

ESCHATOLOGICAL VISION OF SYRO MALABAR EUCHARISTIC LITURGY

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1. Introduction

Human beings are oriented towards the future, though they stand on the past and act in the present. Time, in the Christian tradition, starts from God and ends in God. Eschatology is the systematic reflection on the end times and the heavenly realities. From a Christian point of view, Jesus through his incarnation, life, death and resurrection inaugurated the eschatological kingdom. Church is the visible sign of this reality. She commemorates and celebrates this eschatological reality in Jesus Christ in her liturgy and looks forward to the future glory with her heavenly bridegroom. Liturgy as one of the main *locus theologicus* of the Christian tradition we try to reflect on the end times and the heavenly realities, based on the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Syro Malabar Church of the East Syriac tradition. Since this tradition developed in Asia, outside the Roman and Hellenistic cultures and philosophies, it has a unique value in the whole Christian tradition. While the Western Christian tradition thinks of an other-worldly eschatology, the East has a vision of a realized eschatology here and now, especially in its liturgical celebration. Tomasso Federici aptly points out this:

The Roman Liturgy, in fact, think of the earthly reality worked out by the Church, and prays that it may be taken to heaven by the angel of the Lord to the heavenly altar, to have it the definitive sanction from God. The Orientals, on the contrary, think first of all about heavenly liturgy and transfer everything here and now, on earth to that in such a way that the earthly altar really becomes the heavenly altar.¹

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¹T. Federici, *Introdizione alle Liturgie Orientali*, (PIL, pro manuscripto) Roma: PIL 1975, 122-123. See V. Pathikulangara, *Chaldeo-Indian Liturgy I Introduction*, Kottayam: Denha Services, 1982, 101.

2. Time and End-Time in the Christian Tradition

The awareness of time and space is in the very consciousness of human being and spatio-temporal experience is all pervasive, intimate and immediate. Life, death and time combine in a dynamic unity that has been of concern to all great philosophies and religions and to the arts and humanities. Human beings live within time in the space-bound world. As microcosm each person carries within a piece of the world bound with time in the span of life and becomes hereby a 'historical personality.' Time is the basic component of history as it studies the past events in human terms. It is the record of events in time. Time, like space, is neither homogeneous nor continuous for a religious minded man.² End time is related to the perception of time in each religious tradition.

2.1. Jewish Tradition

The ancient Israelites believed in the existence of a transcendent God who made himself present in time through various actions. So they had a view differed significantly from that of the Greeks and other cultures of ancient near East. Their time was defined by a series of special moments that represented the saving acts of God. It was in the time oriented events of history that God was at work accomplishing his will and purpose through the people of Israel. Time for Israel was linear, moving in a particular direction. Time is also marked by prophesy of future events. Past events contained elements of expectation, of hope, of fulfilment, and even the final judgment.

The Hebraic view of time resulted from the emphasis on historical events and prophecy. Unlike the Greek concept of time, the Hebraic approach recognized the presence of the eternal in time. Time and eternity were not antithetical; rather, God, who created time, was active in time, moving it towards the fulfilment that he intended. Time was an integral structure of God's reality. It was not the result of chance but an evidence of God's benevolent care and purpose for his creation. The implication of this concept of time can be seen in the Hebraic view of worship. There Israel anticipated the fulfilment of worship in the dawning of the new age.

2.2. Christian Synthesis

Christian tradition, as continuation and development of Jewish tradition, also considers time as linear and it is the realm of change given to human beings as a task, to integrate themselves, so that they may enter into the

²See M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, San Diego: Harcourt, 1987, 68.

timeless relationship with the living God and participate in the divinity. Here we are not considering something of mere mathematical or physical time. As Evdokimov thinks, physical time, an abstraction of our instruments of measurement as regularly recurring identical intervals of time, leads nowhere.³ Christians, however, are here concerned about existential time, time related to life and relationship with God. As a mathematical abstract it offers no access to a restful presence in the fullness of God’s life, which bursts apart all human experience of time, which is promised in faith, which is absolute.⁴

Christianity sees the time as limited and actually part of the creation. The Bible begins with the narration of the creation, and the first thing God made, after he had created the formless and void earth *ex nihilo*, is the time, night and day. All the following creations are performed on days, thus marking already a progression of time in the creative act. Time can be measured right from the beginning of the creation, being itself a creature. God himself is timeless. He is the Lord over time. His quality is eternity (Psalm 102:12ff). He lives forever and He is before and beyond time. At the same time he intervenes in history in order to let man realize his original purpose and to perform redemptive acts. His redemptive will, to elevate creation to the divine and to participate in His life, stands immutably beyond time, but expresses itself within time as saving deeds, which in the tradition of the sacred scriptures count as epochs of salvation and entitle transient time as salvation history.⁵ If not interpreted as salvation history, the linear perception of time is absurd and only leads to unending nothingness. In the Christian understanding, time is linear as a precisely given duration, “which comes from God and leads back to God,”⁶ so salvific and eschatological in nature. Creation happens within time and moving towards the goal of participating in the fullness of divine life, light and glory. May be this understanding of linear salvific time differentiates the Judeo-Christian world vision from the neighbouring peoples and other religions who adhere to a cyclical and mystical understanding of time.

The two main terms for time in the Bible are *Chronos* and *Kairos*; *Chronos* is the ordinary time whereas *Kairos* is salvific, demanding a decision from human persons. If the persons do not recognize the *Kairos*,

³P. Evdokimov, *L’Orthodoxie*, Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1959, 205.

⁴M. Kunzler, *The Church’s Liturgy*, London: Continuum, 2001, 62.

⁵Kunzler, *The Church’s Liturgy*, 61.

⁶Kunzler, *The Church’s Liturgy*, 62-63.

they may miss the opportunity of reconciliation with God.⁷ The coming of Jesus Christ into this world is the *Kairos* par excellence. The passage of time indicates also a development of the creation towards its final redemption from the evil forces. Humankind together with the whole creation is heading towards the last day, which is also often called the youngest day, thus giving the impression that one lives under the constant expectation of the end of “his” or “her” time. The coming of Jesus Christ as the saviour into this world is a historical act which cannot be repeated, because everything happens only once during the limited course of time.

God created time and through the incarnation drew it into the sphere of eternity. He is the Lord over time and is really present with time and in time. So “all time is God’s time.”⁸ The entire redemptive history unfolds in two movements, “one proceeds from the many to the One, which is the Old Covenant; and the other proceeds from the One to the many, which is the New Covenant. Christ stands at the middle of these two movements.”⁹ “All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” (John 1:3); and “when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1Corinthians 15:28). This summarizes the redemptive and eschatological time as God’s time.

Jesus Christ, God and man, integrates in himself time and eternity. Through the incarnation he entered time and history and bound them to himself; and through the resurrection and ascension he crosses the history with human being and the cosmos, and entered again the eternity and “reign at the right hand of God.” By this act of the incarnation–resurrection Christ becomes the Lord and mediator of time and eternity. At the same time this puts forward in the Christian concept of time a tension between the already and the not-yet. With Christ the new age to come has begun (Ephesians 1:21; 2:7) and the eschatological time has already started.

Christ’s incarnation is in time and history: “in his divinity he was born of the Father, beyond all times, without limit and without beginning; and at the end of times, in his humanity, Christ was born of flesh, while the Old Testament still held sway.”¹⁰ The Incarnation grounds the

⁷For a detailed discussion see O. Cullman, *Christ and Time*, London: SCM Press, 1952, 37-50. See also G. Delling “*kairos*,” TDNT, 3, 455-461.

⁸J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000, 92.

⁹O. Cullman, *Christ and Time*, 117.

¹⁰G. Qatraya, *Commentary on the Liturgy*, no. 3. See S. Brock, intr. & trans. “Gabriel of Qatar’s Commentary on the Liturgy,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*

ontological bond between God and the creatures. The possibility of creation rides on the possibility of divine incarnation in history and time. Humans are because Christ is. The Word adopts the reality of the world as His own through a primordial and eternal divine intention. This intent encompasses the willing of the Christ’s humanity and in it of all humanity, and with it the willing of the whole creation as its environment. By this personalization he elevates the assumed humanity, and by that the whole creation, to the realm of the divine.

The resurrection (and the ascension) of Christ is beyond time and space.¹¹ It is the time of fulfilment and new creation in Christ. The intersection of time and eternity becomes evident in this unique act. In the resurrection the significance of time allows our mind to glimpse beyond the now to the mystery of eternity. In this way there are parallels between the use of symbols and the use of time as aids to remembrance in liturgical worship. This association links the present with the past and anticipates the future.¹² Resurrection of Jesus unites humankind in and beyond time. As Ratzinger says, “Resurrection builds communion. It creates the new People of God... The risen Lord does not remain alone. He draws all mankind to himself and so creates a new universal communion of men.”¹³

The Christian understanding of time, thus, incorporated the concepts of *chronos* and *Kairos*, maintaining the distinctions given to them by the Greeks but viewing them in a manner similar to the Israelites. It was governed by a major event through which all other times and events found their meaning – incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Thus, in Christianity all time has a centre. Paul developed this notion in his epistle to the Colossians by declaring that Christ is the creator of all things (1:16), the one who holds all things together (1:17), and the one who reconciles all things (1:20). Christ is the cosmic centre of all history. Everything before Christ finds its fulfilment in him. Everything after Christ finds its meaning by pointing back to him.

6, 2 (2003), 205. www.bethmardutho.org/index.php/hugoye/volume-index/150.html (12.12.2012)

¹¹As R. Brown points out, “what is entirely in this world and not beyond time and space is the empty tomb, which is described on the first day of the week by all four evangelists.” See R. E. Brown, *A Risen Christ in Eastertime*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991, 29 (note 30).

¹²P. Atkins, *Memory and Liturgy*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, 108.

¹³J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 102.

From Christ, the centre of time, three kinds of time are discerned. First there is fulfilled time. For in Christ the new time (*Kairos*) had arrived, as Jesus himself announced: “The time has come ... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.” (Mark 1:15). Secondly, the coming of Christ was the time of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2. See also Romans 5:6; Colossians 2:15). Thirdly, the Christ event introduces Christian anticipatory time. This aspect of time is based on the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the promise of Christ’s return. The Church, like the People of Israel, lives in an anticipation of the future.

3. Eschatological Vision of the Syriac Christian Tradition / Syriac Orient

Following the footsteps of the Jewish and Christian traditions, Syriac theological tradition “in general manifests a great tension and anticipation of the future world, [but] it provides very little detail of the time to come.”¹⁴ Though the early writers of this tradition were very much influenced by the ascetical tradition, especially the importance of the life of virginity, they had the least influence from the Hellenistic sources. They always think of eschatology in relation to Christ. Here we take two models of early Syriac thinking, Aphrahat and Ephrem.

Aphrahat’s 8th and 22nd Demonstrations (On the Resurrection and on Death and the Last Things) discuss eschatological themes.¹⁵ The kingdom of death has been defeated by Christ, who descended into the sheol (22.1-5). By setting the hearts on the world to come than on this world human beings can reign over the death (22.9-11). According to him, at the time of final judgment everybody will be reconstituted to their final integrity. The just will be rewarded in an environment of beauty and light (22.12-17) and the wicked will be punished in the darkness (22.18-22). At the end this earth will pass away and “God shall make something new for the children of Adam and they shall inherit possessions in the kingdom of heaven” (22.24, II, p. 249). Ephrem, the Syrian also has almost the same pattern of vision of the last things, but a more developed one. He wants his hearers to pray for their dead, so that “they may be worthy of the road to Eden.”¹⁶ Ephrem has a positive vision of the role of the body and the whole creation. In a blooming poetic

¹⁴S. J. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1983, 133.

¹⁵A Syriac Church Father of third-fourth century who wrote 23 Demonstrations about different theological and ascetical themes. For a complete translation of his writings see: K. Valavanolickal, tr., *Aphrahat: Demonstrations*, 2 vols., Moran ‘Etho 24, Kottayam: SEERI, 2005.

¹⁶Nisibean Hymns, 73.4.

language he reminds his readers that at the final resurrection the soul which is the body’s “pillar of support” will give life to the body and use it as its musical instrument. What about this earth? He says:

In the world there is struggle, in Eden, a crown of glory.
At our resurrection both earth and heaven will God renew,
liberating all creatures, granting them paschal joy, along with us.

And he asks:

Upon our mother Earth, along with us, did he lay disgrace
when he placed on her, with the sinner, the curse;
so, together with the just, will He bless her too;
this nursing mother, along with her children,
shall He who is Good renew.¹⁷

This reminds us of the universal salvation, where not only the human beings but also the whole universe shall be transformed and raised to the divine eschatological glory at the end.

4. Syro Malabar Eucharistic Liturgy

Syro Malabar Eucharistic Liturgy is a liturgy developed outside the Roman Empire in the East Syriac genre, with Semitic and Asian vision, where Christianity and the Bible had their origin. In this tradition the earthly liturgy is the memorial and celebration of the economy of salvation (*mdabbrānutā*) of God completed in Christ, and the anticipation of the heavenly liturgy.

The earthly liturgy is the icon and foretaste of the heavenly liturgy. Vatican Council II puts it clearly in its Constitution on Liturgy:

In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle (cf. Revelation 21:2; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 8:2); we sing a hymn to the Lord’s glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until He, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with Him in glory (cf. Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:4).¹⁸

¹⁷Hymns on Paradise, 9.1. ET S. Brock, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998, 136. This reminds us of Romans 8:19-23.

¹⁸*Sacrosanctum Concillium* 8. A. Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 25.

The whole Eucharistic liturgy of this tradition is an example of the fusion of the earthly and heavenly liturgies. The Angel's hymn in the beginning, the "thrice holy" doxology of the Lord's Prayer, and the "thrice-holy hymn" repeated three times alternately by the earthly and the heavenly choirs, symbolically represent the downward movement of heaven, the upward movement of creation, and the mingling of them in the liturgy.

The whole liturgy is considered as an image of what is happening in heaven and its revelation. The symbolism of the liturgical space-time orientation and ministers reveals this. As Theodore of Mopsuestia reminds, we are necessarily confirmed in the faith of the things revealed to us through this ministry of Sacrament [of Eucharist], as we are led through it to the future reality, because it contains an image of the ineffable Economy of Christ our Lord, in which we receive the vision and the shadow of the happenings that took place.¹⁹

The whole Eucharistic Liturgy of this tradition reveals this eschatological vision and it culminates in the Communion rite. It is a foretaste of the eschatological life and also a movement towards the final fulfilment.

5. Liturgical Time and Spatial Orientation

The liturgical celebration, like any other action of the Church, is a concrete action that is unfolded in a definite place and at a given time. It presupposes a community to celebrate, a space and time to gather, and a final orientation to reach out. The worshipping community together with the liturgical space and time symbolize this reality. The orientation and the movement of the community in the liturgy point towards the final goal of creation and the movement towards it. The Eucharistic Liturgy, the sum and summit of the whole action of the Church, is the sacrament of this whole process. In the Eucharist not only the human being but the whole cosmic reality is transformed sacramentally. Through the cosmic symbolism of the church building the whole cosmos becomes the divine space-time (or "divine milieu") which is a process looking forward to completion only in the *eschaton*.

5.1. Liturgical Time: Foretaste of the Eschatological Time

The time of the Church is in between type/shadow and the fullness of reality/the eschatological kingdom. The Paradise and later the Israel were

¹⁹Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacrament of Baptism and the Eucharist*, ed. & trans., A. Mingana, WS 6, Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1933, 85.

symbols or types of the Church. At the same time the Church itself is a sacramental symbol of the eschatological paradise.

Ephrem sees the Church as the middle stage of a threefold symbolic scheme. In one of the hymns on the Unleavened Bread he says:

The type was in Egypt, the reality in the Church;
the sealing of the reward [will be] in the kingdom.²⁰

The sacred history of the past is the stage of ‘mysteries’ (*raze*) pointing towards the middle stage, the ‘time of the Church,’ which began with Christ. It fulfils the types and is contrasted with them as truth or reality. The fulfilment of this stage, however, will be in the eschatological kingdom.²¹ Because the Church is in an interim period and lives between the Passover and the parousia of the Lord, as Schillebeeckx says,²² it combines in the present time both the past types and future fulfilment.

The Church as the continuation of Christ, who unites time and eternity, here and now, unites time and eternity in its principal action, the liturgy. The Church in the liturgical celebration makes remembrance of the past saving act of God present, unfolding of the future in Christ. In this sense “liturgy is more time centred than space centred. It expresses not only time as timeless, intimations of an unfolding eternity, but also time as timely, a medium of God’s presence in the moment.”²³ Here both sacred and ordinary time together act as a medium of human elevation to the divine in Christ. So, the liturgical time is the presence of eternity in time, which raises the present reality to God’s time. And it is also the time of salvation here and now, *Kairos* in the real sense.

5.2. Sunday: Embodiment of Eschatological Time

Sunday is the real context of the Eucharistic liturgy. Though the Eucharist has an intimate relation with the Jewish paschal celebrations, as Jesus celebrated it in the upper room, it was taken out of the context of the Passover and was placed within the new context of the “Lord’s Day,” i.e., the day which marked the first meeting with the Risen Lord.²⁴ Resurrection of Christ is the beginning of the end-times. In the post resurrection meeting with the disciples Jesus ate with the disciples (Luke

²⁰H. Unleavened Bread, 5. 23. ET in R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, Cambridge: CUP, 1975, 244.

²¹R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 243-244 (footnote 1).

²²E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1963, 41.

²³J. A. Melloh, “Liturgical Time, Theology of,” in P. E. Fink, ed., *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990, 736.

²⁴J. Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 45.

24:30-31, 42-43), which is a symbol of the Eucharist and the messianic banquet. Eating with the messiah is considered as the sign of the arrival of the end time. The New Testament and the early Christian writings put it as the day of assembly and the Eucharistic liturgy.²⁵ Not only that, as R. Taft says, “for in the Early Church, Sunday was indeed everything.”²⁶ It is the first day²⁷ and 8th day, day of creation and new creation, day of light, day of resurrection, day of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost), day of Eucharist, day of Baptism, and the day of final rest in God. “It was the symbolic day, sign of the time of the Church between ascension and *parousia*, the time in which we are living now.”²⁸ Among these the Eighth Day, means the complete and eternal rest in God, has special eschatological connotation. It symbolically contains the whole concept of sacred time in a nutshell.

5.3. Spatial Orientation

Turning towards East, while praying, is an ancient custom in the Christian tradition. It symbolically expresses the eschatological expectation and movement towards the Divine. The importance of eastern direction has its biblical and extra biblical basis. In the biblical narrative of creation ‘Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the East’ (Genesis 2:8).²⁹ Following this tradition some early Jewish Christian (apocalyptic) literature points that the Paradise³⁰ or Heaven is located in the East.³¹ The sin of the first

²⁵See Acts 20:7; *Didache*, 7.

²⁶R. Taft, “Sunday in the Byzantine Tradition,” in M. Searle, ed., *Sunday Mornings: A Time for Worship*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982, 49-74, reprint in R. Taft, *Beyond East And West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 2nd ed., Rome: PIO, 1997, 52.

²⁷First day is the symbol of the creation of light and Sun. Later the birth of the Sun God in Rome and also in Egypt is Christianized and made the birth of Christ, the true Sun.

²⁸R. Taft, “Sunday in the Byzantine Tradition,” 52.

²⁹According to S. Brock, the Peshitta and the two Targum traditions (Babylonian and Palestinian) take the Hebrew word *miqqedam* as having temporal meaning of ‘from the beginning’ rather than spatial meaning ‘to the East.’ S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 50. It seems that the Hebrew word *qedem* has spatial and temporal connotations.

³⁰It is noted that in the concept of Ephrem Paradise is a multilayer mountain, and the *shekinah* at its summit. See Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 52-54.

³¹For example, see, *Testament of Abraham*, XI. ET ANF, X, 192: “When Abraham was very old, God sent Michael to bring him to heaven. Michael brought Abraham to the East, to the first gate of heaven;” *Apocalypse of Peter*, 6. ET ANF, V, 145: “And when we prayed, suddenly there appeared two men standing before the Lord towards the east.”

parents resulted in the expulsion of them from the east. Turning towards the East is an act of repentance. It also stands for hope and homecoming. The re-clothing of man with the lost ‘robe of glory’ and ‘re-entry into paradise’ is the ultimate goal of this movement towards the East. In the early Church on the basis of Matthew 24:27, a popular belief developed that in the second coming, Christ would come from the East. This was further supported by Malachi 4:2, Revelation 22:16 and John 8:12. So, looking and praying to the East stand for our earnest waiting for the coming of Christ, the true light and sun of justice, the healer and saviour of the world. Following Zachariah 6:12, the East has been often understood as a symbol of Christ himself. He is “the *Orient*.” But here the emphasis is on the eschatological manifestation of Christ. The eastward orientation symbolizes our hope in the second coming of Christ as well our desire to return to the Paradise.³²

5.4. Moving towards the East: Moving towards the Lord

The Eucharistic Liturgy is not mere facing towards the east and waiting for the second coming of the Lord. It is rather more a movement towards the Lord, the “Orient”, who is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Above all it is a movement which is enabled by the Spirit of Holiness to the Father. So it is an elevation to the Divine state in its fullest sense.

Baptism in the Christian tradition is a turning towards the “east” from the “west.” In the beginning of the Liturgy of the Faithful in the Eucharist we can see a reminder of this by the deacon proclaiming: “He who did not receive baptism let him go out.” It not only reminds the catechumens to leave but the faithful of their baptismal turning towards the Lord, the “Orient.” According to Narsai, through this expulsion “the Holy Church depicts typically those that go forth into that darkness which is in *Gehenna*.”³³ But those who remain “with clean garments”³⁴ remind us of those who with the ‘robe of glory’ and enter the Paradise.

The sanctuary (*madbhā*) is the symbol of ‘heaven’ and the ‘kingdom which our Lord entered.’³⁵ The celebrant together with other ministers moving in procession from the *bema* in the nave (*hayklā*) to *madbhā* on the eastern direction before the anaphora is a deep symbol of the

³²See *Apostolic Constitutions* II, 57.14.

³³R. H. Connolly, tr., *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, Cambridge: CUP, 1909, 3.

³⁴Connolly, *A Commentary on the Mass*, 3.

³⁵Connolly, *A Commentary on the Mass*, 5.

movement of the whole community, which symbolizes the Church, towards the Lord. According to George of Arbel the three doors (before the apse, in the middle, and before the *bemā*) opened before everyone who wishes to enter into the holy way, begins in Jerusalem. “And from Jerusalem (he goes) to Paradise [Gk. *katastroma*], from Paradise to heaven.”³⁶ According to L. Bouyer, “the dynamism of the Christian celebration is expressed by that procession and the general movement toward the East which it involves.” He continues:

Let us add that, of course, in the Syrian churches which have remained faithful to their early tradition, there are no other seats but those of the clergy. Therefore the whole assembly, far from being a static mass of spectators, remains an organic gathering of worshippers, first centred on the ark [= *bema*], for hearing and meditating upon the scriptures, and finally going toward the East all together, for the Eucharistic prayer and the final communion.³⁷

When we think about the symbolism of the altar as the throne of God and the three steps towards the *madbhā* in relation to Trinity this eastward movement becomes more meaningful and experiential. The whole movement completes with the final communion and transformation in the Lord, which is the sole purpose of this movement.

6. Eschatological Vision of the Eucharistic Liturgy Proper

6.1. Death and Sheol

Sheol is the symbol of death. It is “the place in the underworld where in earlier OT thought all the dead lead the same shadowy existence (Genesis 37:35; Numbers 16:30-34; Deuteronomy 32:22; Job 3:13-19; 26:5-6; Isaiah 14:9-11).”³⁸ We can see this concept in the early Church, especially in the Syriac tradition,³⁹ which is much influenced by the Jewish world-vision. Narsai depicts how Jesus descended into *Sheol*:

The vivifier of all descended and bathed in *Sheol*, a dead sea, and conferred a power of vitality to the dead waters.

³⁶Connolly, *A Commentary on the Mass*, 4.

³⁷L. Bouyer, *Liturgy and Architecture*, Notre Dame, 1967, 34-35.

³⁸G. O’Collins and E. G. Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, New York: Paulist Press, 2000, 243.

³⁹For the theology and the path of this theme’s reception in the Syriac Liturgy, see, A. G. Kollamparambil, “The Theme of Sheol in the Syriac Liturgy: The Path to Its Reception,” *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 113 (1999), 289-306.

With a gentle breeze, he stirred those who were senseless;
and thousands of the dead began to proceed to the rendezvous of life.
By a silent vibration, the mighty one called upon insatiable Death;
and tear up the bond for the debtors who succumbed to sin.⁴⁰

Aphrahat depicts Christ’s war with the Evil One at the Sheol: “He entered into Sheol and brought out its prisoners, he fought with the Evil One and conquered him; he trampled him and broke his foothold and spoiled his possessions.”⁴¹

Sheol represents the state of man after his fall, a dead world. T. Spidlik says: “Man, created immortal by God, descends into *sheol* through his sin. He finds himself in a very peculiar situation; though immortal he is under the power of death. Death sums up all the consequences of sin.”⁴² Christ not merely delivers Adam/humanity from the dead state of sheol but elevated and put him in the Paradise, to his former glory before the fall:

Adam’s Lord came out to see him;
He entered Sheol and found him there;
then led and brought him out
to set him once more in Paradise.⁴³

Though there is no direct reference of *sheol* in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari there references in the third anaphora, the Anaphora of Nestorius, and the prayers proper:

He gave himself for all, for death which reigned over us, beneath whose dominion we were subject, to which we were sold because of our sin, and by his precious Blood He redeemed us and saved us. He descended into Sheol and loosed the bonds of death, and because it was not right that he should be held in *sheol* by death, the First-fruits of our salvation rose on the third day and became the First-fruits of those who slept, that he might become the first among all, and ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of your greatness, O God.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Narsai, “A Homily for the Great Sunday of Resurrection” in F. G. McLeod, ed. & trans., *Narsai’s Metrical Homilies on the Nativity, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension*, Patrologia Orientalis 40, Turnhout: Brepols, 1979, 145, lines 139-144.

⁴¹ Demonstrations, 14. 31. ET K. Valavanolickal, *Demonstrations II*, 81.

⁴² T. Spidlik, “Some Aspects of Syrian Spirituality” in C. Payngot, ed., *Homage to Mar Cariattil Pioneer Malabar Ecumenist*, Kottayam: OIRSI, 1987, 89-90.

⁴³ H. Paradise, 8.10. ET S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 135.

⁴⁴ *Anaphorae of Mar Theodore and Mar Nestorius*, Kochi: LRC, 2005, 21.

Salvation from the chains of Sheol is part of Christian hope. The resurrection hymn (*Lakumara*)⁴⁵ in the beginning of the liturgy is the expression of such a hope. This Christian hope leads one to the resurrection, the door of eschatological life.

6.2. Resurrection of the Dead

Eucharist is the life-giving and divine mystery of the Church. Christ through his incarnation, life death and resurrection incorporated humankind and the whole cosmos into him and lead them back to the eternal life. His resurrection is the pivotal point in the whole Christ event. Eucharistic liturgy celebrates this mystery of resurrection of Christ and looks forward to our own final resurrection. The Resurrection Hymn (*Lakumara*) in the *Enarxis* of the Holy Qurbana is a praise and hope of this central point. The anamnesis at the end of the fourth *g'hanta* prayer says about the commemoration and celebration of the “divine mystery of the passion, the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶ The Epiclesis is considered as the sacramental commemoration and celebration of the resurrection of Christ by many early commentators of the East Syriac Eucharistic Liturgy.⁴⁷

Eucharist not only commemorates and celebrates Christ's resurrection but also the resurrection of the humankind. Eucharistic liturgy is an anticipation and celebration of our own resurrection together with Christ.⁴⁸ The Epiclesis prays also for sending the Holy Spirit in order to have “great hope of resurrection from the dead and new life in the kingdom of heaven.”⁴⁹ It is the “pledge which we have received and are receiving ... for the pardon of offences and forgiveness of sins, for the great hope of resurrection from the dead and for the new life in the

⁴⁵It is an ancient hymn that confesses and glorifies Christ who is the quickner of the bodies and saviour of souls. It is one of the archaic elements of the East Syriac liturgy. According to an ancient tradition it is the song sung by those who were (Adam) in the Sheol when Christ descended to it after his death. So it is also known as the “Hymn of Adam.” See V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana: The Eucharistic Celebration of the Chaldeo-Indian Church*, Kottayam: Denha Services, 2007, 166-67.

⁴⁶*Order for the Solemn Raza of the Syro-Malabar Church*, Trivandrum: SMBC, 1986, 50.

⁴⁷For example, see, Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary*, 104; G. Qatraya, *Commentary on the Liturgy*, no. 70; Connolly, *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, 21.

⁴⁸S. G. Thakidiyal, *The Eschatological Vision of The East Syrian Holy Qurbana*. Excerpta ex Dissertatione ad Doctoratum, Romae: PIO, 2009, 20.

⁴⁹*Order for the Solemn Raza*, 50-51.

kingdom of heaven...”⁵⁰ So, “these glorious, holy, life-giving and divine mysteries are set and arranged on the holy altar of Christ until his second coming from heaven.”⁵¹ Eucharistic Communion is the food of immortality, medicine of life and pledge of eternal life.⁵² So, the formula at giving communion is “unto the remission of sins and life everlasting.”⁵³ Through the remission of sins in this world the communicant looks forward to the end times and eternal life.

6.3. Parousia

The second coming of Christ⁵⁴ is the consummation of the created world. Every Eucharistic liturgy is an appeal to the Father for the final consummation. The early Christians expected the parousia of the Lord during the Eucharistic celebration as the Jews expected the coming of the Messiah on a Sabbath celebration.⁵⁵ “He will come again to judge the living and the dead” is the common faith of the Christians. With this faith and hope the liturgical community is waiting for the final reward at the coming of our Lord, “May they be made worthy to receive from you blessed and exalted position at the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵⁶

The Eucharistic Liturgy in the East Syriac tradition reveals, commemorates and celebrates the parousia through different symbolic acts.⁵⁷ The solemn procession of the celebrants from sanctuary to bema, veneration of the cross, opening of the sanctuary veil and resurrection Hymn, Sanctus hymn with Hosanna, communion procession etc. are all symbols of the final coming Christ. For example, let us take the communion procession. As we have already seen sanctuary is the symbol of heaven. The celebrant, together with deacons, symbolically represents

⁵⁰ *Order for the Solemn Raza*, 67.

⁵¹ *Order for the Solemn Raza*, 37.

⁵² See S. H. Griffith, “Spirit in the Bread; Fire in the Wine”: The Eucharist as ‘Living Medicine’ in the Thought of Ephraem the Syrian,” *Modern Theology* 15, 2 (1999), 225-246.

⁵³ *Order for the Solemn Raza*, 64.

⁵⁴ Modern theologians like Karl Rahner think of it as “the world that will come to God in the parousia rather than Christ to the world.” G. O’Collins and E. G. Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, 190-191.

⁵⁵ Thakidiyal, *The Eschatological Vision of The East Syrian Holy Qurbana*, 15.

⁵⁶ *Anaphorae of Mar Theodore and Mar Nestorius*, 10. K. A. Paul and G. Mooken: *The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles Adai and Mari together with the Liturgies of Mar Theodorus and Mar Nestorius and the Order of Baptism*, Thrissur: 1967, 81,

⁵⁷ See Thakidiyal, *The Eschatological Vision of The East Syrian Holy Qurbana* 1, 15-16.

the angels Gabriel and Michael, comes to the sanctuary door to distribute communion. This is the symbol of the final coming of Christ who receives the faithful to his final communion, the communion of saints and the life ever lasting. George of Arbel's *Expositio Officiorum Ecclesiasticorum*,⁵⁸ explains the symbolism of the communion:

Gabriel [=the deacon who bears the chalice at the communion service] goes forth, as one who knows the way: for it is he also who will bear the cross of our Lord and come before Him in the resurrection. And here you are to consider the cup as in place of the cross, which in the hand of Gabriel is to appear before our Lord at His coming... As servants they [sc. the 2 deacons] bow their necks to the service before Christ their master; and while he distributes, they are the bearers of the mansions; shewing by this that the whole service of the resurrection is performed by angels...⁵⁹

The appearance of the cross at the second coming of Christ, a belief of the Jewish Christianity,⁶⁰ is the basis of this explanation. The distribution of communion here symbolically considered as the distribution of mansions after the final judgment.

6.4. Heavenly Life

In the Eastern Christian tradition, as we have seen above, liturgy is the foretaste of the heavenly life. So, we can see many references to heaven and heavenly life in the liturgical texts. Because heaven and the eternal life are beyond human comprehension liturgical texts use many symbolic expressions to explain the eternal bliss.⁶¹

Heavenly court is reverberated with the acclamation of angels and saints: "Holy, Holy, Holy." The heavenly liturgy before the throne of God by the angels (e.g., Isaiah 6; Revelation 4-6 & 19) is the model and end of the earthly liturgy. Singing thrice "Holy" is referred in both the narrations in Isaiah (6:3) and the Book of Revelation (4:8). Isaiah saw in his vision the heaven filled with God's glory. We can see this thrice holy acclamation through out the liturgy: with the Lord's prayer in the beginning and end, *Trisagion* at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Word, anthem of Mysteries at

⁵⁸Though it is known in the name of George of Arbel many scholars believe that it is an anonymous commentary of the liturgy of 10th century origin.

⁵⁹R. H. Connolly, trans., *A Commentary on the Mass by the Nestorian George, Bishop of Mosul and Arbel*, ed, R. Matheus, Kottayam: OIRSI, 2000, 123-124.

⁶⁰See J. Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964, 269.

⁶¹Thakidiyal, *The Eschatological Vision of The East Syrian Holy Qurbana*, 33.

the transference of gifts, Sanctus and the following secret prayer of the celebrant and *Sanctum Sanctis* before Communion. The vision of heaven and God’s glory in it are symbolized in the Eucharistic Liturgy by the solemn opening of the sanctuary and the incensing before the *Trisagion*. The symbolism of the sanctuary, the upper choir, and the deacons, symbols of angels, serve in the sanctuary to generate a sense of the holy space and the dwellers of heaven in the worshipping community. Following this vision, in response to the invitation of the deacon to “praise the living God,”⁶² the earthly and heavenly choirs mingle in singing interchangeably thrice “Holy” to the most Holy Trinity.

At the Incarnation heaven met earth and heavenly choirs descended on earth and sung “Gloria.” In the East Syrian tradition this event is celebrated in the beginning of the Eucharistic Liturgy itself as the liturgy is not merely an earthly liturgy, but heavenly.⁶³ According to Abdisho the thrice “Holy” hymn before the readings is the proclamation by the angels of the whole salvific plan of the incarnated Word.⁶⁴ The goal of the economy of salvation completed in Christ is the participation in the heavenly liturgy and singing “Holy” to the Trinity. Gabriel Qatraya sees the *Trisagion* in relation to the earthly ministry of Jesus: “The *qanona* “Holy ...” is a symbol of the sanctification (of Christ) by the angels who accompanied him during his entire dispensation, just as the blessed Matthew said, “the angels approached and were ministering to him” (Matthew 4:11).”⁶⁵

The downward movement of God, who is holy, mighty, and immortal, is also the downward movement of the heavenly liturgy. Heaven lowers and embraces the earth, in order to raise the earth up to heaven. As M. Kunzler puts it “he [man] has nothing else to do except to enter into the unceasing “Holy” of the angels, who bear the Lord of all in the procession of the heavenly liturgy.”⁶⁶

⁶²*Order for the Solemn Raza*, 16.

⁶³Voste, “*Liber Patrum*,” 18.

⁶⁴Abdisho bar Brikha, *Ordo Iudiciorum*, 94.

⁶⁵G. Qatraya, *Commentary on the Liturgy*, no. 13. See also J. Kochuparampil, trans., *The Mystery of the Eucharist: Syriac Critical text, Translation and Studies of the Chapter “On the Mysteries of the Body and Blood” from The Book of the Seven Causes of the Mysteries of the Church by Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy II (1318-1332)*, Exerpta ex Dissertatione ad Doctoratum, Romae: PIO, 2000, 58.

⁶⁶Kunzler, *The Church’s Liturgy*, 20.

Church is the foretaste of the eschatological assembly of saints or the eschatological Paradise, which looks backward also to the first/primordial Paradise. As Ephrem says,

The assembly of saints
bears resemblance to Paradise:
in it each day is plucked
the fruit of Him who gives life to all;
in it, my brethren, is trodden
the cluster of grapes, to be the Medicine of Life.⁶⁷

In this tradition Baptism is frequently described as the re-entry into the Paradise.⁶⁸ “Through the working of the Holy Spirit,” as Sebastian Brock says, “he has already potentially entered Paradise, in sacred time.”⁶⁹ And the Eucharist is “the spiritual bread which becomes for everyone an eagle that conveys to Paradise.”⁷⁰ Moreover, Christ is the tree of life in the Paradise, and the Eucharist is the fruit of this tree that gives life to all who eat it. Ephrem further says in his Commentary on the Diatessaron:

Just as it was said to Adam, *The day on which you eat of it you will die* (Genesis 2:17), – he did not die however on the day when he ate it, but [instead] received a pledge of his death through his being stripped of his glory, chased from Paradise and haunted daily by [the prospect of] death, – so too, in like manner, with regard to life in Christ, we eat his body instead of the fruit of the tree, and we have altar in place of the garden of Eden. The curse is washed away by his innocent blood, and in the hope of resurrection we await the life that is to come (cf. Romans 8:23-25). Already we walk in a new life, for these [the body of Christ and his altar] are the pledges of it for us.⁷¹

The Eucharist in the Church combines both the primordial and eschatological Paradise, in sacred time and space.

⁶⁷H. Paradise, 6.8. ET S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 111.

⁶⁸Christ (who is the perfect image of the Father) is the new/second Adam and Church is the new Paradise. Entry in to Church through baptism is considered as the re-entry into the Paradise, by restoring the “image of God” and “re-clothing by the robe of glory.”

⁶⁹S. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, ed., J. Vellian, SCS 9, Poona 1979, 123.

⁷⁰H. Unleavened Bread, 17.12. ET in S. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 123.

⁷¹*Commentary on the Diatessaron*, 21.25. ET C. McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, JSSS 2, Oxford: OUP, 1993, 329.

Eucharistic Communion is the *sacramental symbol* of the eschatological communion and fulfilment. This eschatological communion is figuratively depicted as a wedding feast.⁷² It is the symbol of the Eucharist, where the Bride, the Church or the individual soul, is nourished by the very body of the Bridegroom. The images of the wedding feast and the bridal chamber are highly relevant of the Eucharist and its climax in the Communion.

The praise and thanksgiving is the new wine that fills the participants of the eschatological banquet. The Eucharistic liturgy as the offering of praise and thanksgiving is the mystery of this new order of the wedding feast. In one of the Hymns on Faith Ephrem says:

I have invited You, Lord, to a wedding feast of song,
but the wine – the utterance of praise – at our feast has failed.
You are the guest who filled the jars with good wine,
fill my mouth with your praise.

He continues this in the Eucharistic context:

Jesus, You were invited to a wedding feast of others,
here is Your own pure and fair wedding feast:
gladden Your rejuvenated people,
for Your guests too, O Lord, need
Your songs: let your harp utter.
The soul is Your bride, the body Your bridal chamber,
Your guests are the senses and the thoughts.
And if a single body is a wedding feast for you,
how great is Your banquet for the whole church.⁷³

Christ is the bridegroom who invites his bride, the Church / soul, to the bridal chamber, where he shares his body and blood as food and drink. The celebrant’s acclamation just before receiving the chalice in the Holy Qurbana is very clear: “For the guests at your banquet, heavenly bridegroom, you have prepared the chalice of your precious blood.”⁷⁴ Christ the bridegroom mixes his precious blood for the bride and elevates her to the heavenly bridal chamber.

⁷²See the parable of the wedding feast in the Gospels: Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24. Even the wedding feast of Cana is a figure of the eschatological wedding feast where the wine (= joy/praise) is overflowed. See *Hymns on Faith*, 14.

⁷³*Hymns on Faith*, 14. 1,4,5. ET S. Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of Saint Ephrem*, Studies Supplementary to Sobornost No. 4, Oxford: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1983, 18-19.

⁷⁴*Order for the Solemn Raza*, 61.

The Eucharistic Communion is the intimate union of Christ and the communicant. Christ, the Bridegroom, here enters the body of the communicant, and so the body in a very literal sense can be described as the bridal chamber. It is an intimate union of Christ / God with human beings. At Incarnation Mary's womb became the bridal chamber of the Divinity:

In a womb of flesh was a Bridal Chamber set out
in whose midst the heavenly Bridegroom lay reclining,
while the virgin doors were carefully guarded.⁷⁵

According to Sebastian Brock, Communion is the anticipation of the eschatological Bridal Chamber: "The potentiality of entering the eschatological Bridal Chamber is something given at Christian baptism, and this eschatological event can, potentially, be momentarily be experienced in anticipation through Communion."⁷⁶ In the Eucharistic Communion the communicant is raised up to the bridal chamber of Christ, which is an anticipation of the heavenly bridal chamber where the full communion takes place. So the Eucharistic Communion here and now (in historical time) can be seen as the betrothal than the final consummation.⁷⁷

6.5. Concept of Hell

The Syriac word '*Gehanna*' is used for hell, the place of eternal punishment. The Eucharistic Liturgy refers to hell as a place of darkness and condemnation. It is also the place of eternal death and separation from the heavenly communion.⁷⁸

Commentators of the liturgy relate various rites of liturgy in relation to the eternal condemnation. For example Pseudo Narsai relates the rite of dismissal to condemnation in the place of darkness. "Sadly they all go forth from the midst of the nave, and lament and stand with great mourning in the (outer) court (*daretha*) of the Church, congratulating those who remain in that enjoyment, and giving woe to themselves for their

⁷⁵Anonymous, "Hymn on Mary, no.12," ET in S. Brock, *Bride of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches*, Kottayam: SEERI, 1991, 59.

⁷⁶S. Brock, "The Bridal Chamber of Light," 189.

⁷⁷According to S. Brock, "the betrothal is seen as taking place in historical time (whether the bride to be is collective or individual), while the marriage feast and the mystery of the consummation of the marriage in the bridal chamber belong to the eschaton." S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 93.

⁷⁸See Thakidiyal, *The Eschatological Vision of The East Syrian Holy Qurbana*, 39-42.

exclusion. By her expulsion (of these) Holy Church depicts typically those that go forth into that darkness which is in Gehanna.”⁷⁹ Here the author relates this expulsion to the expulsion of the one who has no wedding garment in the parable of the wedding Feast. In the Gospels this parable is related to the heavenly marriage feast.

7. Conclusion

From the above discussion we understand that the Syro Malabar Eucharistic Liturgy has full of allusions to eschatological time/life. As a creation of God (historical) time moves forward to the end times and at last to God himself. Christ, in his person, integrates in him time and eternity, and he is the centre of all history and time. Through incarnation God in Christ entered the historical time definitively and through resurrection he again cross the time-boundary and entered eternity with humankind and the whole creation. This is the basis of the whole Christian eschatological vision.

Liturgy as the expression and celebration of faith reveals this eschatological vision/hope in all through its prayers. This expression may change according to different traditions though the kernel of the faith is same. The Syro Malabar liturgy of the East Syriac tradition has a unique way of expression and celebration of its eschatological vision. The whole Eucharistic Liturgy is considered as the foretaste of the heavenly liturgy. Liturgical time not only points towards the eternity but unites time and eternity. Liturgical space and orientation leads the worshippers to the experience of heaven on earth. They help the community to move from the earth to heaven symbolically. The Eucharistic liturgy proper of this tradition commemorates and celebrates death and resurrection, and eschatological life in heaven with the death and resurrection of Christ, who re-entered the eschatological paradise as the first born of all creation. The poetic and symbolic expressions like Paradise, Wedding Feast, Bridal Chamber etc. reveal partially the eschatological life that is beyond human comprehension. In short the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Syro Malabar Church expresses its faith in the eschatological life in a unique manner.

⁷⁹Connolly, *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, 3