall be purified in the baptismal font as their mother's (Church) womb (*Hymns on Virginity* 7.7-8; *Epiphany* 8.9). Christ's Jordan baptism as the foundation of Christian baptism (*Hymns on Virginity* 15.3) fills the baptismal font with the power of the Holy Spirit (*Homily on Our Lord* 53).

Baptism through immersion in the triple divine names indicates the Trinitarian nature of baptism (*Hymns on Virginity* 7.5, 10). Baptism renews the old and creates the newborn infants (*Hymns on Virginity* 7.7). The Trinitarian names pronounced in baptism forgive sins to make recipient the first born of Christ and declare his/her heavenly inheritance with Christ, just as Jesus' virginal birth made Him the first born of the Father and His Jordan baptism declared His inheritance with the Father (*Commentary on the Diatessaron* 2.8; 16.29). Putting on of new clothing after baptism relates to the themes of putting on of Christ and regaining of the lost glory in Paradise (*Hymns on Epiphany* 4.3, 7; 12.1, 4).

#### *Effects of Baptism*

Ephrem's *Hymns on Epiphany*<sup>16</sup> explains the biblical types as the foreshadowing of the various effects of baptism found in Christian life towards a new creation.

1. Destruction of Evil and Creation of Goodness: The command of Yahweh destroyed the bitterness of Marah water and induced sweetness in it (Ex 15:23-25), likewise the power of the Holy Spirit in the baptismal water destroys the bitterness of death and produces sweetness of life.
2. Circumcision of Heart: Circumcision (Gen 17:11; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Josh 5:2, 4; Jer 4:4) separated Jews from others, likewise the baptism separates the believers from unbelievers.
3. Purification: Old Testament ablutions (Ex 40:12; Lev 16:4, 24; Num 19:7; 2 Kings 5:14; Jer 4:14; Is 36:25) and Hyssop (Ex 12:22; Lev 14:4; Ps 51:7) symbolised purification, likewise the baptismal washing symbolises sanctification of life.
4. Destruction of death and Creation of life: The Deluge (Ex 7:17) and the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 14:21-31) destroyed evil ones and saved good ones, likewise the baptismal water destroys death and sin providing eternal life to the baptised.

---

<sup>16</sup>*Hymns on Epiphany* 1.1-6, 17-19; 2.7; 3.4; 4.3; 5.6-7, 9-11; 7.1-3, 22; 8.5-6, 16; 12.1-2, 12.

5. Entry to the Promised Land: The crossing of Jordan River enabled Israel to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 3), likewise the crossing of the baptismal water enables Christians to enter the Paradise of heaven.
6. Healing: The washing of Naaman in Jordan water healed his leprosy (2 Kings 5:14), likewise the baptismal washing absolves sins of the baptised to heal iniquities.
7. Salvation: The Israel's crossing of Red Sea was the passage of rescue from the hands of enemy (Ex 14:21-24), so also the baptism is the passage of salvation to the baptised from the hands of Satan.
8. Armour of Protection: The anointing of David by Samuel set him with the armour of protection against Goliath (1 Sam 16:13ff), likewise the anointing in baptism helps the Christians to receive the armour of protection against Satan.
9. Triumph: The three youths' bath with the flood of flames in the burning furnace helped them to declare the triumph of the Lord (Dan 3: 23ff), likewise the bath with water in the baptismal font helps the baptised to declare Christ as the Lord and saviour of all.
10. Conversion: The water of Jacob's well became the sign of conversion to the Samaritans (Jn 9:6ff), likewise the baptismal water becomes the sign of conversion for Christians.
11. Illumination: John the Baptist witnessed the true light (Christ) that enlightens everyone (Jn 1:6-9), likewise the baptised are illumined to witness Christ to the world.
12. Christian Mission: The gifts of Magi declared the Messianic roles of Christ in the world (Mt 1:11), likewise the baptism declares the kingly, prophetic, and priestly missions of Christians in the world.
13. Divine Intimacy: The heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism declared the intimacy of the Father to the Son (Mt 3:17), likewise in baptism Jesus declares His intimacy to the baptised.
14. Seeing: The washing in the Siloam Pool made the blind man to see Christ as the Lord (Jn 9:7ff), likewise the washing in the baptismal water helps the baptised to see Christ as their Lord and God.
15. Divine Cleansing: Jesus' washing of the feet cleansed the souls of the apostles (Jn 13:1-20), likewise the baptism cleanses the souls of the baptised.

### **2.3.3. Eucharist**

The newborns in baptism are immediately nourished with the Eucharist instead of milk (*Hymns on Virginity* 7.8). The Eucharistic bread



as the life giving fruit (*Hymns on Paradise* 6.8), and the blood as the cup of life (*Hymns on Faith* 10.15) provide the medicine of life (*Hymns on Virginity* 31.13). The Fire and Spirit present in the bread and cup (*Hymns on Faith* 10.10, 17) as the treasury of healing (*Homily on Our Lord* 13) expiate sins and sanctify the soul (*Armenian Hymns* 48.21-23) restoring the glorious life of the communicants (*Hymns on Virginity* 31.14).

### *Powers of the Eucharist*

Ephrem's hymns on different themes<sup>17</sup> explain the biblical types as the foreshadowing of the various powers of the Eucharist in Christian life as the new nourishment.

1. Blessing: The sacrifices of Abel (Gen 4:4), Melchizedek (Gen 14:18), and Abraham (Gen 22:14) conferred the material blessings, while the Eucharistic sacrifice confers spiritual blessings.
2. Life Giving Fruit: The tree of life in the Old Paradise provided the life giving fruit, while the eucharist provides the life giving fruit in the New Paradise.
3. Life Giving Bread: The unleavened bread (Ex 12:15-20), paschal lamb (Ex 12:22), bread of Elijah (1 Kings 19:5-8), divine manna (Num 11:7-9), and the bronze serpent (Num 21:9) were the material supports for the Old Israel, while the Eucharistic bread is the life giving bread for the New Israel (Church).
4. Life Giving Medicine: The water and blood from the side of Jesus, the Groom, purified His bride, the Church (Jn 19:34), while the eucharistic body and blood make the baptised the perfect Bride to the Groom healing all the scars of sin.
5. Spiritual Enrichment: Cana miracle (Jn 2:1-11), multiplication of bread (Jn 6:8-13), and miraculous catch of fish (Lk 5:4-8) were the material provisions for the human needs, while the Eucharistic miracle is the spiritual provision for the spiritual needs.
6. Establishment of the Kingdom of God: The forgiven sinful woman (Lk 7:48) and the parable of leaven (Mt 13:33) are the types of the Kingdom of God on earth, while the Eucharistic forgiveness is the true sign of God's kingdom at hand.
7. Creation: The creation of Eve from the side of Adam (Gen 2:21-23) brought forth a worthy bride to the worthy groom, while the water

---

<sup>17</sup>Mentioned in the *Hymns on Paradise* 6.8; *On the Church* 13.18; 39.5-9; 41.14; 51.6-7; *On the Crucifixion* 2.5, 7, 9; 3.11; *On the Unleavened Bread* 2.2-9; 5.6; 17.17, 19; *On Virginity* 33.6-7; *On Faith* 10.6, 8, 10-13; *Armenian Hymn* 49.

and blood flew from the side of Christ (Jn 19:34) brought forth the Eucharistic community, the worthy (holy) Bride (Church), to the worthy (holy) Groom (Christ).<sup>18</sup>

8. Fountain of Life: The water from the Horeb rock quenched the physical thirst of the Old Israel (Ex 17:6), while the Eucharistic blood from the wood of Golgotha (Jn 19:34) quenches the spiritual thirst of the New Israel.

9. Transformation: The Seraph's burning charcoal purified Isaiah (Is 6:6-7), while the Eucharistic fire transforms communicants to Christ.

10. Forgiveness: The fire from heaven consumed the sinners in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24-25), while the Eucharistic fire from heaven consumes the sins of its communicants.

11. Purification: Fire from heaven consumed the sacrificial offering of Elijah (1 Kings 18:38), while the Eucharistic fire from heaven purifies life as a living sacrifice to the Lord.

## **2.4. Narsai (399-502)**

Narsai an eminent theologian of the East Syrian Church and the founder of the great school of Nisibis,<sup>19</sup> in his *Homily 21: On the Mysteries of the Church*, and the *Homily 22: On Baptism*<sup>20</sup> explains the detailed structure of the East Syrian rite of initiation during the sixth century. For him the sequence of initiation is the anointing, baptism, and Eucharist.

### **2.4.1. Anointing**

This rite includes the renunciation of Satan, profession of faith (acceptance of Christ), witnessing of sponsors (godparents), kneeling on sackcloth, oil consecration, signing on forehead as spiritual stamping, and the anointing of the whole body signifying healing, protection, and immortality of the soul.

### **2.4.2. Baptism**

The baptismal rite includes water blessing, baptism of immersion, kiss of peace, and white garment as the glorious bridal robe for the

---

<sup>18</sup>S.P. Brock, "Mysteries Hidden in the Side of Christ," *Eastern Churches Review* 7 (1978) 462-472.

<sup>19</sup>R.H. Connolly, trans., *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, Texts and Studies 8, Cambridge: University Press, 1909; E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 54-59.

<sup>20</sup>For a study of these two homilies, see M.A. Kappes, "A Voice of Many Waters: The Baptismal Homilies of Narsai of Nisibis," *Studia Patristica* 33 (1977) 534-547.

heavenly marriage-supper. The baptismal font symbolises the tomb of Christ, the womb of Church, and the furnace of purification. The tomb signifies death and resurrection (Rom 6:4), the womb signifies rebirth in water and Spirit (Jn 3:3-5), and the furnace signifies purification of the soul.

Baptism is the moment of triumph over Satan and death. It creates the firstborns of the Holy Spirit as the children of God and the citizens of heaven. The baptismal rebirth in the womb of the Church, and the rearing up of the newborn to the grownups makes the Church the spiritual mother. The Holy Spirit present in the oil and water provides redemption by recasting the body of clay to the pure gold like image of God. The oil provides divine armour, and the water provides divine purity.

### **2.4.3. Eucharist**

Baptism follows the Eucharist, incorporating the baptised to the Church. The Church as the spiritual mother feeds her newborns not with breast milk, but with Eucharistic body and blood like *viaticum*, which nourishes the recipients on their way to life eternal.

## **2. 5. Iso-Yahb III (647-650/57)**

When the child initiation became very common everywhere, Patriarch Iso-Yahb III introduced the East Syrian practice of child initiation, where the adults also were baptised after children. He added two more extra pre-baptismal anointing, and transferred the existent only one anointing before baptism to the post-baptism as Chrismation. Thus, we see three anointing in the preset initiation rite.

The reason was to purify the candidate before baptism. Since the Spirit cannot enter into unclean things, the two pre-baptismal anointing purify the person. Then, the post-baptismal chrismatic anointing confirms the person with the Holy Spirit. Another reason was the imitation of Jesus' Jordan baptism where the Holy Spirit dwelt upon Him when He came out of the water.

## **2.6. Elia I (9<sup>th</sup> c.)**

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Patriarch Elia I reformed the initiation rite by integrating it with the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>21</sup> In this system,

---

<sup>21</sup>J.E.Y. de Kelaita, ed., *The Liturgy of the Church of the East: Compared in details with Many Ancient Manuscripts, which their Name and date is given in the Syriac Introduction*, Syriac, Mosul: The Assyrian Press, 1928; for the *Order of Baptism*, see 107-160.

the *Enarxis* introduces the candidate to the rite, the liturgy of the Word catechises the candidate, the preparation rite prepares oil and water needed for the service, and the initiation rite induces faith through baptism, perfects through Chrismation, and provides full membership through the Eucharist.

### 3. Present East Syrian Structure and Theology of Initiation

The whole rite integrated with the Eucharistic celebration is divided into two major parts as the service of the catechumens and the service of those to be baptised. The first part includes *enarxis* and the liturgy of the word, while the second part includes the preparation rite and the initiation rite.<sup>22</sup>

#### 3.1. Service of the Catechumens

*The ceremony integrated with the Eucharistic celebration begins at the baptistery door where the celebrant and the ministers come in procession to welcome the child with its godparents.*

##### 3.1.1. *Enarxis*

This introductory part preparing candidate includes mainly the Psalms, two impositions of hands, first pre-baptismal anointing, entry to the baptistery, two intercessory prayers (*Karozute*), procession to the font, resurrection hymn (*Lord of all*), and preparation of water in the font

The anointing here with reserve oil by the right index finger on child's forehead from below upwards and right to left indicates the disrobing of the old person with all deceitful lusts (Rom 6:6) by absolving sins. From right to left signifies that in Christ the right reigns over the left (Ps 110:1; Jn 23:42-43).<sup>23</sup>

The index finger shows the downfall of Adam and Eve in Paradise. Forehead signifies the high place of the seat of reason. The devil seeing the sealing here flees away from the anointed.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>G. Mookan, K.A. Paul (trans.), *The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles Adai and Mari together with the Liturgies of Mar Theodorus and Mar Nestorius and the Order of Baptism*, Trichur, Kerala: Mar Narsai Press, 1967, 117-173; G. Diettrich, *Die Nestorianische Tauf liturgie* by Iso Yahb, *Adiabenus*, Giessen: Rikersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903.

<sup>23</sup>Timothy II, *The Mystery of Baptism* 16; see P.B. Kadicheeni, *The Mystery of Baptism*...79.

<sup>24</sup>A. Mingana, ed. *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, Woodbrooke Studies 6, Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Limited, 1933, 46; R.H. Connolly, *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, 43; Timothy

### 3.1.2. Liturgy of the Word

This part representing catechesis for the candidates includes thrice holy hymn, Epistle and Gospel proclamations, intercessory prayers, imposition of hand, and dismissal. The power of the Word of God transforms life.

### 3.2. Service of those to be baptised

*This service contains the preparation rite as the consecration of oil and water, and the second pre-baptismal anointing; and the initiation rite as the administration of baptism, Chrismation (Post-baptismal anointing), and the Eucharist.*

### 3.3. Preparation Rite

This rite prepares oil and water, and makes the second pre-baptismal anointing. The anointing before baptism, with newly consecrated oil on child's chest with three central fingers from up downwards and right to left symbolises the putting on of a new person to create the true image of God (Eph 4:24). Chest as the seat of heart controls faculties and activities (Mt 6:21) for the fullness of spiritual life.

Three fingers represent imprinting of the knowledge of the Trinity as a gift. Then the deacon anoints the whole body of the child to symbolise the deposition of the old person.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.4. Initiation Rite

This rite includes baptism of immersion, white garment, imposition of hand, chrismation (Post baptismal anointing), crowning, entry to baptistery, keeping of reserve oil, Holy Communion, concluding prayers, and cleansing rite.

Triple immersion and emersion signifies death to sin and resurrection to new life (Rom 6:4-14), and the Lord's remaining with the dead for three days before resurrection.

Trinitarian formula shows the presence of Trinity in the baptised. Passive form, "N. Is baptised," stresses the mediatorship of the priest that it is not he, but the power of Trinity aroused by him baptises the

---

II, *The Mystery of Baptism* 16; see P.B. Kadicheeni, ed. & trans., *The Mystery of Baptism: The Text and Translation of the Chapter "On Holy Baptism" from the Cause of Seven Mysteries of the Church of Timothy II, the Nestorian Patriarch 1318-1332*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1980, 63.

<sup>25</sup>Timothy II, *The Mystery of Baptism* 16, 17; see P.B. Kadicheeni, ed. & trans., *The Mystery of Baptism...* 69-71, 73, 85.

person.<sup>26</sup> Godparents vest the child with white dress as the symbol of innocence, purity, and the robe of glory.<sup>27</sup>

At Chrismation, the anointing with *Muron/Sayth* by the right thumb on forehead from below upwards and right to left signifies ascending from the world to entry the glory of God (Eph 2:6; 1 Thes 4:16-17) providing perfection.<sup>28</sup> Thumb finger indicates best wishes for a successful life. Crowing means spiritual joy and glory of heavenly inheritance.

Remaining reserve oil is kept in the oil vessel by pouring it from the oil horn held over the font. Then the empty horn is thrown into the font.

The Eucharistic celebration continues, and at the end the Eucharist is given to the Child as the spiritual food.<sup>29</sup> Every living being at the birth has to receive food from the mother, likewise the mother Church gives Eucharist, the spiritual food, to Her spiritual child born in baptism.<sup>30</sup>

There are four priestly concluding thanksgiving prayers of which the first one gives thanks to the Holy Trinity, and the other three give thanks to Christ for the various gifts conferred in the initiation rite. Final sealing prayer with the sign of Cross gives glory, honour, confession and adoration to Christ for His image and inheritance conferred on His children in baptism.

In the cleansing rite, after the prayer to let loose the divine power of water, the celebrant washes the oil vessel in the water. Then he whirls the water and draws hastily his hand out as if snatching something away from it, and throws a little ordinary water into the font. Priests, deacons, and sponsors wash their hands and faces in the water, and the water is let loose to an un-trodden place or to a river.

---

<sup>26</sup>Timothy II, *The Mystery of Baptism* 3, 17; see P.B. Kadicheeni, ed. & trans., *The Mystery of Baptism...* 9, 85; S.P. Brock, *Spirituality in Syrian Tradition*, Kottayam: SEERI Publications, 1989, 66; F. Chirayath, *Taufliturgie des Syro-Malabarischen Ritus*, Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1981, 55.

<sup>27</sup>Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* 6.9.

<sup>28</sup>Timothy II, *The Mystery of Baptism* 16, 19; see P.B. Kadicheeni, ed. & trans., *The Mystery of Baptism...*73-75, 91; R.H. Connolly, ed. and trans., *Anonymi auctoris expositio officiorum ecclesiae Georgio Arbalensi vulgo ad scripta*, CSCO 72, 76, scriptores Syri, series 2, tomus 92, Rome: Luigi, 1913, 96.

<sup>29</sup>Timothy II, *The Mystery of Baptism* 18; see P.B. Kadicheeni, *The Mystery of Baptism...* 87-89.

<sup>30</sup>John Bar Zobi, *Explanation of the Divine Mysteries*; see T. Mannoorampambal, *Explanation of the Divine Mysteries*, Kottayam: OIRSI Publications, 1992, 56.

#### 4. Structure and Theology of Adult Initiation after 7<sup>th</sup> Century

Though a rite as such is not available, there are treatises on adult baptism after the seventh century. "Questions on liturgical matters" by the anonymous author George of Arbel (d.960.), "Questions on baptism" in *Vatican Syriac* 150 (15 c.), fol. 39v-56r, and "The *Memra* (Metrical hymn) on baptism" in *Vatican Syriac* 182 (1706), fol. 268v-272v by Emmanuel As-Sahhar or Bar Sahhare (10 c.) indicate the existence of another adult initiation rite<sup>31</sup> in congruity with the child initiation of Isho-Yahb III (647-650/57).<sup>32</sup>

A comparison of these documents with the child baptism of Isho-Yahb III does not show much difference except for the structural difference of the catechumenate part and the absence of final veneration of saints at *Marterion* (House of martyrs) in Isho-Yahb text. Accordingly, the adult baptism contains two such parts as that of the catechumenate and initiation.

##### 4.1. Part I: Catechumenate

This part includes two stages as remote and immediate preparations. Remote preparation starts on the Monday in the middle of the period of Great Fast up to the Holy Week, which includes the enrolment of the candidates in the register book, exorcism, and the laying on of hand. The immediate preparation starts on the Monday of the Holy Week, which includes daily procession to the baptistery with hymns on baptism.

##### 4.2. Part II: Initiation Rite

This ritual part integrated with Eucharistic celebration of paschal vigil between Holy Saturday midnight and the Easter Sunday includes four such stages as:

(1) Introductory rite (*Enarxis*) with renunciation of Satan and the first pre-baptismal anointing with reserve oil on the forehead from below upward and right to left with right index finger.

---

<sup>31</sup>*Anonymi auctoris expositio officiorum ecclesiae Georgio Arbalensi vulgo ad scripta*, ed. and trans., R.H. Connolly, CSCO 76, scriptores Syri, series 2, tomus 92, Rome: Luigi, 1913, 87-106; *Vatican Syriac* 150 (15 c.), fol. 39v-56r, in J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticanae de scriptoribus Syris*, vol. 2, Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719-1728, 259-270; Bar Sahhare, *Vatican Syriac* 182 (1706), fol. 268v-272v; see W. de Vries, "Zur Liturgie der Erwachsenentaufe bei den Nestorianern," *OCP* 9 (1943) 460-473.

<sup>32</sup>G. Dietrich, *Die Nestorianische Tauf liturgie by Iso Yahb, Adiabenus*, Giessen: Rikersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903, 3-51; *Anonymi auctoris*, 88-105; J.S. Assemani, *Vatican Syriac* 150, f. 39v-56r; Bar Sahhare, *Vatican Syriac* 182, fol. 268v-272v; see W. de Vries, "Zur Liturgie der Erwachsenentaufe bei den Nestorianern," 462-468.

(2) Liturgy of the Word with scripture lessons, preparation rite of the consecration of oil and water in baptistery, second pre-baptismal anointing with new oil on the chest with three middle right fingers from up downward and right to left, anointing of the whole body, baptismal immersion, and the vesting of white garment.

(3) Procession to the sanctuary door, post-baptismal anointing (Chrismation) with *Muron/Sayth* on the forehead with right thumb from below upward and right to left with the laying on of hand. The Eucharistic celebration continues and the baptised receive the Eucharist.

(4) Concluding ceremony of the veneration of saints in the house of martyrs (*Bet shade*), and the cleansing of the oil vessel and the baptismal font in the baptistery.

**5. Relevance Today**

Just as the natural needs like existence (Birth), resistance (Protection), and nourishment (Food) are the immediate requisites for a physically newborn child, so also the spiritual needs like spiritual existence (Baptism), resistance (Chrismation) and nourishment (Eucharist) are the immediate requisites for a spiritually newborn child.

In physical existence (Birth), when the newborn cries out for physical protection against natural restraints of the body, the nature provides an immediate resistance power (Immunity) and nourishment (Breast milk) for its better ongoing process.

Likewise, in spiritual rebirth (Baptism), when the newborn needs spiritual protection against spiritual restraints of evil influences, the Spirit provides an immediate resistance power (Chrismation) and nourishment (Eucharist) for a better spiritual ongoing process. Thus the baptism regenerates, Chrismation fortifies, and Eucharist nourishes the mystical body of Christ:

Baptismal Regeneration	Chrismatic Fortification	Eucharistic Nourishment
Absolves sins	Confers perfection	Provides sustenance
Gives birth	Gives strength	Gives life
Induces grace	Perfects grace	Increases grace
Provides innocence	Provides consecration	Provides vivification

Relevance of this practice enriches the Church today, incorporating Christians to Christ's baptism, His paschal mysteries, and His mystical body.



### **5.1. Baptism of Christ**

At Jordan, the Father and the Holy Spirit manifested their integrity with the Son. Father proclaimed the Son His beloved One to the son and the Holy Spirit established His indwelling upon the Son (Mt 3:16-17). Thus, both of them approved the Son's divine status of intimate attachment to them.

Likewise, baptism declares Christians the beloved to the Father; Chrismation establishes their indebtedness to the Spirit, and Eucharist manifests their unity with Christ. Hence these sacraments unite intimately the members of the Church with the Holy Trinity towards the freedom of the children of God (Rom 8:15) and liberates from the slavery of Satan (Rom 6:17-18) to the status of saints (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2) to live for Christ (Gal 2:20).

### **5.2. Paschal Mysteries**

The initiation rite incorporates the Christians to the paschal mysteries of death-resurrection, ascension-Pentecost, and mystical body.

#### (1) Death-Resurrection

Baptism incorporates Christians to the mysteries of death and resurrection of Christ. Baptismal immersion signifies death to sin (Rom 6:2-4), and the emersion signifies resurrection to life (Rom 6:4), creating the children of God and the heirs heaven.

#### (2) Ascension-Pentecost

Chrismation incorporates Christians to the mysteries of ascension and Pentecost. The Spirit was conferred to the apostles in relation to private and public ascensions. The private one happened on resurrection day evening, after His private ascension to the Father (Jn 20:16-17), where the Spirit was breathed upon them (Jn 20:19-22). The second one in public happened at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), ten days after His public ascension (Lk 24:50-51), where the fiery tongues strengthened them. This resembles the first conferring of the Spirit in baptism and the second conferring in Chrismation. Thus, baptism and Chrismation together provide participation in the mysteries of ascension and Pentecost.

### **5.3. Mystical Body**

Eucharist incorporates Christians to the mystical body of Christ providing full entry to the Church to run a good race to obtain the awaiting crown of justice in heaven (2 Tim 4:7-8; Heb 12:1).

Just as the natural care provides natural growth to the natural body, the spiritual care provides spiritual growth to the spiritual body (CCEO 695, 697). Therefore, Tertullian (+220) says, "Body is

washed that the soul be immaculate; body is anointed that the soul be consecrated; body is signed that the soul be fortified; body is overshadowed with the laying on of hands that the soul be illumined; and body is nourished with the body and blood of Christ that God enlivens the soul.”<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Up to the seventh century, adult initiation followed the model of apostolic tradition that started with Pentecost. Acts of Thomas, Ephrem, Aphrahat, and Narsai give evidence to this tradition with one anointing alone as Chrismation given before baptism.

Isho-Yahb III changed the order of initiation as baptism, chrismation, and Eucharist in accordance with Jesus' Jordan baptism where the Spirit dwelt upon Him when He came out of the water. He added two pre-baptismal anointing and transferred the then existent pre-baptismal anointing as Chrismation to the post baptism, because the Holy Spirit cannot enter the impure things. Thus, at present the initiation contains three anointing.

The first anointing with right index finger from below upward and right to left on the forehead absolves sin. The second anointing with three right middle fingers from up downward and right to left on the chest purifies to a new person. The third anointing with the right thumb from below upward and right to left on the forehead as Chrismation makes entry to the Trinitarian glory.

Later, adult initiation also was formed with catechumenate part in the Great Fast and an initiation part at paschal vigil, but not found much acceptance.

Relevance of this practice as new birth, new strength, and new nourishment enriches the Church today to incorporate Christians to Christ's baptism, His paschal mysteries, and His mystical body for attaining salvation.

---

<sup>33</sup>*De Resurrectione* 8; PL 2, 852.