

General Characteristics and Sources of the Liturgy of the Saint Thomas Christians

Thomas Christian Churches

That the Catholic Church is a communion of different individual *sui juris* Churches,¹ is a fact accepted by all today. It is considered to be one of the achievements of the second Vatican Council. By the promulgation of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* on October 18, 1990 Pope John Paul II stated this reality once for all. This characteristic of the Catholic Church, which was discussed in detail in the Council, is not an invention of the Council Fathers. It was one of the original characteristics of the Church; only that it happened to 'be ignored during the feudal structuring of the Latin Church. The Fathers in the Council were convinced that it was difficult to go on ignoring this basic truth regarding the Church. Thus they decided:

"... All (Churches) have thus the same dignity; none of them is higher than the others by reason of its Rite, all have the same rights and the same obligations, also as regards the preaching of the gospel in the whole world (cf. *Mk 16:15*) under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff. Everywhere, therefore, care must be taken to preserve and develop all particular Churches; where the spiritual good of the faithful requires it, parishes and their own hierarchy should be established."²

Christ-Event, the Beginning of the Church

The Church is the continuation of the Christ-event. The Church alone provides the possibility for experiencing the Christ-event to the end of time. The Twelve Apostles were eyewitnesses to the Christ-event. They experienced Jesus directly and were sent out by him who said:

"Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved" (*Mk 16: 15-16*). "And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it" (*Mk 16:20*).

Apostles, the Foundation of the Church

We find it difficult to presume that the apostles, who went out to different parts of the world, had already with them a document of faith and they read it out to all whom they encountered. It is more likely that they, by words and deeds, tried to share with others, in their own way, the Christ experience with which they were filled.

"We declare to you what we have seen with our eyes what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the word of life - this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it..." (*Jn 1:1-2*).

The communities, which shared the Christ-experience through the life and words of the apostles, gradually formed into particular or individual Churches.³ One can thus

¹ cf. M.Vellanickal, "Biblical Theology of the Individual Churches", in *Christian Orient* 1/1(1980)5-19; X. Koodapuzha "The Indian Church of the Thomas Christians", *art. in op.cit.pp.20f.*

² OE, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* of Vatican II, nos. 3-4

³ cf. V.Pathikulangara, "The Chaldeo-Indian Church", *art.. in Christian Orient* 2/1 (1981)5-28

distinguish between two constitutive elements in the formation of those individual Churches: the *apostolic Christ-experience* and the *life-situation* of the community. Of these, the *apostolic Christ-experience* is the most decisive one.

"...the heritage handed down by the Apostles was received differently and in different forms, so that from the very beginnings of the Church its development varied from region to region and also because of differing mentalities and ways of life."⁴

Apostolic Christ-Experience

One can naturally ask whether there is any difference between the Christ-experience of different apostles. Some say that the foundation of the Church is the cumulative experience of the apostolic college and not that of each one; the Holy Spirit as guiding all the apostles in the same way, and so on. We think that 'experience' is always something personal and not communitarian. Even when an experience is received in a community, each individual receives it in his/her own way. There may not be any difference concerning the fact behind an experience; but with regard to the impression it has produced, there is the possibility of varying expressions. For example, let us think of a road accident and four or five people who are eyewitnesses to it. Consider each one's account of it independently. The exposition of one will surely be different from that of another in some way. The difference is not consciously created; it happens because of the otherness of each individual person in this world.

The four Gospels provide a very good example of this point. All the Evangelists are trying to share the same Christ-experience; but how different they are! This example alone tells us that there are differences among the apostles in their experience of the one Christ-Event. Thus we come to the identity and uniqueness of each apostle's Christ-experience. It is this individualized Christ-experience of one or more apostles that has given rise to the various individual Churches and it is the decisive element of that Church's faith-expression. The life-situation of the community has only contributed to it secondarily.

There are several modern scholars, who, knowingly or not, because of their over-enthusiasm for their national and cultural relations, emphasize more the life-situation than the apostolic 'Christ-experience' itself. They appear to move more in the line of secularization of Christian faith. Thus they lead a kind of inculturation and nationalization which is supported neither by the Bible nor Tradition nor the teaching authority of the Church. And such uncontrolled experimentation in the Church is causing erosion detrimental to the faith itself.

The Churches outside the Roman Empire

The Churches outside the Roman Empire⁵ have revealing data to present to the historians. Roman and Persian Empires were the known Kingdoms of Jesus' time. Almost all the apostles worked in the Roman Empire. Only St Thomas the Apostle went out of this Empire. And he went first to Persia, then to India and its confines to bear witness to Jesus Christ. Gradually, Church historians speak about four *sui juris* independent Churches developing outside the

⁴ UR, *Unitatis Redintegratio* of Vatican II, no. 14

⁵ cf. V.Pathikulangara, "The Catholic World", an. in *St Thomas Parish 10th Year Souvenir cum Informative Directory*, Bangalore 1992, pp.26-29

Roman Empire. Of these, the Churches of India and Persia claim to have been born of a direct sharing of Christ-experience by the Apostle St Thomas. The Church of Edessa, though born of Mar Addai, and the Church of Mesopotamia of Mar Mari, both of them claim to have inherited the apostolic tradition of St Thomas. Mar Addai is said to be the direct disciple of St Thomas and Mar Mari a disciple of Mar Addai. Both of them are considered to be the Apostles and teachers of the East.

In short, it is clear that only one apostolic Christ-experience was shared outside the Roman Empire and that was of St Thomas, the Apostle. And from this apostolic Christ-experience there developed in the course of time four independent Churches. All of them invariably claim to have the same patrimony and heritage.

In all these four Churches, namely, of India, Persia (Iran), Edessa and Mesopotamia or Iraq, there was definitely some kind of liturgy celebrated from the very beginning. As it happened in all other Christian communities, a method of divine worship based on the pattern of the Jewish celebrations in the synagogue and of the Passover feast ought to have developed in these Churches too.

It is by the fourth century that the whole Christian world comes to recognize the various types of worship as belonging to certain definite families. In this process, the proper apostolic heritage and theological centres played decisive roles. Outside the Roman Empire, where the Christ-experience of St Thomas the Apostle was shared, there developed only one theological centre, the famous one of Edessa-Nisibis. Only one liturgy and liturgical family is known to have been born and developed outside the Roman Empire and that is the East Syriac or Chaldaic liturgy and its liturgical family. It is born in the apostolic Christ-experience of St Thomas, developed and organized with the help of Edessa-Nisibis theological centre. There is no trace at all in Church history regarding any other liturgy outside the Roman Empire.

The East Syriac or Chaldaic liturgy is the common heritage of all the four Churches of St Thomas' patrimony. All the four Churches have contributed to its origin and growth. There is no reason to think about its origin and development as having taken place in any one of these Churches and then being imposed up on others in particular circumstances. The study of the "history of Liturgy" has made sufficient progress to dispel all misunderstanding propagated by some writers because of the name "East Syriac" or "Chaldaic". It is sad to note that there are some people in Kerala also repeating the mistakes of old writers even today.

The Church of St Thomas in India flourished in her identity under the title *Mar Toma Nasranikal*. All those who have come in contact with them during early centuries (the Papal Delegate Marignoli also is among them) have attested to their identity in the Faith. She was severely tempted by the European missionaries of the sixteenth century. The missionaries split her into two in 1653 with the Coonan Cross oath because of the extreme measures of Latinization and westernization enforced. Those who stood faithful to the Roman Communion at this decisive juncture form the majority of the Thomas Christians under the name the Syro-Malabarians. Though they were highly Latinized and Westernized in the course of time, still they preserved to some extent their original Chaldaic or East Syriac liturgy in its essentials. Those who were separated from the Roman communion gradually chose the West Syriac liturgy of the Antiochene family.

The Churches in Persia, Edessa and Mesopotamia were brought together to form one Church in the course of time. Their geographical nearness ought to have helped this unification. But it is split into several groups due to internal conflicts, power politics, differences of opinion on doctrinal issues, European missionary influences, and so on. In several cases, it was also highly Latinized. Still all of them continue to express their faith basically through the East Syriac or Chaldaic liturgy.

Those who have some vested interests (in Kerala) are trying their best today to create an aversion to everything Chaldaic. The best tool in their hands is the recent national awareness in India. According to them everything outside the present India is foreign and hence to be discarded! Jesus Christ is a historical person and not an ideological one. He is not an Indian by birth! Until very recently, i.e., until the middle of the 20th century, the *Mar Toma Nasranikal* took pride in calling themselves "*Syro-Chaldeans*."⁶ Now some are audaciously trying to fool all those *Mar Toma Nasranikal* who lived through nineteen and a half centuries as authentic "Syro-Chaldeans"!

The root word *Chaldee* means "Aramaic as used in Old Testament Books" according to *the Concise Oxford Dictionary*. In fact, Chaldaic is the language of divine revelation. Do any people discard the culture and language of their revelation? Think of the importance given by Hindus to Sanskrit, Muslims to Arabic and so on!

In the Eastern understanding, liturgy is the response given to revelation, the call of God to salvation. In this perspective, Chaldaic liturgy is a response given to God's call in the same life-situation and language. This is a typical trait of this liturgy. Hence several scholars qualify Chaldaic liturgy as a unique expression of the Faith in the whole of Christendom. Only through study and research can people reach at all these specialties. Those who are not sufficiently introduced to their own apostolic heritage can never respect and experience their liturgy. A liturgy, which is not experiential, becomes meaningless.

Chaldaic means *East Syriac*; "Syro" or "Syrian" is understood as *West Syriac* in scholarly ecclesiastical circles. Hence true ancient *Mar Toma Nasranikal* were very particular to add the word *Chaldaic* to their other names. Thus the name *Syro-Chaldeans*, meaning the Thomas Christians in India who are using East Syriac as their liturgical language.

We saw the two constitutive elements of every individual heritage: the apostolic Christ-experience and the life-situation of each community. Since Liturgy is an expression of such a heritage, there too we may distinguish between these two constitutive elements. In the case of the East Syriac or Chaldaic liturgy, the apostolic Christ-experience is of St Thomas the Apostle; but the life-situation is a combination of two highly developed world cultures, namely, the Sumerian or Semitic culture of the Middle East and the Dravidian culture of India in the first century. Hence, I feel *Chaldeo-Indian* is the name best suited to the present *East Syriac* or *Chaldaic* liturgy and Churches. This point is sufficiently explained in the book *Chaldeo-Indian Liturgy I: Introduction*.⁷

⁶ Mar Alosius Pareparambil, *An Account of a very Important Period of the History of the Catholic Syrians of Malabar*, Puthenpally 1920, documents p.230

⁷ *Chaldeo-Indian Liturgy I: introduction*, Kottayam 1992; also, *Resurrection, Life and Renewal*, Rome-Bangalore-Kottayam 1982, pp. 1-27.

Ecclesial life Clarifying the proper Identity

It is time that the Syro-Malabarians show readiness to clarify their identity in ecclesial life and live accordingly. They belong to a Church, which is recently raised to the Major Archiepiscopal rank. Hence, there is no justification for continuing in a state of identity crisis. The leadership in this Church ought to take necessary steps for achieving such a clarification.

Liturgical identity is the most decisive element of ecclesial identity. Hence the Church leadership has to aim first at clarifying the liturgical identity. To say that they belong to an oriental Church and at the same time passionately follow the style of the Latin Church is in itself a contradiction. If some find it extremely difficult to conform themselves to the general traits of Oriental Churches and to the particular traits of Syro-Malabar or the *Mar Toma Nasrani* Church as agreed in general, it is salvific that they embrace the Latin Church. Mixing Eastern and Western styles together in an artificial way shows lack of faithfulness to both these heritages and it is always self destructive and detrimental to the Faith itself.

Adaptation and assimilation from other Churches and socio-cultural realities are signs of growth in all Churches and heritages. But when assimilation turns out to be mere juxtaposition or syncretism it becomes awkward and detrimental. The Syro-Malabar Church must grow from within, assimilating from the circumstances where she finds herself. It must never lead to an identity crisis, but to an organic growth of her original Chaldeo-Indian identity.

Liturgical Language

It appears that several people in the Syro-Malabar Church are living today in a new *gnosis*. Their basic presupposition is that the original liturgies were all in the vernacular and developed according to the details of the proper culture. This is, in fact, a mere wishful thinking. This clearly shows the lack of contact with liturgical heritage in any tradition. Those who have read at least the minimum in the history of liturgy should have seen that there were only two liturgical languages during the first three centuries, namely, the Aramaic and the Greek. There are eminent scholars who seem to establish that Aramaic alone was used as liturgical language until the end of the first century.⁸ Even in Rome, the liturgy was celebrated in Greek first and, only by the end of the fourth century, the Roman Church adopted the Latin language. Hence, we can reasonably conclude that the early Christians all over the world were not adamant in using the vernacular or cultural situations in their liturgy, but were very keen to hold on to the faith content and preferred to use the language of our Lord and Apostles or the cultural language of the time.

A historical specialty of Eastern heritages also must be mentioned in this connection. Even when they consider very highly the original liturgical languages, they give the needed emphasis to the vernacular too. Most of the Eastern Churches are using, at least partially, the vernacular for liturgical celebrations from very early times. If any Church was giving excessive importance to the original liturgical language, it was only due to the special nature of that language. In the case of the *Mar Toma Nasranikal*, the Aramaic or East Syriac or Chaldaic was for them the language of the Lord and their Apostle, Saint Thomas. Hence they preferred it to all other languages.

⁸ cf. J.A.Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy*, Notre Dame 1976; H. VEGMAN, *Christian Worship in East and West*, New York 1985.

Kerala in the First Century

It will be useful also to think about the habitat of the Thomas Christians in the first Century A.D. Historians are at a loss to sketch exactly the history of Kerala of this century. According to scholars, Malayalam, the present vernacular of Kerala, is formed by the 12th/13th century. The Aryan language Sanskrit began to exert an influence in Kerala only by the 5th century. But there are several documents proving that Aramaic (Chaldaic) was a very familiar language in the whole of India and especially in the West Coast of it, Kerala. If the emperor Asoka had to proclaim his edicts also in Aramaic, it is evident that there were a considerable number of his subjects who could read only that language.⁹

Aramaic was the only *lingua franca* (commercial language) in the East from before the time of Jesus until the time Arabic took its place. Historians have almost proved that there were Jewish traders in the Malabar Coast from the 10th century B.C. It was the Jewish colonies that attracted St Thomas the Apostle to India.¹⁰ Besides, if the *Mar Toma Nasranikal* gave importance to Aramaic, which was the language spoken by Jesus and their Apostle Thomas, how can they be accused for that? The hypothesis proposed by some that the Chaldaic language and liturgy came to India only in the 4th century through the merchant Thomas of Cana and his friends is too difficult to be proved.

If the Persian language became the court language of India and continued even up to the time of British colonization,¹¹ because of the close cultural relations between India and Persia, how can we find fault with the Thomas Christians for using Aramaic which was the most prominent commercial and cultural language of the East and also the language of their revelation, as their liturgical language?

No one can ever think of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of modern India, as betraying our "Indian-ness". According to him, India had cultural relations with Persia and Mesopotamia (present Iran and Iraq) even before the Indo-Aryan civilization, namely, even before 1500 B.C. In the course of time Persian became the court language of India and remained so right up to the beginning of the British period. All the modern Indian languages, both Northern and Southern, are full of Persian words. He had no doubt about the opinions of modern scholars that the Indus valley civilization and the contemporary civilization in Persia and Mesopotamia were in close contact.

"From a period prior to the seventh century B.C. and for ages afterwards there is some evidence of relations between Persia and India through trade, especially early commerce between India and Babylon which, it is believed, was largely via the Persian Gulf," writes Nehru in his book, *The Discovery of India*. According to the evidences in those days the sea routes around India were all controlled by the South Indians, especially by those who were along the Malabar Coast. The close contact between the Malabarians and the Persians, at least from the seventh century B.C. is thus substantiated.

⁹ Cf. Marshall, *Guide to Taxilla*, Delhi 1936, pp. 78-79 and XXIII (a)

¹⁰ Cf. T. Puthiakunnel, *Jewish Colonies in India paved the Way for St Thomas*, art. In "The Malabar Church", Symposium in Honour of Rev. Placid J. Podipara, CMI, OCA 186, Roma 1970, pp. 187f.

¹¹ Cf. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, New York 1945

According to Nehru only very few people in the world had entertained such ancient and continued close relationship with the Indian people as the people of Persia, which resulted in mutual enrichment. "Then came the British and they barred all the doors and stopped all the routes that connected us with our neighbours in Asia," bewails Nehru. "This sudden isolation from the rest of Asia has been one of the most remarkable and unfortunate consequences of British rule in India," he continues to write.

"World developments and common interests are forcing Asiatic countries to look at each other again. The period of European domination is passed over as a bad dream and memories of long ago remind them of old friendships and common adventures. There can be no doubt that in the new future, India will draw closer to Iran (old Persia) as she is doing to China," Nehru's wish and exhortation, perhaps, to the citizens of independent India.

Nehru concludes his discussion on the relation between Indians and Persians (Iranians) quoting from the speech of the leader of an Iranian cultural mission to India at Allahabad:

"The Iranians and Indians are like two brothers who, according to a Persian legend, had got separated from each other, one going East and the other to the West. Their families had forgotten all about each other, and the only thing that remained in common between them were the snatches of a few old tunes that, after a lapse of centuries, the two families recognized each other and were reunited. So also we come to India to play on our flutes our age-old songs, so that, hearing them, our Indian cousins may recognize us as their own and become reunited with their Iranian cousins."

How significant is the expression of the first Prime Minister of India! Shall not the Thomas Christians, especially the Chaldeo-Indians (Syro-Malabarians), think in these lines? The Chaldeans of Iran and Iraq (now also in other nations) are their own cousins, separated from them by the western missionaries in and after the 16th century. Now the Thomas Christians are freed from that undesired bondage and separation. Shall they not accept again their Chaldeo cousins and be reunited to them? The sacred Liturgy appears to be the unique and privileged reality that unites them together. Why not they make a common effort to make researches into their liturgy, spirituality, theology, discipline, monastic and ascetic life and so on in order to contribute positively to their own respective Churches and to the universal Church herself?

Christianity developed against the background of two ancient cultural belts, the Greco-Roman and the Chaldeo-Indian. Many researches are already done on the details of Christian communities in the Greco-Roman belt. The details of Christian communities in the Chaldeo-Indian belt are yet to be searched out. We believe that the Aramaic Christianity of this belt has a lot to contribute to the universal treasury of Christianity. The *Mar Toma Nasranikal* in India appears to be the most resourceful community in this heritage to do the needful.

Characteristics of Thomas Christian or Aramaic or East Syriac Liturgy

Christian Liturgy is better explained as the expression or manifestation or confession or proclamation of the Church. There is something unique to detect and experience in it, especially as it is lived in Eastern Churches. The liturgical act for the faithful in any eastern tradition is the climax or meeting-point of their whole lives – spiritual and secular, social and private, political or economical, intellectual or mental, etc. Thus for the faithful in eastern traditions, the liturgical experience is the supreme life-experience and hence they are not at all distracted by any other kind of experience. It is for them an experience of the whole Christ in whom they are baptized and growing – an experience

of the whole Church, which continues to present Jesus Christ in the day-to-day life-situation – an experience of the heavenly Kingdom where they are united fully with Jesus and presented before the Father.

Naturally, the Eucharistic celebration is the supreme source of this experience for the easterners. Hence they are always eager and long for celebrating it as solemnly and as detailed as possible. They also try to live continuously in this unique experience by praising the Lord through the Prayer of the Church or the 'Liturgy of the Hours' at various hours of the day, usually seven, according to the rhythm of their proper liturgical cycle. This is, in fact, the perfect understanding and vision of Christian faith and spiritual life. Only when one fails to reach this authentic Christian life-style, is he/she tempted to run after other ways and means of self-satisfaction. Other activities of piety such as adoration, way of the Cross, rosary, novenas, bible services, and so on are only secondary means and helps to reach at the above-mentioned supreme style of Christian life and experience. They must never eclipse the uniqueness of the Eucharistic celebration and the "Divine Praises" ('Liturgy of the Hours') in the Church.

With this remark, I would like to note down some of the special traits of the Thomas Christian or Aramaic or East Syriac Liturgy in a very pointed way, especially because of the limitation of this article. I may also try to give some of the sources and writings which helped me to isolate these characteristics and may help the readers to make searches in their own way.

1. The modern scholars qualify liturgy as the human response to the Divine call to salvation. In this perspective, the Aramaic or East Syriac liturgy is a response in the same life-situation of the Christian revelation, namely, the divine call to salvation in Jesus of Nasarath.

[Special to Note: Linguistic studies manifest that the Aramaic spoken by Jesus Christ and His Apostles in Palestine (*Palestinian Jewish Aramaic*), as well as in the adjacent eastern countries, was not static but developed into classical Syriac. *Aramaic* was a general term used to cover a group of Semitic dialects closely related to Hebrew, and even more closely related to one another. But it should be remembered that a language spoken in a wide region will have dialectical differences from place to place. This does not make them different languages. This is true with regard to the Aramaic language too. The Aramaic speaking Patriarchs of the Old Testament could move from place to place making themselves understood by the people of other localities with dialectical differences or intonations. In the New Testament, we read that St Peter, who hailed from Galilee, had a different accentuation or intonation of the Palestinian Jewish Aramaic he was speaking (Mt.26:73). In the Old Testament, not only are Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Dan.2:4b to 7:28 and the gloss in Jeremiah 10:11 in Aramaic, but we find elsewhere also a number of isolated Aramaic words. In certain books, the biblical Hebrew has been somewhat Aramaicised. In the New Testament, we have some Greek transliterations of the Aramaic words spoken by Our Lord (Mk.5:41; 7:34; Mt.27:46). The Greek transliterations have not produced the exact sounds and letters of the Aramaic language due to the limitations of the Greek language which does not have some letters in the alphabet to represent the exact letters and sounds of the Aramaic language.

Aram is mentioned as a place name designating an area north east of the region that came to be known later in Greek as *Syria*. *Aram and Aramit*(= *Aramaic*) in the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament became *Syria* and *Syriac* due to Greek nomenclature, which has influenced the western translations. Therefore, Syriac language is substantially the Aramaic language.

When Christianity began to spread in the eastern regions adjacent to Palestine, the Christians themselves preferred to name their language *Syriac* to distinguish it from the Aramaic speaking pagans.

The Aramaic or Syriac language had only one script until the 5th century A.D. As it was a spoken language until the Islamic conquests, it had only consonants in writing. This script is called *Estrangela*. Vowels were supplied by speakers. The modern East Syriac Script and vowel signs were developed after the 5th century A.D. This script is very similar to the Estrangela. East Syriac has retained also the ancient pronunciation of the language. But in Antioch in the 7th century A.D. there developed another script and vowel system for Syriac language. This script is called *Serto* and the pronunciation is a bit different from that of the East Syriac. The Antiochene Syriac is now called West Syriac. This is also called Maronite Syriac because the Maronite Catholics of Lebanon use it in their Liturgy. Both the Eastern and Western scripts of the Syriac language have Estrangela script in common.

The ancient Church Communities which used the Syriac language in Liturgy come under the designation *Syriac Churches* now. The designations such as **Syrian Church**, **Syrian Liturgy** etc. used by many writers hitherto must be corrected because the Church Communities using Syriac Liturgy were not confined to *Political Syria* alone, but rather were spread over many countries other than Syria, as we have seen above. Hence *Syriac Church*, *Syriac Liturgy* etc are the correct designations.]¹²

2. It is Semitic, Asian, Indian or more correctly and precisely, Chaldeo-Indian and Judeo-Christian (our discussion in the historical part of this article).
3. Unique type of the MYSTERY sense: It is a mystery sense co-extensive with that of the Church. This is a sense which unites together the heaven and earth – the transcendental and immanent – the historical work of redemption, liturgical action in the Church and the permanent heavenly liturgy. It is one that involves the whole Economy of Salvation in Jesus. It really helps the faithful to walk with Jesus or better to live in Jesus.
4. Eschatological character is the real outcome of the sense of Mystery. It is part and parcel of every liturgical action in this tradition. Liturgy is an entrance to the real heavenly experience – a trial of heavenly life during the tedious journey through the ups and downs of this world to embrace it for good.
5. Unique vision of the liturgical space and time resulting in the symbolically distinct church architecture and ordering of the liturgical celebrations in the house of God.
6. Thoroughly Biblical: Being formed and developed almost simultaneously in the same language and life-situation, both of them appear to have mutually influenced and uniquely enriched.
7. Distinguished style of structuring the Eucharistic celebration, the Liturgical year, the “Divine Praises” (Liturgy of the Hours) and the celebration of the Mysteries of the Church

¹² Indebted to Rev. Dr Thomas Kalayil, CMI, Professor Emeritus of Biblical and Patristic studies and Syriac language in the Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore and in several other Institutes of Theology in India, for this special note.

(Sacraments and sacramentals) according to the pattern of the Mystery of Salvation, evident in the kerygmatic scheme seen in the first proclamations of Apostles Peter and Paul as recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

8. Patristic in Core: The texts of the Holy *Qurbana*, Mysteries of the Church, "Divine Praises", etc. are all almost in full contain the Patristic compositions, the vast majority coming from the 'Harp of the Holy Spirit', Mar Aprem, the Syriac father.
9. Use of Symbols and Signs: Christian Liturgy cannot be thought about in the absence of signs and symbols. They are in fact the doors which lead the faithful to the other world giving them the divine and salvific experience. In comparison with the other Eastern Churches the Aramaic or East Syriac Liturgy uses a system of very simple but deeply theological and mystical signs and symbols.
10. Ascetical and Mystical: Liturgy being the human attempt to reach and experience the Divine, it involves naturally self-sacrifice and union with the Divine. The intensity of love is best expressed through the sacrifice involved. Scholars qualify this dimension as something that is personal and creative in the sphere of Christian spiritual life which promotes its dynamic character. Christian mysticism is the perfection and crown of theology and liturgy: theology and liturgy *par excellence*.
11. Theological and Catechetical: The liturgical texts are all real theological formulae, namely, condensed statements of theological insight. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* is fully realized in the case of this liturgical tradition. Hence every liturgical celebration is also highly catechetical, reminding and helping the faithful to grow in the authentic teaching of the Church and become real witnesses of the faith content.
12. Unique style of adapting to and adopting from the life-situation to grow organically. Example are *Puqdankon...* at the beginning of the Holy *Qurbana*, *Rakkuli* and *pindipperunal*, etc. in the liturgical year, *Thali*, *Manthrakodi*, etc. in connection with the Mysteries of the Church.
13. Centrality of the Liturgy in the Church: The Bishop is considered the normal head of the liturgical assembly; priests, deacon, other ministers, and the faithful having their own role and place in every liturgical celebration. Even the ordinary governing and administrative system in this tradition appear to have developed from the ordering of the liturgical celebration.

Sources of Thomas Christian Liturgy

Aramaic or East Syriac Liturgy, which is used at present by three Churches, the Syro Malabar, Chaldean and Assyrian Churches, has many sources in common. Early manuscripts of different liturgies are also common sources of this liturgical tradition. P. Yousif's *A Classified Bibliography on the East Syrian Liturgy* (Rome 1990) contains all the necessary sources and studies of this common tradition. Some important sources related to Thomas Christians, the present Syro Malabarians, esp. the printed ones are worth noting. The acts and decrees of the Synod of Diamper is an important source to

understand the liturgy of the pre-Diamper period.¹³ The first printed texts of the post-Diamper liturgies were printed and published from Rome under the following titles: *Ordo Chaldaicus Missae Beatorum Apostolorum iuxta ritum Ecclesiae Malabaricae* (1774); *Ordo Chaldaicus Ministerii Sacramentorum Sanctorum* (1775); *Ordo Ritum et Lectionum* (1775).

The restored texts published from Rome are the following:

Liturgia Siro-Malabaresi, Revisione e Ristampa del “Messale Siro-Malabarese” (Roma 1955, CCO Prot. N. 947/48); *Taksa d’Quddasa* (Alwaye 1960); *Ordo Celebrationis Quddasa iuxta usum Ecclesiae Syro-Malabarensis* (Romae 1959); *Supplementum Mysteriorum sive proprium de Tempore et de Sanctis iuxta Ritum Ecclesiae Syro-Malabarensis* (Romae 1960); *The Order of Qurbana for the Syro-Malabar Church*, in Syriac and Malayalam (Alwaye 1962); *La Santa Messa secondo il Rito Malabarese* (Roma 1966); *Holy Qurbana according to the Syro-Malabar Rite*, in English and Hindi (Allahabad 1970); *Order for the Solemn Raza of the Syro-Malabar Church*, in Malayalam and English by the Syro-Malabar Church in 1986 and this text was inaugurated in Kerala by Pope John Paul II.

Taksa d-Raza: Order of the Mysteries, “With the First Hallowing that is the Hallowing of the Blessed Apostles Mar Addai and Mar Mari, Preceptors of the Orient” According to the Use of the Church of the East Syrians of Malabar, Editio Typica (Rome 2003).

Pontifical: *Ktaba d-Takse Kumraye, (Liber Ordinum Pontificalium secundum usum Sanctae Ecclesiae Syrorum Orientalium id est Chaldaeorum)*, Rome 1957. This is one for both the Churches, Chaldeans and Syro-Malabarians.¹⁴

“Divine Praises” (Liturgy of the Hours): P. Bedjan, *Slotha Qanonayta d-kahne, Breviarium iuxta Ritum Syrorum Orientalium id est Chaldaeorum*, Paris-Leipzig 1887-88 / SCEO Rome 1938. The reprint in 1938 was for the Syro Malabarians also.¹⁵

Mysteries of the Church (Sacraments and Sacramentals)¹⁶

Some Writings which are to be specially considered:

V. Pathikulangara, *Resurrection, Life and Renewal*, ‘A Theological Study of the Liturgical Celebrations of the Great Saturday and the Sunday of Resurrection in the Chaldeo-Indian Church’ (Bangalore-Kottayam 1982); V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, ‘The Eucharistic Celebration of the Chaldeo-Indian Church’, Chaldeo-Indian Liturgy 2, DSP 48 (Kottayam 1998; updated 3rd Reprint 2007); V. Pathikulangara, (ed.), *Holy Qurbana: A Pictorial Journey*, (English version of the Malayalam book, *Parisudha Qurbana Chithrangalilude*, by Mar Joseph Perumthottam), DSP 69 (Kottayam 2009); E. R. Hambye, *Dimensions of Eastern Christianity*, OIRSI 62 (Kottayam 1983); G. Dix, *Shape of the Liturgy*, (London 1945); J. A. Jungmann, *The*

¹³ See the English translation edited by S. Zacharia, *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599*, Edamattom 1994.

¹⁴ For other editions see, Yousif, *A Classified Bibliography*, 129-30.

¹⁵ See other sources in Yousif, *A Classified Bibliography*, 81-83.

¹⁶ For texts and general studies see, Yousif, *A Classified Bibliography*, 106-133.

Early Liturgy, (Notre Dame 1959); J. A. Jungmann, *The Mass*, (Collegeville 1976); P. Maniyattu, (ed.), *East Syriac Theology, an Introduction*, Ephrem's Publications (Satna 2007); M. Vellanickal, *Church: Communion of Individual Churches, 'Biblico-Theological Perspectives on the Communion Ecclesiology of Vatican II'*, St Pauls (Mumbai 2009).