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ROOTS TO THE WINGS: THE APOSTOLIC CHRIST-EXPERIENCE AND ITS ORGANIC GROWTH IN THE SYRO-MALABAR *QURBANA*

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1. Introduction

The Church as a community is founded on and rooted in Christ witnessed by the apostles (Eph 2:20). As a result, their witness underpins the life and Tradition of the Church and the primary and paramount mission of the Church is to protect and preserve the deposit of the apostolic faith perfect and intact (1 Tim 6:20). The apostolic roots of the faith are kept unbroken in the Holy *Qurbana* and in it a faithful can trace the roots of his or her faith. Hence, the apostolic roots and patristic orientations are to be protected and preserved in the liturgy and an organic continuity is to be maintained to have abundant fruits of faith.

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The present dissertation is a search into the most solemn form of the Syro-Malabar *Qurbana* (SMQ) to comprehend and interpret how it preserves and passes on the apostolic Christ-experience, the roots of the *kerygma*. The scope of the work is to provide and promote a better understanding of the apostolic roots and patristic footings of the SMQ and its progressive development. The dynamic rootedness reveals itself in a constant movement towards the future, i.e., from the “roots to the wings.” The “wings” here denotes the natural movement of organic growth. We receive the apostolic patrimony from the liturgy lived and prayed down through the centuries forming an unbroken chain of tradition. Hence there is a pressing demand to search for the roots of the belief and worship for the right understanding and living of the heritage and the handing down of the same to the posterity.

2. Synthesis of the Study

1. The whole study is grouped into five chapters. The first chapter presents the first apostolic proclamations found in the *Acts of the Apostles* as attempts of the apostles to share their Christ-experience. The analysis of the first five *kerygmatic* proclamations of the apostles Peter and Paul shows that the apostles endorse the service of the Word and witness to the Lord. The first apostolic proclamations, constantly and consistently, hold on to the following structure/elements: Fulfilment of the First/Old Testament prophecies, public life of Jesus and the signs and wonders leading to His rejection, passion and death, resurrection, sending of the Holy Spirit, call to repentance, eschatological expectation and salvation for all. It shows that the apostles followed the same and definite pattern in their preaching, and they provide an outline for the preachers.

It further deals with the interrelation among the first apostolic proclamations, Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:14-15), the individual Churches and their liturgies. Here liturgy is understood as a vital organism that might grow progressively. The Church is the fruit of the *kerygma* of the Christ-event and the diversity in the apostolic Christ-experience and the life situation of the community that receives the gospel are the basis of the plurality of the Churches.

2. Surveying and scrutinizing the gospels, the second chapter highlights the Christ-experience of apostle Thomas. Even though the gospels are *kerygmatic* writings and not treatises on the individual Christ-experience of the apostles, a few episodes communicate the

Christ-experience of the apostles. The fourth gospel discloses the dynamic personality of apostle Thomas and presents him as a prominent figure and eminent leader among the apostles. A study of the episodes of the resuscitation of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44), the farewell discourse and the intervention of Thomas (Jn 14:5-7) and the post resurrection appearance to Thomas (Jn 20:24-29) reveals a unified and progressive picture of the character of Thomas as an ideal disciple who invites the other disciples to walk on the way of the Lord with courage (Jn 11:16), curiousness (Jn 14:5) and commitment (Jn 20:28). The analysis of those episodes unveils the nature of the Christ-experience of apostle Thomas, and sheds light on its depth and progress.

Apostle Thomas is a personification and a paradigm of ideal discipleship and the unique facets of his Christ-experience as a fervent disciple has threefold dimensions, Jesus: The Source and Giver of Life (Jn 11:16); Jesus: The Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6); and Jesus: The Lord and God (Jn 20:28). In and through the celebration of the mysteries of the Lord, the St Thomas Christians experience the real presence of Jesus and the apostolic Christ-experience handed on to them by apostle Thomas. St Thomas Christians in general identify themselves as those who follow the *Mar Toma Margam*, a way of life that witnesses to the Christ-experience of apostle Thomas as the root of their ecclesial life.

3. The third chapter is on the East Syriac patristic witnesses to the apostolic Christ experience. The Fathers kept up a dynamic apostolic tradition and preserved the early and authentic spirituality of apostolic times for the later generations. The attachment to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church guarantees a continuity of the apostolic tradition and guides its organic growth. Hence a detailed investigation is done on the selected ancient Syriac sources *Acts of Judas Thomas*, *Didascalia Apostolorum* and *Liber Graduum*; early Syriac Fathers Aphrahat and Ephrem; and liturgical commentators Theodore of Mopsuestia and Narsai to understand how they carried forward and handed over the different elements of the apostolic Christ-experience. The investigation shows that they were diligent to carry forward and hand over the different elements of the apostolic Christ-experience. Therefore it is fitting to re-read the Fathers to rediscover the continuity with the apostolic times.

4. The fourth chapter is an attempt to analyze the liturgical text of *The Order of Raza* to locate how it lively keeps possession of and celebrates the apostolic Christ-experience preserved in the first

apostolic proclamations. The *kerygma* enshrined in the Scripture and the teaching of the Fathers of the Church permeates the Holy *Qurbana*. Hence a detailed discussion is done on how the common structure/elements of the first apostolic proclamations is followed, developed and celebrated in the Holy *Qurbana*. The analysis of the text is done in consultation with the teachings of the Fathers like Aphrahat and Ephrem, liturgical commentators like Theodore of Mopsuestia, Narsai, Gabriel Qatraya, J. Bar Zo'bi, Anonymous Author (George of Arbel), Abdisho, and Timothy II, and the Eastern liturgical scholars.

There is an intimate relation between the first apostolic proclamations and the SMQ. Each part of the Holy *Qurbana* explicates one or the other aspect of the mystery of salvation. The East Syriac liturgical commentators Theodore of Mopsuestia, Narsai, and Gabriel Qatraya played a vital role in introducing these themes in the Holy *Qurbana*. The whole mystery of Christ is made present, commemorated and lived in the Holy *Qurbana* through the signs and symbols. This survey confirms the profound and intense relation between the first apostolic proclamations and SMQ that preserves the apostolic *kerygma*. The distinctive style of structuring the Holy *Qurbana* according to the scheme of the history of salvation reflects the *kerygmatic* structure.

5. The fifth chapter is a textual study of the Holy *Qurbana* to understand how it preserves and promotes the Christ-experience of apostle Thomas. It explores the richness of the unique Thomistic Christ-experience housed in the Holy *Qurbana*, and seeks to know the patrimony that apostle Thomas bequeathed to the St Thomas Christians. In this survey to discover the salient features of the Christ-experience of apostle Thomas in the Holy *Qurbana*, the *Order of Raza* has been approached in three different but complementary aspects of his faith proclamation, Jesus: The Source and Giver of Life (Jn 11:16); Jesus: The Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6); and Jesus: The Lord and God (Jn 20:28). The support of life-giving mission of Jesus and the fundamental baptismal experience (Rom 6:1-14) of dying and rising with Christ are conspicuous in the hymns and prayers under the aspects of dying to give life, following the Lord with courage, walking on the way of resurrection, walking in the light and dedication as key to salvation (*Karma Marga*).

The teaching that Jesus is the way to the Father with its immensity and intensity is discernible in the trinitarian emphasis, affirmation of

Jesus as the way, truth, life and hope, and the path of knowledge (*Jnana Marga*) the Holy *Qurbana* employs. The third feature of the Thomistic Christ-experience reflects well in the Holy *Qurbana* at least in its emphasis on Christocentrism, resurrection, true and committed faith, missionary zeal and the way of devotion (*Bhakti Marga*) reflected in love and reverence towards the Lord. Holy *Qurbana* retains a constant and consistent style of invoking the Lordship of Jesus by calling him “Lord and God” as in the confession formula of apostle Thomas. The survey reiterates the truth that Holy *Qurbana* is the occasion *par excellence* to encounter the risen Lord God who is the source and giver of life, the way, the truth and the life.

3. Conclusion

Liturgy as a living reality that carries the apostolic *kerygma* has to grow and get renewed from time to time but this growth and renewal shall be organic. The law of organic growth is the law of liturgy and it does not compromise the basic characteristics of the liturgy. Liturgy ought to be an uninterrupted apostolic tradition. The liturgical reform shall impart an experience and understanding of the apostolic *kerygma*. The principle of organic growth is an underlying principle to determine the authenticity of the renewal of the liturgy. The interactions and interventions shall not hamper the organic growth of a particular liturgical tradition but enrich and enhance it.

The principle of organic growth confirms the credibility of the inculturation. It demands great wisdom and discernment, and constant monitoring to spur on the process of organic growth of the apostolic Christ-experience preserved in the liturgy. The development might take place taking into consideration of the socio-cultural contexts of the mission. At the same time it requires the safeguarding of the identity and integrity of the liturgical tradition. The Holy *Qurbana* reiterates that the community is gathered by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and therefore openness to “the Helper” is needed for an effective life-witness in mission.

Only a liturgical renewal and growth coherent and concurring with the sound apostolic tradition of the Church is genuine and authentic; lest it might become only an interpolation or mutilation. Therefore the organic growth of the liturgical tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church is possible only if the roots of this tradition is searched and protected. It enjoins a scholarly research, attachment to the teachings of the Fathers of the Church that guarantees a continuity of the apostolic tradition, courage to accept the reformation and approved

changes, and a flawless liturgical catechesis that affirms the economy of salvation culminated in the Christ event as the content of the liturgy.

In sum, the continuity with the roots in the past might be a touchstone to measure the growth; lest the whimsical adherence to the present might lead to the drying up of the roots. Renewal consists in return to the roots and revitalizing them according to the pastoral needs of the time and contexts. Constant contact with the roots facilitates and accelerates the growth, for growth is possible when the roots are protected. Summing up, it may be observed that the organic growth is an undeviated, gradual, spontaneous and natural passage or progress from the “roots to the wings.”