

SYNERGY, SYNAXIS, AND SYMPHONY OF SYNODALITY IN THE EASTERN LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

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Abstract

This essay explores the deep connection between Synodality and the Eastern Liturgical celebration of the Syro-Malabar Church, focusing on how these elements reflect and nurture a synodal Church. The Syro-Malabar Church, rooted in the traditions of the Thomas Christians, embodies the principles of Synodality – participation, communion, and mission – through its liturgical celebrations, which are both a reflection and a training ground for a pilgrim Church guided by the Holy Spirit. The essay highlights how all Church members, ministers and participants share in the everyday journey of Christian life, which is marked by saintliness and sinfulness and how they rely on God’s mercy for salvation. In the concluding section, the essay introduces concepts from the Indian cultural context – *yagam* (sacrifice or offering), *yogam* (union or organization), and *yugam* (age or era) – to further illuminate the inner dynamics of Synodality as expressed through the Syro-Malabar liturgical celebrations. These concepts help to appreciate how

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the Church, through its liturgy, not only celebrates but also lives out the principles of Synodality in a way that resonates deeply with India's cultural and spiritual heritage.

Key Words: Synodality, Syro Malabar Liturgy, Synergy, Synaxis, Symphony, *Yagam, Yogam, Yugam*

The Eastern Liturgical gathering with a particular reference to the Syro Malabar Church of the Thomas Christians is symbolic of the structure, style and substance of a synodal Church, where the celebration of the Mystery of Christ and the history of salvation not only transmits the characteristic features of Synodality but also trains the hierarchy and the faithful on the path of a pilgrim Church, where people share the lessons of participation, communion, and mission, making the Mystical Body of Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit in an ambience of Christian identity, humility, fidelity, liberty, unity, and diversity.

The Synod of Bishops is the constitutive ecclesiastical structure of the Eastern Churches, including that of the Eastern Catholic Churches, for governance reflecting their Liturgy, Theology and Spirituality through a process of dialogue, discernment, and decision on all ecclesial matters. At the heart of Synodality is the collegiality and communion of the ministry of bishops under the head and father of the Church. Synodality is the heartbeat of the Eastern Church, though there is room for improvement.

The *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (CCEO) has a detailed treatise on the Synod of Bishops, beginning with canons 102 -113.¹ Besides the Synod of Bishops, there is a structure of the Permanent Synod CCEO Can 115 to provide timely support to the Patriarch or Major Archbishop in matters essential and urgent. Another synodal structure in the Eastern Churches is the Synodal Assembly CCEO Can 140-145, consisting of the representatives of clergy, religious and laity of the Church to deal "with matters of major importance especially to harmonise appropriately the forms and programs of the apostolate and ecclesiastical discipline with the current circumstance of the time" (Can 140). Given the canonical protection, Synodality in Eastern Churches is constitutive of its collegiality and communion of the Mystical Body of Christ members.

¹ John Paul II, *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See, Vatican City, Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, No 154, Kottayam, 1992.

Celebrations, in general, and the Liturgical celebrations of the Church, in particular, portray the panorama of walking together, worshipping together, and working together, the dynamics traceable cross-culturally. Any celebration pulls people together at a place and at an appointed time to commemorate a story in a particular manner through different means available to the community with a clear purpose.

Synodality is a reality founded on the relationality of the members to the one body – the Mystical Body of Christ – and directed to praise and thanksgiving because of the abiding and abounding mercy of the Most Holy Trinity.

The Working Document for the Continental Phase reiterates the significance of the Eucharistic Liturgy emphatically:

The Liturgy, especially the Eucharistic Liturgy, is the source and summit of the Christian life, which brings the community together, making communion tangible, enables the exercise of participation and nourishes the momentum toward mission with the Word and the Sacraments.²

Furthermore, the document elaborates on the resourcefulness of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the realisation of a synodal Church:

The Eucharist is already, in itself, the ‘source and summit’ of the Church’s synodal dynamism. “Liturgical celebration and prayer are experienced as a force for uniting and mobilising human and spiritual energies. The prevailing opinion is that prayer fosters the joy of life and a purpose of community because it is seen as a point of reference, a place of strength and an oasis of peace.”³

The report of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops succinctly articulates the inner dynamics and the transformative effect of the Eucharistic Liturgy:

The celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sunday, is the first and fundamental form by which the Holy People of God gather and meet... In the Eucharist, we celebrate a mystery of grace which is given to us. By calling us to participate in his Body and Blood, the Lord forms us into one body, with one another and with Himself. Beginning with Paul’s use of the term *koinonia* (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17), the Christian tradition has treasured the

² Working Document for the Continental Stage. “*Enlarge the space of your tent*” (Is 54:2). General Secretariat of the Synod Via della Conciliazione, 34 - Vatican City October 2022 (= “*Enlarge the space of your tent*” Is 54:2, 2022) [<https://www.synod.va/en.html>], § 11, 5.

³ “*Enlarge the space of your tent*” Is 54:2, 2022, § 11, 5.

word “communion” to indicate, at the same time, full participation in the Eucharist and the nature of relationships among the faithful and among the Churches... This is why communion, which springs from the Eucharist and is celebrated in it, configures and directs the paths of Synodality.⁴

Often, though we underline the importance and significance of the Eucharistic Liturgy in principle, when it comes to the celebration, there is a general disinterest, disappointment, and distortion of the Liturgy for transforming life and mission. The liturgical celebration is the window to the Synodal Church, delineating the essential dispositions for a synodal walk and attending to the details of the celebration of life in Christ. Hence, a discovery of the liturgical celebrations, especially of the Eastern Church and the Syro Malabar Church, is in order here.

In what follows, I illustrate the excellent arrangement of the nature, structure, and substance of Synodality celebrated in the celebration of the Qurbana, the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Syro Malabar Qurbana, under three subtitles: 1) Synergy of Synodality, 2) Synaxis of Synodality, and 3) Symphony of Synodality, the epiphany of walking together with the whole world, including other Churches.

1. Synergy of Synodality:

“As One Body, May We Properly Please You”

Synergy means “working together” or “cooperation.” The liturgical celebration of the Qurbana is an epiphany of divine initiative and human cooperation to make the Assembly of one pleasing Body in the Lord. Synergy of Synodality is an ongoing exercise between God’s grace and human effort.

The opening of the Liturgy of the Qurbana is unique, and it begins with a dialogical note that remembers the command of the Lord, emphasising and encouraging Synodality. Following the ancient theatre tradition of India, the celebrant seeks the approval of the Congregation, “Let us begin the Qurbana as the Lord has commanded us,” to which the Assembly responds, “It is indeed in accordance with the command of Christ that we offer this Qurbana” (Qurbana, 13). The gathering in the memory of Christ starts with the Paschal Mystery. It goes up to celebrate the Mystical Body of Christ, unfolding the mystery

⁴ Segretaria Generalis Synodi, *A Synodal Church in Mission. Synthesis Report, Part I: The Face of the Church*, 3. Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation, e., XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, First Session, October 4-29, 2023, Vatican City, 2023.

of Incarnation to the second of the Lord in the liturgical time-space. This initial remark sets the scene of salvation alive and active for the Assembly to assimilate intimately, showcasing the mutual relationships, the necessity of reconciliation, and rejoicing.

The following prayer of the Eucharistic Liturgy sets the stage for a synodal way of being the Church:

Merciful God! Bless us. Grant that all of us, as one body, may properly please you throughout our lives by works of justice that reconcile us with you. Make us worthy to offer you never-ending praise, homage, thanksgiving, and adoration. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord of all, forever.⁵

Syro-Malabar Qurbana celebrates the organic unity of the members of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. The prayer discloses the truth of unity and solidarity when the celebrant prays, "All of us, as one Body." When the Assembly acknowledges and announces the fundamental experiences of one body, it alludes to two crucial factors: one, God's mercy, which makes all the members one body, and two, the work of justice, which reconciles all in the Lord. Mercy and justice are prerequisites for Christians to live and move as one Body of Christ. Being unworthy, the celebrant beseeches for divine mercy on the Assembly. Readily, God bestows his grace and mercy, for God is mercy.

An equally important component of becoming one body is the work of justice. Among the people of God, justice should prevail, meaning people should put on God, who is just and kind. Another word for God's justice is mercy. In forming the Body of Christ, the community members must follow the path of mercy and justice as the children of God. The members are taking upon themselves the great privilege and challenge to live a life of mercy and justice, the hallmarks of Christians. Jesus invites every believer - every member of the Mystical Body - to be merciful as the merciful heavenly father.

Another essential ingredient in shaping the members, as outlined in the above liturgical prayer, is the act of reconciliation. Jesus inaugurated his public ministry, inviting his hearers to repentance or reconciliation as the basic disposition to belong to the Kingdom of God. He reiterated the necessity of reconciliation in the Sermon on the Mount, "if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remembers

⁵ Syro Malabar Bishop's Synod, *The Order of the Syro Malabar Qurbana*, Commission for Liturgy, Kakkanaad: Mount St Thomas, 2005, 39.

that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5:23-24). In the celebration of the Qurbana – the offering – the prayer reminds the Assembly about the demands. When Christians forgive and pray for their enemies, they become worthy of their identity. Following Christ means following the path of reconciliation. Reconciliation helps the worshippers become one body, empowering all to walk together, worship, and work together, showcasing Synodality in charity.

The prayer also has a meaningful clause that should not miss our attention, as we are in the context of celebrating the Qurbana or offering. We pray, "May properly please you throughout our lives." The Liturgy that the Assembly celebrates is to please the Lord. A pleasing sacrifice presupposes three elements in the prayer – mercy of God, works of justice by people, and reconciliation. These characteristics are essential to being a synodal Church, in the absence of which there is marching together in the Lord for the world towards the glory of God.

In this manner, the above prayer is a solid and candid celebration of the Synodality before, during, and after the Liturgy. The mercy of God enables the Assembly to be a synodal Church, the work of justice works towards shaping the community move in unison, and because of the merit of these two – mercy of God and the works of justice of people – the members of the body – actualise reconciliation and enlighten them to follow the Lord joyfully and willingly.

Having been reconciled by the mercy of God and following the path of justice, the Congregation shifts the focus of the prayer, "Make us worthy to offer you never-ending praise, homage, thanksgiving, and adoration." At this stage of the prayer, the celebration points to the praise, homage, thanksgiving, and adoration of the Lord, a spontaneous outpouring of the heart of the Assembly. Being made worthy of the children of God or the disciples of Christ through the mercy of God by the works of justice, they begin rejoicing in the community.

Reconciliation leads the Congregation to rejoice in the celebration of the Qurbana, a requirement for a synodal Church. Regardless of their ministerial services in the Qurbana, the above prayer is a window to the fundamental dispositions of the celebrating Congregation – reconciliation and rejoicing – which are requirements

for living Synodality in every arena of life. Varghese Pathikulangara reiterates the nature of Christians at the Liturgy. He says, "Liturgy is the celebration of what we are, a celebration of our own Christian existence."⁶ Christian existence is one of saintliness and sinfulness; we are saints and yet sinners. The consciousness of Christian existence will help the members to celebrate their life in Christ with identity coupled with humility, a *sine qua non* for a synodal Church. All members of the Mystical Body of Christ – the one Body in celebration of the Qurbana – experience the necessity for reconciliation and consequent rejoicing, which pave the way for singing and dancing with the Lord in the world towards full flourishing.

The closing phrase of the prayer, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord of all, forever," indicates the source and summit of Christian Synodality. The company and communion of the most Blessed Trinity draws the Congregation to walk, worship, and work together. Being attentive to the voice and seeing the face of God, the Father in the Son, through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit make our journey dialogical, discerning, and devotional at every moment of life, the animating divine Spirit permeating the centre and the periphery. The journey of the Eastern Churches, as illustrated in the prayer, is walking with, worshipping of, and working because of the Holy Trinity. In the proper sense, the Holy Trinity inspires and motivates the Mystical Body of Christ for their pilgrimage. Besides, the Holy Trinity is the prototype of Synodality, the style of eternal dialogue, discernment, and dedication to the culture of identity, diversity, and inclusivity. Hence, every time the Eastern Church celebrates the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, an essential characteristic of the prayer formula proper to the Eastern and Oriental Churches, they remember and rejoice in the joint walk necessary for Synodality after the pattern of the Trinity.

When celebrated knowingly and willingly, the Sacred Liturgy – the source, centre, and summit of the Christian life – can shape the style and adequate disposition of the synodal Church, underlining the cosmic and eschatological life.

We have praised, honoured, and ministered to Our Lord Jesus Christ through these glorious, sacred, life-giving, and divine mysteries. May He make us worthy of the glory of His kingdom, eternal happiness with His holy angels, and joy in His divine presence.

⁶ Varghese Pathikulangara, *Qurbana. The Eucharistic Celebration of the Chaldeo-Indian Church*, Kottayam: Denha Services, 1998, 5.

May He enable us to stand at His right hand in heavenly Jerusalem. May He bestow His mercy and blessings on us, on the whole world, and on the holy Church and all her children. Now, always, and forever.⁷

The above prayer picturesquely presents the mindscape of the Assembly walking with the whole world, the holy Church, and all her children, the epitome of a synodal Church. Being made worthy by the mercy of God, the Congregation lifts its heart to join in God's glory, eternal happiness with the angels, and joy in the divine presence. The Liturgy of the Qurbana takes us beyond the inner circle of the Church, expanding our journey together with the whole world; this is the future of the Synod of Synodality in the Church, for she is the sacrament of salvation.

2. Synaxis of Synodality:

“Let Us Remember All”

Synaxis refers to the coming together of the faithful for worship, prayer, or other ecclesiastical purposes. Synaxis also means Assembly to deliberate, discern, and decide on essential matters. It emphasises the importance of communion and unity within the Church. The celebration of the Liturgy of the Qurbana showcases the whole Mystical Body of Christ through remembering, reconciling, and rejoicing.

The Liturgy is the icon of the Synodal Church, and the celebration of the Qurbana manifests the Mystical Body of Christ. Being the wellspring of theology, the Eucharist makes the Church and vice versa. A bird's eye view of the synodal structure of the Church is available in the prayer of the Deacon, which reiterates an all-inclusive living memory of the members of the Church constituting the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church:

Let us pray for the memory of our fathers, the patriarchs and the bishops and all priests, deacons, young men and virgins, our parents, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Let us remember all the rulers who love Christ and are faithful to Him and all who have departed from this world in true faith.

Let us remember all the prophets, apostles, martyrs and confessors. May God, who will crown them at the resurrection of the dead, grant us hope, life, and a share with them in the heavenly inheritance.

⁷ *The Order of the Syro Malabar Qurbana, 77.*

May this Qurbana be graciously accepted and sanctified by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Through the grace of Christ, may this sacrifice obtain our help, salvation, and life everlasting in the kingdom of heaven.⁸

The prayer recollects all the Church's members, living and dead, without sidle-lining or eliminating anyone. A panoramic picture of the Church is visible here, beginning with "our fathers, the patriarchs and the bishops and all priests, deacons, young men and virgins, our parents, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters." An all-inclusive and orderly remembrance of all the members of the Church, though ministries are varied, ensures the body's well-being and function. Saint Paul illustrates this phenomenon wondrously through his allegory of one body and different members, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body" (1 Cor 12:12). Paul reiterates the unity and diversity of the Mystical Body by saying, "there are many parts, but one body" (1 Cor 12:20). Furthermore, he reiterates the importance of all the members, regardless of small and weak appearance, "those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour" (1 Cor 12: 22-23). In the announcement of Deacon, the Congregation gets a concise and comprehensive sense of the Mystical Body of Christ. All the faithful assembled for the celebration experience this oneness in Christ, though the mission or function of the members varies. Paul's directive holds good to the ecclesial nature. He writes, "There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other" (1 Cor 12:25). Regardless of the ministry one has in the Church, all are one in Christ, and all are equal in dignity.

This ecclesial unity is experiential when the Deacon makes the following supplication on behalf of the Congregation. "May God, who will crown them at the resurrection of the dead, grant us hope and life and share with them in the heavenly inheritance." The deep-seated desire and dedication of the Mystical Body for hope and life along with them in the heavenly inheritance. Illustrating the beauty of the pilgrim Church - dead and living - the Congregation walks forward and upward to share in the same divine bliss. A mingling of the dead and the living takes place in this synodal journey, always mindful of the oneness of the Mystical Body of Christ. The prayer represents the union and communion of the members of the Church in the Lord, and

⁸ *The Order of the Syro Malabar Qurbana*, 44-45.

all the members walk towards heavenly bliss, showcasing the eschatological reality in store for all. The hope and life of the pilgrim Church keep the members united and focused on their journey. As with any celebration, the prayer celebrates the past, present, and future of the faithful in Christ; it brings forward the members who have gone before them in Christ and brings the future glory backwards in the present liturgical Assembly, again emphasising being a synodal Church. There is always a need for connectivity to sustain the style and substance of Synodality in the Church, which the liturgical celebration amply provides. The prayer presents an attractive scene of the Mystical Body of Christ and retells the story of being one with all members, living and dead, which offsets the ecclesial truth. Through an immersive learning process, a powerful and moving narrative of journeying together is told repeatedly through the liturgical celebration, which stays with the celebrants. Memory means celebrating life and communion.

The following section of the prayer, “May this Qurbana be graciously accepted and sanctified by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit,” is vital to set for a synodal journey. Two phrases in this section deserve special attention. One, “sanctified by the Word of God,” and two, sanctified by “the Holy Spirit.” Sanctity is essential for this joint journey towards the divine heavenly reality. Otherwise, the pilgrims cannot see the path to walk and the goal towards which they progress. Purification is a prerequisite for a unified vision of the faithful, taking them to conviction and confidence to make the journey, however troublesome it may be. Dialogue on the way, the fundamental disposition of being a synodal Church, presupposes purity of heart and clarity of purpose.

Being dialogical, the Liturgy makes an implicit statement about accepting the Qurbana: the sanctification of the Congregation by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. As the Bride of Christ, the Church has to undergo the purification process. Following the Word of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit make the heart clean and pure in following the Lord our God. Through the participation of the Liturgy, the Assembly can avail itself of the opportunity to be acceptable and holy before the Lord. Being a synodal Church means all the members of diverse ministries in the Mystical Body of Christ be guided and directed by the Gospel of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Gospel enlightens the people of God to walk the way of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit accompanies the faithful in discerning the will of God and deciding for it. There is a recount of purification by the Word of God elsewhere.

Before the proclamation of the Gospel, the celebrant prays earnestly, “Christ Our Lord! Enlighten us in Your laws, inflame our minds with Your

knowledge, and sanctify our souls with Your truth so that we may be faithful to Your words and obedient to Your commandments.”⁹ The celebration of the Liturgy makes this process of sanctifying the Mystical Body of Christ from top to bottom. The purification process is a sine qua non for all; all must undergo this process without exception, for all are sinners and saints simultaneously. We are unworthy, but the Lord’s grace and mercy make us worthy of the Holy Mysteries, the undercurrent of the Liturgical celebration. A synodal journey is possible only on the backdrop of a humble and joint search for truth and follow its splendour.

Enlightened by the Word of God and accompanied by the Holy Spirit is an excellent assurance that our journey is synodal, having the focus throughout the joint walk to the heavenly bliss. Reading the Sacred Scriptures and understanding the signs of the time in the light of the Holy Spirit will guarantee the progress of our walking together, being grateful, joyful, and ever humble.

The Deacon concludes the prayer, “Through the grace of Christ, may this sacrifice obtain our help, salvation, and life everlasting in the kingdom of heaven.” This line of prayer indicates the orientation of the synodal journey and the assistance required on the way. Beyond any doubt, the Assembly of the Liturgy states that it travels towards “life everlasting in the kingdom of heaven”. As the Church, the members are on their journey to everlasting life. While the Congregation celebrates, it has a foretaste of the future joy and glory of eternal life. All the same, the faithful seek the grace and help of the Lord to have the merits of the Qurbana and make their everyday life offering focused and worthy of the kingdom of heaven unfolding.

In this manner, the prayer of the Deacon before the *Anaphora* discloses the beauty and grandeur of the worshipping community making a synodal journey towards everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven, an epiphany of the Mystical Body of Christ well-knit among the members and purified and strengthened by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, constant companions fostering their journey in and after the Liturgy.

Remembrance does the magic of bringing or uniting all the members of the Body of Christ; all belong to the same body of which Christ is its head. Walking together presupposes the remembrance of their belongingness. When the command of the Lord to “Do this in remembrance of me” is carried out earnestly and seriously, the joy and beauty of the Church become credible and tangible.

⁹ *The Order of the Syro Malabar Qurbana*, 33.

The celebration of the Qurbana is the window to the Mystical Body of Christ; it is an epiphany of the nature and structure of the Church. After the third *g'hanta* prayer, we have the intercessory prayer led by the celebrant, which sketches the communion's details, unique to the Eastern Church:

For the head and Father of the universal Church, Pope (Name), for the Major Archbishop (Name), the father and head of our Church, for Archbishop (Name), for Bishop (Name), the father and head of our diocese, for all bishops, for the entire holy Catholic Church, for priests, religious women and men, lay missionaries, rulers and all those who are in authority, Lord, Mighty God, receive this Qurbana.

For the honour and glory of all the prophets, disciples, martyrs, confessors, and all the just and holy people who have found favour in Your presence, Lord, receive this Qurbana.

For all those who suffer and are in distress, the poor and the oppressed, the sick and the afflicted, for all those who have departed from us in Your name, for this Your people who await Your mercy with great hope, and for me, Your unworthy servant, Lord, receive this Qurbana."¹⁰

It is a bird's eye view of the nature and structure of the Church. It unveils the intimate fellowship of the People of God and illustrates the Church's ministries. Though ministries are varied, all are members of the Body of Christ, and everybody is equal in dignity.

The intercessory prayer presents the One Holy Catholic Church with all its natural unity, maintaining the particularity and integrity on the one hand and, on the other, the Church's hierarchical structure without any division or confusion. Paying close attention to the first segment of the prayer we see the order of the Church, beginning with the Pope, Major Archbishop, Archbishop, Bishop, Bishops, the entire holy Church, priests, religious, and rulers. A picture of the Church's close-knit organic and hierarchical structure emerges here. Leaving no doubt behind, the Eastern Catholic Church acknowledges and celebrates the memory of the Pope, the head and Father of the universal Church. This bond clarifies that the Catholic Church is a communion of Churches, stating that every Church constitutes the universal Church.

By remembering and praying for the Pope, the head and Father of the universal Church, the Assembly proclaims the union and communion existing among the particular *sui iuris* Churches. Once the

¹⁰ *The Order of the Syro Malabar Qurbana*, 55-56.

universal communion is established, the prayer takes the name of the Major Archbishop (when the Church obtains the status of Patriarchate, then the name of the Patriarch), who is the head and Father of the particular Eastern Church. Being the head and Father of the Church, the Major Archbishop serves the Church in collaboration with the Archbishops. So, the community pleases to include the name of the Archbishop of the eparchial Church. After that, the name of the eparchial bishop, the father and head of the Church, occupies the order of the prayer. Then comes the mention of the holy Catholic Church, which includes priests, religious, lay missionaries, rulers and all those in authority.

This prayer echoes the inner communion existing within the Church's hierarchical structure and the diocese's interconnectivity with the universal Church through the Archbishop and the Major Archbishop. In this prayer scheme, we glimpse the whole Church and constituent components of the universal Church, recognising and respecting the communion of Churches.

In the next section of the intercessory prayer, the celebration recalls the memory of the members who had gone before the present community. The liturgical Assembly, which is in continuation of the Church in history, in the presence of the Lord, is grateful for the witnessing of the holy women and men who followed the way of the Lord and, therefore, they "honour and glory of all the prophets, disciples, martyrs, confessors, and all the just and holy people who have found favour." The attitude embedded in the ecclesial community is praiseworthy, for only eucharistic people will enjoy belonging to the Mystical Body of Christ. As we have seen earlier, the Assembly experiences and expresses its joy in remembering all who have gone before them, showcasing the spiritual and mystical bond they treasure with them in the celebration of the Qurbana. Being a synodal Church means being a people of grateful memory.

The celebration of the Qurbana trains the celebrants in the school, which is known for its Eucharistic attitudes and approaches. Recalling the memory of the prophets, disciples, martyrs, confessors, and all the just and holy people, they not only relive the great examples of holy women and men of the Church but are also inspired to follow the path of the Lord courageously and enthusiastically. People remembering the past shapes their present and future, which is the key to the inner dynamics of any celebration. They are happy to belong to and become part of the legacy of the missionary disciples of Christ.

In the final section of the prayer, the Congregation remembers all the living and struggling people of the Mystical Body. It brings all of them to the mercy and grace of God for a graceful and merciful presence of the Lord. The Assembly places all people of God with different life situations and struggles - the Mystical Body of Christ - together with the Paschal Mystery of Christ, giving meaning and purpose to carry their crosses and move forward with the luminous eyes of faith. The Qurbana, true to its meaning, takes everything to God in offering. Therefore, the liturgical celebration lists people of all conditions, "For all those who suffer and are in distress, the poor and the oppressed, the sick and the afflicted, for all those who have departed from us in Your name." It reflects the prayer of hope and mercy. There is no mention of any special favour other than the divine mercy and hope that faith guarantees. It sets the Christian pattern of prayer, which is to take everything to God in prayer. Leave the rest to the mercy of God. And accept the will of God, whatever it may be, in the providence of God. In this manner, liturgical celebration emerges as the ideal and model school for Christians. Through the medium of celebration - the participatory involvement and immersing - the faithful take the lessons for their life journey - the synodal journey - even after the Liturgy. Synodal Church faces several issues on her daily journey. The liturgical celebration of the Qurbana equips and enables them to cope with the challenges and changes on a daily basis.

Last but not least, the celebrant takes the people physically present in the celebration, the people and the priest who presides. The priest concludes the intercessory prayer by saying, "Your people who await Your mercy with great hope, and for me, Your unworthy servant, Lord, receive this Qurbana." There are a few features we notice in this section of the prayer. Firstly, the priest and the people form part and parcel of the same Body of Christ, considered one, travelling in the same vessel to the shore of the kingdom of God. Secondly, the presider and the people await God's mercy and hope. So, they make one, and their aspirations are the same. Thirdly, there is excellent admittance of the priest as an "unworthy servant." This self-understanding of the priest - whether the Pope, Patriarch, Major Archbishop, Archbishop, Bishop, or Priest - is a saving clause and a lifegiving thrust for a synodal Church. Fourthly, the chief celebrant finds his place in the last, though he stands in front and first in the Assembly. The words of the Lord come true: the first among you must be the last. Such an order of the priest in the celebration sets a beautiful image of servant leadership in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the servant leader for the emulation of all.

As you celebrate, so you live. Suppose such a fitting exercise, imitating the Lord who washes his disciple's feet, is carried out faithfully and freely in the liturgical celebration; there will be no divide between the clergy and the faithful, which unfortunately is not the case today. The liturgical celebration – the school of Christian life – displays and trains all the celebrants, including the priest and people, in the fundamental lessons of charity and humility, the sure way to holiness. All celebrants – ministerial priests and royal priests – require God's mercy and grace to be worthy of celebrating the Mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Such an attitude to the ministry can help bridge the current gulf between the ministerial priesthood and the royal priesthood, a level player in synodal participation, communion, and mission, without weakening the role and rank of the minister of the sacrament in the Mystical Body of Christ.

All members of the Church, including the hierarchy, need the mercy of the Lord, for none is worthy of the celebration. Many times, this idea is further orchestrated in liturgical celebrations. For instance, the celebrant prays:

Lord, O God! Deal with Your people and me, Your unworthy servant in accordance with Your mercy and the abundance of Your goodness. Do not judge me in accordance with my sins and transgressions. In Your mercy, may we be made worthy, through the Holy Body, that we receive with true faith, for the remission of debts and forgiveness of sins (Qurbana, 56).

All share the same holiness, and the growth of holiness depends on the grace and mercy of God. Minister and ministered require the mercy of the Lord. Therefore, there is no distance between the clergy and the faithful. All share the same holiness, irrespective of their ministry, which sets the scene for better participation, communion, and the mission of the Church. The closer one comes to the holiness of God, the more unworthy one realises. The minister vouches for this experience in the prayer. When the liturgical celebration fosters the fundamental equality and dignity of every Christian, whatever one's ministry assists the faithful to brave the synodal walking, working, and worshipping. Humility is the pathway to Synodality and the way to holiness.

All the ministers and the people of God are in the same boat, sharing saintliness and sinfulness. Though ministries are varied in the Church, all share the exact nature of the children of God. All require God's mercy for divine *darshan*. By the grace of God, all are granted holy communion. The liturgical celebration is a blueprint for being a

synodal Church, and we also need to work on the ideals after the Liturgy. It is like the promise made by the couple in the sacrament of matrimony and lived out in the actual setting for its fulfilment.

3. Symphony of Synodality:

“The Whole World and the Holy Church”

Symphony refers to harmonious relationships and inclusive cooperation of all on the scene. The litmus test of Synodality is the symphony, which includes the whole world and all people. In the Liturgy of the Qurbana, we experience a beautiful unfolding of the principle of harmony and symphony, by which the Congregation enlarges the space of its tent towards a broader Synodality, going beyond the circles of the Church. Synodality gets a more comprehensive perspective in the celebration of the Qurbana, inviting the celebrants to walk together with other Churches and in harmony with the whole world.

The whole universe is a gift of God and radiates God’s love and life. All people are God’s children, created in the image of God with equal human dignity. God created all things through Christ, and the world finds salvation through Christ. God sent his only begotten Son so that the world has eternal life. The Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, as the sacrament of salvation, has a mission to walk with all people and the world. Synodal Church, therefore, has a mission to enter into a union and communion with the earth, our common home, by preaching the Gospel to the whole creation. And this is the ethos of the Liturgy, the epitome of Christian revelation. The liturgical celebration of the Qurbana opens the horizons for engaging with other Churches and the world.

The Qurbana’s sealing prayer epitomises the Synodality’s broader spectrum wonderfully. Concluding the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist, having praised and thanked the Lord God and expressed the future glory of having joy in the divine presence, the priest imparts his blessings on the Congregation, saying, “May He bestow His mercy and blessing on us, on the whole world, and the holy Church and all her children. Now, always, and forever.”¹¹ What is unique in this blessing formula is that the priest implores the divine mercy and blessing on the whole world, meaning everything in the world is an epiphany of the Lord of all.

¹¹ *The Order of the Syro Malabar Qurbana*, 77.

In continuation of the missionary mandate of Jesus Christ imparted on his disciples, the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, asks her children to go and preach the Gospel to the whole creation, encouraging the Congregation to be a merciful and blissful presence on earth. If our journey has to align with the sense of Synodality, walking with creation, God's first love and the source of human sustenance on earth, is paramount. The Church and the cosmos have to walk together as partners, taking care of the elements of the universe and everything in it.

In tune with a broader perspective on Synodality in the Church, the liturgical celebration begins with the angelic hymn at the Nativity of Jesus, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and hope to human beings."¹² At the outset of the celebration of the Qurbana, the Assembly knowingly and willingly rolls out the message of Incarnation and the need to take the Body of God, the cosmos, seriously. Acknowledging the triadic realities - God, creation, and human beings - is essential for the worshipping community to emphasise the significance of the world in the life of people and their salvation. There is no salvation in isolation, but in relation to the triadic realities.

Synodality has an ecumenical character. The liturgical celebration incorporates the ecumenical Synodality, "For peace, unity, and stability of the whole world and all the Churches, we pray to You."¹³ Interrelationship with the Churches is a project of the Liturgy. Being one in Christ, all Christians walk together, discovering peace, unity, and stability. Reflection on the prayer directs us to the prayer of Jesus for unity. "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (Jn 17:20-21). This unity is not achieved by eliminating diversity but rather by confirming and consolidating the identity of each Church, founded on the apostolic faith experience. At the time of the solemn sanctuary entrance, the celebrant prays for "the reconciliation of the whole world, and for peace and tranquillity of all the Churches."¹⁴ Unity, peace, stability, and tranquillity are characteristic features of the Churches in Christ. Thank God, there is a growing understanding and collaboration among the Christian Churches today. Ecumenical Synodality will strengthen and nurture each Church and all the Churches, showcasing the unity, identity, and solidarity of the Churches.

¹² *The Order of the Syro Malabar Qurbana*, 13.

¹³ *The Order of the Syro Malabar Qurbana*, 35.

¹⁴ *The Order of the Syro Malabar Qurbana*, 45.

Conclusion

Liturgy as the Synthesis of *Yagam*, *Yogam*, and *Yugam* of a Synodal Church

The concept of Synodality is nothing new in the history of the Church, especially in the ecclesial life of Eastern Churches. Moreover, Synodality is the *mantra* of any organism's sustainable development and progress, including the vitality and vibrancy of the ecclesial community. The contemporary catchwords of Synodality – participation-communion-mission – are paramount in its actualisation.

Eastern Church, through her liturgical celebration of the Qurbana, treasured the concept and content of a synodal Church, being faithful to its participatory nature, communion of the Mystical Body of Christ, and promoting missionary zeal and enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of Synodality needs contextual interpretation and application. Synodality was in praxis in the Church, especially in the Eastern Church and the liturgical celebration of the Qurbana vouches for its nature and structure. Over the centuries, due to the forgetfulness of the members of the Church or the oppression of the ancient and important ecclesial structures due to historical vicissitudes, the truth of the Synodality might have been covered. Therefore, its genuine structure is to be reinvented and reinstated.

The Liturgy of the Qurbana is an epiphany of the synergy, synaxis, and symphony of Synodality, for it is a celebration showcasing the real and the ideal walking, working, and worshipping God the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit towards the glorification of God and the welfare of the world through a process of participation, communion, and mission.

Reflecting on the celebration of Synodality in the Liturgy of the Qurbana in the Indian ethos prompts me to indicate three simple terms of resourcefulness for further reflection and embellishment. Inspired by the liturgical celebration of the Qurbana, I propose three concepts: *yagam*, *yogam*, and *yugam*.

Yagam means sacrifice or offering. It is the equivalent of Qurbana. Holding *yagam* has been an age-old practice in India; though it may have different connotations, fundamentally, it denotes a sacrifice or offering. A journey is associated with *yagam*, either a circumvention of the offering or a journey announcing good news. In the celebration of the Qurbana, the Church commemorates and celebrates the offering of the Lord on the cross for the world's salvation. *Yagam* is symbolic and makes the faithful

participate in the act of oblation. Consequently, *yagam* unites all the parts into one whole and helps all journey together, which is nothing short of being synodal. In essence, *yagam*, taken to the liturgical tradition of the Church, is symbolic of the supreme offering, and it gathers people around as one body and goes round and round the Mystery of the Qurbana until all pilgrims arrive at heavenly bliss.

Yogam means union or organisation. It refers to the communion aspect of Synodality. *Yagam* leads people to *yogam*¹⁵, a union of the members of the Mystical Body of Christ. In other words, it reiterates the adage that the Eucharist makes the Church, and the Church makes the Eucharist. The members of the *yagam* enjoy the *yogam*. Indeed, the bond with the Lord and the mutual fellowship of the members of the Church is strengthened. *Yagam* becomes a *yogam*, a blessing or a boon. As a result, the Church rejoices in the communion of all its members *with* Jesus Christ and the world. To be and to belong to the Body of Christ becomes a *yogam* for the faithful with the ministers in the Church, and *yagam* makes it possible.

Yugam means age. Through the celebration of the *yagam* of Jesus Christ and enjoying the *yogam* of the Mystical Body of Christ, the celebration of the Liturgy of the Qurbana prepares a roadmap for the dawn of *yugam*, the new age of the kingdom of God, wherein people celebrate diversity and unity in all humility and charity, following the way of the Lord Jesus Christ. The celebration of the *yagam* of Jesus Christ inaugurates a new *yugam* on the earth, the reign of God, and constitutes a *yogam* as the *margam*, the way, more precisely, the Mar Toma Margam – *My Lord and My God* – illustrated by the celebration of the Qurbana taking us to heavenly bliss through our joyful mission on earth for the welfare of all.

¹⁵ The Syro Malabar Church of the Thomas Christians evolved different administrative structures; all have the name *yogam*, which vouches for a synodal Church. George Nedungattu gives a detailed account of the *yogam* of Thomas Christians, "The ancient institution of the Thomas Christian *yogam* with its three-tier structure what obtains now is the *Pallyyogam* at the parish level and the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly at the level of the Church *sui iuris*." See George Nedungattu, *Laitry and Church Temporalities: Appraisal of a Tradition, Dharmaram Canonical Series, 1*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2000, 335. Francis Thonippara discusses the administrative structures of the Thomas Christians of India in the light of Synodality in his article, "Synodality Among the Christians of St Thomas Tradition and the Challenges," in *Church in India on the Synodal Path*, National Conference 21-23 March 2022, ed. Antony Lawrence, Stancy C. Fernandes, Simon Pinto, Bengaluru: ATC Publishers, 2022: 236-249.