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MÖRĀN ETHŌ

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Consecrated persons, by virtue of their consecration, follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way. They are called to recognise the signs of God's presence in daily life and wisely to discern the questions posed to us by God and the men and women of our time.

-Pope Francis

The world needs monks and religious to give Christ in the complexities and darkness of the modern world.

-Baselios Cardinal Cleemis Catholicos

MÖRĀN ETHŌ - 47

MONASTIC VIRGIN PROFESSION IN THE WEST SYRIAN TRADITION

Sr. Dr. Ardra SIC



ST. EPHREM ECUMENICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SEERI)
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2020

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis.</i>
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , New York, 1992.
AJT	<i>Acts of Judas Thomas.</i>
AMS	Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum.
ARAM	<i>Aram</i> , Oxford.
Arm.	Armenian.
ATR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
BenMsch	<i>Benediktinische Monatschrift.</i>
BN	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
BO	<i>Bibliothecae Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana</i> , 4 Vols., J.S. Assemani, Ed., Roma, 1719-1728.
Brit. Mus.	British Museum.
Brit. Mus. Add.	British Museum Additional.
CCEO	<i>Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium.</i>
C/cc	Canon (s).
CD	<i>Christus Dominus.</i>
CNis	Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syers <i>Carmina Nisibena</i> , Syr text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 218/219, Syr 92/93, Louvain 1961 & II CSCO 240/241; Syr 102/103, Louvain 1963.
CO	<i>Christian Orient.</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium.</i>
DB	<i>Dictionary of the Bible</i> , McKenzie, Milwaukee, 1965.
DBS	<i>Dictionnaire de la Bible Supplement.</i>
DBT	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i> , Melbourne, 1967.
DCSp	<i>Dictionary of Christian Spirituality.</i>
DELit	<i>Dictionnaire Encyclopedique de la Liturgie.</i>

DESp	<i>Dizionario Enciclopèdico di Spiritualità</i> , E. Ancilli, Ed., 3 Vols. Roma, 1990.
DIP	<i>Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione</i> , Roma, 1974.
DM	<i>Dizionario di Mistica</i> , Vaticano, 1998.
DSp	<i>Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique</i> , Paris, 1937-1995.
DTC	<i>Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique</i> , Paris, 1903-1950.
DThVC	<i>Dizionario Theologico della Vita Consecrata</i> , Milan, 1992.
ECR	<i>Eastern Churches Review</i> .
ECQ	<i>Eastern Churches Quarterly</i> .
Ed.	Edited.
EDB	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the Bible</i> .
EDNT	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , Michigan, 1991-93.
Eds.	Editors.
EphLit.	<i>Ephemerides Liturgicae</i> .
ET	English Translation.
FT	French Translation.
GLAT	<i>Grande Lessico del Antico Testamento</i> .
GT	German Translation.
HArm	<i>Hymnes de S. Ephraem conservées en version arménienne</i> . Armenian version and LT. Maries & Mercier, PO 30, 1961. The English citations are from R. Murray, <i>Sob/ECR</i> 11 (1989).
HEccl	Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers <i>Hymnen de Ecclesia</i> , Syr. Text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 198/199; Syr 84/85, Louvain 1960.
HEccl	Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers <i>Hymnen de Fide</i> , Syr. Text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 154/155; Syr 73/74, Louvain, 1955.

HEpi	<i>Hymni de Epiphania</i> , in <i>HNat</i> .
HNat	Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers <i>Hymnen de Nativitate</i> , Syr. Text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 186/187; Syr. 82/83, Louvain, 1959.
HParad	Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers <i>Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum</i> , Syr. Text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 174/175; Syr. 78/79, Louvain, 1957.
HVirg	Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers <i>Hymnen de Virginitate</i> , Syr. Text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 223/224; Syr. 94/95, Louvain, 1962.
IDB	<i>Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible</i> , New York.
JahrLitw	<i>Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft</i> .
JBC	<i>Jerome Biblical Commentary</i> , London, 1970.
JCSSS	<i>Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies</i> .
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i> .
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> .
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> .
Mal.	Malayalam.
Ms. Mss.	Manuscript, Manuscripts.
NCE	<i>New Catholic Encyclopedia</i> , 1962-1966.
NDT	<i>New Dictionary of Theology</i> , Wilmington, 1989.
NDSW	<i>New Dictionary of Sacred Worship</i> .
NPNF	<i>Nicean and Post Nicean Fathers of the Christian Church</i> .
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i> .
OCA	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i> .
OCP	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i> .
OE	<i>Orientalium Ecclesiarum</i>
OS	<i>L 'Orient Syrien</i> , Paris.
PdO	<i>Parole de l'Orient</i> .
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> .

PIO	Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome.
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina.</i>
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis.</i>
PS	<i>Patrologia Syriaca.</i>
PUG	Pontificio Universitas Gregoriana, Rome.
RB	<i>Revue Biblique.</i>
RivLit	<i>Rivista Liturgica.</i>
RSR	<i>Recherches de Science Religieuse.</i>
SA	<i>Studia Anselmiana.</i>
SCA	Studies in Christian Antiquity.
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> , Paris.
SCC	Syriac Correspondence Course.
SCS	<i>Syrian Churches Series.</i>
SCDW	Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship.
<i>Serm</i>	Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers <i>Seromones</i> IV, Syr. text and GT, by E. Beck, CSCO 334/335; Syr. 148/149, Louvain 1973. (Sermons Vols. I-IV).
SNT	Supplements to Novum Testamentum.
Sob/ECR	<i>Sobornost Incorporated with the Eastern Churches Review.</i>
SP	<i>Studia Patristica.</i>
StL	<i>Studia Liturgica.</i>
TS	Theological Studies.
UDD	Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation.
Vat.	Vatican.
VC	<i>Vita Consecrata.</i>
ViSpi	<i>La Vie Spirituelle.</i>
VSpi Sup	<i>La Vie Spirituelle - Supplement.</i>
WS	Wood-Brook Studies.
ZThk	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie and Kirche</i> , Tübingen.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The consecrated religious life is a vocation that originates in baptism, the primary consecration of every Christian to Jesus Christ. Baptismal consecration, in which Christ takes possession of a person within, is the foundation for religious consecration. *Vita Consecrata* considers religious profession or consecration, in the Eastern and Western Christian tradition as a special and fruitful deepening of the consecration received in baptism by which one's union with Christ develops into a fuller, more explicit and authentic configuration to him.

From its very beginning, the entrance into a monastic or religious state was inaugurated by a liturgical service of some sort. The Syrian Fathers like Aphrahat and Ephrem testify to a special consecration of the early Christian virgins along with baptismal consecration since 4th Century. In fact, though we have evidence of a systematic form of monastic consecration since the time of Pseudo- Dionysius the Areopagite (5th Century) it is only since the 10th century that the manuscripts of the service of profession in the West Syrian Churches have been found and from thence the later manuscripts like Vatican Syr.51.

There is no doubt that monasticism as a way of life has enjoyed a glorious place in the history of the Oriental Churches of the Antiochian Tradition since 4th century. It has been influencing the life of the Church and of the society in different ways. Due to its manifold contributions, Pope Francis, wishes to re-instate monasteries and convents so that they become like oases in a desert enable men and women of all ages to rediscover themselves, “in harmony with creation, allowing God to restore a proper order in their lives”.

In India, we are proud of the existence of the rich heritage of *Sanyasa* as a way of self realization from time immemorial. But in the West Syrian Churches especially in the Malankara Orthodox Church in India, there was no such foundations exist till 1925. It was in 1919, for the first time in the history of the Malankara Church, that monastic life was introduced as a state of life due to the strenuous efforts of Archbishop Mar Ivanios (1882-1953), formerly known as Fr. P.T. Geevarghese. In 1919, it was he who inaugurated a monastic movement integrating the monastic ideals of both the Oriental Christian monasticism and Indian *Sanyasa* and eventually founded the Order of the Imitation of Christ for men and in 1925, the Congregation for the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ for Women. Both these Congregations were started with the aim of Imitating Jesus Christ by closely following his contemplative hidden life and his exemplary active public life and to strive for the spiritual renewal of the Malankara Church, which was then in a state of spiritual turmoil, dissention and internal strife. In 1930, Mar Ivanios reunited with the Catholic Church and following him all the members of the monastic orders too entered in to the Catholic fold. Thus, since 1930, the Order of the Imitation of Christ and the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ have been rendering their dedicated services to the Church and to the Society, thus they serve as “two lungs” of the body of Jesus Christ.

As we have mentioned above, it was in the Malankara Orthodox Church of Antiochean Tradition that Mar Ivanios inaugurated monastic life for the first time in its ecclesiastical history. Since, it was not found any prior model of liturgical service for the *Sanyasa Prathishta* (monastic consecration). We presume that the ritual of the service of the profession of nuns was compiled by Mar Ivanios for the monastic dedication ceremony of the first members of the sisterhood in 1925. The Service which he compiled for the monastic dedication was known as *Sanyasa Prathishta*. The Service was handwritten by Mother

Cybar, the eighth member in 1925. We have in our archives the manuscript in Syriac with a Malayalam Translation. Until now both the Order of the Imitation of Christ and the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ use this liturgical service for the profession of vows of their members. The service in its entirety contains and conveys the theology of monastic life in the West Syrian Churches. Hence it is our earnest desire to study this liturgical service in order to comprehend its liturgico-theological significance and to convey the same throughout this inspiring work, which I am pleased and honoured to present to all who will be its readers.

This book entitled Monastic Virgin Profession in the West Syriac Tradition is thus a study of the liturgy of profession of the nuns in the Syrian Churches of the West Syrian Tradition. The Churches of the West Syrian Tradition implies those Churches which follow the Antiochean liturgical tradition. These Churches include: The Malankara Orthodox Church, the Malankara Jacobite Church, the Maronite Church, and the Malankara Catholic Church. It is a complex task to deal with the liturgical services of the profession of nuns in all these Churches, in detail; hence we give a glimpse about the structure and content of the services of profession of the nuns in these Churches. However, our research is focused on the Liturgy of Profession of the Nuns in the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church.

The Sources

The main sources for this study are the liturgical texts of monastic profession in the Antiochean and in the Malankara tradition. *They include: Sanyasinikalude Vritha Vagdanam* (Profession of Vows: The Service for Nuns), Ritual of the Clothing of the Monks (*Takso d' tulbosho d' dairoye*), Ritual of the Tonsure of Nuns (*Takso d' suporo d' dairoyoto*), *Pontificale Iuxta Ritum Ecclesiae Syrorum Occidentalium id est Antiochiae* Pars III, O Heiming's Translation of

the Syriac Manuscript (BN Ms.Syr.154) of 1951 are also used in our study. We also have studied the early Syriac literary sources and the writings of Aphrahat, Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh etc. As our inquiry examines the spousal relationship between Christ and the Church; His bride, we have also used the modern Church documents available on the topics

The Method of the Study

Since this study involves the fields of liturgy and theology, the method that we use is multifarious. In the first chapter we make a historical enquiry into the sources, origin and the development of the Service of profession in the West Syrian and Malankara tradition. The Second chapter is an expository study of the liturgy of profession based on the Liturgical Service of Profession in the Malakara Church. In the third chapter an analytical study of the rites and rituals involved in the service is dealt with. In the fourth chapter we adopt a synthetic method to converge the main liturgical and theological elements of the service of profession and to understand the influence of the liturgy upon the life and ethos of the consecrated virgins.

Previous Studies

No previous studies have made on the topic and this is an initial study which will be an impetus for future research works.

Limitations

We limit our study to a liturgico-theological explication of the Service of Profession, therefore we do not deal with the different other dimensions involved in the matter such as philosophical, juridical and canonical implications of the rite of profession.

Structure of the Work

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter is a theoretical study which is an enquiry into the sources of the liturgical

rite, such as the scriptural, patristic and liturgical rites. In this chapter we also deals with the emergence and the development of the liturgical rite, In this regard we try to study how monastic profession was done in the early monastic traditions of the Oriental Churches. Particular mention is made of the Antonian, Pachomian and Basilian practices. Considering the development of the Service of Profession in the West Syrian Churches we will examine how it is evolved in the Syrian communities of the Covenanters. Since our study concentrates on the Malankara Liturgy of Profession as a model for other Churches of the West Syrian tradition, we introduce the monastic life in the malankara Church and the early practice of monastic profession in this tradition. .

The second chapter concentrates on the analysis of the structure and content of the liturgical service of profession. For this, we made an explication of the Service by dividing it into three parts; the Service of Profession prior to the profession of vows, the Service of Profession of the Vows, and the Service of Profession following the profession of vows. Thus we try to see how liturgy of the service of profession as celebration of faith becomes an incentive for the newly professed to live the life of consecration. Hence, we try to understand the relationship between liturgy and life.

The third chapter deals with the mystery dimension of the rite of profession. By stating the concept of mystery in the Syrian understanding, we attempt to bring the divine involvement of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in the liturgical service. Through an enunciation of the prayers and symbolical rituals involved in the service, we try to illustrate the nuptial dimension of monastic profession and the spousal ethos required from the virgin bride of Christ. At the end we give a typology of Christ and the Church as prototype of the Christian couple to better conceive the nuptial mystery underlying monastic profession..

The fourth chapter envisages a liturgico-theological understanding of the Service of Profession. Summarising the important aspects studied in the service, we draw out three points of theological significance in the service. The first point deals with the covenantal dimension of monastic profession. Here we attempt to bring to light the elements found in the Old and New Testament covenants to articulate our view that monastic profession is by nature a covenant with God. In the second point we deal with the aspect that monastic profession is a consecration. Since this consecration is rooted in the baptismal consecration and is an extension of the same, we mention similar elements involved in both these rites and the uniqueness of each rites. In the third point, we also examine the communal and missionary dimensions of monastic profession in the West Syrian tradition. The relevance and the observations evolved from this study are briefly reviewed in the general conclusion.

Chapter One

THE WEST SYRIAN RITE OF MONASTIC VIRGIN PROFESSION: SOURCES, EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

It is the thrust of the scholars of each Church *sui iuris*¹ to study their ecclesial traditions and liturgical services by analyzing the liturgico - patristic sources. This is for acquiring an authentic understanding about their spiritual heritage and to contribute efficiently for the growth of the Church.² This is factual with regards to our topic, the Service of Monastic Profession in the West Syrian and the Malankara Tradition.

In our study on the monastic profession of the virgins in the Antiochene and the Malankara tradition, we first appraise the notion of monastic profession in the Malankara Catholic Church³ in order to understand the concept of it in the West Syrian tradition. Secondly we try to analyze the sources of the present liturgical text of the service of

¹ According to the Code of the Oriental Churches, a community of the faithful united by a hierarchy according to the norm of law and tacitly or expressly approved as *sui iuris* by the supreme authority of the Church is called a Church *sui iuris*. A Church *sui iuris* has its specific rite, theology, spiritual traditions, liturgy, and discipline. Cf. *CCEO*, 27.

² *OE*, 2:6.

³ The Malankara Church is the Church of apostolic origin in Kerala, India. The Christians of the Malankara Church are generally known as St. Thomas Christians. Until the 16th century the St. Thomas Christian community followed the East Syrian (Chaldean) liturgical tradition. But the missionary enthusiasm of the occidentals had created tensions and ultimately brought division in the Church in 1653. The existent Christian community was divided into two groups namely the *Pazhayakoottukar*, (old group) who accepted the authority of the missionaries and the *Puthenkoottukar* (new group) who rejected the authority of the missionaries. The new group entered into

profession in the Malankara Church, which are comprised of the Syrian literary sources, life and teachings of the Fathers, and the early liturgical rites. Finally to view the emergence and the development of the service of profession we sketch the influence of the rite of profession in the Coptic-Greek monastic traditions and conclude the chapter describing the Syrian monastic life and the present structure of monastic profession in Maronite, Syro-Orthodox monasticism. We give a depiction of the early practice of profession in the Malankara Catholic Church, as an anticipation to the forthcoming elaborate study on the structure and the content of profession in this tradition.

1. THE MONASTIC PROFESSION: A WEST SYRIAN OVERVIEW

According to K. V. Mathew, “the traditional rite for the consecration of a monk or nun is full of insight about monastic life”⁴ where the importance of penetrating into the meaning and the significance of monastic profession in the West Syrian liturgical tradition is found.

ecclesial communion with the Jacobite Patriarchate of Antioch in 1665 and gradually adopted the West Syrian liturgical tradition by 1836. In 1926, the Episcopal Synod held at Parumala, in South India empowered Metropolitan Mar Ivanios of the Orthodox Church to enter into negotiations with Rome to effect re-union with the Catholic Church under the expressed condition that the ancient venerable tradition of the Malankara Syrian Church should be retained and kept intact. Pius XI approved the terms and welcomed the re-union. Five of the members including Mar Ivanios, entered into the Catholic communion on 20th of September 1930. Thus was effected a historical event in the Indian Church. From thence the re-united community came to be known as the Syro Malankara Catholic Church of Kerala India. This Church has now twelve dioceses and numerous mission centers within and outside of India and it has been raised to the status of the Major Archbishopal Church *sui iuris*. Malancharuvil, *The Syro-Malankara Church*, 22-52; Podippara, *The St. Thomas Christians*, 152-156; Malancharuvil, “The Introduction”, 103-104, Malankara (I Vol.).

⁴ Mathew, *Faith and Practice*, 81.

The term profession in Greek *homologia* and in Hebrew *berit*, used since the 3rd and 4th century to designate virginal commitment of a person, has acquired different technical meanings such as consecration, promise, and dedication.⁵ The writings of the Fathers like Aphrahat, Ephrem and the later studies of the scholars like A. Vööbus, R. Murray, I. Pēnā inform us that the commitment to a life of virginity in early Syrian pre-monasticism, and in later monasticism necessarily involved a pronouncement of a pledge called *qyōmo* (ܩܝܘܡܐ) and a way of life proper to the life of Jesus the poor obedient chaste son of God.⁶

In the present religious context, profession indicates the public solemn pledge of the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty before the Church and in the presence of a legitimate religious superior by which one attains membership in a specific religious community with rights and obligations.⁷

Considering the specific liturgical celebration of the profession of virgins in the West Syrian tradition, especially in the Malankara Church, we find that the liturgical text *Sanyasinikalude Vritha Vagdanam* (Profession of Vows: The Service for Nuns) provides us with fine points regarding the religious commitment of virgins in this tradition.⁸ Hence religious profession is an act of divine consecration by which candidates to the religious life declare their intention in the midst of a worshipping community to put on the charism of singleness (ܐܝܗܕܘܝܘܬܐ *ihīdōyūtō*), to draw near to God in absolute trust with

⁵ In the early period since Clement of Alexandria and in the Syrian tradition since Aphrahat, the term *homologia* and *berit* were used respectively. *Homologia* the Greek word signifies the external manifestation of an internal consent and *berit* means a pact in terms of a covenant made between God and man. Later, the terms *consecratio*, *professio* and *propositum* became the vocabulary to denote the consecration of the virgins. Cf. Gribomont, “Professione”, 884.

⁶ Cf. Pēna, *The Amazing Life*, 110; Griffith, “Asceticism”, 238.

⁷ Gribomont, “Professione”, 884.

a view to recount all through their life the wonders of the Triune God.⁹ This is a voluntary commitment of love for a whole-hearted following of Christ the *ihīdōyō* (ܝܫܘܥ) which effects a consecration – a setting apart for God and a putting on of the *ihīdōyō* - the Only Begotten Son of God. It is further a communion with God and with others, and is oriented for mission.¹⁰ In the West Syrian tradition, dedication is made primarily through consecratory rites of initiation specifically manifested through the tonsuring and the clothing of the candidate.

1.1. Monastic Profession and Religious Profession?

The term ‘monastic’, deriving from the Greco-Coptic word *monachos*, corresponds also to the Syriac word *ihīdōyō* meaning ‘single’ or only one. Murray has attributed three senses to the term *ihīdōyō*: single from wife or family, single mindedness (*monotropos*) and united to the Only Begotten (*monogenus*).¹¹ The term is used to denote Christ the Only-Begotten Son of God, as well as the monk since the monk’s vocation is to become one with the One and Only Son of God. This is the goal of monastic profession.

Since Vatican Council II, the term religious profession is commonly used instead of monastic profession probably due to its emphasis on the profession of vows. Nevertheless, we do not find any theological problem with either usage of the term. The rite of monastic profession and of religious profession comprises two essential elements: a

⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam* is the Malayalam version, and Profession of Vows: The Service for Nuns is the English translation of the *Ordo* of Profession in the Malankara Catholic Church. The English translation of the Service is done by Rev. Samuel Thaikkoottathil, in 2001. He was a professor in liturgy in the Malankara Major seminary, Trivandrum, Kerala, India.

⁹ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 46.

¹⁰ This aspect is highlighted in the liturgical books *Takso d'tulboshō d'dairoye*, *Takso d'suporo d'dairoyoto*, *The Ritual of the Clothing of the Monks* and in *Vritha Vagdanam*.

¹¹ Murray, “Exhortation”, 67.

consecration or a dedication of oneself to God through a tacit promise as was done by the early ascetics, or by explicit vows as in the modern religious congregation, and an entry into a particular religious institute.¹² However, the limitation of the terminology is inadequate to highlight the goal of religious consecration, which is essentially monastic life.

In our work, we often use the term “monastic profession” with regard to the nature, the significance and the character of the Liturgical Service of Profession. It consists not only of the profession of vows, but also of an explicit profession, consisting of a series of questions and answers, prayers and instructions, wherein the virgin makes the promise of permanently living the ascetical life in the monastery. This latter is considered important to the Syrian understanding.¹³ The consecration of life in order to draw near to God through a life of singleness “*ihīdōyūtō*”, exposes the monastic nature of this state. The monastic traits of the Liturgy of Profession, for example, the ample use of the psalms, emphasis on a long and large quantity of prayers, use of ascetical rituals of tonsure, prostration etc. give this rite a monastic character. These aspects of the liturgy also give the participants an experience of monastic worship.

1.1.1. Profession and Consecration

Monastic or religious profession is termed a special consecration in the documents of Vatican Council II. This terminology however, is not a new innovation, but is the restitution of the early understanding of monastic profession as the outcome of baptismal consecration.¹⁴ In the Malankara and in the other Syrian Churches of Antiochene liturgical tradition, though monastic profession is envisaged as a consecration

¹² Cf. Yeo, *The Structure and Content*, 338-339.

¹³ Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 116-117; Instead of profession of vows Mar Ivanios used the term ‘*Prathinja*’ or promise to highlight ‘*Prathishta*’ or consecration since consecration should accompany “*Prathinja*’ or promise. Cf. Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 56-58.

¹⁴ *PC*, no. 5.

rooted on baptism, it is further considered parallel to the consecration of persons, places or things to God.

The celebrant, who represents Christ, through prayers and liturgical acts of worship, elevates the image of God (the candidate) to a blissful state of Christian perfection. This is done in the presence of and with the prayers of the ecclesial community of the believers. With the service of consecration, the virgin becomes the “virgin of God.” Separated entirely, dedicated totally, and offered as an oblation, the virgin accepts the obligation to live for God and with God as His abode.¹⁵

Consecration is primarily an action of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and profession is the action of the consecrated one in response to the loving invitation to the divine life of the Holy Trinity. As the primary agent of consecration, God Himself receives the virgin, accepts and elevates her to the lofty status of His spouse.¹⁶ Promises or profession of vows as the outcome of consecration stabilizes the act of dedication. Through vows, the candidate gives herself to God totally and absolutely for a way of life, which is obedient, virginal and poor, in and through a monastic or religious community. Through this dedication, one becomes the shareholder of Christ’s life, His own disciple, and assumes the way of life, proper to a particular monastic community or religious congregation on the way towards union with God.¹⁷

1.1.2. The Significance of the Vows in Monastic Profession

The Books of the Service of the Clothing of the Monks (ܬܘܒܘ ܕܐܬܟܣܘܢܐ ܕܕܝܐܝܘܬܐ , *Takso d’ tulbosho d’ dairoye*) and of the Nuns (ܬܘܒܘ ܕܐܬܟܣܘܢܐ ܕܕܝܐܝܘܬܐ , *Takso d’suporo d’ dairoyoto*) in the

¹⁵ Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 106. Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 55.

¹⁶ Cf. *Vriitha Vagdanam*, 45-48; Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 116-117.

¹⁷ Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 56.

Antiochene tradition do not mention the pronouncement of the vows.¹⁸ This indicates that a subjective, legalistic commitment of the candidate by explicit vows was absent in early Syrian monasticism. What was considered essential was not the pronouncement of the vows formally and in public, but the interior commitment to God.¹⁹ However, it is also noteworthy that the statement of vows, though insignificant in the early Syrian monastic tradition, was tacitly inherent in the concept of renunciation — abandoning everything for the sake of following Christ — and in the implication of celibacy.²⁰

In our times, the explicit profession of vows is the practice in the Antiochene tradition.²¹ We understand this as a transition or a development with regard to the old understanding of a tacit vow tradition. The evangelical counsels, the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, are the means to attain union with God. Through the vow of obedience, the virgin disregards all other voices to listen to the Word of God, and unites her will to His. Through chastity the whole heart, mind and strength

¹⁸ The *Takso d’ tulbosho d’ dairoye* and the *Takso d’ suporo d’ dairoyoto* published by the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate, Charfet, Lebanon in 1952 in the Book of the Priestly Rites (*Ktobo d’ takse Kumroye*) are the basic texts used for the monastic initiation of the monks and nuns in the West Syrian Churches. Cf. *Takso d’ tulbosho d’ dairoye*, 255-326; Cf. *Takso d’ suporo d’ dairoyoto*, 327-359. These texts do not speak about the profession of the three evangelical counsels, but often mention about the covenantal life that the monks and nuns enter into. F. Acharya translated the *Takso d’ tulbosho d’ dairoye* and it was published by SEERI in 1999 under the title Acharya, *The Ritual of the Clothing of the Monks* and S. Brock translated the *Takso d’ suporo d’ dairoyoto* into English in 2002 for the use of our present study and is published with its English & Malayalam translation under the title, Sr. Ardra SIC, *Takso d’ suporo d’ dairoyoto*, SEERI, Kottayam 2020.

¹⁹ Yeo, *The Structure and Content*, 331.

²⁰ Yeo, *The Structure and Content*, 338.

²¹ In the Malankara Catholic Church and the Maronite Catholic Church the monks and the nuns profess the three vows. Cf. *Vriithanushatana*, 71; Raffin, *Les rituels*, 120; *Vriitha Vagdanam*, 43.

are devoted to loving God, the source of love, and the virgin assumes the obligation to live in purity and in holiness. Through the vow of poverty she dedicates herself to inherit God, the precious treasure.²² Thus, we see that the Catholic and the non-Catholic Churches of the Antiochene tradition (The Malankara Catholic Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Maronite Church and the Jacobite Churches) envision vows as an efficacious expression of one's deliberate self-giving to God in perfect love. The vows are intrinsic to religious consecration and adapted to its explicit profession in the Liturgical Service of Profession.

2. THE SOURCES OF MONASTIC VIRGIN PROFESSION IN THE MALANKARA TRADITION

In this section we study the sources of the Service of the Liturgy of Profession in the Malankara tradition. We consider first, the inspirational sources of the liturgical text *Sanyasinikalude Vrithavagdanam* (Profession of Vows: The Service for Nuns) which is used in the Malankara Catholic Church for the Service of Profession and then the related sources and the *Takso* as such.

2.1. The Inspirational Sources of the Liturgical Text

We proceed to enumerate the sources which inspire the liturgical text in order to comprehend the basic foundations upon which the Liturgical Service of Profession is formulated and thus to comprehend its richness.

2.1.1. Sacred Scripture

Sacred Scripture is the most important source for the liturgical text used for the profession of the nuns. Monastic theology as it develops, consists entirely in the exegesis of Sacred Scripture, and it becomes "a

²² Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 116-129; Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 58-70.

²³ *DV*, no. 21.

pure, and perennial source" of the spiritual life of the virgins.²³ In fact, this is the characteristic feature of the Syrian liturgical rites.²⁴

The readings, paraphrases and quotations ingrained in the liturgical text witness to monastic spirituality of the West Syrian tradition as "productive of Scripture."²⁵ Here, the religious significance in the context of biblical language and biblical figures like Abraham, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Samuel underlines the ascetic nature of monastic life and expresses the covenantal foundation of the monastic commitment.²⁶ The biblical themes such as consecration, virginity, covenant, repentance, cross, new life, kingdom of God, renunciation, discipleship, evangelical counsels are all inserted in the Service.²⁷ Consequently, the entire religious experience of the Church is rooted in and articulated by biblical symbolism. This in fact reflects the rays of the "Consecrated One" and the concept of discipleship which shines forth from the Scripture into the hearts of the consecrated ones, rays which have become light and warmth in their lives.²⁸

The liturgy manifests the importance of the Word of God in the life of the consecrated. In the Service of Receiving of the Candidate to profession there is a Bible lesson comprised of four readings from Mathew's Gospel (Mt 7:13-14; Mt 7:24-27; Mt 6:19-21; Mt 5:48).²⁹ In the Service of Religious Profession, there are seven readings; (Gen 12:1-10; Num 6:1-9; Deut 30:15-19; Is 19:1-25; I Pet 1:13-21; Col 3:5-17; Mt 25:1-13).³⁰ Three Psalms (Ps 51; 63; 135), *Magnificat* (Lk 1:45-55) Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5: 3-12) are also integrated

²⁴ Schneiders, "Scripture and Spirituality", 4 -5.

²⁵ Schneiders, "Scripture and Spirituality", 2.

²⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 22-34.

²⁷ Beth., Ms., 1, 4-113; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 1-52; *Profession of Vows*, 1-20.

²⁸ A Monk of the Eastern Church, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 2.

²⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 18-19.

³⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 32.

into the Service.³¹ In the Syrian understanding, patristic writings are included in the category of Sacred Scripture. Thus writings of the Fathers such as hymns (*Bo 'ūtō of Mar Jacob*) and portions of their homilies (Moses Bar Kepho) also constitute the content of the rite.³²

2.1.2. Syrian Literary Sources

In the liturgical text of *Vritha Vagdanam* we see the influence of some important Syrian literary sources. The Odes of Solomon, the Acts of Judas Thomas and the writings of Aphrahat, Ephrem, Jacob of Sarugh and the Homily of Moses Bar Kepha serve our purpose of finding the possible relation and the mutual influence which in fact underlines the Syrian identity of the Malankara Service of Profession.

2.1.2.1. The Odes of Solomon

The Odes of Solomon³³ are considered to be the early Syriac Christian hymns assumed to have been written around the year AD 100.³⁴ This document written in mystical language and symbolic figures highlights the profound relationship between the soul and Christ, which emanates from baptism.³⁵ Baptism is described as a spiritual marriage

³¹ Cf. Beth., Ms., 1, 33. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 24-28.

³² Cf. Beth Ms.1, 20-21; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 35.

³³ The Odes of Solomon are considered the earliest lyrical Syriac literary source. There are diverse views concerning their authorship, the language in which they were written and the date of composition. Cf. Bernard, *Odes of Solomon*, 2-4. Though the title suggests the authorship of the Odes to King Solomon of the Old Testament, there is nothing related to him. The name Solomon is an allegorical figure and type of Christ. Cf. Battifol, 'Les Odes de Salomon', 35. A Critical edition with English translation is given by Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon*. Our quotations are from this Syriac-English Text.

³⁴ Since the discovery of the Odes by J. R. Harris in 1900, scholars have held diverse views regarding their origin. Cf. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 228. See also Quasten, *Patrology*, 160.

³⁵ The baptismal character of the Odes was first brought to light by J. H. Bernard. Later, other writers also agreed with Bernard. Cf. Aytoun, "The

and a bond of union between the human person and Christ the bridegroom. Thus, it gives an authentic account of the baptismal life of Christians. This poetical text speaks about the main features of Christian ascetic spirituality. The centrality of the baptismal covenant, the nuptial imagery of baptism, union with Christ the heavenly bridegroom (ܚܘܬܢܐ, *hatno*) in the heavenly bridal chamber, Christian life in terms of contest, and attainment of salvation out of struggle constitute the main themes of the Odes.³⁶ The Odes are known for their ascetic orientation. Ode 33 is an example of this.

However the perfect Virgin stood,
Who was preaching and summoning and saying
O you sons of men, return,
And you their daughters come
And leave the ways of that Corruptor
And approach me.³⁷

The Odes refer to those early Christians who practiced continence. They are referred to as those who entered into "His everlasting fellowship",³⁸ "immortal rest",³⁹ and who attained the "likeness of a new person."⁴⁰ These Christians seemed to belong to a special group, who led a pure, holy and dedicated life. It is therefore clear that the Odist had in mind the holy ones, the ascetics of his time.

Mysteries of Baptism", 1-10; Brock, *The Holy Spirit*, 27; Daniélou, "Odes de Salomon", 682.

³⁶ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* I, 63; Brock, *Spirituality*, 18-19.

³⁷ *Ode*, 33: 5-7; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 120. The identity of the 'perfect virgin' though obscure in expression, is proposed by scholars as the Word of God or the Church. She invites the sons and the daughters of men to leave the ways of the corruptor, and to approach her, to renounce the worldly ways in order to attain true wisdom, the core of ascetic life. Here we see an ascetic dimension of the Odes. Cf. Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 121. Bernard, "Odes of Solomon," 117-118.

³⁸ *Ode*, 21:5; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 88.

³⁹ *Ode*, 11:12; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 52.

⁴⁰ *Ode*, 17:4; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 75.

Studying the Odes analytically to find in them the themes bearing directly on monastic consecration is rather futile. But the text provides complementary ideas and themes on baptismal consecration on which monastic consecration is rooted. As we see in Ode 33, The Church, through the prayers of the Liturgy of Profession invites the baptized ones to follow Christ. In the Liturgy of Profession we often hear Christ's invitation: "Whosoever willeth to come after me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross and follow me (Mt 16:24)."⁴¹ Moreover, the Service depicts monastic life in terms of covenant and of struggle, and it highlights the theme of union of the virgin with Christ the heavenly bridegroom in the eternal bridal chamber (ܩܢܘܢܐ, *gnūnō*).⁴² Hence, the link between baptism and the consecrated life of virginity is recognized from the 3rd century and it is probable that our text on monastic virgin profession is inspired by the ideas and themes of the Odes of Solomon.

2.1.2.2. The Acts of Judas Thomas

The Acts of Judas Thomas⁴³ (AJT) is a Syriac apocryphal work in the name of St. Thomas, the apostle of Jesus Christ. Though this legendary work written probably at the beginning of the 3rd century sheds light on the apostolate of St. Thomas in India, it also elaborates the ascetical mind of the early Syrian Christians.⁴⁴ The narratives, exhortations, and chants in the text highlight the virtue of virginity.

⁴¹ See Peshitta Version of the Bible. Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 8; 51.

⁴² Beth. MS. 1., 86-87; 100-101; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 30; 46; 52.

⁴³ Cf. Klijn, *Acts*, 1. AJT got Greek, Latin, Arabic, Armenian, Coptic and Ethiopien versions and has different editions. Cf. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 37-41; Klijn, *Acts*, 1-13. Regarding the Syriac provenance of AJT almost all the scholars have agreed. Cf. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* I, 66; Burkitt "Another Indication of Syriac Origin", 94 -95; Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*, 205.

⁴⁴ Burkitt, "Thommayude Nadapadikal", 612-614.

Virginal life, characterized as more excellent than married life is the central theme of the Acts. According to the Acts, marriage and sexual union are the transitory deeds of corruptible man, while chastity and purity are seen as the hallmarks of the Spirit-filled man.⁴⁵ The Acts also brings to light a new way for women—a way to live for God, devoted to His service—which was previously hidden and obscured.⁴⁶ It portrays two women: one a Hebrew flute girl who recognizes the apostle as a messenger of holy tidings and a minister of holy works, confessing her faith in Christ, leaving her livelihood and devoting herself to God,⁴⁷ and the second, the newly-wedded daughter of Gûdnaphar, the King of India, who freed herself from the obligations of her earthly marriage and devoted herself to live in joyful betrothal to the Lord, awaiting her heavenly bridal chamber.⁴⁸ This document portrays the examples of other women who followed the path of these precursors and thus, it disposes the Syrian women for a single-hearted life of service to God unimpeded by any demands either of the family or of the culture or of the society.⁴⁹

The Acts also upholds the idea of renouncing the old man and his filthy deeds of corruption, intercourse, deceit, wantonness and filthy lust and exhorts one to be renewed by putting on (ܐܒܫܐ, *lbeš*) the new man.⁵⁰ Purity (ܫܦܘܬܐ, *šapyuto*), tranquility (ܫܠܘܐ, *šelyo*), humility (ܫܚܘܬܐ, *makikuto*) are the distinguishing features of the

⁴⁵ AJT 1:14; 3:34; 10:124.

⁴⁶ Marriage was the only way of life for women in the ancient world. This was an approved system in the social, political, moral, and cultural milieu. This age old system gave way to another way of life for women. Freed from the marriage ties, and through a virginal life, women found themselves free to enter into new areas of activity. Cf. Harvey, "Women in the Syriac Tradition", 69-70.

⁴⁷ AJT 1:9.

⁴⁸ AJT 1:14; Harvey, "Women in the Syriac Tradition", 70.

⁴⁹ Harvey, "Women in the Syriac Tradition", 71

⁵⁰ AJT 9: 117; AJT 9:103.

new man. Through conversion, repentance, poverty, renunciation of the world and of the self, one is united to Christ the New Man and attains internal and external unity.⁵¹ Baptism is the means to renounce the old man and to put on the new man.

As in Acts our liturgical document on profession, recommends: “putting off the old man with all his manners, and putting on the new, in order to become one who is renovated by knowledge in the image of his Creator.” It continues: Wear therefore as the chosen of Aloha, saints and beloved, compassion, and tenderness, and benignity, and lowliness of mind, and composure and patience” (Col 3:10-12).⁵² The document refers also to themes such as virgins as brides of Christ and renouncement of the “marriage of this world” for a marriage with Christ the immortal bridegroom through which alliance they are deemed worthy to enter into the eternal bridal chamber.⁵³ In short, the emphasis of our document on conversion of life as basic to monastic life helps us to consider the Acts as an inspirational source for the liturgical text.

As we have mentioned above, the Acts highlights the preference and esteem for virginal and simple life in the early Syrian Christian communities. The document places emphasis on virginity rather than on marriage because the author has written it for an early ascetic Christian community who viewed the baptismal life of the Christians as a life of covenant with Christ. But it is also noteworthy that celibacy was never considered as a requirement for baptism.⁵⁴ The negative

⁵¹ AJT 10: 130; AJT 1: 14.

⁵² Cf. *Vriitha Vagdanam*, 33-34. The text from the Epistle to the Colossians is given in the document. Our citation is from the Peshitta version.

⁵³ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 98-101.

⁵⁴ Vööbus in his writing, argues in his writing that celibacy was a requirement for baptism in the early Syrian Church. Scholars like Murray rejects his position. Cf. Vööbus, *Celibacy, a Requirement*, 54-58. Murray, “The Exhortation”, 59-80; This points to the view that the Syrian Church was not limited to celibates only. It admitted both the married and the celibates to baptism since from the very beginning until now this practice continues. See also Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 101-102.

views on married life found in the Greek versions are to be seen as the writers’ “linguistic limitation” and laxity to translate properly the Syriac terms and expressions in the Greek versions.⁵⁵

2.1.2.3. Aphrahat (+345)

Aphrahat, known also as the Persian Sage, is considered the first Father of the Syrian Tradition.⁵⁶ He was one of the most important Syrian theologians who lived in the first quarter of the fourth century. Our information about Aphrahat and his vision on ascetical life is based mainly on his 23 treatises, also known as Demonstrations (ܐܦܪܗܐܬܐ , *tahwito*), composed during the period from 336-345 AD.⁵⁷ Some points in the Demonstrations suggest that he was born around the year 280 AD and was an adult convert from paganism.⁵⁸ Later he became an ascetic and led a celibate life until his death in 345 AD.

The Demonstrations of Aphrahat are devoted to principle aspects of the spiritual life. Demonstration VI is written for the ascetics who made a quasi - sacramental promise to live the celibate life. These ascetics were virgins both men and women, known as Sons of the Covenant (ܐܦܪܗܐܬܐ , *bnay qyōmo*) and Daughters of the Covenant (ܐܦܪܗܐܬܐ , *bnot qyōmo*).⁵⁹ Aphrahat does not give us details about the life-style of these ascetics but his views on virginity and ascetic life

⁵⁵ Cf. Burkitt, “Thomayude Nadapadikal”, 618.

⁵⁶ For biographical details, works and doctrines of Aphrahat, Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 46-51; Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, (PS I, ix-xxi).

⁵⁷ On the date of composition: Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, V: 5 (PS I, 194); XXII: 25 (PS I, 1039-1043) XV: 50 (PS I, 723-726).

⁵⁸ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, XVI: 5-8 (PS I, 781); XIII: 11-16 (PS I, 801) In Demonstration XVI Aphrahat speaks of their customary idol worship which he abandoned, of the futility of worshipping many Gods and the advantage of worshipping one God our Father and maker. See also Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, 4.

⁵⁹ See Aphraates, *Demonstrationes* VI, ET, Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat Demonstrations* 102-136; Nedungatt, “The Covenanters”, 191-203. We will discuss the covenanters in the coming part of our study.

can be deduced from the Demonstration. Aphrahat praises virginity, as a divine gift from God and emphasizes its eschatological significance.

How worthy and desirable is virginity, even when a man accomplishes it in necessity as our Lord said, "Not every man, but he to whom it is given is able to accomplish it" (Mt. 19: 11). The Apostle said, "On account of necessity which is in the world, it is good for a man to remain as he is" (1 Cor. 7: 26). For this portion there is a great reward, because in our freedom we accomplish it, but not in bondage or compelled by the commandment, or we are not bound to it under the law.⁶⁰

Aphrahat does not urge everyone to be celibates. But those who are given this divine yoke must accept it voluntarily and practice it meticulously. Aphrahat envisages a nuptial bond in the relation between Christ and the consecrated virgins. He warns the consecrated virgins to refrain from co-habiting with the male ascetics.⁶¹ According to Aphrahat, virgins are betrothed to Christ. Christ is their sole Bridegroom (ܚܬܘܢܐ *hatno*). With Christ, the virgins made a covenant through consecration and the nature of this pact is irrevocable.⁶² Aphrahat exhorts the virgins:

⁶⁰ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, XVIII: 12 (PS I, 842); Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, 82-83. The teachings of Aphrahat seem influenced by the Gospel of Mathew, Mark and Luke: "Jesus said to them, the sons of this world marry women, and women are given to men in marriage. For those who are worthy of the other world and the resurrection from the dead, neither take women, nor are women given in marriage to them". See. Mt. 22:30; Mk. 12:25; Lk. 20: 34-35.

⁶¹ In Syria and its adjacent places, there emerged among the virgins, male and female, a mode of holy co-habitation. In the beginning it was for providing security and for giving and receiving spiritual assistance. Those who love deeply began to live together like brothers and sisters through a specific bond, which came to be known as spiritual marriage. This mode of co-habitation of the ascetics created moral problems and social scandals in the Churches both in the East and in the West. Aphrahat warns these ascetics to refrain from such practices. Cf. Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VI:4 (PS I, 272); Cf. Leyerle, *Theatrical shows*, 81.

⁶² Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VI: 7 (PS I, 271); Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat's Demonstrations*, 121.

O ye virgins who have betrothed yourselves to Christ, when one of the monks shall say to one of you, "I will live with thee, and minister thou to me", thus shalt thou say unto him: "To a royal husband am I betrothed and Him do I serve; if I leave His service and serve thee, then my betrothed will be wroth with me, and will write me a letter of divorce, and will send me away from His house" and while seekest to be honoured by thee, take heed lest hurt come upon me and thee. Take not fire into thy bosom, lest it burn thy garments; but be thou in honour alone and also alone will abide in my honour.⁶³

Aphrahat's teaching on consecrated virginity in terms of nuptial language is seen in the above citation. Instead of mortal husbands, the virgins are betrothed to Christ.⁶⁴ Loyalty to the Lord, faithfulness in his service and love for Him, according to Aphrahat are the duties of the virgin. Infidelity on the part of the virgin is compared to separation or dismissal from the service of the Lord. Aphrahat warns the professed ascetic not to marry contrary to his/her vow.

Our source on the rite of profession accentuates Aphrahat's visions on monastic life in the introductory prayer, exhortations, and the prayer for eternal bliss. It terms monastic life itself as a way to stay at the sanctuary of the exalted One.⁶⁵ The Church prays for the virgins who receive the "yoke of Christ" that Christ Himself may gladden them. It envisions monastic life as a covenant with God and a betrothal to Christ. The virgins are also admonished to a faithful following of Christ in prayer, humility, simplicity and fidelity. They are promised eschatological bliss like the wise virgins in the parable (Mt. 25:1-10).⁶⁶

⁶³ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VI: 7 (PS I, 271); Gwynn, "Demonstrations of Aphrahat", 368.

⁶⁴ Cf. Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VI: 6 (PS I, 266-270); Gwynn, "Demonstrations of Aphrahat", 367-368.

⁶⁵ See *Vritha Vagdanam*, 1.

⁶⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 23-34.

2.1.2.4. Ephrem the Syrian (+373)

St. Ephrem, surnamed “the Harp of the Spirit”, the “Prophet of the Syrians”, was a prominent figure in the monastic history of Syriac-speaking Churches. He was born around the year 306 at Nisibis in north-eastern Mesopotamia.⁶⁷ As the deacon of Nisibis and as catechetical instructor, his service was remarkable.⁶⁸ He was very much influenced by Jacob of Nisibis, whom Ephrem addressed as a loving father in his Nisibene Hymns.⁶⁹ Ephrem was not a monk but he was a great ascetic of the time and was one “who devoted his life to the monastic philosophy.”⁷⁰ Very ascetic and imbued with the spirit of divine love, Ephrem led a very rigorous and humble life until his death in 373 AD.⁷¹

Ephrem’s Hymns on Virginité, based on the theme of the consecrated virginité of the daughters of the covenant promoted consecrated life in the proto-monastic period. Ephrem’s vision on the consecrated virgins and their noble dedication to a virginal life is acclaimed in his hymns.⁷² Ephrem says that Christian baptism is betrothal to Christ. Those virgins, who take the vow of virginité at baptism, in Ephrem’s term, are “being betrothed to Christ” (*HVirg* 5:10). His usages “betrothed to the living One” (*HVirg* 24:5), and an exchange of the temporary bridal chamber “for the bridal chamber whose blessed joy never departs” (*HVirg* 24:5) manifest the core of the relationship between Christ and the consecrated one. Christ is the Bridegroom (ܚܘܿܢܘܿܬܐ , *hatno*) and the consecrated virgin is the Bride (ܕܘܿܠܘܿܬܐ , *kalto*). Here

⁶⁷ Beck, “Ephrem le Syrien” 788-791. For the detailed study of Ephrem’s biography and works, Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 56-67; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, II, 70-92.

⁶⁸ Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 16.

⁶⁹ Ephrem, *CNis*, 14. 16-22; See also Beck, “Ephrem le Syrien”, 788.

⁷⁰ Sozomen, *The Ecclesiastical History*, III.16. Quoted in Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 131.

⁷¹ Cf. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 16.

⁷² Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 123; 155-156.

the term “consecrated virgins” does not mean the virgins who are consecrated by any ritual as we conceive it today, but it denotes those virgins who chose a mode of life and made an oath at baptism to be “with the Sacred One.”

Ephrem counts virginité superior to a chaste life of continence. For him it is the gift of the Holy Spirit to the virgin to bear Christ in her heart and in her womb and to give him to the world as Mary did.⁷³ Ephrem compares virginité to a pearl luminous and pure.⁷⁴ To Ephrem, every uncorrupted virgin soul unites with Christ her betrothed not only through her physical virginité, but also through her interior virginité.⁷⁵ Moreover, he has another dynamic vision about virginal life. He wrote of consecrated virgins who would be denied entry into paradise because their virginité had not been fructified with works of charity among the needy, while the married ones who proved to be exemplars of the holy life would be let in because through their charitable deeds, they expressed their perfect devotion to Christ.⁷⁶

Our source often brings out the thoughts of Ephrem in its prayers and statements. It highlights virginal consecration as betrothal to Christ the bridegroom, and also upholds the idea of interior virginité and the need of faithfulness on the part of the consecrated virgins.⁷⁷ Praise is accorded to the consecrated for choosing Christ as her Treasure by despising all other earthly treasures.⁷⁸ Through the liturgy, the Church

⁷³ Ephrem, *HNat* 28:3; Leloir, “La pensée monastique” 115-116. see also Yousif, “La Vierge Marie et le disciple bien-aimé”, 287-298.

⁷⁴ Ephrem uses the image of pearl widely as symbol of virginité. See in Ephrem, *HVirg*. 2:4-5; 2:10; *HNat*. 12:7; 16:12. see also Yousif, “La Vierge Marie et le disciple bien-aimé”, 287-298.

⁷⁵ Brock, *Spirituality*, 40-41.

⁷⁶ Ephrem, “Letter to Publius”, Sec. 15-16. See also Paikkatt, *Life Glory and Salvation*, 315.

⁷⁷ See *Vritha Vagdanam*, 23; *Profession of Vows*, 13.

⁷⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17.

inspires the newly consecrated ones to dedicate their life to the service of the Gospel.⁷⁹

2.1.2.5. Jacob of Serugh (+521)

Jacob of Serugh was born in 451 at Kurtam in North Mesopotamia.⁸⁰ As a prominent writer of Syrian asceticism through his hymns and letters, Jacob gives incentive to monastic spirituality. The letters to the monks of the monasteries of Mar Bassus, Mar Naf̄sata testify this.⁸¹ In a spiritual letter addressed “to Paul the Solitary”, Jacob treats the basic issues of ascetic life with a view to supporting those who are on the road of asceticism to attain spiritual maturity.⁸² The mode of this letter is didactic.⁸³ Jacob begins with the theme of renunciation, the basic path of discipleship using the episode of the departure of Lot⁸⁴ and his wife from the traditional biblical imagery. Lot acted as a perfect disciple. While leaving his possessions and fleeing from Sodom, he did not turn around to see the things he left behind for he was not attached to his possessions. But his wife who was attached to her possessions and to Sodom the evil world, turned around and became a statue of salt (Gen. 19:26).

Jacob holds the view that the one who sets his/her heart to follow Christ has to heed the path without looking behind. This is the idea that we see in the book of Joshua the son of Nun who says to the Israel: “Set your heart straight towards the Lord, God of Israel (Josh. 24:23). This aspect is preached by John the Baptist in the words, “make your path straight” (Mt.3.3). This is what Christ demanded from His disciples:

⁷⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 30-31; *Profession of Vows*, 10.

⁸⁰ Tisserant, “Jacques de Saroug”, 300-309. For the details about the life and works of Jacob of Serugh see Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, 148-158.

⁸¹ Olinder, *The Letters of Jacob of Sarugh*, 13-17; See also Wright, *Catalogue II*, 519-520; 523.

⁸² See Jacob of Serugh, *Epistulae*, 11 in G. Olinder, *Epistulae*, p. 42.

⁸³ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism III*, 110.

“No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Lk 9:62). Jacob’s idea of discipleship thus conforms to the ideals of Scripture.

Jacob also highlights the value of renunciation. He depicts Jesus as a “great school master” who through his teaching and life of privation, and withdrawal from the world, illuminated the whole creation. Those who renounce the world should imitate the life of Christ “for it is not from selling one’s possessions and giving them to the poor that one becomes perfect but from the fact, that he goes after Him.”⁸⁵ It is the fire of divine love that inspires and motivates one to imitate Christ, which in fact prompts one to embrace the monastic life.⁸⁶ The idea of imitation leads to the theme of the cross. The soul, when it realizes that its salvation is brought by Christ through the crucifixion, will not subject itself to the evil desires of the world.

The spirituality of the interior man is vital in Jacob’s writings. The value of the interior man depends on two things: first, God has created man in his image, so the inner man has this image imprinted upon him, secondly, God has come to save this inner man. So the ultimate aim of ascetic life is not exterior mortification of the body, but a deepening of the internal life and inner spiritual growth.⁸⁷

Jacob also brings forth the theme of the “bridal chamber.” He calls it the “beautiful chamber” the great bliss that awaits the monks who strive to attain it. The influence of the writings of Jacob of Serugh is very vivid in the Liturgy of the Profession of Virgins in the Malankara

⁸⁴ Jacob of Serugh, *Epistulae*, in G. Olinder, *Epistulae*, p. 44; See also Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, III, 111. St. Ephrem had already used this theme in his letter to the Mountaineers. Cf, Ephrem, *A Letter to the Mountaineers* in Vööbus, *History of Asceticism II*, 2-4.

⁸⁵ Jacob of Serugh, *Epistulae*, 44 quoted in Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, III, 111.

⁸⁶ Cf. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism III*, 114.

⁸⁷ Cf. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism III*, 112.

Church. Most of the prayers, *Sedre*, the *bo`wothe* (hymns of petition) convey the special character and spiritual inducement of Jacob.⁸⁸

2.1.2.6. Pseudo-Dionysius (5th - 6th Century AD)

The Christian writer who called himself Dionysius Areopagite is an anonymous author. His biography can be assumed only from his writings, which put his lifespan probably in the 5th or 6th century AD.

We find a detailed description of monastic consecration in the 6th chapter of His work *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.⁸⁹ The rite is entitled *Mysterium Monasticae Consecrationis*. It contains the following elements of monastic profession:

- An invocation by the priest in front of the Altar
- Interrogation of the candidate on renunciation of material possessions, vices and imaginations
- Catechesis on the most perfect way (monastic life)
- Profession
- Sealing the candidate with the sign of the cross
- Tonsuring
- Invocation of the Holy Trinity
- Stripping of the secular dress and vesting with the monastic habit
- Greeting the brethren (members of the community)
- Participation in the *Thearchic* mysteries (*Qurbono*).

⁸⁸ *Beth.*, Ms.1, 80; *Vriitha Vagdanam*, 35; Profession of Vows, 14.

⁸⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 6:1; 2; 3. See in (PG 3), 530-538; CSCO, 488-489, (Arm. 17-18) 77-80. Concerning the tradition of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and about its purpose Pseudo-Dionysius gives an account of it to Timothy, a fellow priest of Athens. There are three sections included: 1. Concerning the ranks of the initiated. 2. Mystery of the Monastic Consecration. 3. Commentary. See CSCO 488-489 (Arm. 17-18) 76-80. Our references are from the English Translation.

The ceremony of monastic profession portrayed by Pseudo-Dionysius reveals the essential aspects of the rite of profession in the Syro-Antiochene Churches. It is also worthy to note that Pseudo-Dionysius considers the consecration of a monk as one of the mysteries to be celebrated.

Pseudo-Dionysius also writes, “Of all the orders of the initiated, the highest is the holy order of the monks, which has been cleansed by a complete purification. By means of its integral power and the absolute purity of its activities, it has acquired the ability to contemplate with spiritual vision and communion every sacred work as far as permissible”.⁹⁰ He further suggests that the process of monastic initiation is itself “sacramental” by virtue of which the monk becomes “the sharer in the supreme divine mysteries.”⁹¹ The monk has to denounce not only worldly life but also all phantasies regarding life in order to raise his mind above all earthly cares to the divine realm. We see the rite of monastic consecration of Pseudo-Dionysius as a prototype for the development of the later rite of religious profession in the West Syrian tradition.⁹²

2.1.2.7. The Homily of Moses Bar Kepha

Moses Bar Kepha, the liturgist among the Syrian writers, lived during the period AD 813-909.⁹³ He was born and brought up at Balad in Mesopotamia and was educated under Rabban Cyriacus, the abbot of the monastery of Mar Sergius on the Tura Sahya or “Dry Mountain” near Balad. He became a monk and superior of Mar Sergius monastery and was elected bishop of Mosul, Beth Ramman, and Beth

⁹⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 74.

⁹¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 75

⁹² Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 75.

⁹³ Wright, *Syriac Literature*, 207.

Kiyonaya about 863 AD.⁹⁴ He died on 12th February 903 and was buried in the monastery of Mar Sergius.⁹⁵

Bar Kepha was a voluminous author of commentaries on Old Testament, Gospels and Pauline Epistles.⁹⁶ He also wrote a number of homilies and treatises on ecclesiastical matters, such as on the ordination of bishops, priests and deacons and on the tonsure of monks.⁹⁷ His homily on the monastic clothing of the monks found in the *Pontificale Syrorum Occidentalium id est Antiochiae*, (Vat. Syr.51 (cvi) Cap-xxi),⁹⁸ the Latin version of Father J.M Voste has been recently translated into English by Abbot Francis Acharya.⁹⁹ In this homily, Moses Bar Kepha speaks of the need of faith on the part of the monks to believe in the promises and assurances given by the Lord. He exhorts further about the kind of renunciation and hardships that the monk should undergo as a true disciple to attain rewards from God; about the unseen warfare of Satan and temptations of the world and of the body; about wearing the spiritual armaments of prayer, fasting, and vigil, to gain victory over the enemies of spiritual life; about God's judgment; about the acquiring of virtues, and about asking God's grace for the faithful observance of monastic ordinances. In his homily, he speaks about the monastic charism and gives a brief account of its different stages of development. He defines monkhood, the monastery, the meaning of monastic initiations, and the significance of the monastic vestments. In brief, we get a clear picture of the monastic initiation in the West Syrian

⁹⁴ Cf. Duval, *Littérature Syriaque*, 26; Wright, *Catalogue II*, 621; Hoffmann, *Auszüge*, 190; *BO.*, ii, 218, Wright, *Catalogue II*, 620, The name is given as Beth Kiyona in *BO.*, ii., 127.

⁹⁵ Chabot, *Littérature Syriaque*, 95.

⁹⁶ *BO.*, ii, 130. The commentaries on the Gospel and the Pauline epistles (incomplete) are kept in the British Library, Add, 17, 274. Cf. Wright, *Catalogue*, 620.

⁹⁷ Cf. Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae II*, 322; *BO.*, ii. 131.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Pontificale*, 333-342.

⁹⁹ Acharya, *The Ritual*, 129-136.

Church from the homily of Moses Bar Kepha.¹⁰⁰ Our source, the Service of Profession, is impregnated with the above mentioned monastic thoughts of Moses Bar Kepha's homily.¹⁰¹

2.2. The Early Liturgical Services and the Monastic Profession

We see in the rite of monastic profession some features of the early liturgical rites such as the Service of Baptism (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܡܡܘܕܝܬܐ, *Teshmeshtho d' Mamodito*), the Rite of Ordination of the Deaconess (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܫܡܫܘܢܘܬܐ, *Teshmeshtho d' Shamsonutho*) and of the Service of Reaching to the Harbour, or (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܐܠܡܝܢܐ, *Wa'deh da-lmino*). We would like to examine the influence these rites have upon the Liturgy of Profession in the Malankara Church. Here we do not go into the details of the services, but we try to point out some related aspects in these services to the Service of monastic consecration.

2.2.1. The Baptismal Liturgy

The West Syrian service of religious profession manifests its baptismal resemblance in a new and analogical way. The Service itself is treated as a mystery; hence, it designates the secret hidden action of God in the sacred mysteries of Christian initiation as well as in the life of the consecrated one by setting him/her apart for entering into a covenantal relation.¹⁰² The resemblance of monastic life to baptism

¹⁰⁰ *Pontificale*, 334-342; Acharya also gives an account of the contents of the homily. See Acharya, *The Ritual*, 129-136

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Beth. Ms.*, 90-108; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 46-52; *Profession of Vows*, 8-17.

¹⁰² Cf. Acharya, *The Ritual*, 9; 108-112. The word mystery is used by the Syrian Churches in a sacramental theological context. This designates the mysterious Divine intervention of God by which He communicates in the sacraments. Here the ritual of the clothing of the monks is termed as mystery, which means the hidden action of God in the life of those who receive the monastic charism as in Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. See also Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 75, 195. Theodore, *Epistle*, 165, (PG 99) 1524.

therefore, lies not in the concept that monastic profession is a second baptism as it was conceived by the Messalians,¹⁰³ but in the fact that the sacrament of religious life is baptism; hence, it coincides with the way in which the Christian comes to share in the paschal mystery of Christ's life, death and resurrection.¹⁰⁴ The main features of the mystery of baptism involve a period of catechetical formation, exorcism, the neophyte's renunciation of sin, his/her confession of faith in Christ and in the teachings of the Church, the new birth as a child of God, and his growth in conformity to Christ.¹⁰⁵ The rite of baptism challenges the faithful with "the task of imitating Christ."¹⁰⁶

The liturgical celebration of the monastic consecration and the Service of Christian Initiation, in the West Syrian tradition have some common liturgical elements. These are: the threefold sealing with the sign of the cross in the name of the Holy Trinity, the confession of faith, the conferring of new name to the candidate and the ritual clothing and the rite of incorporation into the community.¹⁰⁷ These elements convey the baptismal ethos of monasticism.

The essential relationship that exists between consecrated life and baptism leads us to the understanding of its relation with Holy Confirmation and the Eucharist.¹⁰⁸ By sealing the virgin in the name of

¹⁰³ The Messalians also known as "praying people" were an ascetic sect spread in the Middle East, Greece and Egypt. They denied the efficaciousness of baptism and other sacraments in forgiving sins and achieving grace, and thus constituted themselves as ascetic groups separated from the Church. Denouncing all kinds of labours, they spent their whole time in prayer and ascetical practices in order to save themselves from sin. In 431 they were condemned at the council of Ephesus. Cf. Collins & Farrugia, "Messalians" 140. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* II, 127-139.

¹⁰⁴ Farrugia, *Monasticism as a Bridge*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ *The Order of Services*, 12-45.

¹⁰⁶ Foley, *Rites of Profession*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Koodasakal, 1-32; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 41-52; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 113-115.

¹⁰⁸ Auge, "Una Liturgia della Vita Religiosa", 222-223.

the Holy Trinity, she is set apart for the Holy One, to recount all His wonderful deeds, for no one can proclaim God unless by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14).¹⁰⁹

The covenantal themes in the liturgy of profession relate it to the mystery of the Eucharist. In an admonition, which precedes the profession of vows, the celebrant reminds the candidate that the nature of life that she is undertaking is covenantal.¹¹⁰ The candidate's entrance into a covenantal relation with God and the community is related to the "New Covenant" instituted by Christ on the eve of His passion.¹¹¹ Through the New Covenant in His blood Christ's followers are being taken into a distinctive relationship. They become His own peculiar possession and partners of His work of salvation.¹¹² This is what happens in the religious consecration of the virgin when she enters into the covenant. The concept of religious life as an oblation realized in the life of the monks / nuns gives evidence of its Eucharistic relation.

2.2.2. The Rite of Ordination of the Deaconess

The ministry of the deaconess was not a novel phenomenon in the ecclesiastical tradition of the Syrian Church. The New Testament testifies to the service of women to Christ (Lk 8: 1-3) and of the deaconess (ܡܫܡܫܘܢܘܬܐ, *mšamšonuto*). St. Paul had entrusted charismatic roles to many women (I Cor.12: 4-12; Rom. 12:5-8; Eph. 4: 11-12). This can be seen as the basis for the ordination of the deaconess in the Syrian Churches.

According to Apostolic Constitutions, like other ecclesiastical orders the Order of the Deaconess called *Chairotonia* is conferred by the bishop with the imposition of hand within the sanctuary in the

¹⁰⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 38; *Profession of Vows*, 14.

¹¹⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 38

¹¹¹ See Acharya, *The Ritual*, 107.

¹¹² Acharya, *The Ritual*, 107-108.

presence of priests, deacons and deaconesses.¹¹³ The prevalence of the rite of ordination of Deaconesses was never under question, though scholars interpreted its importance differently. Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) and John Chrysostom viewed this tradition as an apostolic institution, while other scholars see it in relation to the Order of Widows.¹¹⁴ However, authentic early documents give information regarding this as an ecclesiastical institution in its own specific nature and identity.

There are a number of 16th century manuscripts, which contain an *Ordo* for the ordination of deaconesses. The Vatican Syr. 45 contains such a manuscript written by Joseph, Metropolitan of the Indians. J. Assemani, published the Latin version of the *Ordo* in the *Bibliotheca Orientalis*; which is now translated into English by S. Brock.¹¹⁵ The text deals with the significant common features of the Order of the Deaconess in the East Syrian Tradition.

According to S. Brock, in the West Syrian tradition there are few recent manuscripts containing the service of the deaconess. From a modern printed text of Tûr Abdîn (a West Syrian monastery in Mesopotamia) S. Brock furnishes us with the details of the liturgical celebration.¹¹⁶

The Service takes place outside the threshold of the altar where the deaconess stands with covered head and in an inclined position. The structure of the liturgical celebration is:

¹¹³ *Apostolic Constitutions*, VIII 19: 2; See in Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones*, 525; Kunnacherry, *Deaconess in the Church*, 8-10.

¹¹⁴ St. Clement of Alexandria (+64) and Origen (+104) testify to the existence of deaconesses in the Apostolic periods. Cf. Martimort, *Diaconesses*, 73-80; Kunnacherry, *Deaconess in the Church*, 14-15; Vagaggini, "L'Ordinazione delle Diaconesse", 149; Abel, *The Deaconess*, 3-4.

¹¹⁵ *BO.*, iii, 13, 751-753. Brock, "Ordination of Deaconess", in Kunnacherry, *Deaconess in the Church*, 28-29.

¹¹⁶ See for details Brock, "Deaconesses", 213-216.

- Initial prayer: Asking for God's assistance and for the divine charism for the deaconess to serve the Holy Church in a pure and holy fashion.
- Psalm 51 (Have mercy on me)
- Prayers to receive the handmaid in God's mercy
- A series of invocations, addressed to the Holy Spirit, to overshadow and to hover upon the deaconess, to consecrate her. The recitation of Psalm 150 is inserted in between the invocations.
- Scripture Reading
- Epistle: Romans 16: 1-2; 25-27
- *Hullolo* (Psalm 122:1)
- Gospel (John 12:20-26)
- Tonsuring of the deaconess
- Blessing in the name of the Trinity
- Prayer of thanksgiving
- Vesting of the deaconess
- Communion

Even though not conformed totally to the rite of profession, the liturgical celebration of the rite of the deaconess's ordination and the motives, contents, and role of the deaconess prescribed in the Service resembles the Service of Profession of the monastics in the West Syrian tradition. The Prayer of Receiving (eg. Be a propitiation for me O God... receive me like that prodigal son), tonsuring of the deaconess and the Trinitarian blessing are parts of the Service of Profession.¹¹⁷ Therefore we found the Rite of Ordination of the Deaconess would be a source for the Service of Profession in the Antiochene tradition.

¹¹⁷ See the prayers of the liturgy. Cf. *Profession of Vows*, 3; 8; 9; 12; 14; 17.

The liturgy of ordination of the deaconess also has some aspects common to the presbyteral ordination. The initial prayer of the Rite of Ordination of the Deaconess, the *hoosoyo havely*, and the hymn of invocation of the Holy Spirit in the ordination liturgy of priests are the same.¹¹⁸ This means that the ordination of the deaconess was not merely a laying upon of hands or a blessing imparted to a woman for doing some limited ecclesial ministries, but it was the imparting of a charism, a special ordination, different from the sacerdotal one, to serve the church as a diligent minister (*mšamšono*).

The disappearance of adult baptism diminished the role and extinguished the institution of the deaconess in the Church. But we see the emergence of the monastic life and the apostolic activities performed by the religious in the present Church as the outcome of this institution.¹¹⁹ It is to be noted that the position in the Church and the ecclesiastical and the liturgical role entrusted to the deaconess was praiseworthy when compared to that of the religious in the modern epoch.

2.2.3. The Rite of Reaching to the Harbour (*Wa'deh da-lmino*)

The Service of Reaching to the Harbour, or *Wa'deh da-lmino*¹²⁰ is a remarkable West Syrian liturgical office in the Malankara Church, celebrated at the end of the evening prayer (*ramšo*) of Palm Sunday.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ See Brock, "Deaconesses", 213-215; *Vaidika Pattabhishekam*, 4; 14-15.

¹¹⁹ Kunnacherry, *Deaconess in the Church*, 13.

¹²⁰ The Office of the *Reaching* to the Harbour is known in the West Syrian Churches including the Malankara Catholic Church is known as *Wa'deh da-lmino*. Cf. *Aradhanakramam*, 167. In the Syrian Oriental Churches it is known as *The Office of the Ten Virgins* and in the Byzantine tradition *The Prayer of the Bridegroom* Cf. Mouhana, *I Riti della Settimana Santa*, 5.

¹²¹ *Aradhanakramam*, 167. This office takes place also in the night office of Holy Monday after the second *Koumo*. See. Hambey, "The Symbol of the Coming", 401. This rite is already mentioned in the *Ms.B.M.308* (add.14516) belongs to the 9th century. See Wright, *Catalogue I*, 246. The description of the office is given in Vat Syr.51 fol. 300-304 pertaining to the end of the 12th century. See Assemani, *Bibliotecae Apostolicae* II, 322-323; The texts of

Through this Service, the Church commemorates the salvation brought by Christ the King to his faithful by bringing them through the harbour of His passion to a harbour of new life and a harbour of peace.¹²² The Rite, *Wa'deh da-lmino*, rich in symbolical, eschatological and penitential dimensions is pointed out by scholars as a service directed towards the Easter festival and its baptismal rites.¹²³ The Parable of the Ten Virgins seems to be a traditional reading for the service, which indicates that like the wise virgins the Church waits for the bridegroom in order to enter with Him into eschatological glory.¹²⁴

The Service of Profession is not the same as the Rite of *Wa'deh da-lmino*. But we see many elements in the rite of *Wa'deh da-lmino* in the Malankara liturgy of monastic profession. The Service of Receiving the Candidate to profession has similar rubrics for entering into the Church. For example, the *Eqbo* of the Rite of *Wa'deh da-lmino* is the same as the opening prayer of the Service of Profession.¹²⁵ The entrance prayers of the Service of Profession have similar lines and themes from the *Sedro* of the Rite of *Wa'deh da-lmino*.¹²⁶ Moreover the Scripture reading: Mt.25:1-13, occurs both in the Service of *Wa'deh da-lmino* and in the Service of Profession.

Early Syrian liturgical sources also envisage the link between the harbour theme and monastic life. The Syriac Father Aphrahat compares the world to a ship directed by just men towards the harbour of rest.¹²⁷ Ephrem uses the term harbour in the monastic, ascetical and ecclesial

the office is found in Vat.Syr. 56 fols. 124 –39 (15th /16th cent.) Assemani, *Bibliotecae Apostolicae* II, 337-338.

¹²² *Aradhanakramam*, 169

¹²³ Hambey, "The Symbol of Coming", 411.

¹²⁴ Hambey, "La semaine", 226.

¹²⁵ Beth. Ms., I, 4-5; *Vrithavagdanam*, 12; *Aradhanakramam*, 178.

¹²⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam 15; Profession of Vows*, 6; *Aradhanakramam*, 169.

¹²⁷ Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, XXIII, Murray, *Symbols*, 251.

context. He calls the monastery a harbour of chastity.¹²⁸ John Chrysostom, the Antiochene writer, also relates the harbour metaphor with virginity and monastic life.¹²⁹

The liturgical elements such as procession of the faithful outside the church, standing of the assembly before the closed door of the church, the liturgical entrance into the church, the prayers and the Scripture readings contained in the Liturgical Service of *Wa'deh da-lmino* occur also in the Liturgy of Profession. The resemblance of the liturgical rites found in *Wa'deh da-lmino* and in the Liturgy of Profession impel us to state that the Service of *Wa'deh da-lmino* has been incorporated into the Service of Profession. It is also a fact that the compiler's¹³⁰ familiarity with the solemn celebration of the Service of *Wa'deh da-lmino* probably influenced him to include many elements of this rite into the Service of Profession. It is also to be noted that the compiler associated the entrance of the virgin into the monastic life with a ship reaching harbour. This would mean a renewed participation of the person in the mysteries of redemption so that the virgin herself becomes for the distressed and the needy, a harbour of grace, of peace, of tranquility and of love.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Cf. Ephrem, "Sermo de Monachis" in Lamy, *Sancti Ephrem Hymni*, vol. IV, no.14, 175-178. See also Murray, *Symbols*, 251-253.

¹²⁹ John Chrysostom, *La virginité*, XXXIV: 1-2 in SC 125, 198-201.

¹³⁰ Mar Ivanios, the founder of the monastic movement of Bethany has compiled the liturgy of profession in Syriac-Malayalam version for the use of monastic dedication of the first members of Bethany. He also made a translation of the same for the use of Mother Edith, the foundress of the Sisters of Epiphany (Oxford) and a benefactress of Bethany who was present on the occasion of the monastic consecration of the first members of Bethany on September 8th 1925. Unfortunately we could not find the original and the English version of Mar Ivanios. According to S. Helena, the liturgical service, which Mar Ivanios compiled has its foundation on "other Eastern liturgical services." Hence it is quite reliable that he also has merged with the Service of Profession many aspects from the Service of *Wa'deh da-lmino*. Cf. Helena, *Bethany*, 65. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 176.

¹³¹ Cf. *Proemionukal*, 48-50.

2.3. The Liturgical Text and Its Related Sources

Here we discuss the proper liturgical sources of *Vritha Vagdanam* (The Profession of Vows: the Service for Nuns) in the Malankara Tradition. For this study we look first into the related sources, which form part of the liturgical text, and then we study the text, which is used at present for the celebration of the liturgy of profession.

2.3.1. The Ritual of the Clothing of Monks (*Takso d'tulbosho d' dairoye*)

O. Heiming who translated the Syriac manuscript belongs to the National Library of Paris (BN., Ms., le Syr. 154. fol. 186) suggests that the Ritual of the Clothing of the Monks was written in 1001 at the monastery of Mar Schaino in the west of the Euphrates region.¹³² Heiming's German translation of the *Ordo*, namely "Der Ordo des Heiligen Mönchs Schema" (The Consecration of the Monks), has two parts. The first part consists of the prayers (*Proemion, sedro, qolo, 'etro*) followed by the liturgy of the Word comprising nine readings: six readings from the Old Testament and three readings from the New Testament. The second part includes: the signing of the candidate's forehead, tonsure, vesting ceremony, the giving of peace and the closing prayer.¹³³ According to Heiming, the BN., Ms., Syr. 154 corresponds to the manuscripts Vat., Syr. 51 and to the Bodleian Ms. Hunt 444 of the year 1493.¹³⁴ P. Raffin also accepts Heiming's view as he made a parallel study on the BN., Ms. Syr. 154, and Vatican Syr. 51.¹³⁵ There

¹³² For more details of the manuscript See Zotenberg, *Catalogues des manuscrits Syriaques*, 111; Heiming, "Der Ordo des Heiligen Mönchs Schema", 152-172; Heiming, "Der Nationalsyrische Ritus Tonsurae", 123-174. This is in microfilm at the PIO, Roma. See also Auge, "Una Liturgia della Vita Religiosa", 93-111.

¹³³ Heiming, "Der Ordo des Heiligen Mönchs Schema", 163-168.

¹³⁴ Heiming, "Der Ordo des Heiligen Mönchs Schema", 153.

¹³⁵ Raffin, *Les rituels*, 93-95.

are two Latin translations of the manuscripts; one of J. A. Assemani published in 1773 from the Vatican Syr 51 (Borg. 167)¹³⁶ and the other of J. M. Voste. J.M. Voste's version is not from the Syriac manuscript. He revised Assemani's translation, The Pontifical of Michael the Syrian Patriarch (1166-1199) and the Vatican Syr. 51 (1172)¹³⁷ and edited and published it in 1942, entitled *Vestitio Monachorum*, for the Oriental Congregation. The Ritual is found immediately after the Ritual of Baptism.¹³⁸

The Charfet Ms 7/8 and 7/9 of 1878 also furnishes us with details of the rite of monastic consecration and of profession of vows using a specific formula.¹³⁹ According to I. Armelat, this formula of vows was drawn up by Patriarch Ignacio Michael for the monastic consecration of three monks in the monastery of Charfet and later it was adopted by other monasteries such as that of St. Ephrem in Lebanon.¹⁴⁰ In 1952 the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate of Charfet re-edited and published the two Rituals entitled; *Takso d'tulbosho d'dairoye* and *Takso d'suporo d'dairoyoto* in the Book of Priestly Rites (*Ktobo d'takse Kumroye*).¹⁴¹ It has its place next to the ordination of bishops, priests and deacons. The rite of consecration of the monks has a Malayalam version (the local language of Kerala, one of the Southern States of India) known by various titles: *Remban Pattam*; *Remban Sthana Kramam*, and *Vrithanushtana Sushrusha*.¹⁴² For the first time this has been translated

¹³⁶ Cf. Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae* II, 321-322; *BO.*, III, pars ii, 900-908.

¹³⁷ Vat. Syr. 51 ff.. See also *Pontificale Iuxta Ritum Ecclesiae Syrorum Occidentalium Id est Antiochiae*, Pars III, 299-331.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Pontificale*, 299-331.

¹³⁹ Armelat, *Catalogue*, 140.

¹⁴⁰ Armelat, *Catalogue*, 140.

¹⁴¹ See Chapter 1, 1.1.2, Armelat also is given details about the monastic clothing of the monks and of the tonsure of the nuns in his Catalogues of the Charfet Manuscripts of 1936. See Armelat, *Catalogue des manuscrits de Charfet* 132-133.

¹⁴² See in the Bibliography.

into English and published as the *Ritual of the Clothing of Monks* by Francis Acharya, the Cistercian abbot at the Kurisumala Ashram in India in 1999.¹⁴³

The *Takso d'tulbosho d'dairoye* constitutes the major part of the present liturgical text of the profession of nuns in the Malankara Church. We see only contextual changes made in the liturgical text from that of the *Takso*, which we will see through a classifying table in the coming part of our study.

2.3.2. The Ritual of the Tonsure of Nuns (*Takso d'suporo d'dairoyoto*)

As we learn from J. M. Voste's translation, the Ritual of the Tonsure of the Nuns was also part of Vatican Syr. 51. We could not find any other information about the manuscripts of the Ritual either in O. Heiming or in P. Raffin. Since the tonsure of nuns in the Antiochene tradition has not been studied, we were disappointed in our hope to find the early manuscripts. However, by the effort of S. Brock, we find in a West Syriac manuscript (Bodleian Library, Ms Hunt, 444) of 1627 some parts of the prayers of the tonsure that are identical with the Voste's Latin translation and Charfet edition.¹⁴⁴

The Syriac text *Takso d'suporo d'dairoyoto* (The Ritual of the Tonsure of Nuns) was also published by the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate, in 1952.¹⁴⁵ It is found after the Ritual of the Clothing of the Monks, and excluding minor differences in Bible readings, and liturgical prayers, both rites resemble one another in their content and structure.¹⁴⁶ The

¹⁴³ See Acharya, *The Ritual of the Clothing of the Monks*. This is published in 1999 by St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute.

¹⁴⁴ The prayers are translated by S. Brock in his letter to me. For the prayers, See also *Takso d'suporo*, 356-357; *Pontificale*, 351-352.

¹⁴⁵ *Takso d'suporo*, 327-359.

¹⁴⁶ With the exception of a quite different Liturgy of the Word, the structure and the content resemble each other.

Latin version of the text *Tonsura monialium* is found in the *Pontificale Iuxta Ritum Syrorum Occidentalium id est Antiocheae* edited by J.M Voste, for the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Rome in 1942.¹⁴⁷ The version is similar to a great extent with the Syriac text of the Charfet edition but we have found that the Latin translation has been reduced to a minimum compared to the Syriac Text. The Syriac text of the Charfet edition according to S. Brock is longer and in many places has a better text than the Latin text.¹⁴⁸ Compared to the Latin version, there are numerous Bible lessons in the Syriac text and the sequence of the readings given in it, are also different. The Syriac original does not have the ritual of washing of the feet of the candidate, where as in the Latin version, this ritual occurs as a later addition.¹⁴⁹ In the Syriac text as well as in the Latin version, the tonsure of the nun is given immediately after the ritual of the clothing of the monks (*Vestitio monocharum*).¹⁵⁰

Comparing these sources to the actual liturgical text of the Malankara Church, we see identical prayers and parallel themes in the concerned texts, but there are also minute differences in some rubrics, hymns, and in the Liturgy of the Word.¹⁵¹ It seems that the text of the tonsure of the nuns also contributed to the outcome of the Malankara liturgical text of the service of profession.

2.3.3. The Liturgical Text: *Sanyasinikalude Vritha Vagdanam*

The principal source of our study is the liturgical text *Sanyasinikalude Vritha Vagdanam* published in 1980 by the Liturgical Commission of the Malankara Church. The term *Vritha* derived from

¹⁴⁷ *Pontificale*, 343-355. See also Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae* II, 322, BO, III, pars ii, 908-910.

¹⁴⁸ For this information I am indebted to Dr. S. Brock.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Pontificale*, end notes no. 16, p. 353.

¹⁵⁰ *Pontificale*, 333-355.

¹⁵¹ For example, the ritual of washing of the feet and putting on of the shoes is omitted in the *Ordo* of Profession in the Malankara Church.

Sanskrit means vow, and *Vagdana* means to proclaim, to promise; hence, the liturgical text *Sanyasinikalude Vritha Vagdanam* means the Profession of Vows: The Service for Nuns. The liturgical text in Malayalam published in 1980 is based on Mar Ivanios's Syriac-Malayalam anthology of 1925 and its hand-written copy by Mother Cybar, the eighth member of the Bethany congregation of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ.¹⁵²

Compared to the manuscript copy, the re-edited liturgical text is in a splendid form. Omission of two *proemions* and two *sedrōe* of the Syriac manuscript is solved by the inclusion of two other *sedrōe* in the liturgical text.¹⁵³ The Liturgy of the Word is given partially in the manuscript (five readings; two from the Old Testament and three from the New Testament) but it is specified clearly as seven (four readings from the Old Testament and three readings from the New Testament) in the liturgical text.¹⁵⁴ A considerable portion of the exhortation which contains statements against those Fathers, who had fallen in the heresies and were anathematized, also is not included in the liturgical text.

The English translation of the liturgical text was done by S. Thaikoottathil in 2001 and it is entitled, Profession of Vows: The Service in the Malankara Church. The translation, though identical to the Syriac-Malayalam version, needs to be revised again together with our recently acquired Service, the Ritual of the Tonsure of Nuns (*Takso d'suporo d'dairoyoto*) the Charfet publication of 1952.

¹⁵² The rite of profession formulated by Mar Ivanios in Syriac-Malayalam is copied by Mother Cybar. The copyist did not indicate on the copy the year in which it is copied but according to Sr. Rehmas, one of the pioneers, it is copied in 1930.

¹⁵³ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 18. The *proemion* and the *sedro* given in the liturgical text are an addition which are not seen in the Syriac manuscript. The *proemion* and the *sedro* given in the liturgical text are different from that are given in the Syriac manuscript. See *Vritha Vagdanam* 29-31; *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 69-73. The *'etro* given in the liturgical text also is different from that of the Syriac Manuscript.

¹⁵⁴ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 32-33

The present liturgical text, a rich heritage of the Malankara Church, is comprised of three parts namely, the Service for Receiving the Postulant (s) as Novice (s), The Service for Receiving the Novice to the Temporary Vows and the Service of the Profession of Religious Vows.¹⁵⁵ As we have indicated above, the structure and the content of the Liturgical Service is to a great extent identical to the Ritual of the Clothing of the Monks (*Takso d'tulbosho d'dairoye*) and to the Ritual of the Tonsure of Nuns (*Takso d'suporo d'dairoyutho*). Through the following table we would like to illustrate the resemblance and the difference between them.

Table Showing the Resemblance and the Difference between the Liturgical Text and its Related Sources

Profession of Vows: The Service in the Malankara Church	Ritual of the Clothing of the Monks (Takso D'tulbosho D'dairoye)	Service of the Tonsure of the Nuns (Takso D'suporo D'dairoyutho)
Service of the Reception of the Novice to be Professed <i>Vriitha Vagdanam</i> (Service of Profession) Doxology and Opening Prayer Ritual of the Clothing Doxology and Opening Prayer Service of the Tonsure Doxology and Opening Prayer (<i>Slootho d' Šuroyo</i>)
Psalm 51 Psalm 63 Magnificat (Lk 1:47-55) Psalm 132 Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:3-11) <i>Eqbo</i> <i>Proemion</i>	Psalm 51 Psalm 63 Psalm 84 Magnificat (Lk 1:47-55) Psalm 113 <i>Proemion</i>	Psalm 51 Psalm 65 Psalm 32 <i>Proemion</i>

¹⁵⁵ The Rite for Receiving the Novice to religious consecration and the Profession ceremony (*Prathinja*) are given in the Syriac manuscript but the Service for Receiving the Postulants to the Novitiate is seen as a later addition. Cf. *Beth. Ms.* 1, 4 - 101; 129-132. *Vriitha Vagdanam*, 1-11; 11-22; 22-52; *Profession of Vows*, 1-6; 7-11; 11-20;

<i>Sedrō</i> <i>Qōlō</i> <i>'Etrō</i> Liturgy of the Word Genesis 12:1-10 Numbers 6:1-9 Deuteronomy 30: 15-20 Isaiah 19: 1-25 I Peter 1: 13-21 Colossians 3: 5-17 Mathew 25 : 1-13 <i>Bo'ūtō</i> of Mar Jacob Exhortation by the Prelate Interrogation by the Prelate and the Response of the Candidate Interrogation of the Superior General and the Response of the Candidate Profession of Vows Prayer by the Celebrant Sealing Tonsure Blessing and Conferring of the Monastic Habit on the Candidate; Stripping and Clothing	<i>Sedrō</i> <i>Qōlō</i> <i>'Etrō</i> Liturgy of the Word Genesis 12: 1-9 Numbers 6: 1-9 Deuteronomy 30:15-20 Sirach 2: 1-11 Isaiah 18: 1-7 I Peter 1: 13-25 Colossians 3: 1-17 Luke 14: 25-35; 15: 1-10 Intercessory Prayer Admonition by the Rish Dairoyo Prayer by the <i>Rish Dairoyo</i> Sealing Tonsure Conferring of the Monastic Habit on the Candidate; Stripping and Clothing Followed by a Psalmody (Ps. 118:15) and Bible Lesson from the Prophet Zachariah 3:1-8. Washing of the Feet and Putting on of the Sandals with Proper prayer. Reception into the Community (Genuflection Facing the Four Directions of the World, Conferring of Cross and Lighted Candle, Kiss of Peace) Concluding Prayer and Blessing of the Congregation by the Celebrant, Procession of the Newly Professed, Prayer in Conclusion (by the Superior)	<i>Sedrō</i> <i>Qōlō</i> <i>'Etrō</i> Liturgy of the Word Genesis 35:1-7 Isaiah 54: 14-18; 55: 1-3 Isaiah 56: 1-5 Baruch 5:1-4 Daniel 3: 40-43; 9: 4-5; 7-9. Zachariah 2: 10-13 Acts 9:36-42 I Timothy 6: 6-16 Mathew 25: 1-13 <i>Bo'ūtō</i> of Mar Jacob Prayer of Thanksgiving by the Abbot Sealing Tonsure Conferring of the Habit for the Tonsured Nun to the Abbess Stripping and Putting on the Tunic Putting on of the Sandals; Prayer by the Abbot Reception into the Community (Genuflection Facing the Four Directions of the World, Conferring of Cross, Kiss of Peace) Concluding Prayer by the Abbot (<i>Rish Dairoyo</i>)

The table immediately illustrates the rapport between the literary sources. The variations are due to the omission or addition of various prayers and Bible readings. We find that the *Takso d' tulbosho d' dairoye* and the liturgical text for the service of profession are almost identical. So we assume that *Takso d' tulbosho d' dairoye* is the basic text and the *Takso d' suporo d' dairoyoto* is the secondary source that Mar Ivanios relied upon for the edition of the present liturgical text: *Sanyasinikalude Vritha Vagdanam* (The Profession of Vows: The Service for Nuns) in the Malankara Church.

3. THE EMERGENCE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RITE OF PROFESSION

The emergence and the advancement of the liturgical rite of profession in the monastic movements of the West Syrian tradition will be traced in this section. We first examine the stimuli for the emergence of profession in the West Syrian tradition and then we trace the development of the liturgy of profession in the Maronite, Syrian Orthodox and Malankara monastic tradition. Here we do not intend to make a historical study; rather we will deal with the matter thematically.

3.1. Stimuli from Early Monastic Initiations

Initiation to monastic life with specific religious rites proper to it is a cross-cultural phenomenon that we found in almost all religions. In the beginning of Christian anchoritic-coenobitic movements there were also initiatory rites in enigmatic as well as in developed forms. These rites, along with coenobitic way of living penetrated into the Syrian world and without displacing the indigenous rites of monastic initiation contributed to the emergence and to the systematic formulation of the liturgical rites of profession.¹⁵⁶ With this consideration, in the following section we deal with the monastic initiatory rites in the Anchoritic tradition, in the Pachomian *Koinonia*, and in Basilian Coenobitism.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Maude, "Who were the Bnai qyama"? 18.

3.1.1. In the Anchoritic Tradition

St. Antony of the Desert (ca. 259-356) is considered as the initiator of Christian monasticism in Egypt. According to St. Athanasius, the biographer of the life of St. Antony, the nature of the ascetic movement started by Antony is anchoritic.¹⁵⁷ We do not find any explicit prescription regarding the rite of monastic initiation of Antony or of his disciples, but an embryonic connotation about the nature of Antony's monastic commitment can be deduced from the biographer's words. St. Athanasius writes: "The Lord has wiped clean the items (sins) dating from his birth, from the time he became a monk, and devoted himself to God."¹⁵⁸ Here Athanasius, one of the early promoters of monastic life, conceives of monastic commitment as an action which produces grace and thus having a sacramental dimension. This notion arises from the view of ascetical life, which was considered in the beginning as a spiritual martyrdom, and those who dedicate themselves for such a life receive remission of sins as in martyrdom.¹⁵⁹

3.1.2. In the Pachomian *Koinonia*

Pachomius (+346) is the founder of Coenobitic monasticism in the Orient.¹⁶⁰ Discerning the will of God, the way of loving and serving Him through the service of his fellow beings, and animated by the spirit of the first Christian community, Pachomius founded the first monastery

¹⁵⁷ The term "Anchorites" derived from the word *anachoresis* means departure or flight. This was initially a technical term applied to tax evaders and draft dodgers later used to denote in a Christian sense to those people fleeing from the world and going to the desert to live radically a life of solitude in the presence of God. Cf. Pettipiece, "Eremos", 115. For more about anchoritism, Cf. Festugiere, *Les moines d' orient*, 41-57.

¹⁵⁸ Athanasius, *The Life of St. Antony*, n. 65: 79.

¹⁵⁹ Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 119-120.

¹⁶⁰ Quasten, *Patrology*, III, 154. The word Coenobitic is derived from *Koinos bios* means communal life.

at Tabenisi in upper Egypt.¹⁶¹ He himself had codified norms of monastic life in which he prescribed the admission of the candidates.

Those who desired to enter into the community had to make a request to the elder of the monastery and had to wait for few days outside the monastery.¹⁶² During those days, careful examination was made of the candidates' intention, their past and present life, the authenticity of their renunciation of the world, the profoundness of their spirit of detachment towards their own parents, and their good will in serving God.¹⁶³ After scrupulous examination, the candidates were given admission and were given training in ascetical and monastic disciplines. An aptitude for prayer, an average knowledge of the Sacred Scripture, a propensity for observing monastic disciplines, and the willingness to lead a life of communion with the rest of the members of the community were also required from the candidate.¹⁶⁴ Those who have the required qualities for monastic life are given the monastic habit in a ceremony at the end of the probation period, as a sign of enrollment into the community.¹⁶⁵

Here we see the essential elements required for monastic initiation: the petition, which manifests the candidate's authentic and voluntary desire to become a monk; the meticulous examination of the candidate

¹⁶¹ See Quasten, *Patrology*, III, 154; Gribomont, "Pacomio", 1067.

¹⁶² Boon, *Pacomiana Latina*, 49, p. 25 Regarding the probation time of the candidate, different authors give different opinions. According to Cassian a candidate who wanted to enter a Pachomian monastery had to wait for a long period. Cf. Cassian, *Institutiones*, 4:30 in SC 109, p. 166. According to Palladius, a candidate shall not be received in the community until he has spent three years doing hard work. See Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, (PG 34) 1102.

¹⁶³ Lefort, *Les vies Coptes*, 94.

¹⁶⁴ Boon, *Pachomiana Latina*, 49, pp. 25-26.

¹⁶⁵ According to Lefort the candidate's acceptance into the monastery and the deliverance of the monastic habit are done together. Cf. Lefort, *Les vies Coptes*, 64-65.

to ascertain his vocation; a probation period to test the candidate; and vestition as a sign of dedication and of membership.

Pachomius enlightens us more on the formative rather than the liturgical aspect of religious profession. He refrains himself from saying how the vestition is to take place and does not mention any specific promise or counsel in the monastic profession. He conceives the acceptance of monastic garb as an important moment in the life of the monk. It is the sign of renouncing the old ways of life and embracing a new way of serving God and the fellow monks.¹⁶⁶ For Pachomius, the acceptance of monastic life is making a pact or covenant with God (*Kai omologhesas enopion thou theou*).¹⁶⁷ Chastity, poverty and obedience are demanded from those who enter into this covenantal life.

3.1.3. In Basilian Coenobitism

Basil (329-379) the greatest among the Capadoccian Fathers, and a renowned ecclesiastical head and defender of the orthodox faith is known under the title the "great".¹⁶⁸ It is Basil who organized the monastic life in the Roman Orient, which earned for him another designation, the "Father of Eastern Monasticism." The Pachomian monastic tradition serves as the basic point of reference to the organization of the Basilian Coenobitic life.¹⁶⁹

The monastic rule of Basil mentions the admission of the candidate, the period of training under the master and the making of monastic profession. The "Great Rules" (*Oroi Kata Platos*) and the

¹⁶⁶ Oppenheim, "Die Religiöse Bedeutung des Mönkskleides", 268-272.

¹⁶⁷ Halkin, *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae*, 104.

¹⁶⁸ Quasten, *Patrology* III, 204-207.

¹⁶⁹ Gribomont, "Obéissance et Evangile", 193-215.

“Brief Rules” (*Oroi Kat’ Epitomen*) furnish us with details regarding the essential elements of formation and profession.¹⁷⁰ Among them, the candidates’ aptitude for renunciation and the willingness to lead a celibate life are important.¹⁷¹ By renunciation, Basil intends, the aspect of renunciation that impels one to follow Christ denying his possessions, and taking up his cross (cf. Mt 16:24). According to Basil, a monk should be able to renounce his evil inclinations of the body, attitudes of the mind and attachments of the spirit.¹⁷² The tearing up of the old man with his corrupted acts for a new life in Christ (Eph 4: 22; Col 3: 9-10) is thus the spirit of Basilian Coenobitic formation and the motive of monastic profession.

The one who desires monastic life has to undergo a probation period. During this time, the candidates are under the careful guidance of an experienced master who is advanced in age and is renowned for an exemplary life.¹⁷³ He has to love the trainees as a father/mother and to correct their faults with kindness. He should also be a teacher who teaches them with words and with his own exemplary life.¹⁷⁴ With great prudence, he has to discern their divine and the mundane aptitudes and

¹⁷⁰ In Latin the “Great Rules” or “Detailed Rules” are known as the *Regulae Fusius Tractatae* (PG 31, 889-1052) and the “Brief Rules” or “Short Rules” as *Regulae Brevius Tractatae* (PG 31) 1080-1305. They are not “rules” as the term signifies but are pastoral conversations between Basil and his monks which are arranged in the form of questions and answers under two headings. The Great Rules discusses under 55 heads the principles of monastic life and the Short Rules under 313 heads discusses on the application of the monastic principles in the day to day life of the monks. The Greek original does not exist, but the Syriac version and Latin translation of it by Ruffinus survives. Cf. Quasten, *Patrology*, III, 212. The Armenian Version of the Rule and its Italian translation is given in CSCO, Vol. 536-537, Louvain, 1993.

¹⁷¹ *Reg. Fus.* 8:1 (PG 31) 934-935.

¹⁷² *Reg. Fus.* 8:1 (PG 31) 935; Basilio, *Il Libro delle Domande*, 43-46.

¹⁷³ *Reg. Fus.* 15 (PG 31) 953; Basilio, *Il Libro delle Domande*, 51-53.

¹⁷⁴ *Reg. Fus.* 53 (PG 31) 1027.

their spirit of stability in enduring difficulties in monastic life. Their attitude for a celibate, poor, obedient and humble life is also tested during this period.

The profession of the candidate is made upon the termination of the probation period in the presence of the “chiefs of the Church” and of reputable witnesses.¹⁷⁵ The ecclesiastical, social dimension of the act of profession is thus evident in Basilian Coenobitism. Basil is the pioneer witness to the monastic profession and its proceedings. He says: “They shall be interrogated and their profession which is distinctly made be accepted.”¹⁷⁶ Here it seems that the making of profession is in set terms, by word of mouth. This would make us think about the probability of the use of a definite formula of profession. Through the act of profession, the novice “dedicates himself as an offering to God.”¹⁷⁷ The reception of the new member is an occasion for joyous thanksgiving and fervent prayer. Basil does not mention the conferring of the monastic habit, but refers to the use of it as a sign of the simple life.¹⁷⁸

Basil’s understanding of the character and implication of the monastic vow is clear from his Great Rules. According to him, those who have devoted themselves to God are making a pact with God (*homologias*). This pact with God is inviolable, irrevocable and definite. The violation of the pact is equal to sacrilege.¹⁷⁹ Basil also speaks of the dedication of the female virgins. He says: “The virgin is to be regarded as the bride of Christ, and a chosen vessel dedicated to the Lord. If therefore, she breaks her vow she is to be punished as

¹⁷⁵ *Reg. Fus.* 15:4 (PG 31) 955. Also see Morison, *St Basil and His Rule*, 90.

¹⁷⁶ *Epist.* 199 (PG 32) 935.

¹⁷⁷ *Reg. Fus.* 15:4 (PG 31) 955; Cf. Morison, *St. Basil and His Rule*, 91.

¹⁷⁸ Basilio, *Il Libro delle Domande*, 146-147.

¹⁷⁹ *Reg. Fus.* 14 (PG 31) 950-951. Basilio, *Il Libro delle Domande*, 123-124. Morison, *St. Basil and His Rule*, 92.

though convicted of adultery.”¹⁸⁰ This principle is also applicable to men.¹⁸¹

In Basilian monasticism innovations, including special monastic service of profession, monastic vows, and the monastic habit, were introduced, and thus monasticism itself attained its organized form.

3.2. Syrian Monastic Life and Profession

Even though we can see a Greco-Coptic incentive for the rise and expansion of the Syrian monastic movement, Syrian monastic life has its own history and identical features distinct from Egyptian monasticism.¹⁸² Syriac sources, like the Odes of Solomon and Acts of Thomas give evidence of the existence of a community of Christians distinct from the average Christians.¹⁸³ These Christians are characterized as those who possess “His everlasting fellowship”,¹⁸⁴ “His holy ones”,¹⁸⁵ who live a life which is characterized as “war.”¹⁸⁶ These people persevere in the struggle and gain the victory.¹⁸⁷ The Armenian document¹⁸⁸ preserved under the name of St. Ephrem portrays the

¹⁸⁰ *Epist.* 199 (PG 32) 719; Morison, *St. Basil and His Rule*, 93.

¹⁸¹ Morison, *St. Basil and His Rule*, 93.

¹⁸² Scholars like Jargy, Vööbus and Brock brought to light the specific features of the indigenous monastic tradition in Syria which is unique yet different from Egyptian monasticism. See JARGY, “Les origines du monachisme” 110-125. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism I*, 145-146; Brock, “Pracheena Syrian Sannyasam”, 1050-1054.

¹⁸³ Escolan, *Monachisme et Eglise*, 20-21.

¹⁸⁴ *Ode* 21: 5; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 88.

¹⁸⁵ *Ode* 7:16; 22:12; 23:1; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 36; 90; 94.

¹⁸⁶ *Ode*, 8: 7; 9: 6; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 41; 46.

¹⁸⁷ *Ode*, 9:11; 29:9; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 46;112.

¹⁸⁸ *Srboyn Ephremi matenagrowthiwnkh*, 261-345 in Vööbus, *Celibacy a Requirement*, 23. Those who examined the authority of this document traced its origin to the second or the third century, and thus negated its ownership to St. Ephrem. Cf. Harris, *Tatian: Perfection according to the Saviour*, in *BullJRL VIII*, 44, 51, note 2 in Vööbus, *Celibacy a Requirement*, 23.

lives of Christians as those who led a “spiritual mode of life”, imitating Christ and His apostles.¹⁸⁹ They are distinguished from others by their very life of renunciation and moral code.¹⁹⁰ These ascetic Christians, according to the Armenian document, were in a “state of vow” which is not based as such on the “Gospel counsels” but on the “commandments and laws of the Gospel.”¹⁹¹ They included virgins of both sexes. As we already have mentioned, the Syriac Acts of Thomas also highlight the price of virginity as a witness to eternal life and compare it to married life for an intimate life in union with Christ. From the above-mentioned characteristic features of early Syrian asceticism, we deduce that the precursors of Syrian monasticism bound themselves by a vow of virginity and they lived alone or in communities adjacent to their own native places. They are known as Sons and Daughters of the Covenant.¹⁹²

3.2.1. The Covenanters (**ܒܢܝ ܒܢܘܬ ܩܝܘܡܘ** *Bnay-Bnōt qyōmō*) and the Ascetic Communities

The Syriac term *qyōmō* comes from the verbal root *qwm* and has the basic meaning “to rise up” and “to stand.” The later usage of the term took on other meanings such as “covenant”, “status”, “station in life” etc.¹⁹³ This term also had a religious implication among the Jews in portraying the divine human relation in terms of a pact. Modern authors like Jargy considers *qyōmō* equivalent to the ebraic term

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Vööbus, *Celibacy a Requirement*, 24.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Vööbus, *Celibacy a Requirement*, 24.

¹⁹¹ Vööbus, *Celibacy a Requirement*, 24-25. According to early Christian thought, all Christians are obliged to keep all the commandments without any exception for one’s salvation. The Gospel counsels have as their goal to attain a virtuous life. Therefore we see a distinction between precepts and counsels in the writings of the Oriental Fathers. Cf. Spidlik, Tenace & Eemus, *Questions monastiques*, 89-91.

¹⁹² Griffith, “Asceticism”, 220-223.

¹⁹³ Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, Vol. II, 3533-3535. See also Griffith, “Monks, Singles”, 148.

berith (pact).¹⁹⁴ The singular masculine form is *bar q̄yōmō* (ܒܪ ܩܝܡܘܐ) which means “son of the covenant” and the feminine form is *bart qyōmō* (ܒܪܬ ܩܝܡܘܐ), “daughter of the covenant.”¹⁹⁵ The term *qyōmō* in a wider sense could signify an oath, an alliance, an association, the Church of God, a life of chastity and virginity and it also indicate the group of people who were united by a pact.¹⁹⁶

Our major source of information regarding the covenanters is from Aphrahat’s 6th Demonstration written between 336-337.¹⁹⁷ Aphrahat addressed them as “my beloved singles (ܒܢܝ ܩܝܡܘܐ) and “sons and daughters of the covenant”.¹⁹⁸

The covenanters (ܒܢܝ ܩܝܡܘܐ – ܒܪܬܝ ܩܝܡܘܐ, *bnay-bnōt qyōmō*) were the ascetic Christians, the “Singles in God’s Service” of the Syriac speaking Christian communities of the fourth century.¹⁹⁹ They were not monks and nuns, but were ascetics and virgins distinct from monks and nuns at least down to the seventh century.²⁰⁰

Through a promise or vow at baptism the ascetics and virgins pledged themselves for a committed life of virginity and thus entered into a covenantal relationship with Christ.²⁰¹ According to Nedungatt “The *qyāmā* of the covenanters does not differ from the *sunteke* and

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Jargy, “Les fils et filles du pacte”, 304-313.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*, 128. This term is also used to denote the wife of a priest in the Jacobite Orthodox tradition. This is because with matrimony the *bart qyāmā* entered into a pact and shared some of the pastoral services in the Church as consequence of her baptismal commitment. Cf. Tabé, “Les Bnay wa Bnoth Qyomo” 56-60 ; Yakoub, *Il Monachesimo Siro*, 30.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism I*, 99-101; Jargy, “Les fils et filles du pacte”, 304-313.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Aphraates, *Demonstrationes* (PS I, 239-312).

¹⁹⁸ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes* (PS I, 276).

¹⁹⁹ Griffith, “Monks, Singles”, 160.

²⁰⁰ See Maude, “Who were the B’nai Q’yāmā”? 20.

²⁰¹ Cf. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism I*, 102; Griffith, “Monks, Singles”, 159.

pactum virginitatis of the *monádzontes* in the Greco-Roman world of the early fourth century.”²⁰² They observed a life of psalmody, fasting, vigil, poverty and were under the direction of the Church authorities.²⁰³ They took part in the worship of the local church and “represented an inner circle of elite Christians.”²⁰⁴ Their liturgical role required the learning of the Scripture.²⁰⁵ E. Beck observes in Aphrahat that the covenanters, in all ways possible were closely connected to the sacramental and hierarchical order, and they, in no way tried to separate themselves from the Christian community.²⁰⁶

Some literary works have also come out from this group. Aphrahat has a whole treatise for the covenanters (Dem.VI). Ephrem who probably belonged to the community of the covenanters, had written series of Hymns in praise of the covenanters.²⁰⁷ Rabbula, the bishop of Edessa had codified rules, for them in spiritual and ecclesial matters.²⁰⁸

These early Syrian Christians, oriented to an ascetic life, were influenced not by the ascetic elements of Egyptian monasticism or by Manichean asceticism, but were guided by Scripture, the life of Christ and his teachings. According to S. Brock, in their pursuit of the ascetical life, they have some conceptual models based on baptismal life. They

²⁰² Nedungatt, “The Covenanters”, 443.

²⁰³ Cf. Ephrem, *CNis.* 21, 5. In this Hymn Ephrem says to Bishop Abraham of Nisibis “You are a protective wall for the chaste women; in the stand you take, the people of status achieve glory.” See Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem*, 68. See also Griffith, “Monks, Singles”, 152.

²⁰⁴ Nedungatt, “The Covenanters”, 203.

²⁰⁵ Nedungatt, “The Covenanters”, 204.

²⁰⁶ Beck, “Asceticisme et monachisme”, 277.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Ephrem, *HEpi* 8:16; *HNat* 1: 61-62; *HVirg* 33: 4. see also Murray, “A Marriage for all Eternity”, 65-68.

²⁰⁸ Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, 96-98; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism II*, 384-386.

²⁰⁹ Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 139.

had “the model of Christ as the Bridegroom to whom individual Christians are betrothed at baptism.”²⁰⁹ They also viewed the model of the baptismal life as the unmarried life of the angels and as the way to return to paradise.²¹⁰ As the number of these believers increased, celibate communities were organized and were approved by the Church and common rules were made for them. Thus, from individual virgins the ascetic life proceeds to one’s own family, where the “sons or daughters of God” lived together with their parents; thus, original homes were transformed into “ascetic households.” These “ascetic households” in due time turned into ascetic communities or monastic houses.²¹¹

The Syrian anchorites also promoted the emergence of coenobitic life simultaneous with anchoritic life. When an anchorite accepted disciples who wished to imitate his way of life, it meant those disciples had to be provided with certain edifices, adequate facilities for the proper functioning of common life. Thus, the need of a chapel, refectory, common lodging partitioned into cells became indispensable. This paved the way for the origin of habitations for monastics called *dayro*.²¹² Thus, towards the end of the 4th century organized ascetic communities or monastic life emerged in the scenario of the Syrian tradition. The foundation of principal monasteries in the Antioch area like Gindaros (modern Jenders), Dier Telade in the town of Telade in the 4th-5th centuries and the joining of hundreds of candidates to these monasteries marked the golden age of monastic life in the Syriac West.²¹³

In the Syrian understanding, community life is conceived as a life of paradise and a type of the Church; hence, living together in love with

²¹⁰ Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 139.

²¹¹ ELM, *Virgins of God*, 38-40.

²¹² *Dairo* the Syriac term means sheepfold or habitation. It is used in the sense of the dwelling place of the monks. Cf. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* I, 229; Pěna, *The Amazing Life*, 111-112.

²¹³ Pěna, *The Amazing Life*, 20; Cf. Canivet, *Le monachisme Syrien*, 163; Colombàs, *El monacato*, 135.

another witnesses one’s sublime communion with God and others.²¹⁴ The Syrian coenobitic life was therefore characterized by its communal features consisting essentially in the common recitation of prayers, meals together, and work for common good.²¹⁵ Community was regarded also a *locus* of penance which enabled the monastics to conform to the redemptive actions of Christ.²¹⁶ The practice of continence by avoiding the company of the opposite sex, observance of personal and communal poverty by renouncing possessions or having materials personally with the permission of the superiors and submitting oneself to the guidance and care of the superiors, were considered noble means to live in and with Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God (*Ihidoyo*) who lived a chaste, poor and obedient life for the sake of God and of man.²¹⁷

3.2.2. Monastic Formation

Though we see the emergence of monastic communities, there is scant evidence of a kind of formal monastic formation for the aspirants of monastic life as we understand it today.²¹⁸ The Syrian Fathers kept silent about it. But this doesn’t mean that the early Syrian monasticism didn’t have a paradigm for the formation of its members.

Theodoret and other writers hold the opinion that the adults and even children were admitted indiscriminately to the monasteries.²¹⁹ It was the practice of the Syrian parents to consecrate their children to God at the moment of their birth or during illness. They were entrusted to a senior who initiated them in the practice of a virtuous life. I. Pěna

²¹⁴ Cf. Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa* (introduction) in Price, *A History*, 191-205.

²¹⁵ Cf. Pěna, *The Amazing Life*, 112; Pěna, Castellana, Fernández, *Les cénobites Syriens*, 52-53.

²¹⁶ Cf. Ephrem, *HParad* 13: 4-11; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* II, 92.

²¹⁷ See the monastic rules of Rabbula, Johanan Bar Qursos, Canons for the Nuns in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 34-68.

²¹⁸ Hendriks, “La vie quotidienne du moine”, 413.

²¹⁹ Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa* (introduction) in Price, *A History*, xi. See also Pěna, *The Amazing Life*, 110-111.

observes the possibility of monastic formation of the Syrian candidates in buildings with porticos, which were discovered during archeological excavations; hence, they shed light on the Eastern monastic practice of lodging the candidates for a certain period of time away from the community in a separate place.²²⁰

According to Vööbus, the monastic masters were faced with the responsibility of imparting Christian teaching to the candidates in order to receive them into the ranks of monks. He says:

It always was the task of the monastic masters to teach their disciple or disciples elementary knowledge in reading, to introduce them into the most necessary and basic information in the Scriptures, and to acquaint with them with the liturgical and ascetic practice.²²¹

For Syrian spiritual masters, monastic formation consisted not only in the imparting the science of monastic life but also in the practice and in the exercise of community life. The Canons of Babai presupposes a tri-year novitiate antecedent to monastic initiation and to the right of possessing an individual cell.²²²

3.2.3. Monastic Tonsure

The tonsure of the candidate in monastic initiation is an essential feature in the Syrian monastic tradition. This rite is based on the Scriptural tradition. In the Old Testament those who took the Nazarite vow and those who consecrated themselves to God, were commanded to shave their head (Num 6.18). In the ordination of the Levites, the hair was shaved off (cf. Num 8.7). In accordance with the command of Numbers 6:18. St. Paul and his four companions have observed this custom under

²²⁰ Cf. Pěna, *The Amazing Life*, 68.

²²¹ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, II, 407.

²²² Babai, *Rules*, in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 179.

a vow (Acts 18: 18; 21: 24).²²³ The practice of tonsure developed in the Church as a mode of asceticism both for men and for women.

In Syria it was the practice to cut off the hair of the monastics during their initiation into the monastic life.²²⁴ Isaac of Nineveh also speaks about the practice of tonsure. In a treatise on various types of solitaires, Isaac refers to the ascetic life of good secular Christians, the *bnay qyōmō* and of the monks (*dayarōye*). Presenting the monks, Isaac says:

{...}. They do not marry wives or eat flesh; and they wear the habit of solitaires; but their tonsure is smaller than that of the solitaires and larger than that of the *bnay qyāmā*.²²⁵

The rite of tonsure which evolved in the ascetical tradition of the Syrian Churches can be paralleled to the biblical understanding of tonsure and presumably it is also an adaptation from the rite of ordination of the deaconess.²²⁶

J. M. Vosté, gives an explanation regarding the origin of the rite of tonsure in the West and East Syrian monasticism.²²⁷ According to him, the apostles Peter and John were tonsured as a sign of disgrace, at the time of their arrest by the *Sanhedrin*. The apostle John was tonsured completely while Peter was tonsured partially. The West Syrian monks, imitating St. John, tonsure their heads completely while the East Syrian monks imitating St. Peter, partially retain their hair.²²⁸ Imitating the disciples of Christ and thus making themselves “fools for Christ”, the

²²³ Wawryk, “La Tonsura in Orient”, 1229-1231.

²²⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 75.

²²⁵ Isaac of Nineveh, *Perfectione Religiosa*, 602-603. The same passage occurs in Dadisho Qatrāya. See Mingana, *Early Christian Mystics*, (WS VII), 78.

²²⁶ Cf. Chapter 1, 2..2.2.

²²⁷ Vosté's details regarding the tonsure is from *Codex 55 of Mosul*. See in Raffin, *Les rituels*, 131.

²²⁸ Raffin, *Les rituels*, 132.

monks adopted the practice of tonsure. Unlike the priestly ordination, in which priesthood is conferred through the imposition of hands, here in the monastic profession, the monastic charism is bestowed officially to the monk through the rite of tonsure.²²⁹ This rite of tonsure of the monks has rich symbolism, which we will examine later in the subsequent parts of our study.

3.2.4. Monastic Habit

Precise descriptions regarding monastic vestments in primitive monasticism are very rare. From the ascetic writings of Ephrem and from the Vita of Symeonis the Junior, we presume that in the eremitical state of Syrian monasticism, there were ascetics who preferred nakedness as a sign of their return to the original state of life, to the “Paradisaal state.”²³⁰

But with the emergence of the coenobitic life from the 4th century, the use of the monastic habit became a custom in Syrian monasticism. This was perhaps due to the ethos of the Syrian religious culture which demands, even from the laity, the avoidance of disgraceful garments during liturgical worship and the use of proper and simple dress as a sign of their ascetic attitude and reverential approach to the divine mysteries. According to the Syrian ascetical mentality, if lay people could take on such a measure, it is even essential and proper for the monastics, the perpetual adorers of God, to have austere and simple clothing.²³¹

From the description of I. Pěna, we understand that the Syrian monks vested in a way that demonstrated externally their disdain for worldly things.²³² Their habit called *eskimo* was a sign of evangelical simplicity. The other vestments include a leather cincture (*zonnoro*), a

²²⁹ Cf. Fiey, “Cénobitisme féminin ancien”, 296-300.

²³⁰ Ephrem, *Sermo in Paters Defunctos*, (Opera Omnia gr. I, 177); *Vita Symeonis Jun.*, col. 3061 in Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, II, 269.

²³¹ Cf. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* II, 265-266.

²³² Pěna, *The Amazing Life*, 98.

pointed hood (*bušitho*) to cover head and neck and a mantle or *chadia*. In the initial stage, there was no uniformity with respect to the type and to the shape of the habits, hence, each one chose and designed the habit according to his/her own tastes.²³³

Theodoret describes that the Syrian nuns wore long dresses that covered the entire body down to the feet. Their habit had the same shape as that of the monks; however, they did not use the hood. They also used a veil in front, which reached to the cincture (possibly like the *pardha* of muslim ladies) to cover their face, neck, bosom and hands.²³⁴

As we mentioned above, the emergence of coenobitic life had increased the relevance of the monastic habit; hence, the founders and spiritual fathers proposed the use of the monastic habit for their disciples as a sign of their new life and incorporation into a community.²³⁵ In early days, the Syrian monastic habit was usually made from wool and was black in colour “betokening penitence and deadness to the world.”²³⁶ The use of linen clothes on Sundays as a symbol of faith and new life was in practice among the Egyptian monks, but the Syrian monks did not follow this custom.²³⁷

Pseudo-Dionysius and Cassian speak of monastic habits as signs for those who travel on their way of perfection.²³⁸ Moses Bar Kephra in his homily on monastic profession gives us a detailed description about

²³³ Pěna, *The Amazing Life*, 99.

²³⁴ Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa*, XXIX, in Price, *A History*, 123. See also Pěna, *The Amazing Life*, 99.

²³⁵ St. Antony received the monastic habit without making any promise and also in the Pachomian set up, the conferring of the monastic habit occurred before profession.

²³⁶ Robinson, *Monasticism in the Orthodox Churches*, 54. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* II, 267.

²³⁷ Oppenheim, *Das Mönchskleide*, 45-46. See Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* I, 119-121.

²³⁸ Špidlik, Tenace & Cemus, *Questions monastiques*, 99-100.

monastic vestments and their significance.²³⁹ Since then, the use of the monastic habit and its solemn conferring seems an essential part of the rite of profession in the Antiochene tradition. The habits were made differently for the monks and for the nuns. In the rite of monastic profession the vestments of the monks are listed as an outer cloak, girdle, head cover, mantle, and sandals.²⁴⁰ In the Tonsure of the nuns the listed habits include an outer cloak (*galo*), a mantle (*priso*), a cloak of holiness (*ma pro*) girdle, head cloth in the form of a hood (*quno 'o*) and a long woolen veil (*magna 'to*) and sandals (*tallâro*).²⁴¹ Much significance and symbolic meanings are attached to the monastic habits, and we will deal with this in the second chapter of our study.

3.2.5. Monastic Canons

The West Syrian canonical sources highlight the nature and theology of the life of virginal promise which the 'virgins of God' have made, as well as the injunction of infidelity to the vow. These sets of rules have remained as the foundation of monastic legislation for religious, especially in the West Syrian Churches.

a) The Canons of Jôhannân Bar Qûrsôs (+ 538)

These canons are written by Mar Johannan, an energetic bishop of Tella de-Mauzelat. He was born in Qualliniqos in 519 AD and died in 538 at Antioch.²⁴² He had written the canons for the monks of Tella in the form of admonitions and commandments. According to Vööbus, the Ms. Mardin Orth. 310 (fol.156b-160b) of the 8th century gives us

²³⁹ *Pontificale*, 340-342; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 135-136.

²⁴⁰ *Pontificale*, 326-328.

²⁴¹ Cf. *Takso d' suporo*, 357.

²⁴² For the biography of Jôhannân of Tellâ See. *Vita Johannis*, edited by E. W. Brooks, *Vitae Virorum apud Monophysitas Celeberrimorum*, in CSCO Syr. XXV, 1, Paris, 1907; See also *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, edited by E. W. Brooks, (PO 18) Paris 1925, p. 513-526.

more information about the canons of Jôhannân than the Ms. Vatican Syr. 560 (fol.68b-72a) and Ms. Brit. Mus. Add. 12, 155 (fol. 220b-222b) of the same century.²⁴³

The canons for monasticism are enumerated in the work of Vööbus namely the Syriac and Arabic Documents.²⁴⁴ There are eleven such canons.²⁴⁵ The first Canon speaks about those who have voluntarily chosen monastic life and have "promised" to live like angels and to live for the Messiah.²⁴⁶ The third Canon states: "According to their promise, then, it is fitting always to live in the truth and in the life elevated above marriage."²⁴⁷ He exhorts the "promised ones" to wear the monastic habit as a sign of their life of promise and appeals to them to keep the garments holy so that when the virgins meet God, they may appear in holiness before God.²⁴⁸ Regarding one's attitude towards the world and its lust, in the fourth Canon he says: "Crucify yourself to the world and to its lust so that Messiah may dwell and live in you".²⁴⁹

²⁴³ See Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 56; also Wright, *Catalogue II*, 950; 955.

²⁴⁴ Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 57-60; See also Kuberczyk, *Canones Ioannis bar Cursos*, 1901.

²⁴⁵ These canons given in Vööbus (*History of Asceticism*) are the different sections of Canon 11th of Johannân. The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition gives twenty seven canons under the name of Johannân. Barqûrsôs. Cf. Vööbus, *Synodicon*, 142-152.

²⁴⁶ Johannan, *The Canons*, no. I, in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 57; *History of Asceticism III*, 178.

²⁴⁷ Johannan, *The Canons*, no. 3 in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 57; *History of Asceticism III*, 178

²⁴⁸ In the third Canon the Canonist speaks about carnal Israel who prepared to meet God on Mount Sinai, received order through Moses to sanctify and to wash their garments, and not to approach wives. See Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 57; *History of Asceticism III*, 178.

²⁴⁹ Johannan, *The Canons*, no. 4. in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 57-58; *History of Asceticism III*, 178.

Virginity and purity are kept in high esteem in the legislation. Jôhannân insists that the monks do not allow women to enter into their monasteries.²⁵⁰ According to him, renunciation of natural love and affections render the monks free to develop those supernatural affections as children of God born of the Holy Spirit, towards all those who have united by the ties of faith.²⁵¹ To safeguard the virtue of virginity he impels the monks to welcome tribulations and to wear rough monastic tunics. This is to participate in the passion of Christ more efficaciously and to keep the monks holy. It is clear that to a great extent the Canons of Jôhannân treat not only the aspect of promise in the monastic life, but also the different aspects of the “life of promise.”

b) The Canons for the Nuns

The Canons for the Nuns constitute a singular cycle of rules found in the Ms. Brit. Mus. Add.17216, fol. 43a.²⁵² As a parchment folio unnoticed even by Bar Ebraya during his work of codification, this source is very important, for it is the “only remnant of this genre of monastic legislation”.²⁵³ Since the text suffered unduly from wear and tear the labour to recognize its title, or to find its origin has not yet succeeded. But the content suggests its provenance from the West Syrian monasteries and presupposes its origin towards the middle of the 5th century.²⁵⁴ The injunctions in it are in the form of canons enumerated from one to fourteen, and each canon begins with the same formula: “It is not lawful for any of the sisters.”²⁵⁵ From the information we would

²⁵⁰ Johannan, *The Canons*, no.6. in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 58; *History of Asceticism*, III, 178.

²⁵¹ Cf. Johannan, *The Canons*, no. 6.

²⁵² Wright, *Catalogue II*, 1037; Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 62.

²⁵³ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism III*, 181 - 182.

²⁵⁴ With regard to the content of the rules, it is suggested that they belong to the middle of the fifth century; but on the other hand, the style of writing indicates that they were written in the 8th century. See Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 62; Wright, *Catalogue II*, 1037.

²⁵⁵ Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 62.

say that it is designated for the monastery of the nuns. Several aspects of the coenobitic life are treated in these canons.

The first three Canons envisage a strict life for the nuns in the monastery itself. They explicitly mention that sisters are to go out only for spiritual purposes, and if they go out, they should go with a “female companion” and with the explicit permission of the *rêshat dayarōyūtō* (the head/superior of the monastery).²⁵⁶ The fifth, sixth, and the seventh Canons restrict the sisters from the company of men.²⁵⁷ The only exemption is for a father or brother with the permission of the abbess. The sisters are not supposed to visit the monks or the monastery on any pretext. The monks, if they are old priests, can enter into the nunnery for the Eucharistic celebration or in case of a funeral service. Canon 9 restricts the sisters from lending and borrowing. “The sisters were neither permitted to lend nor to borrow, to write letters nor to receive them except from parents, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts and not without the knowledge of the abbess.”²⁵⁸ Canon 10 admonishes them to be fervent in prayer and the spiritual life. It is not lawful for the sisters to be exempt from the prayers or from the Eucharistic liturgy unless they are sick, or due to some pressing needs of the community.²⁵⁹

These canons though very legalistic, express the spirit of total renunciation of the Syrian monastic life. For a modern nun, these canons seem rigorous and outdated, but they shed light on the ascetical life of the early Syrian virgins, their ethos and their moral code of behaviour, which deepened their life of promise.

²⁵⁶ Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 64.

²⁵⁷ Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 65-66.

²⁵⁸ Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 67.

²⁵⁹ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism III*, 185.

3.3. The Rite of Profession in the West Syrian Churches

By the term, West Syrian Churches, we intend those Churches that share the patrimony of the Antiochene liturgical tradition.²⁶⁰ It is beyond our scope to make an elaborate survey of the development of monastic life and profession in these Churches; nevertheless, we will discuss briefly the monastic life and the structure of the liturgy of profession in the Maronite and the Syrian Orthodox tradition and deal especially with that of the Malankara Catholic Church. Since the analysis of the Malankara liturgical rites of religious profession is intended for the second chapter, we will not consider the structure of the liturgy of profession in this section.

3.3.1. Profession in the Maronite Church

Maronite monasticism started by St. Maron had eremitic and austere features until its reformation in 1695 by Abbot Caraali.²⁶¹ In the first stage of monastic life, there was only the practice of receiving

²⁶⁰ Here we mean the liturgical prayers, rites and rituals, which the smaller Christian communities borrowed from the Antiochene Church. Antioch was the third greatest city in the Roman empire, and was well known as one of the centers of Christian formation. Being an apostolic Church founded by St. Peter, this Church was very influential and noted for its theological contribution. It was the general practice the small communities borrowed the liturgical patrimony of more influential and major churches. Thus, the Antiochene liturgy spread through out the whole of the Oriens province. See Chediath, *Antiokian Sabha*, 1-12; Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 108.

²⁶¹ The Maronite Church named after Saint Maron (+ ca. 410) an Antiochene monk, can be called a monastic Church for its innate monastic nature. The Maronite monastic Order was started by the Saint in the valley of the Orontes river in eastern Syria near Apamea (qal'at al-Modiq). The monastic life started by Maron was of a solitary and austere nature. Due to the Muslim invasion, the monastery founded by Maron was demolished and then it was transferred to the mountains of Lebanon. Unlike the Syrian Orthodox and Catholic Churches this church remained ever faithful to the Council of Calcedone and to the Apostolic See of Rome. Cf. Mahfoud, *Précis D'histoire*, 1-26; Tayah, *The Maronites*, 9-20.

the monastic habit without any formal ceremony of profession.²⁶² Though the Ms. Békorke no.14 speaks of an explicit profession ceremony of taking vows in the year 1670, it was in the year 1700 in the history of the Maronite Church that the profession ceremony with the promise of the three evangelical vows made its first appearance.²⁶³ In the Church's tradition, monastic life begins with the novitiate and continues with the profession of vows. Therefore the *Takso* of the Ritual of Profession presents the ceremony of admission to the novitiate, the ceremony of profession of the vows and that of receiving the monastic habit.²⁶⁴

Comparing the ritual of profession of the order of monks with that of congregations for women, we find that the basic structure is essentially the same, but with contextual variations.²⁶⁵ The rite of profession is usually celebrated in the context of the Eucharistic liturgy. The basic aspects included in the ceremony are the following:

- a. Initial Prayer (*qawmō*)
- b. Introductory Prayer
- c. Dialogue
- d. Admonition
- e. Profession of Vows
- f. Hymn
- g. Benediction of the Candidate

²⁶² Mahfoud, *L'organisation monastique*, 96; Elias, *Monachesimo Maronita*, 1.

²⁶³ Mahfoud, *L'organisation monastique*, 97; Elias, *Monachesimo Maronita*, 3.

²⁶⁴ Raffin, *Les rituels*, 114-126.

²⁶⁵ In the Ritual of Profession by Raffin, we found differences in the Liturgy of the Word and of the profession of vows. The Monks make their profession of religious vows perpetually once and for all. Cf. Raffin, *Les rituels*, 120. But the ritual of the ceremony of congregations for women included the rite of entrance to the novitiate, the rite of first profession in which the candidate takes vows for a temporary period of time and the rite of perpetual profession of vows. See *The Ritual of Vows*, 1-27. For the translation of the important parts of the ritual from Arabic to English, I am indebted to Father Makram and Sister Fereale (Lebanon).

- h. Hymn
- i. Liturgy of the Word; Eph 6: 1-20; Mt 19: 27-30
- j. Hymn
- k. Intercessory prayer by the Deacon
- l. Tonsure
- m. Vesting Ceremony²⁶⁶
- o. Prayer by the Superior of the Monastery
- p. Kiss of peace
- q. Conferring of the Cross and the Lighted candle
- r. Procession
- s. Final prayer

The readings from Scripture are minimal in the Maronite liturgical rite compared to those which are given in the manuscripts. The profession of vows is given in the Maronite Ritual, but it is not mentioned in the manuscripts.

3.3.2. Profession in the Syrian Orthodox Churches²⁶⁷

The Service of Profession in the Syrian Orthodox monasteries for the clothing of the monks and for the tonsure of the nuns have their contents primarily taken from the *Takso d'tulbosho d'dairoye*. Only contextual changes are made in the prayers for the tonsure of the nuns.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Raffin mentions the putting on of the shoes along with the monastic habit but he does not mention the washing of the feet. See Raffin, *Les rituels*, 124. In the Ritual of Vows of the Maronite Nuns, the washing of the candidate's feet is also omitted. See *The Ritual of Vows*, 15.

²⁶⁷ For studying the Orthodox Profession Rite we used the Liturgical text of the rituals of the Orthodox Church in India. We have also referred to the rite of Profession in the Jacobite Church; the Sister Church of the Orthodox Church. The content is same for the liturgy in both these Churches. Thus, we see the link between the Liturgy of Profession in the Catholic Church and the Jacobite Churches. Cf. *Remban Sthana Kramam*, 1-294. This liturgical book is translated from the Syriac original which comprises of almost all the liturgical rituals of the Church.

²⁶⁸ *Remban Sthanakramam*, 181-219.

The rite conforms also to the Byzantine liturgical ritual of monastic profession contained in the official *euchologion* of the Church.²⁶⁹ The actual text of the Byzantine rite was made from the Greek text, called *Euchologion Tho Mega*, edited in 1873 in Rome, and collated with the Slavonic text printed at Moscow in 1884.²⁷⁰ The text puts the rite of profession both for the monks and for the nuns under three different headings: Order for a Beginner Taking the Rason, Order of the Little Habit and the Order of the Great and Angelic Habit.²⁷¹

In the Syrian Orthodox tradition, the basic elements of monastic profession constitute tonsure and the vestition ceremony. The taking of vows though incorporated later in the profession of nuns is not given in the *Ordo* of the monastic ordination of the monks. The rite resembles the Byzantine rite of profession in content but not in form.²⁷² The actual text of profession in the Orthodox Church in India includes the rite for the aspirants, postulants, and for the novices. They are not innovations but are the constitutive parts of the rite of profession, formatted as separate rites for each context.²⁷³ The Ritual of Profession involves two parts.

²⁶⁹ The Byzantine Rite of Profession has its basis in the ancient Greek *Euchologion* called Barberini 336, a valuable Greek manuscript (no. 336) in the collection of Cardinal Francis Barberini. Since 1902 it has been kept in the Vatican Library. According to the *euchologion*, the rite of monastic initiation consists of three fundamental parts, namely *professio*, *tonsura* and *vestition*. For details Cf. Wawryk, *Initiatio Monastica*, 108-118; 121-130; *Rituel de la profession*, 5-128; Robinson, *Monasticism in the Orthodox Churches*, 61.

²⁷⁰ Robinson, *Monasticism in the Orthodox Churches*, 61-62.

²⁷¹ According to Robinson, the Greek *Euchologion* and the Slavonic Trebnik do not have the division of the Order in different parts. According to Robinson this division is for convenience. Cf. Robinson, *Monasticism in the Orthodox Churches*, 62-63; Raffin, *Les rituels*, 30; *Rituel de la profession*, 5-128.

²⁷² The contents of the rite especially the prayers, the interrogation of the prelate regarding the intention of monastic dedication, the answers of the candidate of profession, the rite of tonsure etc. resemble to the rite of profession in the Orthodox Churches. Cf. Robinson, *Monasticism in the Orthodox Churches*, 76-85; *Remban Sthana Kramam*, 87-100; 267-275.

²⁷³ *Remban Sthana Kramam*, 134 -180.

I. The Preparatory Part

- a. Initial Prayer (*qawmô*)
- b. Responsorial Psalm
- c. *Sedrô*, Hymns
- d. Prayer of the Incense
- e. Liturgy of the Word :- Gen 12: 1-9; Num 6: 1-5; 7-8; Dt 30: 15-20; Jb 2: 22-28; Lam 3: 25-36; Is 18: 1-7; Sir 2: 1-13; I Pt 1: 13-25; Col 3: 1-17; Lk 14: 25-34; 15: 1-10.
- f. Litany by the Deacon
- g. Catechesis of the Prelate

II. The Tonsure and the Vestition

- a. Benediction of the Candidate
- b. Prayer by the Prelate
- c. Consignment of the Scissors to the Prelate by the Candidate
- d. Tonsure of the Candidate
- e. Divestiture
- f. Vestition with Monastic Habits
- g. Reading from Zc 3: 1-18
- h. Washing of the Feet
- i. Consignment of the Cross by the Prelate
- j. Kiss of Peace
- k. Final Prayers (by the prelate)

The ritual resembles closely to the rite given in the manuscripts BN., Ms., 154, Vat. Syr. 51 and the Latin translation *Vestitio Monochorum* of J. M. Voste in the Pontifical.

3.3.3. Profession in the Malankara Catholic Tradition

Under this title we speak of the practice of profession in the monasteries and congregations of the Malankara Catholic Church which include the Religious Orders of Bethany for men and women, the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, and the contemplative Orders of Kurisumala and Thattathumala in Kerala, India. All these communities

adopt the same service for the profession of their members which springs from Bethany, the first indigenous monastic movement in the Malankara Church of India. Therefore, we shall discuss this theme only in the context of Bethany, by highlighting the foundation of Bethany and by examining the vision of Mar Ivanios, its founder of monastic commitment. This serves as a preface to the further analysis of the structure of the Service of Profession in the Malankara tradition.

3.3.3.1. Mar Ivanios and the Foundation of Bethany

Father Geevarghese Panicker, who later came to be known as Archbishop Mar Ivanios, is the founder of the Order of Bethany.²⁷⁴ Geevarghese was born on September 21, 1882 at Puthencavu in Mavelikkara, a village in central Kerala, India. Influenced by the ascetic life of his mother Annamma Panicker and his uncle Skariah Panicker, Geevarghese entered into the priestly ministry in the Jacobite Orthodox Church in 1908 and began his career as the principal of St. Dionysius

²⁷⁴ The term Bethany in the Syriac language means the “House of Response.” See Payne Smith, *Thesaurus*, 175. Mar Ivanios while searching in the Bible for a name suitable for the monastic institution he founded providentially came across the name Bethany. He chose the name for the institution and adopted the ideals of Bethany the house of comfort at Jerusalem, which provided Jesus solace and joy in loving response to his visitation. Mar Ivanios also adopted the ideals of Mary, Martha and Lazarus the inmates of Bethany who represent the life of contemplation and of action and a new life of resurrection. So the Religious Institute and the Religious houses are called ‘Bethany’. According to Mar Ivanios, Bethany represents an ideal of life which would be accomplished by each of its members. Bethany is comprised of two Orders- Bethany: Imitation of Christ First Order (*Prathamashram*) is for the clerics, and Bethany: Imitation of Christ Second Order (*Dwittheethiyashram*) is for the nuns. Later, the term *Prathamashram* is changed to ‘Bethany Ashram’ now known as the Order of the Imitation of Christ (OIC) and the term (*Dwittheeyashram*) or Second Order is changed to Bethany Madhom the Congregation of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ (SIC). ‘Ashram’ and ‘Madhom’ are Indian terms which signify ‘community’ in the sense of dwellings of the monks and of the nuns. Cf. Mar Ivanios, *Pastoral Letter*, 1931, *The Holy Rule*, art. 2.

Seminary in South India. Later he served as professor in the Serampore University in North India.²⁷⁵

Though Geevarghese as a priest was well placed to contribute to the spiritual growth and development of the Orthodox Church, he was often overwhelmed by a desire to serve God as a monk and to give himself totally in the service of God. According to Geevarghese, monastic service is for a life in Christ which leads to divine union. According to him, “There is nothing more sublime than union with God in this valley of tears”.²⁷⁶ The urge to serve God and to render to the Divine Majesty a service at once simple and noble within the monastic confines led him, with the co-operation of his few disciples, to the foundation of a monastic movement called Bethany in the Malankara Church in 1919.²⁷⁷ After he became a monk he was consecrated a bishop of the Malankara Orthodox Church in 1925. He received the name Mar Ivanios meaning “golden mouthed” and was designated as the head of the monasteries. On September 20, 1930 Mar Ivanios entered into the Catholic communion with four of his disciples and thus became the Father of the Re-union Movement.²⁷⁸ Later he was appointed as the head of the eparchy of the Christian faithful who were re-united with the Catholic Church known as the Malankara Catholic Church. Mar Ivanios died on July 15th, 1953 at Trivandrum in South India.

The Bethany monastic movement started by Mar Ivanios paved the way for the foundation of two monastic institutions for men and women in 1919 and 1925 respectively and for the beginning of a tertiary for the laity.²⁷⁹ The movement led thousands of Orthodox faithful into the Catholic communion. It thus helped and is still helping the spiritual

²⁷⁵ Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 1-9.

²⁷⁶ Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 55.

²⁷⁷ Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 20-21.

²⁷⁸ Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, 66.

renewal of the Malankara Church and contributing to the cultural and social development of the Kerala society.

3.3.3.2. Monastic Commitment to the Imitation of Christ

Since our endeavour is to explore the aspects of monastic commitment, we would like to probe into what Mar Ivanios’s ideal about monastic life is and how he conceived the commitment to such a life.

In the monastic rules and the writings of Mar Ivanios, we often see the words “imitation of Christ” and “union with God”. In the Bethany Constitution we read: “The special end of the Congregation (that is, the particular aim of each member of this Congregation) namely the Imitation of Christ, is for each member to imitate as closely as possible Our Lord Jesus Christ in His life of prayer and action through the practice of religious discipline and through the adaptation of Indian ways of life.”²⁸⁰ From this, it is explicit that Mar Ivanios’s ideal of monastic life is imitation of Christ. In forming this ideal he was first of all inspired and influenced by the Gospel, St. Paul’s teachings on imitation and by the teachings of the Greek and the Syrian Fathers.²⁸¹

Mar Ivanios envisioned monastic life as a sublime way of life chosen in order to be in union with God by imitating Christ. This imitation does not happen in an abstract way without tending towards the fullness of the love of Christ through self-renunciation (*m’sarqutho*)²⁸² So Mar

²⁷⁹ Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 210-212.

²⁸⁰ *The Holy Rule*, art. 2.

²⁸¹ Mar Ivanios’s idea of imitation is based on the Gospel teachings and on St. Paul and it also conforms to the teachings on the imitation of Christ by Ignatius of Antioch, St. Basil, and Nicola Cabasilas. In fact, Basil’s ideal of imitation of Christ through a life of prayer and service influenced Mar Ivanios to a great extent and he adopted Basil’s rule to formulate the way of life in Bethany. Cf. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 202; Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 52-59.

²⁸² Roberts, *Centered on Christ*, 16.

Ivanios always proposed an absolute deliberate dedication and complete surrender of the whole person in response to one's charismatic vocation to live in conformity to the teaching and example of Christ the obedient, chaste, and poor Son of God through a sacred commitment. According to Mar Ivanios, this sacred commitment to live monastically, helps one to appropriate the way of imitation and union with God.

3.3.3.3. Total Dedication (*Prathishta*) is Essential

Mar Ivanios uses the term "*Prathishta*" (total dedication or consecration) to denote monastic commitment. In his writings, he widely uses the words *Sanyasaprathishta* for the ceremony of monastic dedication and *Sanyasaprathinja*, instead of the term "profession of the vows".²⁸³ The term *Sanyasaprathinja* cannot be aptly translated but it can be understood as a solemn promise that the monks and nuns take at their consecration. It is a pledge of fidelity to God made public in the Church, and in the presence of the heavenly choirs and earthly beings.²⁸⁴ Through this pledge the *Sanyasini* (the monastic virgin) promises to live for Christ in holiness and according to His commandments. The term *Sanyasaprathinja* conforms very much to the aspect of *Sanyasprathishta* or monastic consecration. Through *Prathishta* one surrenders her whole being to God and enters into the service of God with the sole motive of glorifying Him.²⁸⁵

3.3.4. Preparation for the Monastic Dedication (*Sanyasaprathishta*)

For the *Sanyasaprathishta* (monastic dedication/consecration), one has to undergo a long period of ascetic preparation. This is to enable the candidates to grow always and in every way into Christ (Eph 4:15) and become totally identified with him so as to say, "It is no

²⁸³ Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 105; 106. Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 54.

²⁸⁴ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 37-38; *Profession of Vows*, 12.

²⁸⁵ Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 51.

longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).²⁸⁶ The period of preparation is intended to help the candidates to be fully open and docile to the action of the Holy Spirit who is the agent of formation.²⁸⁷ Formators as collaborators and instruments in this work of God diligently work to achieve this goal. The Oriental and Indian heritage of the Congregation emphasizes the importance of *anubhava* (experience) *abhyasa* (practice) and *guru-sishya bandh* (master-disciple relation) in obtaining the personal and spiritual growth of those in formation.²⁸⁸ Mar Ivanios proposes three different but subsequent periods before the monastic consecration; namely *Ayathapath*, *Arthinipath* and *Dharmasishyapath*.²⁸⁹

3.3.4.1. Aspirancy (*Ayathapath*)

The word *Ayatha* is derived from the Sanskrit root '*Ayath*' meaning come, see, and stay.²⁹⁰ Mar Ivanios used this term for the person who seeks monastic life and comes to stay at the Bethany *Ashram* (monastery) or *Madhom* (convent) to experience monastic life. The "come and stay" of the candidate is patterned on Jesus' calling and acceptance of his disciples who came to stay with Him to experience life with Him.

Those men/women who seek monastic life are invited to the Bethany community united in mutual love and deep faith where the "Guru is present" (Jn 11: 28).²⁹¹ The Superior of the Congregation is responsible for receiving the candidates.²⁹²

²⁸⁶ Cf. *Holy Rule*, art. 16.

²⁸⁷ *HRSIC*, art. 25

²⁸⁸ Cf. *Holy Rule*, art. 16

²⁸⁹ The *Ayathapath*, *Arthinipath* and *Dharmasishyapath* can be named as aspirancy, postulancy and novitiate. Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 25-34.

²⁹⁰ Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 51.

²⁹¹ *The Holy Rule*, art.16

²⁹² *HRSIC*, art.13.

Ayathapath is the initial period of preparation for entering into the monastic life. During this period the *Ayatha* (aspirant) is expected to prove his/ her motivation and fundamental option in seeking God alone.²⁹³ *Ayatha* is allowed to stay in the monastic community with other members in order to see and experience the ascetical yet joyful life of communion. This period is to provide the aspirants with *amubhavajnana* (experiential knowledge) about monastic life. After this period the *Ayatha* is admitted to the subsequent stage of preparation known as Postulancy or *Arthinipath*.

3.3.4.2. Postulancy (*Arthinipath*)

The word *Arhini* derived from the Sanskrit word 'Arth' means the seeker.²⁹⁴ Here it is used to indicate the one who seeks monastic life. Those who have come to the *madhom* (nunnery) to pursue monastic life and have completed the *Ayathapath* are accepted through a specific rite into the community by the Superior. They are given proper training for religious life.²⁹⁵ In the beginning, there was no stipulated time for this stage of preparation. What was considered important was providing sufficient time of preparation for the candidates from their time of entrance to total dedication, which could last even up to a period of ten years.²⁹⁶ Now the period is scheduled for one year.²⁹⁷ During this period the *Arhini* is trained to direct her will and mind to the Messiah and to understand His way of life.²⁹⁸ The candidate is also given proper orientation to grow in holiness and to practice Christian virtues. Importance is given to the *abhyasa* (training) of the *Arhini*. This means, that the aspirant's aptitude of practising Christian virtues and living the

²⁹³ Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 6.

²⁹⁴ Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 52-53.

²⁹⁵ *HRSIC*, art.13.

²⁹⁶ Salga, *A Short History*, 41.

²⁹⁷ *HRSIC*, art. 30.

²⁹⁸ Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 102-103.

Christian life in a more authentic way are counted as important during this stage. With the end of *Arthinipath*, the candidate is received into the next stage of preparation called *Dharmasishyapath* (novitiate).

3.3.4.3. Novitiate (*Dharmasishyapath*)

Dharmasishyapath (the stage of discipleship) now known as the novitiate period is the most important stage of formation for monastic life. In the Syrian tradition we see the origin of the novitiate period during the time of Rabbula the Bishop of Edessa (411-435). He stipulated a period of three years for the novitiate.²⁹⁹

Mar Ivanios uses the Indian term *Dharmasishyapath*, which corresponds to *Talmeeduthô* the Syriac term to denote the stage of novitiate.³⁰⁰ These terms signify the status of a novice as a disciple. Hence, with the entrance into the novitiate the novice begins the life of discipleship, a life in and with Christ. In the Antiochene and in the Malankara tradition the *Dharmasishyapath* begins with a special ritual of entrance into the novitiate in which the candidate is accepted into the novitiate.³⁰¹

According to Mar Ivanios, the *Dharmasishyapath* has a privileged role in determining the future life of the *Dharmasishya* (novice). He says: "As is the *dharmasishyapath* so will be the rest of his (her) religious life."³⁰² The hidden life of Our Lord in Nazareth (Lk 2:51) is the model of a *Dharmasishya*. In the undistracted and prayerful atmosphere of the *Dharmasishyalaya* (novitiate house), the *Dharmasishya* lives an interior life based on the spirit of the Gospels

²⁹⁹ Rabbula, *The Canons*, no.21 in Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic*, 83.

³⁰⁰ Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 29. The Syriac word *Talmeedo* means discipleship and is from the root *Talmid*. *Taleth* is the one who receives catechetical instruction or the one who enters into the discipleship. This term is also used for a novice. Cf. Jennings, *Lexicon*, 235.

³⁰¹ *CCEO*, 450; *HRSIC*, art.43:4

³⁰² Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 103.

and slowly and steadily learns and experiences the Bethanian life. He/she practices the monastic charism and prepares to dedicate herself/himself through religious consecration.³⁰³ During this period the novice is given training to direct his/her will, mind and spirit to the person of Christ which enables him/her to grow in every way into Christ in accordance with the promptings of the Holy Spirit.³⁰⁴ Hence the *Dharmasishya* is expected to try in all diligence to be faithful to the inspirations of the Spirit following fully the will of God, giving up self and controlling movements of the soul; to always grow in union with God by a life of deep prayer and purity of intention, zealously imbibing the love of God and fellow men.³⁰⁵ Those who successfully finish the *Dharmasishyapath* are received for *Sannyasapraphithshta* or monastic consecration.

3.3.4.4. The Monastic Dedication: Total Life-giving Sacrifice

The details regarding the early rite of monastic consecration in the historical accounts of Bethany, the manuscript of the Order of the Service of Profession of the Nuns in the Malankara Church of 1925, and Mar Ivanios's book on ascetic life entitled *Malankara Sanyasa Jeevitha Sahai* written in 1926, give us a unique yet different understanding of the rite of profession and of the vows in the Malankara Church, from what is given in the Canon of the first Constitution.³⁰⁶ In the first Constitution we read:

When the Superior is satisfied that a Novice is called and ready to dedicate himself/herself to God in the Brotherhood, for the rest of his life {...} will be admitted to profession according to the form in use in the community and will take vows of Poverty and Chastity, Obedience

³⁰³ *The Holy Rule*, art. 32; *HRSIC*, art. 40.

³⁰⁴ Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 105.

³⁰⁵ Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 29-32; *The Holy Rule*, art. 34: 2-3.

³⁰⁶ Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 107-112; Salga, *A Short History*, 42-43; Helena, *The History of Bethany*, 48-50; For this information I am indebted also to Sr. Philomena, the former superior general of the Bethany Congregation. See also Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 55-58.

and Stability for a period of three years after which he will take his life vows.³⁰⁷

This does not mean that Mar Ivanios and his disciples made their monastic dedication and profession of vows in Catholic fashion, taking their vows temporally or perpetually. It is true that Mar Ivanios though he was aware of St. Basil laying great stress upon religious chastity as the foundation of monastic life, St. Francis of Assisi pointing to holy poverty as its basis, and Ignatius Loyola teaching that religious obedience which means living in closest possible union with God and enabling the perfect accomplishment of His divine will, was the be-all and end-all of the means of attaining perfection,³⁰⁸ did not profess the vow or adopt it in the consecration ceremony of the monks or nuns in the Malankara Orthodox Church.³⁰⁹ The early manuscripts shed light on the fact that the first members of the Orders of Bethany after a long period of their formation consecrated their life totally to the service of the Lord.³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Mar Ivanios, *The Constitutions*, art. 3. The copy of the English translation is kept in the Apostolic Nunciature at Delhi. Our quotation is from Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 154. This article of the Constitution, though speaks only about profession in the Order of the Monks, is intended for the Order of the Nuns, for the content of the constitution is same for both orders. The Malayalam text of the rule, the history of the congregation and the sayings of the pioneer members, testify that there was only *Sanyasapraphinja* and not profession of vows for monastic consecration in Bethany until 1928. This was probably due to Mar Ivanios's intention of keeping the Syrian liturgical rite intact.

³⁰⁸ Mar Ivanios, *Bethany Yogam*, 15; Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 34-35.

³⁰⁹ Liturgical prayers of consecration and solemn promise constituted monastic dedication in the Malankara Church until 1928. According to Mother Salga the 4th member and the author of the history of the congregation of Bethany, there was only a solemn promise of life until 1928. Salga, *A Short History*, 43-44.

³¹⁰ The first members underwent a period of fifteen years of formation before their commitment. Cf. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 200-201; Salga, *A Short History*, 42-45.

It is written that on September 21, 1925 the first three members of the feminine order dedicated their entire life as a holocaust without professing the triple vows.³¹¹ For them, their dedication was a total *Prathishta* (dedication) called *Sannyasaprathishta* like the *Devaprathishta*³¹²(consecration to a deity) in the Indian culture and like monastic ordination or *Sannyasadiksha* in the *Bharatiya* (Indian) *ashrams* or like the ordination ceremony of a bishop-elect prior to his consecration (*Remban Pattom* in the Syrian Churches. The *Sanyasaprathinja*, (monastic promise) a solemn written pledge of fidelity in monastic living, pronounced and signed with the sign of the cross by each one of them, was handed over to the prelate following the ritual of the tonsure constituted the apex of the *Sanyasaprathishta* or monastic dedication. This was the structure of profession until 1928.³¹³

After 1929 the profession of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for a temporary period and then for the whole life, and the

³¹¹ Helena, *Bethany*, 68.

³¹² *Devaprathishta* means dedication to God or any other deity. It is a ceremony among the priestly class of the Hindu people in India. In this ceremony an image (statue) of their deity is separated, and the priest by reciting mantras or prayers infuses the spirit and power of the God into it and it is kept in a special place for the veneration of the people. The image becomes the instrument of grace for others and becomes the symbol of God's presence. Mar Ivanios's vision on *Sanyasaprathishta* was the dedication or consecration of the image of God (the person) for an ascetic life. From thence the image become the abode of the Holy Trinity, a symbol of God's presence and a channel of grace. It is through the ritual of monastic consecration that the *Prathishta* or dedication is effected. This idea is prominent in the prayers and rituals of monastic consecration and in the writings of Mar Ivanios. The first three members of Bethany through a pledge totally dedicated their entire lives to God. For them there was no explicit pronouncement of vows. Cf. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 198-201; See also Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 51-55.

³¹³ Salga, *A Short History*, 42-43.

periodical renewal of the term of the vows became an accepted custom in the liturgy and in the monastic tradition.³¹⁴ Here some questions arise. Does Mar Ivanios disregard the Syrian liturgy of consecration? What was his vision behind the incorporation of the evangelical counsels?

To answer these and like questions, one should know the vision of Mar Ivanios on monastic dedication and vows. The sermon given by Mar Ivanios, on the day of the dedication of the pioneer monks at Bethany would address this question.³¹⁵ Mar Ivanios says:

Sanyasam (monastic life) can be compared to a sacrificial cow.³¹⁶ This cow has to pass through four different stages before it is sacrificed. First, it should be separated from the herd. Secondly, after it is brought to the temple, it is tied somewhere outside the temple. Thirdly, on the day of its sacrifice it is cut into pieces from which the blood and the best part of the flesh are taken for sacrifice. Finally the priest burns the flesh in the sacrificial fire and sprinkles the blood over the altar. The greatest offering of the Jews is the offering of the holocaust. In any other sacrifice only a part of the flesh is offered, the other portion is for the priest. But in a holocaust everything is offered to God. *Sanyasam* is a sacrifice of holocaust. In the same way the *Sanyasi* also separates himself from others. By his own accord he also comes to the premises of the temple, which in this case, is the monastery where he is waiting for the day of sacrifice. Here (in the monastery) by his own tears, he washed himself from all malice and stain. On the day of sacrifice he should be beheaded. On that day he immolates himself. The triple vows of the religious take the place of the sword used for killing the cow. After that he entrusts himself into the hands of the superior who offers him to God. Then in His

³¹⁴ According to M. Salga, in 1929, with the monastic dedication of the fifth member of the congregation of the sisters, the taking of vows as temporary and perpetual became an accepted custom in Bethany. Cf. Salga, *A Short history*, 53.

³¹⁵ The dedication ceremony of the first group of monks occurred on Pentecost in 1919. Cf. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 199; Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 43.

³¹⁶ The cow is considered a sacred animal, to be offered as sacrifice to gods in the non-Christian religions in India.

name the superior accepts him. As in the case of the sacrificial cow, the skin of the *Sanyasi* should be removed first and then the body should be cut into pieces. By mere profession of vows, one does not become a perfect *Sanyasi*. He should be immolated on the sacrificial altar. There together with Christ, he should offer himself throughout his life.³¹⁷

The sermon of Mar Ivanios reveals the content of monastic profession and of the vows. In short, it is the content of monastic life itself.

Mar Ivanios though aware of the sacrificial yet life-giving dimension of the vows, had to face some legal problems for implementing the tradition of the vows in the monasteries he founded. P. Podippara has written about this. According to him, the divisions and discontent in the Malankara Jacobite Church created two rival authorities: the Catholicos and the Patriarchate in the same Church. So the question of to whom the vow of obedience was to be made by the religious directed caused Father Gheevarghese, later Mar Ivanios some anxiety.³¹⁸ Later in 1929, Mar Ivanios became the Archbishop of the independent Bethany, and afterward executed the profession of vows in the Malankara Church.³¹⁹ Thus, Mar Ivanios formulated and implemented a consecration liturgy, which embodies elements that are common to all religious consecrations in the Catholic Church. He did justice to the Syrian liturgical service of monastic consecration and to the monastic charism proper to the West Syrian Churches by keeping it intact. Consequently, the Malankara Church inherited a liturgical service of monastic profession, which is Syrian in its content, Oriental in its form of celebration, and Indian in its soul.

³¹⁷ Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, 128-131.

³¹⁸ Podippara, "The Syro Malankara Re-union" *Unitas* Vol.VII, no.1, Our citation is from Moolaveetil, *The Spiritual Life*, 90.

³¹⁹ Helena, *Bethany*, 64.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have tried to analyze first, the concept of monastic profession in the Antiochene tradition and then have attempted to develop three themes simultaneously: the sources, the emergence, and the development of the rite of monastic profession in the Antiochene and in the Syro-Malankara tradition. The first theme we studied through an overview of the liturgy of profession and the document, *Sanyasinikalude Vritha Vagdanam* (The Profession of Vows: The Service in the Malankara Church) to envision the concept of monastic profession and the significance of the vows in the West Syrian tradition.

To inquire into the sources of the liturgy of profession, we made a search through the sources of inspiration of the liturgical texts, comprising early Syrian literary sources and the writings of the Fathers. The writings of Pseudo-Dionysius help us to understand the early celebration as well the structure of the West Syrian monastic consecration, which is the same until this day. Moses Bar Kepha's homily sheds light on the importance of the monastic profession and of the vestition of the monastic habit in the attainment of the charism of monkhood. We noted some elements of the early liturgical rites in the service and we studied the three early liturgical rites of the West Syrian or Antiochene Church namely the Liturgy of Baptism (*Teshmeshtho d' Mamodito*) the Rite of the Ordination of the Deaconess (*Teshmeshtho d' Shamsomutho*) and the Rite of Reaching to the Harbour (*Wa'deh da-lmino*). Having arrived at the inspirational sources, we aimed to study the proper liturgical text, by examining through the available manuscripts (BN., Ms Syr. 154. fol. 186, Vat. Syr. 51, Bodlein Ms. Hunt 444) its direct link to the Ritual of the Clothing of the Monks (*Takso d' tulbosho d' dairoye*) and the Ritual of the Tonsure of Nuns (*Takso d' suporo d' dairoyoto*).

By way of conclusion of the first part of the chapter, we may point out that the liturgical rite used for the profession of nuns in the Malankara Church is of Syrian origin and is a splendid ritual with its

monastic features. With regard to the liturgical text of profession, which we use in the Malankara Catholic Church, we may say that it is not an independent source of its own right. It is neither a replication of the text used for the vestition of the monks nor a mere copy of the tonsure of the nuns. It is a source of its own identity and richness in which we see the fusion of the content of two primary texts of Syrian monastic profession along with the addition of some parts of the liturgical rites like *Wa'deh da-lmino* relevant to the context and to the celebration of the rite of profession.

Having discovered the ritual's foundational roots in the Syrian milieu both in the Syriac literature and the liturgical rites, we are prompted to inquire how the rite of profession as a liturgical service evolved in the Syrian tradition. For the emergence of a specific tradition, the contribution and influence of other traditions are noteworthy. In our case, we tried to see the influence of the early monastic initiation in the Orient including the Coptic and Basilian tradition for the emergence of the liturgy of profession of the virgins. In the early ascetic communities of the Orient, the stress on monastic commitment is intended not to create a structure or hierarchy of life separated from Christian life, but it is envisaged as a commitment or a covenant made to God by the one making vows in order to live as a perfect Christian, "as a true imitator of Christ".³²⁰ For Basil, a perfect monk /nun is a perfect Christian who renounces everything including oneself and binds oneself to the teachings of Christ and to the service of his or her community, the Church. Thus, monastic profession as a means to incorporate one to a stable form of Christian life attained a celebrative dimension with rites and rituals in an ecclesial and communitarian context.

With regard to Syrian monasticism, anchoritism was the ideal of monastic life and later coenobitic life became prominent. The foundation of principal monasteries, in the Antioch area like Gindaros, Dier Telade

and the joining of hundreds of candidates to these monasteries brought prominence to monastic life in the ecclesial and social context, which naturally brought forth the institutionalization of monastic life and the consequent formation of the rites and rituals of monastic initiation. In this context we see the influence of oriental Greco-Coptic monastic initiatory rites as stimuli for the formulation of the liturgical rite of profession in the West Syrian tradition.

Coming to the last part of our source study, we try to see the development of monastic life of the West Syrian liturgical tradition in the Syrian Churches. In this context we studied Syrian monastic life and profession by viewing the pre-monastic life of the covenanters and the later monastic aspects of formation, tonsure and monastic habit. We also analyzed two of the monastic canons to see the nature and the theology of Jesus' commitment in Syrian monasticism. Then we tried to see the liturgical rites as such in their present form in the Maronite, Syrian-Orthodox and the Syro-Malankara Catholic tradition. In conclusion, we may say that the Antiochene Service of Monastic Profession has its own origins and background rooted on the basic foundations of Sacred Scripture, the liturgy, the Fathers of the Church and sacred tradition. From early monastic praxis the liturgical rite of profession gradually merged into the ascetic scene of the Antiochene monastic settings and attained a definite form and structure in the Antiochene ecclesial life.

³²⁰ Hausherr, "L'imitation de Jesus – Christ", 217-245.

Chapter Two

THE LITURGY OF PROFESSION OF VIRGINS IN THE MALANKARA CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we have studied the sources, the emergence and the development of the rite of monastic profession in the Antiochean and in the Malankara tradition. In this chapter, we study the liturgical Service of Profession in the Malankara Church composed of rituals and prayers. We divide the whole rite into three parts namely 1) The Service Preceding the Profession of Vows, 2) The Service of the Profession of Vows, and 3) The Service Following the Profession of Vows. Accordingly, this chapter concentrates on the rituals, their history and meaning so as to comprehend the mind of the Church in the consecration of the religious and also to perceive the content of the monastic life conveyed through the liturgical rites.

1. THE SERVICE PRECEDING THE PROFESSION OF VOWS

The rite preceding the profession of vows known as the “Service for the Temporary Vows” is reserved for those who make the profession of vows for a temporary period. The title, “Service for the Temporary Vows” is rather confusing for the name does not indicate clearly the nature and the content of the service.

The Service of Receiving the Candidate¹ prior to profession originated in the Malankara Church in 1925 with the profession of the

first nuns.² We are not able to trace the origin of the rite in any other monastic traditions. However, as we have mentioned already, the rite of *Wa 'deh da-lmino* of the Holy Week liturgy can be alluded to as a source of influence for the founder to include this service with the rite of profession.³ As a rite full of repentant themes, the Service of Receiving is significant for its ascetic orientation and mystic lure. The prayers and rituals embody thoughts of “conversion and turning to God” not only of the candidate (s) who makes the profession, but of the participants as well.

1.1. The Order of the Service

The Service of Receiving the Candidate is conducted separately on the day previous to profession, either at noon or in the evening with the Canonical prayers.⁴ The candidate who makes the profession of vows, together with the members of the congregation and the faithful, stands outside the closed door of the church on the western side facing the east.⁵ The celebrant stands inside the church behind the closed door. After making stipulated prayers and rituals outside the church the candidate is received by the celebrant into the church.

There are two parts for the Service of Receiving. The first part involves the Opening prayer (قَامِدْ , *qawmō*), Prayer of petition by the candidate, (قَلْدْ , *qōlō*⁶) and (بُو'ؤْتُو , *Bo 'ūtō*) of Mar Balai.⁷

² Salga, *A Short History*, 43-44.

³ See *Chapter I*, pp. 36-38.

⁴ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 4; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 12-22; *Profession of Vows*, 4–8.

⁵ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 4; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 12; *Profession of Vows*, 4.

⁶ *Qōlō* literally means voice or tune. It consists of a series of short hymns known as *oas baitō* (stanza) from psalms with doxology. Cf. Day, *The Liturgical Dictionary*, 247.

⁷ The word *bo 'ūtō* means supplication. It is a hymn usually consisting of four strophes in which the last strophe is a doxology. See Day, *The Liturgical Dictionary*, 38. The supplications written by Mar Balai, the Chorepiscopus

¹ In our study we refer to the Service of Receiving the Novice in the liturgical text as the Service of Receiving the Candidate for profession to avoid confusion and for the sake of consistency. We use the terms candidate and virgin instead of novice to denote the person who makes the profession.

Excluding the opening prayer or *qawmō*, the candidate begins all the prayers of the first part of the Service.⁸ The celebrant does not initiate any prayers until the second part of the Service.

The second part of the Service constitutes an (ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ) introductory prayer, (ܩܕܝܫܐ) *qōlō*, (ܥܩܒܐ) *eqbo*,⁹ a dialogue between the prelate and the candidate and receiving her into the church. This follows the (ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ) *proemion* (preface of a series of prayer), (ܩܕܝܫܐ) *sedrō* (series of prayer) (ܩܕܝܫܐ) *Bo'ūtō* of Mar Jacob of Serugh, the giving of religious names to the candidate, the blessing of the candidate and the conferring of partial monastic garments. The service ends with (ܩܩܠܝܘܢ) *quqliyon*¹⁰ and (ܩܩܠܝܘܢ) *hutōmo*.¹¹ For the convenience of our study we deal with the prayers of the service first and then study the Receiving Service separately.

of Aleppo at the end of the 4th century are known as the *Bo'ūtō* of Mar Balai. "Merciful to sins" is his famous *bo'ūtō*. Cf. *Prarthanakramam*, 25.

⁸ The *qawmō* is initiated by the superior of the congregation or by her delegate. Cf. *Beth.Ms.*, 1, 1-4.

⁹ *Eqbo* literally means end. It is a short hymn of a single verse in the Syriac measure at the end of certain movements. *Eqbo* usually appears before the *qōlō* and contains the brief content of the following *qōlō*. Cf. Plathottathil, *Richness of Syriac*, 83.

¹⁰ *Quqliyōn* means a cycle of hymns or a cycle of verses from the psalms usually recited after the Gospel reading. They are litanies used in the liturgy. There are *quaqliyōn* in commemoration of Mary (Ps 45: 9, 11); Saints (Ps 92: 12, 14); Cross (Ps 44: 5, 7) Departed priests and bishops (Ps 132:9-12) and all departed ones (Ps 103: 13, 15). Cf. Day, *The Liturgical Dictionary*, 248; Plathottathil, *Richness of Syriac*, 87.

¹¹ *Hutōmo* literally means seal. It is the final prayer in the form of a hymn recited at the close of the liturgical prayers and Holy *Qurbano*. Cf. Plathottathil, *Richness of Syriac*, 91.

1.1.1. The Prayers of the Service (Šluto d'tešmešto)

A series of introductory prayers, and entering prayers constitute the Service of Receiving the Candidate. Alternating prose prayers and hymns, a feature of the Order, adds to the beauty of the Service. We examine these prayers in the following section.

1.1.1.1. The Introductory Prayers (Šluto d'šurōyo)

The introductory prayer, which initiates the community into a particular service, is a common feature of Antiochene liturgical celebrations. In the Service of Receiving, the ritual begins with the *qawmō*, initiated by the major superior (Superior general) or her delegate. It includes the doxology (*šubahō*), which reflects the Trinitarian foundation of the Service, *trisagion*¹² (Greek word denoting thrice holy), the Christological hymn, the Lord's Prayer and a petition to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Every liturgical service in the Antiochene tradition begins with either the Canonical prayer or with a specific prayer which

¹² *Trisagion*, the Greek word, meaning thrice holy is a hymn "You are holy God" (*Qaddishat aloho*). Its origin goes back to the first half of the 5th century and is associated with the name of Proclus, bishop of Constantinople. The interpretation as to whether the hymn should be understood as referring to the Trinity or to Christ was a contentious and emotive issue from the fifth to the eighth centuries. In Syria the Trisagion was addressed to Christ, but in Constantinople it was thought to be addressed to the Trinity. This led to the controversy over the addition "who was crucified for us", by Peter the Fuller, the Patriarch of Constantinople (+488). Later it became identified as a Christological hymn, in order to emphasize the orthodox teaching that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity suffered on the cross. As a result the added words are only to be found in Syrian orthodox manuscripts and they have been removed from the Syrian Catholic liturgical texts. This hymn became a part of the liturgical prayers of the Malankara Church. Böhmer, *Das Trishagion*, 4-6; Kochakian, *The Trisagion*, 2-4; Brock, "Thrice Holy Hymn", 28-29.

conforms to the service celebrated. This upholds the view that “divine praise is the main purpose of the believer’s life.”¹³

1.1.1.2. The Entering Prayers

The Entering Prayers are the prayers meant to be recited by the candidate at the closed door of the church before entering into it. We deal with the Entering Prayers in two parts. The first part of the prayers includes; an invocation, two *qōlō*; (one hymn and the other a prose) and a *bo ’ūtō* of Mar Balai. The second part consists of an introductory prayer, a hymn, and an *eqbo*.

a) The Content of the First Part of the Entering Prayers

The initial prayer is an invocation of the candidate to God, stating that like the sinful woman of the Gospel parable, the candidate is waiting before the door of God’s house (church) expecting God to open the door for her. The candidate states her need of getting the living water from God (cf. Gen 26:19; Lev 15:13; Jer 2: 13; 17:13) in order to quench her thirst and for her purification. In the New Testament context the prayer relates to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16: 19-31) and also to Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of St. John (Jn 4:10-15).¹⁴ According to Ephrem, these biblical figures request God to satiate their thirst, because their sins are burning them upon and their evil deeds like coals of a broom tree are roasting them.¹⁵

The first *qōlō*, which comprises a hymn and a prose text, contains themes of repentance and of seeking God’s mercy, forgiveness and grace to live a new life. Through this hymn, the candidate confesses her shortcomings to the Lord in the midst of the assembly. The awareness of human limitations and God’s divine mercy challenge the candidate to

¹³ Acharya, *The Ritual*, 47.

¹⁴ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 5; *VrithaVagdanam*, 12; *Profession of Vows*; 4.

¹⁵ Ephrem, “Letter to Publius”, Sec. 4.

ask with confidence: “Where shall we knock except at your door of mercy, O King of kings? There is nothing other than your mercy to intercede for us.”¹⁶

The second *qōlō* given in the form of a petition is an invocation to God by the candidate. With nothing to boast of except her own sins, the candidate humbly approaches God and confiding in His mercy she prays:

Lord I am the lamb that has gone astray from the life-giving path and perished...O good shepherd, you came in search of me. Do not permit me to be utterly lost. Count me in your sheepfold together with the publican, the sinful woman and the wise virgins and make me worthy to enter into your wedding chamber. O God, retribute my sins and forgive all my foolishness. Lord, since I have made you angry on account of my sins, I cry out like the woman sinner. O lover of mankind, when you come in glory, enable me to sing praises to your grace along with your saints. Lord, I call upon you like the prodigal son. O my father, have pity on me in your mercy, for I have sinned against you and against heaven. Consider me as a daily wage earner. I shall be a servant in your house. O merciful God, forgive me all sins I have committed against your will.¹⁷

The prayer is one of a humble approach. The candidate’s acknowledgement of her sinful state and her confessing of God’s mercy is beautifully pictured in the *qōlō*. The various biblical images in the prayer present the state of the candidate before God. She is the lamb that has gone astray (Is 53:6; Psalm 118:176; Mt 18:12-14), the prodigal son (Lk 15: 11-32), the sinful woman (Lk 7: 36-50), and the publican (Lk 18:9-14).¹⁸ In short, she represents herself as a penitent before

¹⁶ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 6; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 12; *Profession of Vows*, 4. This passage is taken from a hymn of the service of Melchisedek in the preparatory part of the Eucharistic liturgy. See Panicker, *Holy Qurbano*, 31.

¹⁷ *Profession of Vows*, 5-6. This prayer is given as an *eniyônô* in the Lenten prayers of the Syrian Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Cf. *Valiya Nombile Prarthanakram*, 74; *Proemionukal*, 50-52.

¹⁸ *Beth Ms.*, 1, 7-8; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 13-14.

God with remorse of soul. According to Scripture, “He who confesses his sins and abandons them, on him God has mercy” (Prov 28:13). According to Ephrem, penitence (ܬܘܒܘܬܐ *tyōbūtō*) is the ark of mercy which opens its door to sinners, and its harbour is a pure heart.¹⁹

The Petition of Mar Balai follows the confession of the candidate. This petition, “merciful to sins” of five syllables (penta syllabic) which is inserted within the Ritual of Receiving the Candidate has the theme of God’s reception of the wicked ones who remorsefully knock at His door for mercy.²⁰ Since Christ through His entry into Paradise has become the pathfinder and the Way (ܐܘܪܗܘܐ *urhō*) to those who are on the journey to the Kingdom, through the Petition of Mar Balai, the candidate and the whole congregation with her, pray to God the Lord of heavenly beings and the hope of earthly ones, to accept their prayers and service and to have mercy upon all.²¹ This prayer reminds the entire people of God that the entry into the life and glory of God is possible through Christ alone.

b) The Content of the Second Part of the Entering Prayers

The second part of the Entering Prayers constitutes an invocatory prayer in which Christ is called upon as the “harbour of life and of peace.” Recalling the episode of Peter’s sinking and Christ’s rescuing him, the candidate prays to God to rescue her like Peter, from the tangles of the world and from the snares of spiritual enemies, since she takes refuge in the Lord, the Vast Ocean of Mercy.²²

¹⁹ Ephrem, *HEcccl* 34: 3; *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 6.

²⁰ Cf. *Prarthanakramam*, 25-26.

²¹ Ephrem, *HEcccl* 35: 19; *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 9, *Vritha Vagdanam*, 14.

²² *Profession of Vows*, 5. This is a liturgical prayer of the Lenten season and it also comes in the Service of *Wa’deh Da-Imino* and in the Thursday *sapro* (morning prayer). Cf. *Valiya Nombile Prarthanakramam*, 126 *Šhimo* (MT, ‘*šubaho*’ first part of the divine office), 220.

The ancient Syrian usage of the word “haven of salvation” can be found in the early documents. In the Odes of Solomon, we see that the Odist compares himself to a helmsman and his work of praise to the steering of a ship, which after various perils by land and sea, brought him to a haven of salvation.²³ In the Acts of Thomas Christ is called the “haven in a sea of trouble.”²⁴ Comparing the idea to that in the invocatory prayer, we see its Syrian heritage and its antiquity.

A hymn follows the invocatory prayer. It is a part of Psalm 51, verse 1-3, which pictures Christ as the Physician (ܐܘܨܝܐ *ōsyō*) and the candidate as a sick person who approaches Christ the Physician for healing.²⁵ Sins are here mentioned as wounds of the soul that can only be cured by Christ. The need of purification and of sanctification to enter into the divine life is stressed in the hymn.²⁶ The words “hyssop”²⁷ and “tears” in the hymn suggests not only the candidate’s urge for an external purification but reveal her request to be cleaned integrally by “Christ the New Hyssop.”²⁸ An *eqbo* of praise and petition for God’s mercy follows the hymn. The candidate prays:

²³ *Ode*, 38:1; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 129-133.

²⁴ AJT 3:37; Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, 84.

²⁵ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 11; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 15-16; *Profession of Vows*, 5.

²⁶ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 10-11; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 15-16; *Profession of Vows*, 5-6. This penitential hymn is a version of Psalm 51 and is used during Lent and other services of the Church. See *Valiya Nompile Prarthana kramam*, 13-14; *Šhimo*, (*šubaho*), 65-66.

²⁷ Hyssop is a kind of bushy plant that grows in the Mediterranean region. The bunch of hyssop was used as a brush for daubing the lintels of the Hebrew homes with blood from the sacrificial lamb at Passover (Ex 12:22). Thus hyssop forms an integral part of redemptive theology. It also symbolizes cleaning and purification. David prayed to God, “purge me with hyssop” Ps 51: 7. Ephrem calls Christ the “New Hyssop” who purifies man from all his sins and redeems him. Cf. Buttrick, “Hyssop”, 669-670.

²⁸ Cf. Ephrem, *HVirg* 31: 4; see also Paikkatt, *Life Glory and Salvation*, 186.

My Lord, I understand that you are full of mercy. You have your very existence in mercy. Jesus you are the refuge for those who seek mercy. Shower your mercy upon this sinner who seeks mercy from you.²⁹

Rahme (ܪܗܡܝܢ)³⁰ is the word used here to denote the divine mercy, which corresponds to the Hebrew word *hesed* and the Greek word *eleos*.³¹ The candidate prays to God to shower upon her God's loving kindness by forgiving her sins and iniquities not because, God is obliged to do so, but out of His immense generosity "as merciful God." Following the prayer, the candidate knocks twice at the closed door, but the door is not opened; it remains closed.³² With this ends the preliminary part of the Service of Receiving outside the church.

1.1.2. The Receiving

This part of the Service consists of receiving the candidate who seeks entrance into the church by "standing at the closed door and knocking" in order to be received by the celebrant (bishop) as the closed door is opened for her.³³

The Service begins with an invocatory prayer by the candidate, a hymn, a prayer to Christ and an *eqbo*. Following the *eqbo* the candidate knocks on the closed door three times. At the third knock the prelate opens the door and asks: "Who are you? Why have you

²⁹ *Beth. Ms.*, 1 13; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 16; *Profession of Vows*, 6.

³⁰ The word *rahme* is from the root *rahçm* indicates womb, and thus it signifies the tender love of a mother towards the child. God's love is often referred to as *rahme* (Is 49:15) see Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 537.

³¹ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 13. The translation "mercy" is inadequate to grasp the meaning of *rahme*, the Syriac word and *hesed* the Hebrew word. It means God's loving kindness, which is dynamic. Cf. McKenzie, "Mercy", 565-567.

³² *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 11; *Vritha Vagdanam*; 15.

³³ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 12-13; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 16-17.

come here?." ³⁴ To this question, recalling the mercy of God, the candidate responds:

My Lord I am a stranger; my Lord I am the prodigal son (Lk 15, 11-24). Lord I am the lost sheep (Lk 15: 4-8). Lord I am the lost coin (Lk 15: 9-10). I come seeking my Father's house. I come desiring to enter into your fold. For, the good shepherd came seeking me. He searched for the lost coin and found the same. Lord, receive me. Open for me the door so that I shall inherit the wealth of your abundant grace.³⁵

At this juncture the prelate opens the door for the candidate and holding her hand says: "She who seeks religious life, i.e., holy wisdom, the life of dedication and justice, perfection of virtues, is the most beloved of God. She lives in the king's palace; princesses attend her. She becomes heir to the treasure that the world cannot acquire!"³⁶ The candidate kisses the pastoral ring of the prelate and enters into the church.

1.1.2.1. The Solemn Prayers of Entrance

The Solemn Prayers of Entrance are those prayers initiated officially and solemnly by the celebrant (bishop) inside the church following the entrance of the candidate and of the participants into the church. Through these prayers, the celebrant invokes the Divine mercy and says : "Kyrie eleison, kyrie eleison kyrie eleison. Lord, have mercy on us; Lord, answer our prayers and have mercy on us. Glory to you O Lord; Glory to you our refuge forever."³⁷

³⁴ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 12-13; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 16.

³⁵ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 13; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17; *Profession of Vows*, 6.

³⁶ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 13-14; *Profession of Vows*, 6.

³⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17; *Profession of Vows*, 6. This part is an addition, which we do not find in the manuscript.

The remission of sin, the receiving of God's mercy (ܩܢܘܢܐ *rahme*) and kindness (ܩܢܘܢܐ *hnōnō*) characterize the Service of Reception. According to the Syrian understanding, the mercy and kindness of God sent the Only-Begotten Son of God. In the Service, the candidate receives the mercy and kindness of God.³⁸ The whole congregation offers God glory and praise in public. With this prayer the ceremony outside the church ends, and at this point begins the third and the final part of the ritual of reception with the *proemion* and the *sedrō*.

1.1.2.2. The *Proemion* and the *Sedrō*

The Syriac word ܩܘܡܝܘܢܐ (*proemion*) traces its origin from the Greek and means “introduction” or “preface.” It is a prayer of introduction to a series of prayers. *Proemions* are comparatively shorter than the *sedre*. The *proemions* begin with praising the salvific action of God, highlight the significance of the liturgy being celebrated and end by glorifying the Trinity.³⁹ They are used in the Divine Office and in all the sacraments and sacramental ministry including feasts and fasts. The majority of the *proemions* are addressed to Christ and they invariably end with the formula: “We will offer you glory and thanksgiving together with your Father and Holy Spirit now and at all celebrations and times and seasons and all the days of our lives.”⁴⁰

The literal meaning of the word ܩܘܡܝܘܢܐ (*sedrō*) is series or order.⁴¹ In the cultic context it means to arrange things in a specific manner. In this sense the term *sedrō* is used six times in the Book of Leviticus (Lev 24: 3-7). In the Antiochene liturgy *sedrō* denotes a long set form of solemn official prayer in prose recited by the celebrant in public

³⁸ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 17; *Vriitha Vaghdanam*, 17; *Profession of Vows*, 6.

³⁹ Cf. Beggiani, *The Divine Liturgy*, 26; Panicker, *The Holy Qurbano*, 42.

⁴⁰ Mateos, “Trois recueils anciens de proœmia Syriens”, 457-458. *Profession of Vows*, 1; 3; 9.

⁴¹ Mateos, “Sedre et prières”, 281.

while putting incense in the censer. The content of the prayers are set in a specific manner and for that reason the prayer deserves the name *sedrō*. The *sedre* are more Christological than Trinitarian because in their entirety they are directly addressed to Christ.

Beggiani points out the roots of *sedrō* in the Jewish Sabbath Service of apostolic times especially in the 18 Benedictions (*berakha*).⁴² The use of this type of prayer in the Church of Jerusalem and its adoption in the fourth or beginning of the fifth century is indicated in Book VIII of the Apostolic Constitutions.⁴³ Originally they were series of short prayers like the litany. But in due time they developed into long prayers fitting the context of the liturgical celebration.

The *sedre* prayers in the Antiochene Churches are attributed to authors like Mar Severius, the Patriarch of Antioch (+538) John I, the Patriarch of Antioch (+648) Mar Marutha, the bishop of Tagrit (+649) and Mar Athanasios II the Patriarch of Antioch (+686).⁴⁴ Among the authors Patriarch John I is said to have introduced the “*Sedrō* style” in the Antiochene liturgy.⁴⁵

The *sedrō* is composed of two parts. The first part can be characterized as the theological part. It begins with a prayer of divine praise and enunciates the theology of the liturgical celebration concerned. The second part of the *sedrō* consists mainly of petition and supplication. Here particular intentions, desires, and needs of the faithful are presented before God. Requests are offered also for receiving God's love, mercy and grace.

⁴² Cf. Beggiani, *The Divine Liturgy*, 34.

⁴³ *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book VIII, 13: 1-10. See in Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutions*, 515-517. Here a series of litanies is given in the form of an intercessory prayer. God's receiving of the prayers as a fragrant offering and sacrifice is also mentioned in this prayer.

⁴⁴ Cf. Assemani, *BO.*, ii, 335, See also Khouris-Sarkis, “Le *sedrō*”, 89-91.

⁴⁵ Baumstark, *Die Christlichen Literaturen*, 58. “*Sedro* style” signifies the order of the prayers and the special tone for recitation of the prayer.

Each liturgical celebration has its specific *sedrō*. But each *sedrō* irrespective of its title speaks of the remission of sins by God (*hussoyo*) and repentance of man for their sin (*tyōbūto*). The salvific actions of God in Christ and the redeeming dimensions of man are presented beautifully in the *sedrō*. Thus, *sedrō* possesses a divine and an anthropological tone, which in fact give specific identity to it among the other liturgical prayers.⁴⁶

In the Receiving Service, the *proemion* presents Christ as Lord, who forgives transgressions, justifies tax collectors and cleanses sinners. Through it God is asked to grant grace and to remit the sins of the celebrant who ministers the ceremony, and to the candidate who has requested religious life. The celebrant concludes the *proemion* by offering the Trinity, infinite glory and praise.⁴⁷

In the *sedrō* Christ is invoked as Saviour and Benefactor who desires, that all may live and arrive at true knowledge. It petitions Him to receive the candidate and to bestow plentiful and peaceful benediction upon her who with bowed head stands before the throne of God's divine majesty.⁴⁸

The celebrant presents a series of requests to Christ in favour of the candidate which include: to shower upon her the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that she may put on the virtuous garments of religious life and be adorned with the same; to strengthen her to stand by the side of Christ fighting against the fiery arrows of Satan; to prepare her for the proclamation of the Gospel; to root her conscience on the rock of true faith; to fortify her life with Christian charity; to cleanse her body and soul from all stains of impurity and to remove from her every envy, enmity, deceit, calumny, pleasure-seeking attitude and avarice. The

⁴⁶ Mateos, "Trois recueils anciens de proœmia Syriens" 457-460; Kakkanatt, *Christological Catechesis*, 274-276.

⁴⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17-18; *Profession of Vows*, 6.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 4 -5.

celebrant asks God to grant the candidate patience, perfection, and prompt obedience to God's commandments, and the holy rules of religious life. God is asked to nurture her in His garden so that she may grow as a blessed tree that produces for Him good fruits.⁴⁹

Again, Christ is invoked as the Heavenly Bridegroom and the celebrant solicits Him to render the candidate the grace to receive Christ with lighted lamp whenever He visits her, so that like the wise virgins, she also might be able to enter into the Heavenly Bridal Chamber, thus inheriting the lofty state of holiness along with the saints.⁵⁰ In conclusion, the celebrant prays: "Lord Jesus Christ, may she and we offer to you, your Father and the Holy Spirit chaste fruits of thanksgiving as gifts of glory."⁵¹

The divine praise and the petitions for the candidate in the prayer indicate the profound reciprocal relationship that exists between Christ and the candidate who represents His virgin bride. The eschatological dimension of religious life is also very vividly portrayed in the *proemion* and *sedrō*.

1.1.2. 3. The Bible Lesson

In the Service of the Receiving, the Bible lesson serves as a spiritual exhortation of Christ on discipleship. As a didactic service, the pattern of the reading for the ritual of reception is unlike the usual pattern of the liturgy of the Word.⁵² The celebrant reads from the Gospel of Mathew in which different verses about discipleship from three chapters

⁴⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 4-5; 18; *Profession of Vows*, 7.

⁵⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 5.

⁵¹ *Profession of Vows*, 7.

⁵² The ordinary pattern of the liturgy of the Word is comprised of Old Testament and New Testament readings and its climax is the reading from the Gospel. Here we see only the readings from the Gospel of Mathew and the elements such as the Alleluia the Gospel acclamation, proclamation of the deacon are omitted. We see this as evangelical instructions to the novices on monastic life and discipleship.

are put together as one unit.⁵³ This is probably due to the importance of Mathew's Gospel in the context of discipleship. It serves as the background for the ascetic life of the Syrian Christians.⁵⁴ Eusebius also mentions in his work the testimony of Panteneus the Alexandrian scholar and traveler who found the Aramaic version of the Gospel of Matthew, an important source for the ascetic life of the early Syrian Christians of Kerala- India.⁵⁵

The four passages linked together as one unit are: Matthew 7: 13-14; 7: 24-27; 6: 19-21; 5: 48. They are given in a descending order, probably intending to highlight the themes successively. These "master texts"; Mt 7: 13-14, on the entrance into the narrow gate that leads "to the land of the living", Mt 7: 24-27, on the house built upon the rock, Mt 6: 19-21, about the true treasure, Mt 5: 48, about attaining perfection like God the Father who is perfect, are put together in the liturgical text (*takso*) in order to convey the basic theology of Christian discipleship through monastic living.⁵⁶ The readings of related content are combined together to emphasize the theme of discipleship. This technique of linking related passages identifies the Syrian features of the service as we have noted in the earlier part of our study. According to the Fathers, the repeated encounters with the Word of God enable one to persevere in the covenantal life on the way of discipleship.⁵⁷

1.1.2.4. The Naming

Naming the candidate is an important moment in the service of the reception. The celebrant by placing his pastoral cross on the head

⁵³ The reading involves verses from Mathew Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

⁵⁴ Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa* in PRICE, *The History*, (intr.) xx-xxi.

⁵⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 224-225.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 18-19. In the VI Demonstration on the Sons of the Covenant Aphrahat brings forth these bible quotations. See Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VI: I (PS 1, 242; 246; 250).

⁵⁷ Cf. Valavanolickal, "*The Exegesis of Aphrahat*", 99-108.

of the candidate utters the new name, which is communicated to him beforehand by the superior of the congregation. The name is inscribed upon the bearer as a sign to express one's character, nature, and being. The naming of the candidate before consecration has a religious and an ethical significance as opposed to naming a child in the secular context.

The celebrant utters the name and seals the candidate in the form of a cross upon the forehead in the name of the Holy Trinity saying: "So that you shall have inheritance in the holy abode of God (name) is sealed in the name of the Father + and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit + for life everlasting."⁵⁸

Here the purpose of inscribing the name is not simply to distinguish one candidate from another, but to identify the candidate with that name. It is a symbol of divine authority, divine mission and new life.⁵⁹ Here in the context of profession, the motive of inscription apparently is for inheriting the holy abode of God, and for attaining everlasting life.

The conferring of a new name and the subsequent change of the old name is a significant feature which we see in the Scriptures. Name signifies the substance of one's whole being. When Moses asked God to reveal His name, He said, "I am who am" (Ex 3: 13-15). Name identifies the person. Adam gives names to all the animals of the earth to distinguish them one from the other (Gen 2: 19). In the Psalms we see God the creator fixing the number of the stars, and calling each one by its name. (Ps 147: 4). Before entering into a covenant with Abraham, God changed the name of Abram to Abraham (Gen 17:5). Jacob is given the name Israel (Gen 35: 10). All these aspects indicate the new imprint that God has engraved upon the candidate as His own possession.

⁵⁸ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 24 -25; *Profession of Vows*, 8.

⁵⁹ Hughes, "What is in a Name?", 121-122.

1.1.2.5. The Concluding Prayers

In the Malankara liturgical prayers and the divine services, concluding supplications (*bō 'awōtō*) mark the end of the service. Among the *bō 'awōtō* we see those of Mar Ephrem, Mar Balai, and Mar Jacob. The *bō 'awōtō* of Mar Jacob are frequently used in the Divine Office and in other liturgical services.

The petition of Mar Jacob of Sarugh after the liturgy of the Word and before the conferring of the name on the candidate indicates the concluding part of the service. In the *bo 'ūtō*, God is called upon to come to the aid of those who invoke Him. He is implored to grant to those who are dedicated, the essential elements of discipleship: pure heart, perfection, and wisdom of his salvation. Then the petition is made on behalf of all present by asking God to hear the prayers and to brighten the eyes of the heart of all, so that all may see God's truth (Christ) and thus praise the divine name.⁶⁰

The *bo 'ūtō* is followed by *quqliyōn*,⁶¹ a series of hymns in honour of the Virgin Mary, the apostles and the saints, whose prayers and blessings are invoked for the candidate. According to Moses Bar Kephā, the reason for commemorating the saints is:

By proclaiming them it urges us to imitate their holy conversation, and also their right faith, that we too may be worthy of their blessed end, and after our decease be proclaimed upon the altar, as they are proclaimed.⁶²

The Service of the Receiving of the Candidate concludes with a short final petition called Prayer of Seal (*hutōmo*).

⁶⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 19.

⁶¹ *Quqliyōn* comes from the Greek word *ἐπέεῖν* meaning a cycle of verses from the psalms recited after the Gospel. Cf. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus*, 497.

⁶² Moses Bar Kephā, *Two Commentaries*, 42.

2. THE SERVICE OF THE PROFESSION OF VOWS

The Service of the Profession of Vows is a major celebration in the Malankara Church as in the other traditions.

True to the genius of the Oriental perspective, the Malankara Church believes the liturgy of the Holy *Qurbano* to be the center of Christian life and celebrates the Service of Profession in the Eucharistic liturgy. The Service of the Profession of Vows is a long, elaborate celebration consisting of two processions, a series of prayers, the liturgy of the Word, a homily, catechetical instructions on religious life, dialogue between the celebrant and those who make profession, the making of the profession of vows, tonsure, sealing of the newly professed, conferring of the monastic habits, and the reception of the newly professed into the Congregation. The service begins with the procession of the assembly into the church.

2.1. The Solemn Procession of the Assembly into the Church

The procession of the assembly into the church marks the beginning of the liturgy of profession. It is the solemn entrance of the religious members and the faithful together with the celebrant into the church. The one who makes profession stays in the church and does not participate in the procession. The procession begins from the portico of the church, where the faithful are gathered. When the celebrant arrives, the superior of the Congregation along with other members receive him, and then along with the bishop, the faithful with lighted candles proceed to the church where the profession liturgy takes place. At this time the community sings the song of reception for the bishop.⁶³ With this solemn procession, the faithful enter into the church.

Procession indicates a passage. From the Scriptural background it can be conceived as a continual march towards the presence of God.

⁶³ *Acharangal*, 16. There is a specific Syrian liturgical song, *Tobsalom Abun Sahyo* for the reception of the bishops in the Malankara Church.

The journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land, the Journey of Abraham to Negeb (Gen 12:1-10) and the procession of David carrying the ark of God to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6: 1-29) all prefigure the processions in the Church.⁶⁴ The procession also alludes to the eschatological entrance of Christ the Bridegroom along with the virgins into the Heavenly Bridal Chamber (cf. Mt 25:1-13). Thus, the procession presents the pilgrim nature of Christian monastic life with an eschatological character.⁶⁵

Unlike other liturgical processions of the Church, this procession does not have a cross to head the assembly into the church. Instead, the participants carry lighted candles to signify the ceremony of a wedding feast. The bishop represents Christ, the bridegroom and the religious the virgins. The entering of the assembly into the church can be compared to the entering of the virgins into the bridal chamber where they celebrate the wedding feast of the Lamb and dine at the Eternal Banquet, the body and blood of the Lamb.

Following the procession, the celebrant begins the morning prayer (*sapro*) and then the Eucharistic liturgy and the Service of Profession follow.

2.2. The Creed and the Service of Profession

The Creed is a living confession of faith. The Church has possessed this *kerygma* from apostolic time onwards, and renews it mainly at the Eucharistic celebration.⁶⁶ The Creed and the Liturgy of Profession are intrinsically related. We see that the proclamation of faith and the act of faith meet together in the candidate who comes forward to make the religious profession.

⁶⁴ Cibien, "Gestes", 512-513.

⁶⁵ Pachomius, *Acharanushtanagal*, 27-30.

⁶⁶ Cf. Lacugna, "Presentation of the Creed", 73.

When the faithful conclude the recitation of the Creed, the celebrant initiates a prayer in favour of the candidate (s) who makes profession. He invokes God to accept the virgin who has come forward for the service of God. He implores God to give the virgin the necessary grace for religious life.⁶⁷ When the prayer ends, the virgin who professes her faith in God and in His Church, accompanied by the Superior General proceeds to the front of the *thronos*.⁶⁸ Then the candidate is presented to God with the faith and prayer of the Church.

In the Eucharistic liturgy, the Creed indicates the beginning of the sacrificial part of the Holy *Qurbono*. This time is taken as the specific moment to begin the profession ceremony.⁶⁹ It reveals the virgins' glad acceptance of the divine truth, which is being revealed in the Holy *Qurbono* through the sacred readings, and the homily.

In Christian baptism, the Creed constitutes an important place as a pre-baptismal ritual. The catechumen needs to profess it before baptism as an explicit act of adhesion to God. This means that it is through faith that one approaches God. In the words of St. Paul: "Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists" (Heb 11:6). According to Theodore of Mopsuestia, the profession of the Creed is an indispensable element in baptism because "God is invisible

⁶⁷ Cf. *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 26; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 23.

⁶⁸ The same rubrics are given in the *Takso d' suporo d' dairoyutho*. Cf. *Takso d' suporo*, 327; Brock, *The Rite of Tonsure*, 1.

⁶⁹ Two times are indicated in the liturgy of the Holy *Qurbono* as the beginning of the Service of Profession. One is after the Creed and the other is after the *quqlīyōn* of the Saints. Following the recitation of the Creed the prelate begins a prayer, which marks an introduction to the Service. Following the prayer the candidates for profession come forward. At this time the wooden crosses of the candidates who make final profession are placed on the *thronos*. These are to be seen as introductory parts of the Service of Profession. The proper Service begins at the end of the *quqlīyōn* of the Saints.

by nature; to face him and promise to persevere as members of his household you need faith.”⁷⁰

In the Antiochene concept, the monastic life based on baptism is for drawing near to God.⁷¹ So, the candidate professes her faith in God and in the Church before making the monastic promise.

2.2.1. The Procession of the Candidate to the *Qestromo*

As we have mentioned above, following the Creed the virgin proceeds to the front towards the *qestromo*, an elevated place between the sanctuary (*madebhō*)⁷² and the nave (*hayklō*).⁷³ Derived from the Greek term *kathastromo*, the Syrian word *qestromo* is the place that is allotted officially to the choir in the Malankara Church. As a place significant in its symbolical aspect of worship and of salvation, it reminds the faithful of their nearness to God and to his sanctity.⁷⁴ Those who stand there are compared to the singers of God and they witness their duty of praising and glorifying God throughout their life.

Processing from the *hayklō* to the *qestromo*, the candidates present themselves as those who are called and separated from the world by God.

⁷⁰ Theodore of Mopuseustia, *Baptismal Homilies* in Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 176.

⁷¹ *Takso d' tulbosho*, 311; *Takso d' suporo*, 355. *Profession of Vows*, 14.

⁷² *Madebhō* meaning sanctuary is derived from *debha* the Syriac word meaning victim, and it denotes the place of immolation. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 81; Day, *The Liturgical Dictionary*, 176.

⁷³ The word *hayklō* of Sumerian origin denotes a royal palace, or the temple and also the nave, the part of the church where the congregation assembles. Cf. Luke, “*Etymological Studies in Syriac*”, 127.

⁷⁴ Cf. Luke, “*Etymological Studies in Syriac*”, 127.

2.2.2. The Doxology and Opening Prayer

Derived from the Greek word *doxa*, which means glory, the form of prayer called doxology is an exclusive prayer of praise and glory in the liturgical celebration of the Syrian Churches. The doxological prayers have their root in the Jewish liturgy but the proclamation of God’s glory coupled with an affirmation of His infinity are definite criteria for the doxology developed later in the third century.⁷⁵ Not every prayer where God’s glory is affirmed can be termed a doxology. Thus the doxology of the Church is not merely a benediction but it is divine praise into infinity.⁷⁶ In the liturgical rites of the Malankara Church, the doxology serves as the preliminary part of a prayer of address called the opening prayer.

In the Rite of Profession the lesser doxology is used to glorify God.⁷⁷ The principal elements include the offering of glory to the Holy Trinity and the affirmation of its pre-existence from the beginning of time. The anti-heretical implication of the doxology is evident but when used in the liturgical prayers it is to proclaim the eternal glory of the God.

According to Ephrem, God created Adam and his descendants to glorify Him. So it is the duty of the believer to offer God incessant praise, all through his life (*CNis* 50:10).

The opening prayer, which serves as a key to enter into the liturgical service is a specific feature found in the Syrian tradition. It consists of two parts: the address in the form of divine praise, and the

⁷⁵ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 274.

⁷⁶ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 274.

⁷⁷ The doxology can be divided into the greater doxology and lesser doxology. According to Werner, the greater doxology is well-established in the Apostolic Constitution and is the poetic paraphrase of Luke 2:14 usually known as *Gloria in excelsis* which is used in the Eucharistic liturgy of the Latin Church. See Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 275.

petition, which often resembles the address, but is meant to reveal the specific meaning of the service celebrated.⁷⁸

The addressing of God in the form of a divine praise constitutes the preliminary part of the opening prayer and reveals the particular mystery which the Church is about to celebrate. The prelate prays:

O holy God, who loves holiness and holy people and is pleased with the saints, receive these your servants who have approached you and set them apart to pursue your holiness. Grant them grace for religious life and give them an unperturbed mind required for the life.⁷⁹

The opening prayer of the Liturgy of Profession describes God as Holy, as one who loves holiness. From the Syriac root (*qdš*) originates the words holy one (*qadišō*) and holiness (*qadišutō*).⁸⁰ These two words specify the very essence and the nature of God (Num 20:13; Ezek 20:41; 28:22; 38:16; Is 5:16;). Further, the term *qdš* also implies a separation from all impediments (sin, attachments of the world) for union with God.⁸¹ This is why the celebrant refers to the candidate as the one who approaches God and is set apart to pursue God's holiness.

The second part consists of a petition through which the celebrant prays to the Holy God to keep the candidate closer to His glory so that the candidate may serve God always and may walk in His presence. It says:

Bless them that they shall always serve you with steadfast hearts and with holiness, just as Samuel was reckoned acceptable to serve you at your holy tabernacle in uprightness and purity of

⁷⁸ Acharya, *The Ritual*, 47.

⁷⁹ *Profession of Vows*, 8, *Takso d' tulbosho*, 255; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 11.

⁸⁰ Cf. Jennings, *Lexicon*, 189; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism I*, 104; *Profession of Vows*, 8.

⁸¹ Cf. Vanchipura, *The Notion of Holiness*, 8-9

heart. Through them let there be glory to your mighty and holy name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.⁸²

In the Syrian understanding, human holiness is conceived as a state of remaining closer to God's glory. Ephrem affirms that Adam's place in paradise near to the "Holy of Holies" (*qedūš qudšīn*) defined his holy state.⁸³ The term *qedūš qudšīn* indicates the real presence of God, i.e. to God himself. According to the Syrian mind, the glory (*šubhō*) remains and varies according to one's closeness to or distance from the "Holy of Holies."⁸⁴

Here in the Service, the "Holy of Holies" is referred to as the *Samagamakoodaram* or the ark of God.⁸⁵ Quoting the example of Samuel who lived and served the Lord at the ark of God, the celebrant beseeches God to bless the candidate by imparting God's glory so that she may remain in His presence in uprightness and purity of heart.⁸⁶

In the Old Testament, the priests were those who entered into the Holy of Holies. They were to clothe themselves always in justice, uprightness and sanctity.⁸⁷ These virtues were then considered priestly and thus necessary for those who serve God.⁸⁸ So the celebrant prays to God to clothe the candidate in these virtues so that she may earnestly serve God in purity of heart and in uprightness.

⁸² *Profession of Vows*, 8; *Takso d' tulbosho*, 255; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 11.

⁸³ Ephrem, *HParad III*: 5; 14.

⁸⁴ Cf. Vanchipura, *The Notion of Holiness*, 9-10.

⁸⁵ In the *Takso d' tulbosho d' dairoye* the term used for "Holy of Holies" is *qedūš qudšīn* and in the Malayalam text it is *Samagamakoodaram*. Both are used in the same sense as the Old Testament term the "ark of God." See. *Takso d' tulbosho*, 255; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 23. But in the English translation it is given as "tabernacle" which in fact limits the understanding of the term "Holy of Holies". See *Profession of Vows*, 8.

⁸⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 23.

⁸⁷ *Commentary on the Psalms*, 506.

⁸⁸ *Commentary on the Psalms*, 506.

The opening prayer also brings to light two categories of people. They are the holy people whom God loves and the saints with whom He is pleased.⁸⁹ This reminds us of the virgins (*b tūle*) and the holy ones (*qadiše*) in the early Syrian Church. The term *b tūle* is a common name referring to those men and women who lived as virgins like Elijah and John the Baptist in virginity (*b tūlūtō*).⁹⁰ The holy ones (*qadiše*) were those married persons who practiced sexual abstinence (*qadišūtō*) in marriage for a temporary or permanent period in accordance with the command of God given to Moses (Ex 19:10-15). These holy ones had as their models Moses, Aaron and Elisha who were considered the holy ones of God (Ps 106:16; 2 Kg 4:9).

There also exists another category called the single ones (*ihūdōye*) whom the Service implicitly refers to as those holy ones who dwell in the house of God.⁹¹ Brock in association with the term *ihūdōyō* says: “God causes the *yāhid*, the single person to dwell in a house.”⁹² Though the nature of the house is not given, God is the One who causes the *yāhid* to dwell in a house. So we presume that the reference in the Service is about the virgin or the single one (*yāhid*) who dwells in the presence of God.

Thus the opening prayer introduces by means of Scripture and tradition, to the one who consecrates herself to God, the notion of holiness as living in God’s presence.

2.2.3. A Prayer for the Candidate

The celebrant offers a prayer for the candidate who approaches for consecration. The first part commences with the commemoration

⁸⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 23; *Profession of Vows*, 8

⁹⁰ Cf. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 133.

⁹¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 23; *Profession of Vows*, 8.

⁹² This verse is from Psalm 68:6 (Hebrew Text) which is associated with the term *ihūdōyō*. Brock on the line of Eusebius’ thinking affirms the relation of the passage as it refers to monks and the consecrated celibates. Cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 117-119; Cf. also Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 137-138.

of the divine love of the Almighty God who sent His Only-Begotten Son whom the angels worship in heaven to liberate man from the bondage of sin.⁹³ In the middle part, the prayer refers to the command of God for men to live on earth as angels doing works of justice. The prayer ends by asking God to shower upon the candidate who has been chosen by God spiritual and heavenly benediction to lead a holy life conforming to the divine dignity.⁹⁴

The prayer holds some important Syrian ascetic themes. First of all, the prayer addresses Christ as *Monogenes*, the Only Begotten Son (*Ihūdōyō*). This appellation presents here the binding relation of Christ the *Ihūdōyō* to the individual *ihūdōyō*, the follower of Christ.⁹⁵ The prayer further brings forth the aspect of incarnation and redemption, which enables men to live an “angelic life” (*dūbōro mā lākōyo*) on earth “doing works of justice.” The prayer thus reveals the nature of the life the candidate embraces as “angelic life” and the work to be undertaken as “the work of justice.” The angelic life in Syrian understanding is unmarried life. The Old Syriac Gospels, describe those who lead the angelic life as follows:

Those who have become worthy to receive that world (the Kingdom) and that Resurrection from the dead do not marry, nor can they die, for they have been made equal with the angels (cf. Lk 20:35-36).⁹⁶

The verse above compares the virgins who remain unmarried for the Kingdom to the angels. Thus, we see that the Syrian concept of ascetic life is an angelic life (*angelikos bios*) on earth and the services of the ascetics are termed as “works of justice.”⁹⁷ We will discuss these aspects in detail in the coming part of our study.

⁹³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 24; *Profession of Vows*, 8.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Takso d’ tulbosho*, 255; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 24.

⁹⁵ Cf. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian*, 32.

⁹⁶ Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian*, 30.

⁹⁷ Cf. Colombas, *Paradis et vie angélique*, 27-30; Špidlik, Tenace & Cemus, *Questions monastiques*, 82-85.

In the prayer, angelic life and works of justice are linked together. This is because of the Syrian thinking that asceticism and works of justice should complement one another. Vööbus, in his work on the *History of Syrian Asceticism* enumerates the renowned charitable works undertaken by the monasteries and monks. The monasteries were centers of prayer, of charitable works, of studies and of Christian formation.⁹⁸ The monks and nuns served the people as instructors and pastors of the soul and the body. Martyrius' portrayal of Shirin the East Syrian holy woman gives us the marvelous picture of the good deeds of the early Syrian women saints. About Shirin it is written:

The very sight of her moved everyone to wonder, and her admirable deeds were causes to praise God. Monks and other strangers used to come to visit this spiritual mother from all over the places. They gathered as children coming for lessons of sanctity, wanting to receive blessing and benefit from her. She received them lovingly and ministered diligently to their needs; provided them spiritual and bodily sustenance. She gave joy to souls and their body by her words and by her actions.⁹⁹

St. Ephrem himself was involved in social and charitable works for the victims of a great famine during his lifetime in Nisibis. In the Letter to Publius, Ephrem speaks of the need for charitable and good works on the part of the virgins. He exhorts: "The door of paradise will not be opened to those who lack good works."¹⁰⁰ So Ephrem says to the virgin youth: "O Virgin Youth, you depict in your senses good deeds that you may be honoured through them when you become old."¹⁰¹ According to him "Good works are tickets for our journey to Our Lord."¹⁰² According to Ephrem, the virgins have to adorn themselves

⁹⁸ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* I, 315-327.

⁹⁹ Cf. Martyrius, *Oeuvres spirituelles*, Vol. 1, in A. Halleuex, *Oeuvres spirituelles* (I part) sec. no. 71;77 CSCO 201 (Syri. 86-87; 90-91) 46; 48. The English citation is from Brock & Harvey, *Holy Women*, 178; 181.

¹⁰⁰ Ephrem, "Letter to Publius", Sec. 12.

¹⁰¹ Ephrem, *HVirg* 2:14.

with works of justice. They may not be satisfied merely with keeping the virtue of virginity for it is futile without works of justice.¹⁰³

2.2.4. The Psalms (*Mazmore*)

The psalms are sung poetry integral to the liturgical celebration of the entire Church of the Antiochene tradition. In the Liturgy of Profession various psalms are linked together with the hymns and prayers in order to enrich the celebration.

a) Psalm 51

Psalm 51, inserted at the beginning of the rite of profession is the most famous of the penitential psalms used extensively in the Syrian Churches' prayer service. This psalm is attributed to David who is supposed to have composed it after the sin with Bethsabee. The psalm reveals that not only does the sin affect the doer but it is also against God that one commits sin.¹⁰⁴ The appeal for mercy, confession of sinfulness, request for cleansing the heart and spirit, a vow and assurance of special sacrifice are the contents of the psalm.¹⁰⁵

The psalmist presents the root of all his sins that affect his entire being. Permeated by the desire to be completely purified from it, he prays: "A pure heart create in me, O God"(Ps 51:10).¹⁰⁶

Create, (*bārā*) the technical Hebrew word of the psalmist, is from Genesis 1:1, and it denotes God's action.¹⁰⁷ In the context of Genesis it means God's work of creation. God has created things out of nothing. There was nothing prior to God's creation. Here the statement

¹⁰² Ephrem, *HVirg* 31: 9. See also Paikkatt, *Life glory and Salvation*, 314-315.

¹⁰³ Ephrem, "Letter to Publius", Sec. 15.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Gasnier, *The Psalms*, 65; Jonopulos, *Living Waters*, 115

¹⁰⁵ Sprenger, *Koncordance Zum Syrischen Psalter*, 169; Theodoret, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 294-303.

¹⁰⁶ Theodoret, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 300.

¹⁰⁷ Sprenger, *Konkordanz Zum Syrischen Psalter*, 33; Bergman, "Barā", 1565-1569.

in the psalm about the action of God in bringing forth “new existence” is important. When the psalmist prays: “A pure heart create in me, O God”, he is not asking God to create in him a human heart, since he has it as a living human being. Then, for what is the psalmist longing? This must be viewed in the light of the Syriac Fathers understanding of the term for heart. *Lebba* is the word used in the *Peshitta* version for heart.¹⁰⁸ This does not mean heart as a human organ but it denotes the whole human person.¹⁰⁹ So the psalmist’s prayer is not to create in him a human organ; but to renew and regenerate his whole being so as to reach a pure state, “as white as snow.”¹¹⁰ The psalmist is urged toward a new existence, which according to him is the action of God in his life.

What kind of action is to be done by God? It is clear from the kind of heart the psalmist asked for. He needs a pure heart. Purity (*dakyūtō*) is an attribute of God. God hates all kind of impurity. It is also God’s action to purify things, for nothing impure can approach God. Hence, purification is the work of God and no ritual can accomplish it.

The psalmist prays also for the Holy Spirit to save him and keep him faithful as he resolves to live faithfully, to teach (proclaim) publicly his experience of God’s loving forgiveness and thus lead those who have gone astray back to God (cf. Ps 51:13).¹¹¹

The psalm evokes by its very nature compunction of heart. Its recitation helps the candidate to vindicate the root of all sins before God. God permeates the virgin’s soul and its most secret recesses with His divine grace.¹¹² The virgin receives not merely a pardon but a radical transformation of life. In this new existence, the virgin promises

¹⁰⁸ Jennings, *Lexicon*, 108

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 127-130.

¹¹⁰ Castellino, *Libro dei Salmi*, 134-135.

¹¹¹ Cf. Theodoret, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 301.

¹¹² *Commentary on the Psalms*, 192-194.

to proclaim the mercy of God, which she experiences in life, which in fact will result in leading sinners back to God. When the Syrian Fathers included Psalm 51 in the Liturgy of Profession they meant to signify that the candidate who dedicates herself to God attains a new existence and a new mission.

b) Psalm 63

Psalm 63, describes passionately, the warmest and most intimate expression of the psalmist’s love for God, his yearning to be with God, and his ardent desire to be in God’s service in the temple. The psalmist considers the ardent desire to encounter God in the sanctuary a greater good than life (cf. Ps 27:4; Ps 42:23).¹¹³

In the Old Testament, spiritual union with God in the sanctuary was considered the greatest happiness of man (I Sam 3). When King David had to flee into the desert of Edom to escape from Absalom, he lamented the separation very much for it brought him away from the gracious presence of God in the holy tabernacle of Sion. Such a great longing took possession of him that he thought that he would have to die in a strange land.¹¹⁴

To possess God above all else gives to man’s life its true value. The loss of God creates a spiritual vacuum for nothing can substitute it. It is the “highest Good and man’s last End”.¹¹⁵ The requisite of intimate union with God in and through his temple i.e. the Church, is expressed through the psalm.

Psalm 63 actually creates an echo in every soul which sincerely seeks spiritual union with God. The psalm serves as a spiritual counsel to the candidate to seek Christ who offers her spiritual sustenance and progress in life.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Cf. Sprenger, *Konkordanz Zum Syrischen Psalter*, 97; Cf. Theodoret, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 357-358.

¹¹⁴ Theodoret, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 232-233.

¹¹⁵ *Commentary on the Psalms*, 233.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Jonopulos, “Living Waters”, 89.

c) Psalm 132

According to biblical scholars Psalm 132, without specifying the nature of the community, praises fraternal unity.¹¹⁷

The psalmist, through the images of the “running of the oil from the head down the beard to the skirt of the garment” and the “beneficent falling down of the Hermon dew” describes the blessing of the oneness in faith and its spiritual effect on the community of the saints.¹¹⁸ As the holy ointment dropped on the head makes the whole person refreshed, blessed and sanctified, so by the strength of unity in true faith and love, a holy stream of divine grace flows upon the entire community, over all the members even to its least ones.¹¹⁹

The recitation of the psalm is relevant in the Liturgy of Profession since the newly professed virgin is making her commitment not only to God but also to a community where her commitment to God is accomplished. In that way the psalm gives awareness to the virgin of her role to promote unity and love in the monastic community.

2.2.5. The Service of the Incense

The Service of the Incense is an integral part in the Syrian liturgical celebration. It is undoubtedly an adaptation from the Jewish tradition. The meaning and the symbolic understanding of it is christianized, and from the 4th century it emerged as an indispensable element in Christian prayers, Eucharistic services, the administration of sacraments, liturgical reading of the Bible, funeral services etc.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Theodoret, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 233.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Sprenger, *Konkordanz Zum Syrischen Psalter*, 72; Isho'dad, *Commentaire sur Psaumes*, 197.

¹¹⁹ Murphy, “Psalms”, 599.

¹²⁰ McGarraghy, “Incense”, 417-418; Thekkeparampil, “Prayer after incense”, 325-328.

The use of incense symbolizes, purification and protection. In Old Testament worship, the service began with the offering of incense (Lev 16:12). In the Jerusalem temple, there was an altar of incense where Aaron burnt sweet-smelling incense in the morning and in the evening.¹²¹

Incense offering (*mqārb*) in the Christian tradition has as its purpose to honour and worship of God. Incensing also includes motifs such as propitiation, expiation, *anamnesis* and petition in the Syrian tradition. It is also regarded as a symbol of prayer and a means to obtain protection and blessing from God.¹²²

With the sacrifice of Christ, incense becomes a widely accepted symbol of offering and sacrifice to God. St. Paul remarks: “Christ also loved us and delivered himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God to ascend in fragrant odor”(Eph 5: 2).¹²³

The Service of Incense in the Liturgical Service of Profession consists of the prayers *proemion*, *sedrō*, *qōlō* and ‘*etrō*.¹²⁴

a) The *Proemion*

The *proemion*, a prelude to the *sedrō* prayer has no explicit reference to the incensing service. It begins with praising the merciful

¹²¹ Cf. Lev 1-2; Atchley, *A History of the Use of Incense*, 34-35.

¹²² “Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.” Ps 141:2. See also Atchley, *A History of the Use of Incense*, 270-271.

¹²³ Thekkeparampil, “Prayers after Incense”, 336.

¹²⁴ There are diverse opinions regarding the prayers of incense. Some say it includes *proemion sedrō*, *qōlō*, ‘*etrō* and *hutōmo* but according to our understanding, there is variation. For example, in the Service *proemion*, *sedrō*, *qōlō* and ‘*etrō* are given in a series and *hutōmo* is given at the end of the Service. In the Service of Receiving, *proemion* and *sedrō* are given and incensing is done in another context towards the end of the service after the *quḷyōn* and *hutōmo*. See *Vritha Vagdanam*, 18; 22; 29-32.

God who welcomes the penitent, pardons wrong doers, and justifies sinners. It petitions to receive mercifully and to bless the virgin who has come prepared to carry the blessed yoke of religious life.¹²⁵ Its object is to ask God to accept not so much the incense but the candidate. The *proemion* follows the *sedrō*.

b) The *Sedrō*

The *sedrō*, the principal prayer in the rite of incense consists of a series of prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God. It recalls the attributes of God and remembers the benefits of God on His creatures, the graces that He has accorded to those who bore witness to Him—the prophets, apostles, martyrs and confessors—and petitions Him for similar graces for the candidate who approaches for monastic consecration.

O Lord, gentle and merciful, you are pleased with the life of every creature. You are the one who dwells in everyone, the one who showers your grace on everything. You are merciful to all. You are the Blessed and who blesses every one. Lord, have pity on these your servants and guard them standing with their necks, bent to carry your joyful yoke of religious life [...]. Grant them wisdom in spiritual matters which you gave to your prophets, the sanctity you gave to your apostles who lived with you, the courage you gave to your martyrs, the holy fear and devotedness you granted to the confessors who bore witness to you everywhere, the perfect holiness you gave in your abundant mercy to your servants and the brightness of spirit which ensues from all these virtues.¹²⁶

Prayers are addressed to Christ and this highlights the salvific action of Christ and also the content of the monastic life, which we study in the coming part.

¹²⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 29; *Profession of Vows*, 9. *Takso d' suporo*, 333; *The Ritual of the Tonsure*, 4.

¹²⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 29-30 ; *Profession of Vows*, 10. The *proemion* and *sedrō* are different in *Takso d' tulbosho d' dairoye*. See *Takso d' tulbosho*, 263-268.

The second part is a prayer of intercession in which the requests are ranged in order. Since God has accorded to his servants divine grace in the past, the celebrant implores Him to accord it again to the person who accepts now the joyful yoke of religious life. Thus, the second part conforms to the first logically and concludes with a Trinitarian praise.¹²⁷

c) The *Qōlō*

The *qōlō*, meaning the “voice” or “melody” forms a constituent part of the Rite of Incense. The *qōlō* does not explicitly refer to the incensing rite. It is given as a hymn consisting of four stanzas. It also occurs in the *Takso d' tulbosho d' dairoye* and *Takso d' suporo d' dairoyoto*.¹²⁸

The *qōlō* is in the form of a colloquy between man and God. The man, when observing the world found it in the likeness of an ocean agitated and tossed by the waters of sin.¹²⁹ Discouraged by the scene he was urged to move from it and to live in the house of God and to serve God in His vineyard. For this he seeks God's grace and acceptance.¹³⁰

From a very early date, Syrian spirituality had divided the world into many parts. Based on this idea, Theophilus of Antioch gave the description of a world in the likeness of the sea. In the sea there are some islands which are habitable and well watered and fertile and have anchorages and havens so that those who are tossed by storms can take refuge in them. Likewise, according to Theophilus, “God gave the world, which is agitated and tossed by sins, certain assemblies called holy churches, in which as in havens with good mooring—places there

¹²⁷ *Beth Ms.*, 1, 71-72; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 29-30; *Profession of Vows*, 9-10.

¹²⁸ *Takso d' suporo*, 336-337; *Profession of Vows*, 10; *The Ritual of the Tonsure*, 4-5.

¹²⁹ *Beth Ms.*, 1, 73; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 31.

¹³⁰ *Beth Ms.*, 1, 73; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 31

are the teachings of truth. In these those who wish to be saved and want to escape the wrath and judgment of God will take refuge.”¹³¹

The hymn highlights the abundance of sin and corruption in the world as the motive of the ascetic’s withdrawal from the world towards the House of God.¹³² Living in the House of God, he would struggle against his own sin and the sin of the godless world through ascetical practices striving to reach the eternal shore of salvation to regain the primordial paradise with all purity and holiness.¹³³

d) The ‘*Etrō*

‘*Etrō*, a Syriac term means “smoke” or “odour” and the prayer of incense (šluto d-‘*etrō*) is the prayer offered to God after incensing.¹³⁴ This prayer unlike the other prayers of the Service directly refers to the incense offered. We have no documents regarding the origin of this prayer. But the Syriac MSS in the British Museum I, dating from 8th to 13th centuries describes the nature and characteristic features of this prayer.¹³⁵

The title ‘*etrō* itself depicts the nature of the prayer as prayer of incense. Parallel titles for the prayers including *besmo* and *pirmo* also designate the same meaning. They are prayers after the *sedrō* reserved for the celebrant to recite like the *proemion* and the *sedrō* of the service but unlike them, the object of the ‘*etrō* is to ask God to accept (*qabel*)

¹³¹ Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* II, 14; Our citation is from Grant, *Ad Autolyicum*, p. 51.

¹³² “The house of God” is the monastery according to the hymn and it is used in this same sense used in different places of the liturgical text. The monastery is also called as the “haven” in the writings of the Fathers. See Chapter I, 4.2.

¹³³ Cf. Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 158.

¹³⁴ Thekkeparampil, “Prayers after Incense”, 325-326.

¹³⁵ For the Manuscripts of the ‘*etrō* prayer, see Thekkeparampil “Prayers after incense”, 326.

the incense.¹³⁶ The ‘*etrō* in the Service of Profession is addressed to Christ on behalf of the assembly. In the prayer, God is asked to accept the incense that is offered by the Church at the moment of the Service and also to accept the smoke of incense already offered before Him in the past.¹³⁷

The prayers, *proemion*, *sedrō*, *qōlō*, and ‘*etrō* embodied in the rite of incense signify that they rise up to God like the incense offered and bring with it divine graces for the candidate and for the faithful. The rite of incense signifies also the sacrificial offering of the candidate as the frankincense to be burned with the touch of the fire of the Holy Spirit and thus to offer to God and others the sweet fragrance of their holy life.¹³⁸

2.2.6. The Liturgy of the Word

The Antiochene liturgical tradition is known for its plentiful fare of bible lessons in its liturgical celebrations. It seems due to the synagogal liturgical influence on Syrian Christian worship that the successive readings from the Bible, in which the Gospel reading is its culmination, became an accepted practice. Recalling the importance of the scripture reading during the liturgy, the Apostolic Constitution *Sacro Sanctum Concilium* says:

Sacred Scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects,

¹³⁶ Thekkeparampil, “Prayers after Incense”, 327.

¹³⁷ In every ‘*etrō* the petition for the acceptance is used in the past tense. “Accept this incense we, your humble ones, have offered to you. “This does not mean that the prayer only refers to the past offering of the incense but it holds before God all the incense offerings both of the present and of the past. Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 32. See also Thekkeparampil, “Prayers after Incense”, 327.

¹³⁸ Panicker, *The Holy Qurbano*, 82.

and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration, and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning.¹³⁹

For the Service of Profession, there are seven readings: four Old Testament readings and three New Testament readings. The Old Testament lessons, instead of being read at the celebration of the liturgy, are read after the canonical prayers. This practice of reading in the Malankara Church is an adoption from the Maphrianate tradition.¹⁴⁰ The New Testament readings include three lessons from the New Testament: one, from either the Catholic Epistles or from the Acts of the Apostles, another from the Pauline Epistles, then the Gospel reading from Mathew. All the readings are stipulated in the liturgical text.¹⁴¹

In the Malankara Church, some rubrics are involved in the Scripture reading. The epistle or the reading from the Acts is done at the northern side of the Church to symbolize the preaching of the Good News first to the Jews. The reading from the Pauline Epistle at the southern side represents the proclamation of the Good News to the nations of the world. The reading of the Gospel, at the center facing the western direction, signifies the proclamation of the Good News for all.¹⁴² The Old and the New Testament readings are words of divine wisdom and lessons for life to the virgin who is to be professed. Each of these lessons illustrates in its own way the monastic charism, a gift of grace as well as the divine call to which the candidate has to respond.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ SC, no. 24.

¹⁴⁰ The Maphrianate tradition which also known as the Tagrit tradition was developed in the Maphrianate of the Antiochene Patriarchate. This tradition has little difference from that of the Patriarchate tradition, hence the Maphrians, the representatives of the patriarchs are responsible for executing this tradition in their jurisdictions.

¹⁴¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 32.

¹⁴² Panicker, *The Holy Qurbano*, 40.

¹⁴³ Cf. Acharya, *The Ritual*, 59.

2.2.6.1. The Old Testament Lessons

The Old Testament lessons in the Liturgy of Profession consist of Genesis 12: 1-10; Numbers 6: 1-9; Deuteronomy 30: 15-19 and Isaiah 19: 1-25. In the following part we comment on the relevance of the Word of God in the Liturgy of Profession.

a) Abraham's Call (Genesis 12: 1-10)

This passage represents one of the five instances of Abraham's encounter with the Lord. (The others are Gen 15: 1-21; 17: 1-27; 18: 1-33 and 22: 1-19).

All these passages are important for a proper understanding of divine vocation and election as the book of Genesis presents them. For our analysis, we take the first and the last encounters of Abraham with God which are parallel and which will be of helpful in analyzing the vocation narrative.

The call of Abraham is neither a historical nor scientific event in the ordinary sense of the term, but it is "an event of faith".¹⁴⁴ The initiator of the call is God and not Abraham. God commands Abraham to launch out into a pilgrim life, to go to the land that "He will show him" (Gen 12: 1).¹⁴⁵ The demand is very clear and definite and requires from Abraham a great movement from within his own person. Abraham has to move away from his homeland and his father's house and to migrate to a land of God's choice, which is not mentioned (Gen 12:1).¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ This narrative belongs to the pattern of saga literary form, which means the method of recounting stories about family heads and events with exaggerated styles meant to convey to the hearer the deep inner or spiritual meaning underlying the event. This lesson is primarily meant to strengthen the Israelites in their faith crisis (exile and exodus event) by recalling the intervention of God in the life of their fore-fathers. The God who called Abraham to a covenantal relation has elected them also to a covenantal relation. Cf. Millard, "Abraham", 35-40.

¹⁴⁵ Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, 149.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Peshitta* (mal. version), p. 12. Reggiani, "La Simbologia di Abramo", 18.

Here the demand “to go” is clear to Abraham but “to where he is to go” is not clear. In other words the terminus *a quo* is clear but the terminus *ad quem* is most indefinite and unclear. It is the land “I will show you”. (Gen 12:1).¹⁴⁷ When God is going to show the land, and where the land may be found is all shrouded in mystery. This means that the first encounter contains within itself definiteness and indefiniteness. The same is true with the last encounter (Gen 22: 1-19) in which Abraham is clearly commanded by God to take his son, his only beloved son Isaac for sacrifice. But the place where the sacrifice is to be offered is not clearly indicated. It is “on one of the mountains that I shall show you” (Gen 22:2). Here also, the terminus *a quo* is clear but the terminus *ad quem* is not.

From the journey of Abraham and from his encounters we get the impression that Abraham’s life is stretched out between definite and indefinite demands from God. How can we understand this and what can we say about its inclusion in the context of the Liturgy of the Profession?

The encounters between Abraham and God, especially the first and the last, are demands for forgoing what Abraham had as his own: in the first case his own family and in the second case his own son. In other words, when Abraham encounters God he has to give up his past and go on with an uncertain future. Only the present moment of the encounter looms large in his mind. The past and the future are to be given up.¹⁴⁸

As we have mentioned above, the demand of God for the journey of Abraham is in fact very clear but the destination is not at all clear. From these opposites of the terminus *a quo* and the terminus *ad quem* a man of faith would easily speculate the nature of the terminus *ad*

¹⁴⁷ Origène, “Homélie sur le Genèse”, 113. Chempakassery, *A Commentary on Genesis 12: 1-9, 1-2*.

¹⁴⁸ Chempakassery, *A Commentary on Genesis 12: 1-9, 2*.

quem. This is what the Syrian Fathers did in selecting this passage for the Liturgy of Religious Profession. The demand of God is not simply for a change of space and time since he cannot have a preference for one place over another. For God, every space is equal and He is above the limitation of space and of time. So, the demand of the change of space must be understood in a spiritual sense. It is a demand to move from the tangible of the present to the intangible of eternity. Abraham’s country and house are tangible objects of the present material order. He is asked to transcend these in pursuit of the eternal God. It is a demand to forego the values of the world in pursuit of the values of eternity. It is clear from Abraham’s journey not only to Canaan but his continuous journey towards *Negeb*.¹⁴⁹

Negeb according to the RSV is the proper name for a place in the South of Palestine. Geographically this translation is correct because *Negeb* is the southern part of Canaan. But the Hebrew Word *Negeb* also means *south*.¹⁵⁰ Taking the meaning of *Negeb* as south is more significant than understanding it as a proper name of a place. This Hebrew interpretation is the same as the interpretation of the Syriac Fathers. In fact the Syriac word used in place of the Hebrew *Negeb* in the Peshitta is *thaymno*, which means south (Gen 12:9).¹⁵¹

The spiritual meaning of this word is very clear when we understand the interpretation of this verse by P. Chempakassery. According to him the movement of Abraham was towards the south i.e. towards the house of God.¹⁵² Here *Negeb* is understood as Jerusalem, which is south of Bethel. Abraham was moving to the place which in future was to be the place where the temple of Jerusalem was to stand. The temple in Jewish understanding is the only place on earth

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Genesis 12:9 in RSV, 11.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. McKenzie, “Negeb”, 610.

¹⁵¹ Jennings, *Lexicon*, 238.

¹⁵² Chempakassery, *A Commentary on Genesis 12:1-9, 3*.

where God has deposited His abiding presence. Jerusalem was also considered as the center of the world where in future the redemption of man was to be accomplished through the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁵³

When these interpretations are put in relation to the divine demand to Abraham, we see a clear spiritual meaning to the whole story of the first encounter of Abraham with God. As he moves away from his own country and house, he is moving closer and closer to God and to His redemption. Leaving what is one's own, a believer moves towards God.¹⁵⁴

In this connection we can refer to the Peshitta text of Psalm 45: 9-10. To the princess standing at the right hand of the royal bridegroom it is said: "Forget your people and your father's house" (Ps 45:10). For doing this the bride is given a promise: "The king will desire your beauty" (Ps 45:11). In the Syriac tradition the princess is understood as the individual soul which is to be accepted by its own bridegroom, God. The bride also symbolizes the Church and Christ, the royal bridegroom. The Church has to be spotless by in order to be accepted by Jesus the eternal bridegroom.¹⁵⁵

It is interesting to note that Psalm 45 in this sense is used in the liturgy of the sacrament of Baptism in the Syro-Malankara Church. It is sung over the girl child to be baptized. It is interpreted spiritually as an invitation to forego what is one's own in order to be accepted by God.¹⁵⁶

The Syriac Fathers who selected Genesis 12:1-10 for the Liturgy of Profession may also have had in mind Psalm 45: 9-11, for they convey the same theme. Both are invitations to the soul in pursuit of God to be detached from whatever is its own, such as parents, companionship,

¹⁵³ Isho'dad, *Commentaire sur Genèse*, 154-156.

¹⁵⁴ Chempakassery, *A Commentary on Genesis 12:1-9*, 3.

¹⁵⁵ *Psalm 45: 9-10*; Karukaparambil, "Mar Ephrem", 680; 698.

¹⁵⁶ *Aaradhanakramam*, 3.

family ties etc. in order to be free to move closer to God and to reach the House of God in intimate union with Him.¹⁵⁷

b) Rules for the Nazirites (Numbers 6:1-8)

The reading from the Book of Numbers speaks about the laws concerning the Nazirites who were set apart temporarily or permanently for the service of God.

The rules in Numbers 6:1-21 for the Nazirites are not mentioned anywhere else in the Pentateuch. It belongs to the priestly tradition and therefore is a recent text.¹⁵⁸ The Nazirite vow is a special vow to consecrate oneself for God. Men and women have taken the vow. God demands from them faithfulness to the vow they have taken.¹⁵⁹ God puts forward some obligations to be fulfilled by the Nazirites. They have to abstain from wine, put no razor upon their head, and they have to be holy. The Nazirites are asked by God to sever themselves from the ordinary life patterns.

From the very outset of the divine-human relation, we see that God commands man to do or to behave a little differently from their normal pattern of doing or behaving. In Gen. 2, God asked Adam and Eve not to eat the fruits of the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:17). But they transgressed the divine commandment. This shows that by nature man is patterned to do things for his own complacency. To overcome that, he needs to take a contrary option which is painful. But here lies the real freedom of moving out of himself and moving towards God.

The demand of the vow of the Nazirites not to drink wine, shows the need of controlling one's self will; the demand not to use a razor denotes an un-concerned way of living, and the demand to be holy

¹⁵⁷ Chempakassery, *A Commentary on Genesis 12:1-9*, 3.

¹⁵⁸ Barbier, "Nazirites", 287-288; Couilleau, *Nazireato*, 263.

¹⁵⁹ Origene, *Homélie sur les Nombres*, 466- 468.

requires purity of body and soul. In this way the Nazirite vow touches the whole person. In the context of our study it analogously corresponds to the evangelical promises of obedience, poverty and virginity.

Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist were Israelites who made Nazirite vows (Judg 13:2-7). The early Christians in New Testament times took this vow for a limited period of time (Acts 18:18; 21: 23-26). Rabban Youssif (9th century) described the merits of the Nazirite vow as follows: “It is through the Nazirite vow that the body is made pure by fasting, the soul resplendent, and the spirit raised up to a state beyond splendour.”¹⁶⁰

The reading of the Nazirite vow is included in the Liturgy of Profession. This signifies that the Nazirite vow is fulfilled in the actual life of the virgin characterized by the three vows and by ascetical practices. These include the inheritance of God as possession, the purity of the body and of the soul, and conformity to God’s will. It also reminds the virgin of the ascetical practices such as purification of the soul, fasts, renunciation of bodily comforts and luxury. These ascetical practices lead her on the way to God.¹⁶¹

c) Choose Life (Deuteronomy 30: 15-19)

The lesson from the Book of Deuteronomy, a liturgical address to the exilic community evokes God’s intervention in the life of his people. Through Moses, God confronted them with the urgency of making a life decision. It seems to be an address of covenant renewal liturgy.¹⁶²

The text confronts the exilic community to a binding decision of life. Israel must choose between life and death. It says: “Today I have set before you, life and death”(Deut 30:15). The word “today” emphasizes the existential significance of the message, the necessity of

¹⁶⁰ Quoted from Acharya, *The Ritual*, 61. Acharya does not mention the source.

¹⁶¹ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 23.

¹⁶² Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy”, 119.

making an option between life and death and between good and evil. The Israelites’ choice of life endures not only for them, but it lasts for their descendants also. God says: “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live” (Deut 30:19-20).

God also revealed to the exilic community what life consists in: loving the Lord, walking in His ways, obeying His voice, and cleaving to Him. These are the ways of life and also the requirement for inheriting the Kingdom (Deut 30: 16-20).¹⁶³

Here the term “life” does not indicate life in the natural order therefore not merely of man’s vital existence, but life in its fullness of goodness and blessing. Whether man receives life in this proper sense is determined not by chance but by his own choice.

In the Syrian understanding, eternal life is denoted by the word *ḥayye*¹⁶⁴ which designates not only life, but also salvation. It is the life that God bestowed on Adam and Eve; it is the life that was lost by their transgression; it is the life that Christ has restored; it is the life to which the Church invites all and it is the life which all believers await.¹⁶⁵

The consecration of the candidate involves a commitment or an option for life. This involves three precepts: “love of God, obedience to Him and holding fast to Him”(cf. Deut 30:16). These three aspects also conform to the monastic promises of virginity, obedience and poverty, for they have as their content, love of God, obedience to Him, and cleaving to Him.

Here, through the Scripture lesson, consecration to God is highlighted as a fundamental option for life eternal. In fact, it is the option

¹⁶³ *Peshitta* (mal.version), p. 214; Borbone & Jenner, *The Old Testament*, Vol.1,14.

¹⁶⁴ The word *hayyê* means living, alive etc. see Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 139.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Paikkatt, “Mar Aprem: Jeevanum Rakshayum”, 632

for God, who is Life (Jn 14:6). We can also state that “life” can be conceived as fullness of life in the kingdom of God.¹⁶⁶

d) **Return of the Egyptians (Isaiah 19:1-25)**

This text is an admonition of God’s punishment against Egypt for its idol worship. The relevance of its insertion in the context of the Liturgy of Profession cannot be immediately perceived. It must be interpreted analogically. Isaiah cautions Egypt about God’s intervention and the upheaval brought by it, and warns the nation how God will bring the Egyptians under his sway and deliver the Israelites. After God’s scourging, Egypt will be returned.¹⁶⁷

Isaiah says: “The Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians; and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and worship with sacrifice and burnt offering and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them” (Is 19:21). Here Isaiah wants to say that Egypt will join Israel in the cult of the true God.¹⁶⁸ Though God scourged them in his anger, He will pacify them and heal them when they return. Thus they will become a blessed portion of the Lord.

The reading has contextual relevance in the sense that the candidate’s life may have had its wrongdoing and misdeeds; through them she has now been led to the Lord. Her surrendering and dedication is a gift brought to the Lord.¹⁶⁹ In short the reading points to the fact that the candidate herself has undergone the *metanoic* experience and has become an offering to the Lord.

¹⁶⁶ Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy” 120.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. René Motte, “Egypt”, 114 - 115.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Theodoret, *Commentaire sur Isaïe* II, 139-143.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Acharya, *The Ritual*, 62.

2.2.6.2. **The New Testament Lessons**

The New Testament lessons consist of three readings (I Pet 1: 13-21, Col 3: 15-17 and the Gospel of Mt 25:1-13). A *hullolo* (canticle) comprised of a verse of a psalm sung with the chant of two *halleluyas* precedes the reading of the Gospel, and after the proclamation of the gospel a hymn which varies according to the liturgical season is sung by the whole assembly.

a) **Be Holy As I am Holy (I Peter 1: 13-21)**

The reading from St. Peter’s letter is an exhortation to the Gentile Christians, the “new people of God”, to sanctify themselves through vigilance, obedience to the truth and sincere love.¹⁷⁰ St. Peter reveals the glory of God, which awaits those who live according to the will of God. It is not to those who are subject to passion and purposeless life that eschatological bliss is guaranteed. So Peter earnestly exhorts the Christians to be holy in their new covenantal life of baptism by which they have also become dedicated people, set apart for God’s service.¹⁷¹

Peter also reminds them that they are precious, ransomed and redeemed not by silver and gold i.e. by a measurable price, but by an immeasurable price, through the precious blood of Christ. So by their very existence they are “ransomed ones” of Christ. They are obliged to live not for the world but for God alone.¹⁷²

The reading of the epistle at the Liturgy of Profession can be seen as giving the candidate not only an ascetical and sacramental orientation but also an orientation pertaining to life in its eschatological dimension. Ransomed by the very life of Christ, called for his divine purpose and raised to a covenantal life out of divine love the consecrated

¹⁷⁰ Fitzmyer, “The First Epistle of Peter”, 363-364.

¹⁷¹ Fitzmyer, “The First Epistle of Peter”, 364.

¹⁷² ACC, Vol. 11, 76-79.

one has to strive for holiness and must pattern her thinking and behaviour to a mode that befits the Chosen Ones.

b) Called to the Mystery of Rebirth (Colossians 3: 5-17)

The lesson from St. Paul's letter to Colossians is an early baptismal instruction in compendious form.¹⁷³ We see baptismal symbolism in the catchwords to "put to death" the former personality, the stripping off of the old man, the "putting on" of the new man, to designate the life of Christ himself.¹⁷⁴

Paul calls forth the candidates of baptism for an absolute separation from their former life, by uniting themselves with the death of Christ, which already took place in baptism. He gives a thrust for a life centered upon Christ instead of self, which depends not on superficial religious practices and external asceticism but on a radical putting aside of self-centeredness. Paul categorizes the five vices, which are sins against purity and five others which concern anger and sins of the tongue. The five virtues he mentions correspond to these sins.¹⁷⁵

"Stripping off" and "putting on" are technical terms indicating giving up something that is innate to one's being and taking in something that is different from a normal point of view. These acts themselves touch the interior being of the person.

The candidate who through baptism had already participated in the death and resurrection of Christ at the radical mystical level, now with the initiation of monastic life, enters into a life of death and resurrection on a more practical level. The Epistle in a didactic way highly encourages the candidate to a rebirth and to a life in Christ.

¹⁷³ Grassi, "The Letter to the Colossians", 339.

¹⁷⁴ Grassi, "The Letter to the Colossians", 339.

¹⁷⁵ Grassi, "The Letter to the Colossians", 339

c) Be Vigilant (Mathew 25: 1-13)

The parable of the virgins is based on the Jewish marriage custom. It tells of a bridegroom who returns to his home with his bride and the bridal party in the middle of the night. Five of the young women "the wise virgins" greeted him with lighted lamps, as was the custom. But five unprepared "foolish virgins" were off buying additional oil and were subsequently refused entry into the bridal chamber.¹⁷⁶

The point of the parable is the need for spiritual wakefulness.¹⁷⁷ "Be awake therefore, for you know not that day nor the hour" (Mt 25:13). This wakefulness most certainly referred originally to the waiting for the Second Coming of Christ. This is expanded by the Syrian Fathers to refer to ascetical themes in covenantal life.¹⁷⁸

Aphrahat refers to this parable eight times in Demonstration VI to stress the need of perseverance in covenantal life.¹⁷⁹ He also interprets the parable in an eschatological context to reveal the need to be alert in the service of God. Aphrahat writes: "Let us observe the appointed

¹⁷⁶ According to the early Syrian tradition, the wise virgins enter into the bridal chamber rather than to the wedding feast as in the Greek version of the Bible. Cf. Ephrem, *Commentaire de l'Evangile*, 329. In the English version of the Peshitta (NT), it says the wise virgins enter with the bridegroom into the house of festivity (*beth-chelulo*). Cf. *A Literal Translation of the Four Gospels*, 333. The Peshitta (mal.version) says that the virgins entered into the bridal chamber (*beth gnono*). Cf. *Peshitta* (mal. version), 33. See also Brock, *Spirituality*, 41. Though there exists differences between the Greek and Syriac versions, we take the Syriac understanding hence, bridal chamber corresponds to the Kingdom of heaven.

¹⁷⁷ The Syriac word "*ira*" which means wakeful provides the connection with Christ's word "Be wakeful therefore, for you know not that day nor the hour" (Mt 25:13). Cf. Brock, *Spirituality*, 57.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Valavanolickal, "*The Exegesis of Aphrahat*". 103.

¹⁷⁹ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VI: I (PS 1, 240-254); Valavanolickal, "The Exegesis of Aphrahat", 101.

time of the glorious bridegroom that we may enter with him into his bride-chamber.”¹⁸⁰

In his *Homily On the Ten Virgins* Jacob of Serugh also points out allegorically the eschatological significance of the parable.¹⁸¹ Through it he explains the Second Coming of the Lord and the disposition of the whole of humanity to receive Christ. The virgins are compared to humanity; hence, “all creation as betrothed to God in the Blood of His Son.”¹⁸² The wise virgins entered with the Bridegroom into the bridal chamber because they were vigilant to greet the Bridegroom with lighted lamps. The oil in their lamps stands for their virtues: purity, love, mercy etc.¹⁸³ Jacob of Serugh presents the idea that the foolish virgins are deprived from entering into the bridal chamber, for their virginity had not been adorned with good deeds.¹⁸⁴ According to Jacob, it is by each person preserving the beauty of their very way of life that they would enter with Christ into His bridal chamber like the wise virgins “who in their bodies preserved a treasure that is full of light.”¹⁸⁵

Through the parable Ephrem also unequivocally speaks of the need for good works on the part of the virgins as a surer token for entering into the bridal chamber. According to him, the virgins are not received into the bridal chamber, for they lack oil in their lamps. Hence, Ephrem compares good works to blessed oil. He states: “Let no man

¹⁸⁰ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VI: I (PS 1, 240) in Gwynn, “Select Demonstrations”, 362.

¹⁸¹ Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on the Ten Virgins” in P. Bedgan *Homiliae Selectae* Vol. II, no. 50, 375-401. ET by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery in their publication *The True Wine* 13 1992,39-62. Our references are from this ET.

¹⁸² Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on the Ten Virgins”, 49.

¹⁸³ Cf. Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on the Ten Virgins”, 49-50.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on the Ten Virgins”, 51.

¹⁸⁵ Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on the Ten Virgins”, 50.

any longer trust in the chaste reputation of virginity, when it is deprived of the works which constitute the oil of the lamps.”¹⁸⁶

The liturgical reading of the parable sheds light for the need of wakefulness in the spiritual and moral life of the candidate and the community. Animated by a life of love and service, the candidate needs to be ready to welcome Christ the Bridegroom into her world and in its premises.

2.2.7. Exhortation of the Celebrant and the Scrutiny of the Candidate

Following the liturgy of the Word, the prelate sits facing the assembly to exhort the candidate. The exhortation consists of three parts: A spiritual exhortation, an admonition to keep the orthodox faith, and a series of petitions in favour of the candidate. Following the exhortation, the celebrant and the Superior of the Congregation scrutinize the candidate.

2.2.7.1. A Spiritual Exhortation

The spiritual exhortation commences with a reference to the Gospel of Luke (Lk 9:62). Quoting the Word of God, the celebrant reminds the candidate of the serious implication of her commitment.

Beloved sisters it is written in the Gospel, “Any one who looks back having put his hands on the plough is not worthy of the kingdom of God (Lk 9:62).”¹⁸⁷

The celebrant also gives the candidate a lesson from the Book of Sirach by which he draws her attention to the trials and temptations she would encounter in her committed life. He quotes the words of Ben Sirach: “My son (daughter), if you have approached to serve God,

¹⁸⁶ Ephrem, “Letter to Publius”, Sec. 12-15 .

¹⁸⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 37; *Profession of Vows*, 12.

you should equip yourself to face all temptations, and having sanctified your heart, you ought to be courageous (Sir 2:1-2).¹⁸⁸ To equip the candidate to face all temptations, he says: “You should practice humility, serenity, and obedience, for the discipleship of Messiah demands many virtues.”¹⁸⁹

Thus, we see the exhortation emphasizes the irrevocable nature of the commitment. It makes the candidate and the assembly aware of the tests in committed life and of endurance through Christian virtues.

2.2.7.2. Admonition to Keep the Orthodox Faith

The celebrant exhorts the virgin to the need of true faith and obedience and admonishes her to safeguard them till the end of her life. Particular adherence to the official teachings of all the Fathers of the Catholic, apostolic, one and holy Church is also demanded from her.

The Fathers, the proponents of divine faith and knowledge, are true pillars of the Church. For them, the knowledge of divine mysteries serves as a ladder to ascend to the realm of supreme faith, and they themselves become the holders of the faith.¹⁹⁰ This faith enabled them not only to confess faith in Christ but also to honour it by proclaiming it even at the loss of their lives.

In one of the prayers of the Holy *Qurbano* the Malankara Church exhorts all her children to commemorate and to adhere to the teachings of the Fathers who teach us to become children of God.¹⁹¹ The knowledge they impart is not merely natural knowledge, but spiritual knowledge, which is hidden in the depths of God.

¹⁸⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 38; *Profession of Vows*, 12

¹⁸⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 38. *Profession of Vows*, 12.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 39.

¹⁹¹ *Qurbana Kramam*, 52.

The celebrant concludes the exhortation to accept the orthodox faith of the Fathers with the recommendation to follow the teachings of the universal Church, the Pope of Rome and of the particular Church and the local bishop.¹⁹²

2.2.7.3. A Series of Petitions in Favour of the Candidate

The concluding part of the exhortation consists of a series of petitions by the celebrant in favour of the candidate:

May God grant you the grace so that you may engage yourselves in all right dealings which please God. May He grant you strength, courage and patience in order that you win over all the attacks of the evil one. May God drive away from you the nefarious activities of Satan. May God give you humility and obedience befitting the disciple of Christ the Lord. May He, the lover of men, pardon your shortcomings and make you holy through his grace and abundant mercy.¹⁹³

To live the dedicated life the candidate needs the grace of God. So the celebrant invokes God to grant grace to the virgin to fulfill the demands of the committed life so that she may walk faithfully in the ways of God in truth and in justice.

2.2.7.4. The Scrutiny of the Candidate

The scrutiny of the candidate has its origin in the baptismal rites of the early Church.¹⁹⁴ Before the candidates could be accepted into the Church they were asked to testify to their faith and probity. Entrance into the monastic life, in a way similar to entrance into the Church of Christ, was not a favour easily gained. Thus, the scrutiny of the candidate became an integral part of the monastic profession.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 39.

¹⁹³ *Profession of Vows*, 12.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 128-129.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 129

Though a strange term, the verb “to scrutinize” can be conceived as “investigating or looking closely to see something that is not easily apparent, or to ferret out something less than desirable.”¹⁹⁶ In the context of the Liturgy of Profession it seems to imply a kind of interrogation to evaluate the honesty of the conversion claimed by those who have approached to take on the yoke of Christ through consecrated life.

The time of the scrutiny is stipulated after the liturgy of the Word and the spiritual instruction of the celebrant. Its purpose as in the baptismal rite, is “to uncover, then, heal all that is weak, defective or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong and good.”¹⁹⁷

In the monastic profession there are two parts of the scrutiny. In the first part the celebrant interrogates the candidate to know of her spiritual intention of making profession, and in the second, the superior of the Congregation interrogates the candidate to receive her consent for making vows.

a) **The Interrogation by the Celebrant**

The celebrant sits on a chair in front of the candidate (s) while the candidate kneels before him to give her response. At this time the assembly silently sits and attends the ceremony in a meditative spirit. The interrogation begins with the following reminder.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Francis, “To Worship God”, 63.

¹⁹⁷ Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 11.

¹⁹⁸ For the interrogations and responses, see *Vritha Vagdanam*, 40-42, *Profession of Vows*, 12-13. The interrogatory part is omitted in the *Takso d' Tulbosho d' dairoye* and *Takso d' suporo d' dairoyutho*. But it is given in the Ritual of the Monastic Profession used for the profession of the monks in the Byzantine and the Orthodox Churches. See *Rituel de la profession monastique*, 44-46.

Dear child (children) in the Lord, open the ears of your heart to His words. Open the eyes of your hearts and behold the most sublime example of the Saviour. (He dictates to her the Word of God pertaining different themes on discipleship): the divine treasure (Mt 6: 19-20), renunciation (Lk 14:33) the self-emptying of Christ (2 Cor 8:9), life in the Spirit (Rom 8:13) and doing the will of God (Jn 4:34). After the dictation of the Word of God, the celebrant interrogates the virgin. Then he puts a series of six questions to the candidate.

Qn. Dear child (children) why do you stand on your knees before the sanctuary?

Ans. Your Excellency I desire to make the solemn religious vows in the Congregation of the Imitation of Christ.

Qn. Religious life is the life of angels. Many saints attained perfection through this life. Jesus, Our Lord is the perfect model of this life and the Saviour who grants grace to those who wish to embrace such a life. Are you then prepared to wear the religious habit and lead a life of obedience to the rules of the religious life?

Ans. I so desire with the help of God.

Qn. You have chosen something worthwhile, yes, the blessed path. Are you aware that you have to spend yourselves for the sake of God and that your whole life should be one dedicated to the Lord?

Ans. Yes I do know it. I ardently desire it and have come prepared for the same.

Qn. Do you come with your own will and with due earnestness for this life of dedication?

Ans. By the grace of God, I come with my whole heart and mind.

Qn. Do you come out of any selfish motive or under anyone's instigation?

Ans. Your Excellency, no. I do not come out of any selfish motive or under anyone's instigation.

Qn. O my child (children) blessed by the Lord, you have chosen the better portion. May your choice be blessed. Are you determined to love and to bear the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ your whole life through and to keep the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience?

Ans. Yes, I am so determined and I have come prepared to make vows.

The celebrant: Dearly beloved of the Lord, it is the Holy Spirit who has put this desire in you and has called you to this state of life. May God grant to you the necessary graces and lead you lovingly throughout your life.¹⁹⁹

The questions are direct and simple and pertain to monastic life and discipleship. They are posed theologically, using scriptural verses and patristic quotations with the purpose of examining the motivation of the candidate and for obtaining her consent.

The answers are brief, direct and simple and correspond closely to the questions asked. In the answers, the virgin often uses the verse "with the help of God." It expresses that it is not by the virgin's personal capacity, but with God's grace that she would be able to fulfill the demands of the consecrated life.

b) The Interrogation by the Superior General

Following the interrogation of the celebrant, the Superior General of the Congregation or her delegate interrogates the candidate. This practice is seen as part of the continuity of eastern monastic practice, having prevailed from the time of Basелиos.²⁰⁰ The candidate is

¹⁹⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 42; *Profession of Vows*, 13.

²⁰⁰ In Basilian Coenobitism we also see the practice of solemn interrogation by the superior concerning the disposition of the candidate regarding the obligations of the vows he is going to contract. Cf. Chapter 1, 3.1.3.

interrogated solemnly to reveal her dispositions with regard to the obligations she is going to contract. This ritual is patterned after the baptismal and the ordination rite in the West Syrian tradition. There have been examinations and preliminary scrutiny during the period of formation but a final one is needed. Representing God, the religious community and the Church, and as the person immediately responsible for the candidate, the Superior General solemnly asks:

Dear sister (s), are you prepared to lead your life in the Congregation of the (name) in accordance with its rules and regulations and to undertake the obligations of the religious life bound by the evangelical virtues of obedience, chastity and poverty?²⁰¹

To this question the candidate replies: "Reverend Mother, I am prepared on my own free will and choice to make the (temporary / perpetual) vows and I express my consent thus."²⁰² Then the candidate makes her profession.

The interrogation and the answer verify the intention of the candidate about her deliberate choice of religious life.

2.3. Profession of Vows

The profession of vows in Malankara monasticism is the candidate's solemn public promise of total dedication to Almighty God to follow Christ closely through the evangelical counsels and to serve His Church in perfect charity.²⁰³ The professing of the vows is in public in the midst of the assembly and in front of the celebrant and the major Superior.

The taking of vows is not something peculiar to the Christian or to Malankara monastic life, but it is rather the progeny of an age-old

²⁰¹ *Profession of Vows*, 13.

²⁰² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 43; *Profession of Vows*, 13.

²⁰³ *HRSIC*, art. 71.

custom. In the Greek and Roman traditions, an oath to God taken by Christians and a solemn pledge to emperors by soldiers was considered a sign of their allegiance to supreme authorities.²⁰⁴ Observance of the vow in the Christian tradition indicates one's adherence to God while the breaking it is considered a sacrilege.²⁰⁵

To designate the term vow, the Greeks used the term *euché* (offering).²⁰⁶ It is derived from the verb *eûchomai* meaning "to pray" "to ask" and "to give thanks" (*eucharistía*).²⁰⁷ In the Syrian tradition, the word for offering is (*qurbono*) which is rooted in the term *qrb*. It is used to designate the offering of a person or thing as sacrifice to God which implies also the obliteration and cessation of the object.²⁰⁸ *Qurbono* is the word for the Eucharistic sacrifice in the Malankara Church.

The profession of vows in the Malankara tradition also indicates the total offering of the person to God.²⁰⁹ This offering relates also to one's giving of thanks to God and making of vows before Him (cf. Ps 115:13-14).²¹⁰ Through the profession of vows the candidate becomes totally Christ's and Christ becomes totally the candidate's.²¹¹ This reciprocal union confers on the candidate the status "spouse of Christ", (*kaltō da-mšihō*) as Christ becomes for her the "Bridegroom."²¹² The formula of the profession of vows reveals this aspect.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 113.

²⁰⁵ Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 115-116.

²⁰⁶ Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 317 also Cf. Sierra, "Voti Reliogi", 1922.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 317.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Yousif, *L' eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem*, 217.

²⁰⁹ In the first Chapter we have discussed this aspect. See Chapter I.

²¹⁰ See the Peshitta Version.

²¹¹ *HRSIC*, art. 72.

²¹² John Paul II., *RD*, no. 8; Cf. Nedungatt, "The Covenanters", 435.

2.3.1. The Formula of the Profession of Vows

The offering of the candidate made through the profession of vows in the Malankara Church consists of a formula, which is written down, the signing of the document with a cruciform sign, and the testimony of two witnesses.²¹³

The formula in the profession of vows can refer to the Old Testament covenant-making act. In the Old Testament, covenant-making was an esteemed act in which the covenantal stipulations were written down in a document and the practice of the deposition of the covenant document was also noted down (Ex 25:16; 40:20).

The coenobitic tradition of St. Basil speaks of the oral statement of vows but it is since St. Benedict's time (+ 547) that a definite proof of the taking of vows in the form of a signed document has been an accepted custom in monastic circles.²¹⁴ This statement was kept in the monastery, and if the professed monk lived or behaved contrary to his vows, this signed document served as a testament to give him correction or punishment.²¹⁵

The various religious institutes in the Malankara Church use the same formula, but with slight variation in accordance with their specific charism.²¹⁶ The formula in the Bethany profession of vows is:

²¹³ *HRSIC*, art. 72.

²¹⁴ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 58-19. See also Yeo, *The Structure and Content*, 23.

²¹⁵ Cf. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 127.

²¹⁶ At the Kurisumala Ashram of the Malankara Church, members do not profess vows. The Kurisumala Ashram founded by the late Rev. F. Acharya is a monastery where the Antiochene and Indian tradition prevail. The rite of profession of the monks is the same as that of other congregations and orders of the Malankara rite. But there is only the rite of tonsure and no profession of vows in this monastic community. This information is from Yesudas, the present Abbot of the Ashram.

I (name) persuaded by an ardent desire to dedicate myself wholly to the glory of God and to Jesus Christ in order to closely follow Him, pledge to the Almighty, before the Superior General of the Congregation (name), to observe the religious vows of obedience, chastity and poverty demanded by the holy rules of the congregation. By the grace of the Holy Spirit and by the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I dedicate myself totally to the Congregation, so that by serving God and His Church, I shall reach the perfection of charity.²¹⁷

The candidate has written the formula in the Register of Vows beforehand. After professing the vows, she signs under the formula in the presence of the celebrant (bishop), the Superior of the Congregation and before two witnesses and the entire congregation of the faithful.²¹⁸ Unlike the placing of a signature on secular documents, either by initialing or by writing names, the profession document is signed by a cruciform sign. The exact significance of this cruciform signing is not stated anywhere, but we presume it as an indication of the candidate's self-offering in accordance with the offering of Christ on the cross.

2.3.2. The Content of the Vows

The profession of vows in the Malankara Church is to be comprehended as a pledge and an offering of the person who consecrates, a pledge to God and an offering to the Church through the Congregation. The offering to the Church through the Congregation is made through the promise of the three evangelical counsels: obedience, virginity and poverty.

A promise (*mulkōno*) is a key word of the language of love. To promise is to give word to one's partner or the Congregation, which manifests the generosity of wholehearted adherence, of faith in total

²¹⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 43. When the candidate read the formula for profession they specify the nature of the profession they make (temporary/ perpetual profession).

²¹⁸ *HRSIC*, art. 72.

giving.²¹⁹ Thus, promises bring forth an obligatory relationship with God and with the Church.

2.3.2.1. To Seek and to Do His Will: Obedience

Psalms 40 says: "I delight to do thy will, O my God, and thy law is in the depths of my heart" (Ps 40:9); and the Letter to Hebrews says: "I have come to do thy will" (Heb 10:9). In Christ, the Father's will becomes Christ's will. Thus, we see the core of obedience is nothing but delightfully doing the will of God.

Meštām 'ōmūtō, the Syriac word for obedience means listening, for, in the Syrian understanding one's obedience depends primarily upon his capability to listen.²²⁰ If one listens to the God's word he will behave accordingly but if he listens to the Evil One he will act contrary to the will of God. The virgin promises obedience which means she dedicates herself to listen to the Divine Word and to do the will of God even when it is enclosed in mystery. Nowhere is obedience a passive or constrained acceptance of overbearing decrees from God. Instead, it lies in the acceptance of the divine plan known by faith in the sacred, revealing Word. Then one's judgment shaped by this faith, will discern God's will in the concrete events of one's life.²²¹

According to the rite of profession, accepting the sweet yoke of Christ in self-abnegation is a characteristic feature of obedience.²²² The rite admonishes the virgin:

You should practice humility, serenity and forbearance. (...). You should have obedience and charity, which perfect all commandments. (...). Moreover you have to observe all promises you made before God. You have to have true faith and obedience

²¹⁹ Ramlot, "Promises", 411.

²²⁰ Cf. Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 211.

²²¹ Cole & Conner, *Christian Totality*, 172.

²²² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 10.

and safeguard them truly and without blemish till the end of your lives.²²³

The admonition stresses faith and obedience. Faith is not obedience but rather its secret. It is the principal element underlying obedience. A religious attitude predisposes one to obey anything and thus constitutes what St. Paul calls the “obedience of faith.”²²⁴ The mystery of surrender pervades this realm.

Negation, which is opposed to the mystery of surrender, caused the annihilation of the plan of God. It happened while Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Christ accepts the will of God recapitulates the whole plan of God and gives Himself up to death, in order to accomplish the Father’s will. Discipleship is nothing but the joyful acceptance of God, His commands and precepts, and the perfecting of the law that God has written in one’s heart.²²⁵ It also involves obeying the natural law. It is joyful submission to God’s instruments and mediators of the Church and of the particular Institute.

2.3.2.2. To Inherit the Kingdom: Virginit

The vow of virginit (*btūlūtō*) makes one a “eunuch for the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:2) and is a personal bridal covenant with God. The expression “for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven”, manifests the very nature of the vow as an expression of spousal love for Christ himself.²²⁶

Aphrahat says: “They do well who choose matrimony, but they do better who choose virginit.”²²⁷ This is because in the early Syrian Church virginit was regarded as the pure and perfect

²²³ *Profession of Vows*, 12.

²²⁴ Cole & Conner, *Christian Totality*, 174.

²²⁵ Cf. Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 69-70.

²²⁶ John Paul II, *RD* no, 11.

²²⁷ Abouzayd, “Virginit in Aphrahat”, 127.

way, which leads one to divine union.²²⁸ The attainment of eternal bliss at the heavenly bridal chamber (AllG, *gnuno*) was considered an effect of the virginal life.²²⁹ The early Christians believed that God will render to the virgins the kingdom of heaven because of their being great and powerful witnesses as spouses of Christ.²³⁰

The prayers of consecration highlight the spousal character of virginit. God is called upon to give the virgin the grace to be devoid of passions, to bestow upon her purity of heart, mind and body, and to anchor her life in Christ her heavenly bridegroom.²³¹

Through the vow the virgin commits herself to set her mind upon the affairs of the Lord. She promises to be holy in body and spirit. Thus, she submits herself to God in order to be possessed by Him.²³²

2.3.2.3. To Be Filled with the Divine Treasure: Poverty

One who professes poverty (*meskīnūtō*) aims to follow Christ the rich One, who became poor for the sake of humanity (2 Cor 8:9). With this intention, the candidate makes the promise of poverty and enters into the mystery of Christ’s emptiness in order to become rich.²³³ According to the Odes of Solomon, “to become rich in God the Father and receive the mind of the Most High” is the obligation of all Christians.²³⁴

²²⁸ Abouzayd, “Virginit in Aphrahat”, 125.

²²⁹ *Profession of Vows*, 10-11, Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 123-127; For the Image of the bridal chamber see Ephrem, *HVirg* 24:5, 33:3, 44:20; Ephrem, *HFide* 14:1-5.

²³⁰ Vööbus, *Celibacy A Requirement*, 30.

²³¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 30-31.

²³² Cf. Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 65-66.

²³³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 40.

²³⁴ *Odes of Solomon*, 9: 5 ; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 46.

To sell everything and give it to the poor in order to have treasure in heaven is the guiding word for this entry (Mt 19:21).²³⁵ In the Syrian thinking, poverty should be the lot of all Christians and especially for the monk whose treasure lies in heaven. If only one remained poor in earthly things, he would become rich in spirit and be able to serve Christ His master.²³⁶ Therefore the celebrant exhorts the candidate to withdraw from earthly things and to renounce herself in order to strive for the “heavenly treasure.”²³⁷

Living paradoxically the simple yet rich life to enrich the poor is the challenge the candidate undertakes with the promise. Thus, the profession of the vow of poverty aims at material poverty, absolute dependence on God for material and spiritual needs, and the sharing of material and spiritual riches.²³⁸ This manifests the mystery of the emptiness, which is not a mere void, but the fullness of noble generosity with which the consecrated makes all others partakers of what they are and what they have.²³⁹

2.4. The Rites Proper to Monastic Initiation

With the profession of vows, the candidate enters voluntarily into the monastic life. In the following part of the ritual, the celebrant through a series of rites, consecrates the candidate to the service of God and to the Church. Prayers and blessings are bestowed upon the candidate for obtaining divine grace.

2.4.1. Prayer by the Celebrant

After the profession of vows the celebrant glorifies and gives thanks to God the Creator. He prays:

²³⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 40-41.

²³⁶ Philoxenos of Mabbugh, “Eighth Discourse”, 174–175; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Mathew*, Hom. LXIII in *NPNF*, Vol.10, 387-391.

²³⁷ *Profession of Vows*, 12.

²³⁸ Cf. Gambari, *Unfolding the Mystery*, 59.

²³⁹ *HRSIC*, art. 134.

O Lord God, you have created us instruments of your glory by your wisdom beyond description; you have set us apart for your reverence and glory. To you our Creator, praise and exaltation are offered by chaste and God-loving souls now and at all times. Lord, you need no glory from us. But we glorify you in order that we may be exalted through glorious and wonderful deeds.²⁴⁰

The prayer is addressed to God the Creator who created man and the universe by the richness of his wisdom and goodness. As instruments of God man bears the responsibility of glorifying God by being in His divine presence.²⁴¹ It is from God’s presence that man assumes glory (*šubhō*).²⁴² Adam and Eve in their primordial state of virginity were with God, glorifying Him. But after the fall they lost the divine presence, and also glory and communion with God. In Adam’s place God has set apart chaste and God-loving souls to give the Creator incessant praise and exaltation.

The aim of man’s creation is to glorify God his Creator. From the very beginning of salvation history, God has chosen people and nations for glorifying Him. Adam and Eve, Israel, the prophets, apostles and the Church constitute God’s chosen ones.

The prayer acknowledges God’s setting apart of the virgin as an instrument for His reverence and glory. It speaks of the candidate’s obligation to glorify God throughout her life and it recalls that God does not need any glory from man, but the exaltation of human beings takes place when man does glorious and wonderful deeds.²⁴³ Thus God as the Creator of man is glorified. According to Irenaeus: “The glory of God is man fully alive.”²⁴⁴ The prayer ends with a Trinitarian praise.

²⁴⁰ *Profession of Vows*, 14.

²⁴¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 45.

²⁴² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 45; *Profession of Vows*, 14.

²⁴³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 45.

²⁴⁴ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4, 20:7.

2.4.2. Trinitarian Sealing

Following the prayer, the celebrant calls out the name of the virgin and signs her on the forehead with the Sign of the Cross saying:

“(name) you are being sealed so that you may be an inheritor of the holy abode of God forever, in the name of the Father + and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit + for life everlasting.”²⁴⁵ The sealing is done without chrism. This shows the rite’s specific identity apart from the rite of confirmation.²⁴⁶

The sealing (*sphragis*) refers both to an instrument with which one seals (eg. cylindrical seal, signet ring, or stone) and to the seal is impression itself (*sigillum*) as a sign of attestation.²⁴⁷ From the 6th century B.C, there have been references regarding seal or sealing in private and public life. Objects, animals (including sacrificial animals) human beings particularly slaves were identified and protected as the property of their owner by means of a sign, image, or letter. An analogy in religious life was the sealing of participants in the mystery cults as a means of religious stigmatization.²⁴⁸

The New Testament Scriptural basis for the sealing is found in several places: John 6:27; Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22; Rev. 7:4. Here we see that the servants of the Lord are sealed with the stamp of the Spirit and are separated for the Son of God, upon whom the Father himself has set his seal. The Syrian Father Aphrahat also holds the same view. He says: “Let us carry his ‘mark’ on our bodies (Ezek 9:4) so that we may be delivered from the wrath which is to come” (I The 1:10).²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ *Takso d’ tulbosho*, 307; *Takso d’ suporo*, 354, *The Ritual of the Tonsure*, 9.

²⁴⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 46; *Profession of Vows*, 14.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Schramm, “Sphragis”, 316.

²⁴⁸ Schramm, “Sphragis”, 316-317.

²⁴⁹ Aphrahat, *Demonstrationes* VI: I (PS 1, 243) ; Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat Demonstrations*, 105. Here Aphrahat gives the eschatological implication of the seal.

The Syriac term (*rušmō*)²⁵⁰ corresponds to the term sealing or signum and designates signing or sealing a person with the cross either in the baptismal context or outside of it. Through baptism the Christian is signed on the forehead with consecrated oil (*myron*) as a sign of conferring divine sonship, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, membership in the Church and protection from evil powers. As a mark of ownership, the baptismal signing also emphasizes one’s belongingness to God as His possession.²⁵¹

In the Service of Profession the celebrant seals the candidate with the sign of the cross three times. This is to signify the candidate’s entrance into the death of Christ, to reveal to her that through the cross she will acquire the knowledge of the Trinity, and to signify the characteristic feature of monastic life summed up in the mystery of the cross.²⁵² The candidate is sealed so that she may be the inheritor of everlasting life in the abode of God where one resides with the Lord (2 Co 5:1-8). Sealing with the cross indicates that it is through the cross that the candidate passes over to the abode of life (*l-bēit hayē*).²⁵³ The sealing sets the candidate apart as God’s own possession. It is a sign of recognition. By virtue of it, the heavenly hosts and the earthly beings recognize the bearer. For the Odes of Solomon says: “Thy seal is known and thy creatures are known to it.”²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ The word *rušmō* derived from *ršm* means to grave, to engrave, to inscribe etc. The noun indicates both ‘seal and sign’. This word is often used to denote ‘the sign of the Cross and the seal of baptism. Cf. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 551. See also Schramm. “Sphragis”, 316-317.

²⁵¹ Rondet, “La croix sur le front”, 388 – 392. For details on the significance of the consignment of the fore-head of the candidate in Baptism, see Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, (WS) Vol.6, Cambridge, 1933, pp. 46ff ; Brock, *The Holy Spirit*, 210-218.

²⁵² Aytoun, “The Mysteries of Baptism”, 9.

²⁵³ Cf. Naduvilezham, *The Theology of the Paschal Lamb*, 286.

²⁵⁴ *Ode*, 4: 7; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 22.

To sum up we can say that the rite of sealing in the context of monastic profession is parallel to that of the baptismal sealing, has its own specific features and identity and signifies the consecration by which the candidate is set forth by God as His own possession for eternal life.

2.4.3. Rite of Tonsure (*Suporo*)

The rite of tonsure through which the monastic charism is bestowed upon the candidate is an important ritual in the Liturgy of Profession. The tonsuring of the candidate in the Service of Profession includes two essential elements: a profession of faith by the candidate before tonsuring and then the ritual of tonsuring.

2.4.3.1. Profession of Faith and Its Content

A profession of faith by the candidate precedes the rite of tonsure. The celebrant sits on a chair while the candidate remains kneeling before him. She takes the scissors in her hand, makes an act of profession and then gives the scissors to the prelate.²⁵⁵ Then the candidate professes:

I wish to draw near to God,
Be good to me Lord, my trust,
That I may recount all your wonders (Ps 73:27).²⁵⁶

The candidate professes the formula once since it is so stipulated in the rite for the nuns, while the monks profess it three times in accordance with the traditional way of profession.²⁵⁷ The profession of faith which precedes the tonsure is a truly remarkable confession of faith, essentially theo-centric, and each of its constitutive parts is related to God.

²⁵⁵ *Profession of Vows*, 14; *Takso d' suporo*, 355. see also *The Ritual of the Tonsure*, 10;

²⁵⁶ *Profession of Vows*, 14; *Takso d' tulbosho*, 311; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 38. In the *Takso d' suporo* this prayer is also given but with a slight difference. See *Takso d' suporo*, 355.

²⁵⁷ Acharya, *The Ritual*, 38.

a) Drawing Near to God

“I wish to draw near to God.” The concluding verse of Psalm 73 conveys the psalmist’s intense desire to be with God despite his sufferings (Ps 73:28). Compared to the life enjoyments of the godless, he acknowledges that the just possess an intimacy with God of which the unjust can never dream.²⁵⁸ This conviction induces the psalmist to draw nearer to God.

“To draw near to God” parallels the word “seek” (*tsetein*) found in the Septuagint. The translation of the Hebrew words *biquesh* and *darash* have wider meanings such as “seek the Lord and His strength, seek His presence continually” etc. (cf. I Chr 16:11; Lk 12:31).²⁵⁹ In the light of the Liturgy of Profession, it indicates one’s urging to be with God, and also a turning back to God, acknowledging one’s sinful past.

b) Recounting All His Wonders

Drawing near to God impels one to recount the wonders of God. The expression “recounting the wonders of God” can be seen as an expression of “proclaiming” (*kōrōūtō*) Christ.²⁶⁰ For, Christ is the greatest “wonder of God” and the “faithful witness” of God’s work among men (cf. Jn 5:36). The one who draws near to God begins to testify Him, by proclaiming the wonderful deeds that God has done in the history of mankind and in one’s own life. It is faith and love that draw one near to God. And proclamation of the wonderful deeds of God (Christ and His salvific actions) is the explication of the faith and love in God.²⁶¹

Thus through the profession of faith in the ritual of tonsure the candidate professes her wish to draw near to God, confesses Him as

²⁵⁸ Cf. Murphy, “Psalms”, 589; also see Acharya, *The Ritual*, 75.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Palatty, *Discipleship*, 69-70.

²⁶⁰ Merk, “Kerygma”, 288-289.

²⁶¹ Merk, “Kerygma”, 288.

her refuge and assures God that she will proclaim His wonderful works.²⁶² In other words the candidate acknowledges the scope of monastic profession as a way to witness (*martyreō*) God.

2.4.3.2. Tonsuring

Tonsuring means shaving of the hair from one's head. The rite of tonsure used in the early baptismal rite, in the ordination of the deaconess, and in the Syrian priestly ordination has been adopted in the Service of Profession. The tonsuring of the monks mentioned by Pseudo-Dionysius refers to the antiquity of the rite since the 5th or 6th century.²⁶³ According to Pseudo-Dionysius, "the cutting of the hair symbolizes the absolutely pure and simple life which does not camouflage the ugliness of the soul with foreign and artificial ornaments, but raises the soul to the closest likeness to God, not with human but with singular and unifying ornaments."²⁶⁴

In the actual liturgical rite, it is not the shaving but the cutting of the candidate's hair successively from the front to back, and from the left to the right side of her head in the form of a cross in the name of the Holy Trinity.²⁶⁵ The prelate cuts the hair of the virgin saying:

"As a sign of rejecting the pleasures of the flesh and as a sign of your religious vows, this hair is cut from you (name) in the name of the Father +, and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit + who live for ever and ever.²⁶⁶ While the bishop invokes each person of the Trinity, the congregation responds, "Amen."

The rite has manifold significance. It reminds the candidate of her existential priestly vocation as messenger of the Gospel and

²⁶² Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 46; *Profession of Vows*, 14.

²⁶³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 75.

²⁶⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 76.

²⁶⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 46-47.

²⁶⁶ *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 97; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 47; *Profession of Vows*, 14. See also *Takso d' suporo*, 355.

graces her with the gifts proper to it. Growing the hair indicates worldly care, indulgence in external matters, and of intellectual pride. Tonsuring of the hair signifies one's decision to be master of oneself, of body and mind. It means to strive after full conformity with Christ through the right use of mind and will and through self-discipline.²⁶⁷

The rite of tonsure concludes with a prayer addressed to Christ, the noble teacher of justice.²⁶⁸ Accordingly, the celebrant asks God to be a teacher and to grant his disciple true wisdom and knowledge in the life to which she commits herself.

2.4.4. The Clothing Ceremony

The rite of clothing, a significant ritual in the Antiochene monastic tradition, immediately follows the tonsure and is noted for its biblical, ascetical and theological allure. In the biblical conception clothing originates from the feeling of shame and sexual desire aroused by the first sin. It is therefore worn for modesty sake.²⁶⁹ In the Syrian tradition the imagery of clothing covers the entire history of salvation. Without going into much detail we mention here the relevance of clothing in the context of the profession rite.

The clothing ceremony in profession parallels the divine imparting of the robe of glory to Adam and Eve. The robe of glory, which God imparted to Adam and Eve, was a garment of glory as a sign of their nearness to God and intimacy with Him. They lost the robe of grace with the transgression of God's will which marked also their fall from the divine milieu.²⁷⁰ God, who wanted to re-cloth Adam and his descendants in the robe of glory, put on the garment (body) (*lbeš pagrō*)

²⁶⁷ Cf. Paikkatt, *Life Glory and Salvation*, 285.

²⁶⁸ *Profession of Vows*, 14.

²⁶⁹ McKenzie, "Clothing", 143-144.

²⁷⁰ Cf. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 85-97.

of man and offered man the robe of glory in three significant stages: in His incarnation, baptism and resurrection.²⁷¹ Thus, man can possess this robe of glory in as much as he participates in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

It is with baptism that one attains the robe of glory. But to keep the status of divinity, man has to participate in the life, death and resurrection of Christ at a deeper level. Monastic life aims at participating in the very life of Christ in a profound way and the bestowing of monastic garments signifies this aspect in a concrete way.²⁷²

The monastic garments compared to the robe of glory received at baptism have an eschatological significance. They are associated with the wedding garments of the parable in Matthew 22:12, the royal and the priestly robe of the chosen race, and the garment of the righteous at the resurrection. The clothing in the robe of glory signifies man's return to paradise.²⁷³

The conferring of the monastic garments alludes to the presentation of the white garments in the baptismal rite and the presentation of the bridal cloth in the ritual of the marriage rite in the Jewish and the Syrian tradition.²⁷⁴ The recurrent themes of the "stripping

²⁷¹ Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, 11-12.

²⁷² Brock, *Syriac Perspectives*, 16.

²⁷³ Cf. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives*, 19-20.

²⁷⁴ In the pre and post-talmudic period there existed among the Jews the custom of having *huppah* the erection of the bridal chamber for the bride and for the bridegroom. Later, the custom was replaced by an act of the bridegroom covering the bride's head with his cloak, a rite inspired by Ruth 3:9. The Jewish custom of *huppah* might have influenced the early Christians and it is possible that the Church has integrated it into the rite of marriage and the rite of profession. Cf. Posner, "Marriage" 1040-1041. Pothan also points out the Jewish custom of using a veil, which later became a common practice among the Syrian Christians. Cf. Pothan, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*, 70; Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 142.

of the old man" and the "putting on of the new man" and the themes of "bridegroom", "bride", "bridal chamber" in the Rite of Profession impel us to perceive the evolution of the rite of clothing from a baptismal and the marriage context.²⁷⁵

The vesting ceremony begins with the celebrant's prayer invoking God to clothe the candidate with the imperishable outer garments of the elect and to grant her divine blessings so that she may be worthy of the life of the angels through good deeds.²⁷⁶ The clothing ceremony includes the blessing and the giving of the habit, and the stripping and putting on of the monastic habit.

2.4.4.1. Blessing and Conferring of the Monastic Habit

The monastic habit is blessed with a prayer, which is addressed to Christ the noble teacher of justice and hope.²⁷⁷ The prayer for blessing the garments conveys the virtues and attitudes which are to be worn by the candidate as a true disciple of Christ. The garments are referred to as signs of humility, discipleship, and the mark of those who do the will of Christ. They guarantee the grace of the Holy Spirit and are robes of noble deeds. The garb is also compared to the imperishable garments of the chosen ones. The prayer of blessing the garments ends with a Trinitarian praise.²⁷⁸

In earlier times, the head of the monastery (superior) had the privilege of distributing directly the monastic habits to the newly professed monks of their communities.²⁷⁹ This tradition continues even today in the Antiochene tradition in a different mode. The celebrant

²⁷⁵ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 47-50; *Takso d'suporo*, 356-357.

²⁷⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 48; *Profession of Vows*, 15.

²⁷⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 47; *Profession of Vows*, 14.

²⁷⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 47; *Profession of Vows*, 14.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Lefort, *Les vies Coptes*, 64; 94.

blesses and gives the habit to the superior of the Congregation and the superior hands it over to the professed.²⁸⁰

The following table shows the kind of vestments that are blessed and conferred upon the newly professed, and the sign value attached to each of them.

Table showing the order of blessing and the conferring of the Monastic Habit²⁸¹

Monastic Habit	Signs Alluded to in the Prayer of Blessing	Significance of the Habit
Outer Garment	Joy and Salvation	Removal of the Old Man
Girdle	Earnestness and Faith of a Perfect life Flesh, Undivided	Against the Temptations of the Heart and Readiness of Spirit
Scapular	Robe of Glory in order to Please God with Virtuous Deeds	Robe of Salvation and the Garb of Virtues
Crown	Sign of Humility, Incorruptible Crown of Good Deeds	Crown of Salvation, Shield of Victory
Veil	Discipline, Peaceful Demeanor, Purity of Mind and Good Conduct	Diligence to Meditate on God's Commandments and of Angelic Virtuous Life
Cross	Sign of Obedience, Weapon against the Forces of Darkness	Fulfill in Everything the Sacred Will of God

²⁸⁰ *Takso d' suporo*, 355; *The Ritual of the Tonsure*, 10-11.

²⁸¹ In this table we have given the list of the vestments according to the Malankara monastic tradition comprised of both the Catholic and the Orthodox tradition in India. In the Maronite Churches, we see putting on of the shoes as part of monastic clothing. The shoes indicate putting under foot the devils and serpents, and signify the nun's preparation to preach the Gospel of peace (mission). Moses Bar Kepha gives a detailed account

2.4.4.2. Stripping of the Candidate

In the context of profession, "stripping" means the removal of the candidate's vestments in order to clothe her with the monastic habit. Unlike the monk's stripping of the outer garments by the celebrant during the ceremony, the virgin's garments are removed for modesty sake by a co-member of the community outside the church. The stripping symbolizes the removing of the "old nature with its practices" (Col 3:9). It manifests the ascetic and the sacrificial dimension of the monastic life.

2.4.4.3. Putting On of the Monastic Habit

Following the stripping, the candidate is helped by a co-member to put on the monastic garments with specific prayers that are attached to each garment.²⁸² The content of the rite is depicted in the prayer of the prelate. He prays: "May the Lord clothe you in the new man, renewed in the image of the Creator, in uprightness and true holiness."²⁸³

In early monastic circles, the vesting of the monastic habit replaced the profession of explicit vows and ceremonies.²⁸⁴ The monastic vesting is not intended to confer on the monastics some pieces of garments merely to cover their body and to prevent the disgrace of nudity, or to keep off cold, nor the vestments are "coverings" that foster the seed of vanity. Instead, they imply conversion of life, interior joy, a life of justice,

of the significance of the monastic habits. See Moses Bar Kepha, "Homilia" (*Turgomo*) in *Pontificale*, 340-342; *Takso d' tulbosho*, 314-316; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 39-40; *Takso d' suporo*, 356-357; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 48-50; *Profession of Vows*, 15-16.

²⁸² In the Malankara liturgy, there are specific prayers for the clerics to recite while putting on and removing the liturgical vestments according to their significance. Probably it is from this practice that Mar Ivanios stipulated the prayers for wearing and removing the habit. Mar Ivanios, *Malankara Sanyasa*, 58-59. also see *Acharangal*, 100-101.

²⁸³ *Takso d' tulbosho*, 314; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 39.

²⁸⁴ Colombas, "Abito Religioso", 51.

sanctity, and spiritual progress.²⁸⁵ The rupture of secular life, the consecration to God, and the belonging to a determined community is also characterized by the “putting on” of the monastic habit.²⁸⁶

2.4.4.4. Donning of the Cross

The donning of the cross though a ritual linked to the clothing ceremony is done separately after the candidate’s putting on of the monastic habit. The rite consists of putting on a wooden cross upon the neck of the newly professed tied up with a thread in the form of a necklace.²⁸⁷ Unlike the handing over of the monastic habit, the celebrant himself puts the cross on the candidate. It reminds us of the Indian tradition of tying *minnu* or *tāli* in the marriage rite of the Syrian Churches of India, a tradition taken from its cultural background.²⁸⁸

The rite envisages the salvific significance of the cross. The cross given to the candidate is referred to as the cross of the Son of God which guards, directs, strengthens, and protects the virgin. It is an unconquerable weapon for the virgin to fight against the forces of darkness. The virgin has to accept it as a sign of obedience and wear it as a yoke around her neck so that she may be able to fulfill in everything

²⁸⁵ Cassian, *The Institutes*, 1:2; in *NPNF* Vol. 11, 202; Oppenheim, *Das Mönchskleid*, 50-59; Gregoire, “Nudita”, 508-511.

²⁸⁶ Colombas, “Abito Religioso”, 51.

²⁸⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 50.

²⁸⁸ The tying of *minnu* or *tali* is an old age custom that prevails in the cultural tradition of India. *Minnu* meaning that which glitters, is a leaf-like tiny gold ornament with a cross at the center. It is a token of the marital covenant. The *minnu* attached by a thread tied by the bridegroom marks the peak of the marriage rite. The tying of the *minnu* around the neck of the bridegroom signifies that the bridegroom takes the bride as his own possession and that they are bound together to become one. Cf. Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, (introduction), xi; 72; Cf. also Fonesca, *Marriage in India*, 186; Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 139-141.

the sacred will of God.²⁸⁹ Here the cross is presented not only as a material object but also as a symbol, which represents Christ himself.

The cross, which the candidate is given, is the “Easter Cross” (*slībō*) and not a crucifix (*zqipō*). This signifies that the candidate is espoused to the risen Christ and that she is called to bear His yoke “which is light and pleasing” (Mt 11:30). By carrying the same with love and dedication, she is bound to surrender to the will of Christ and to radiate the “Easter Joy”, a joy that redeems all sorrows in life. Thus the cross which the virgin carries on her neck always reminds her to testify as herald of Good News to the life of the resurrection.²⁹⁰

The use of thread to tie the cross instead of any metallic chain is also commendable in the Indian cultural milieu. Thread is “spirit” in the Indian tradition. The sun is the center to which all things are attached by the thread of the spirit.²⁹¹ The thread of the cross tied together forms a circular shape and signifies that the whole life of the virgin is centered around Christ the Sun, whose Spirit vivifies everything.²⁹²

3. THE SERVICE FOLLOWING THE PROFESSION OF VOWS

The service that follows the profession of vows and monastic initiation has as its purpose incorporating the newly professed member into the community. Incorporation means insertion. It is an insertion of the newly professed member into an institute, which implies a spiritual, theological and juridical bond between the professed and the institute of religious life.²⁹³ With the incorporation, the candidate attains membership as well as rights and obligations in the community.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 50; *Profession of Vows*, 16.

²⁹⁰ Helena, *Bethany*, 70-71.

²⁹¹ Cf. Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 141. Koikara, *The Sacredness of Marriage*, 8.

²⁹² Cf. Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 141.

²⁹³ Gambari, *Unfolding the Mystery*, 36.

²⁹⁴ Cf. *HRSIC*, art. 94.

The ritual of incorporation of the newly professed involves a rite of thanksgiving, conferring of a cross and lighted candle, giving of the kiss of peace by the members of the community as a sign of reception, and the rite of leading the candidate through a procession to the interior part of the monastery.²⁹⁵

3.1. The Rite of Thanksgiving

The incorporation is seen as an action of God. So the newly professed thanks God quoting the celebrant's words: "Lord God, I praise you for having received me and enrolled me in your paradise".²⁹⁶ Repeating this verse with reverence, the newly professed prostrate before the sanctuary facing the eastern direction. Again the celebrant recites: "Accept my thanks for having received me". Repeating the verses the candidate prostrates facing the west, the north and the south respectively.²⁹⁷

In the Ritual of the Clothing of Monks, and of the Tonsure of Nuns the professed ones makes a direct appeal to the members of the community saying: "*Barek Mor!* My brothers / sisters receive me"; and the community responds: "May the Lord receive you in His mercy."²⁹⁸ Here, it is evident that it is not any human person who receives one to the monastic life, but it is God who accepts and gives one the gift of the monastic charism and the right of belonging to a monastic community.

The candidate gives thanks to God for having been received by God in His paradise.²⁹⁹ The primary meaning of this statement is not the enrollment in paradise but in the monastic community. The concept of monastic life as "God's house" and as "paradise" is very much

²⁹⁵ *Profession of Vows*, 16-17.

²⁹⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 51; *Profession of Vows*, 16.

²⁹⁷ *Takso d' tulbosho*, 318; *Takso d' suporo*, 358; *Profession of Vows*, 16.

²⁹⁸ Acharya, *The Ritual*, 83.

²⁹⁹ *Profession of Vows*, 16

emphasized by the Syrian Fathers in the rite. The term paradise is then applicable to the monastic community.³⁰⁰

3.2. The Shouldering of the Cross

The newly professed is given a wooden cross which had been kept on the altar (*thronos*) three days before the service, and the celebrant announces: "He who wishes to follow me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me."³⁰¹ This is a demand that Jesus had often given to his followers. In the Service of Profession, the same invitation is given to the newly professed who makes her commitment to discipleship. How does the demand to carry the cross and follow Christ make sense in the Liturgy of Profession and to the newly professed candidate? To understand this we need to examine the concept of the cross in the Syrian tradition.

The cross as we understand it is a wooden object with horizontal and vertical parts which was used in earlier times to punish criminals. Because of this, the cross seems to be an instrument of suffering, punishment, and death. But, when Christ was crucified on the cross, it became for those who believed a symbol of the whole salvific mystery of Christ's passion death and resurrection.³⁰²

In the profession ceremony there are many references to the cross. Religious life itself is considered a cross, a joyful yoke which one would carry.³⁰³ When we look at other passages of the ritual, the statement is meaningful. When the prelate interrogates the candidate before her commitment he asks: "Are you determined to love and to bear the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ your whole life through?" While conferring the name, making the tonsure, and sealing the virgin, the

³⁰⁰ The monastic literature often compares monastic life and the monastery to the paradise. See Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism*, 71-72.

³⁰¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 51.

³⁰² Kollapampil, "Cross and Crucifix", 181-182.

³⁰³ *Takso d' tulbosho*, 319-320; *Vrithavagdanam*, 51; *Profession of Vows*, 10;16.

celebrant uses the form of the cross in all these rites. This reminds the candidate of her vocation of identifying with the cross of Christ, because her physical constitution as well as her consecrated life is rooted in the mystery of the cross.³⁰⁴

In the Malankara tradition the cross always indicates not only suffering, and death but also life, glory, and happiness. The cross is understood as a powerful weapon, which provides shelter to all those who look upon it.³⁰⁵ It establishes our churches, sustains our monasteries, glorifies our priests, safeguards the virgins, and subdues the emotional disturbance of our youth.³⁰⁶

From this understanding, we can say that the significance of the cross to the follower of Christ is spiritual rather than material. The demand to the newly professed to carry the cross and to follow Christ is then is nothing but the loving imitation of Christ through monastic living and thus participating in the paschal mystery of Christ.

3.3. The Sealing of the Newly Professed

The prelate seals the candidate with his pastoral cross right after the conferring of the wooden cross saying the following words:

May God sign you with His Holy Sign and mark his seal on you.
Let Him enlist you in the sheepfold of the religious Congregation of the (...), so that you shall praise and glorify our God forever.³⁰⁷

The rite of sealing occurs twice in the Service of Profession. The first is with the naming of the candidate, with which we have already dealt, and the second is with the incorporation of the newly professed. This time, the sealing is to enlist the newly professed virgin in the sheepfold of the religious congregation.

³⁰⁴ Yousif, *Le symbolisme de la croix*, 211.

³⁰⁵ *Šhîmo*, (*šubaho*) 260-261; Kollaparampil, "Cross and Crucifix", 181.

³⁰⁶ *Ma'de'dono*, 213.

³⁰⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 51.

The sealing for enrolling the candidate into the community has a baptismal character. In the Syrian baptismal rite, the *rušmo* is a mark of Christ's ownership which is placed on his spiritual sheep at the entry into the flock of Christ the true Shepherd.³⁰⁸

In the Profession Rite, the sealing is for the enrollment of the newly professed which in fact gives her a new status and a communitarian identity. According to Dionysius, the sacred symbol of sealing makes the consecrated godlike and a sharer in the inheritance and sacred order of godly men.³⁰⁹

3.4. The Bestowing of the Lighted Candle

The giving of the lighted candle to the virgin after the profession of vows is another ritual that goes together with the conferring of the cross.

The rite of giving a lighted candle in the Liturgy of Profession probably comes from the baptismal rite. Yarnold points out that in the modern Rite of the Christian Initiation of the Adults, the giving of a lighted candle forms a part of the ritual. Regarding this practice there are sporadic references in the early writings.³¹⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus mentioned the lights used in the ceremony of baptism in his preaching at Constantinople in 381 and compared the lights to the symbolism of lamps mentioned in the parable of the virgins.³¹¹ In a doubtful work of St. Ambrose there is also a reference to the "shining lights of the neophytes."³¹² So, we presume that the ritual of giving lighted candles in the Liturgy of Profession is taken from the ritual of baptism.

³⁰⁸ Cf. Ephrem, *HEpi*, 3: 1.

³⁰⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 29.

³¹⁰ Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 33-34.

³¹¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio*, 46 (PG 36) 425; Cf. Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 34.

³¹² *De lapsu Virginis*, 5.19 (PL 16, 372) in Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 34.

In the Liturgy of Profession the celebrant, while giving the lighted candle to the virgin says: “O Lord God, may this sister also be seen as vigilant in your service at your glorious coming together with those wise virgins who kept their lamps lit.”³¹³ Here the purpose of giving the lighted candle to the virgin is clear. It is to be vigilant in God’s service. The Gospel highlights the need to be vigilant in God’s service. The Parable of the Virgins (Mt 25: 1-12) and the Parable of the Servants (Lk 12: 35-40) correspond to the theme of vigilance. Here in the rite of conferring the lighted candle the aspect of vigilance in God’s service is clearly mentioned.³¹⁴ What kind of service is implied here?

In one of the *bo’ūtō* of the Service of Profession, Jacob of Serugh describes how the wise virgins become beloved of Christ. According to him, the wise ones safeguard the shining virtues in their bodies and diligently keep their lamps lit to brighten the world.³¹⁵ They do this by safeguarding the light of holiness, following the commandments, keeping purity of heart, being upright, doing the works of justice, and wisdom in spiritual matters.³¹⁶

The candidate who receives the lighted candle is called to “carry the fire”. In the Syrian understanding “fire” is the symbol of the Spirit. The Spirit illumines, purifies and at the same time destroys things. The Spirit also gives light and life.³¹⁷ Ephrem says: “At the incarnation Fire entered Mary’s womb, put on a body and came forth.”³¹⁸ Receiving the Spirit, Mary became a source of life to the world. Hence it is

³¹³ *Profession of Vows*, 17.

³¹⁴ *Profession of Vows*, 17.

³¹⁵ Jacob of Serugh, “A Homily on the Ten Virgins”, 53. *Profession of Vows*, 11.

³¹⁶ Cf. Jacob of Serugh, “Homily on the Ten Virgins, 49-50; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 35-36; *Takso d’suporo*, 334, 351; *The Ritual of the Tonsure*, 4.

³¹⁷ Cf. Yousif, *L’ eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem*, 254-262.

³¹⁸ Ephrem, *HFide* 4:2; also cf. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 38

understandable that the virgin’s “service” is to be filled with the “Fire” which gives life to others.

Karl Rahner comments on the dignity of those who make the “Eternal Yes” through the vows. According to him, the vowed one is a flame placed on the candlestick of the Church not to produce stifling smoke but to shed bright light.³¹⁹

3.5. The Prayer for Perseverance and Eternal Bliss

The monastic incorporation foresees the virgin’s entering into the eternal bridal chamber in heaven. For this, the consecrated one requires perseverance and divine protection. The celebrant makes a petition for this intention:

O merciful Lord God, we pray and entreat you. Grant to these, who make their religious vows, your help to live up to their profession without any duplicity. Guard them lest they look back like the wife of Lot. Allow them to live in you alone, always concentrating their gaze on you.³²⁰

The basic theme is a petition to God the Father that he may safeguard the virgin as His own bride from all temptations and may grant her the blissful eternal bridal chamber.

The prayer denotes Christ’s betrothal to the consecrated virgin which is seen as taking place not only at her baptism but also at the time of her profession.³²¹ Therefore, the candidate who has set out on the road leading to the bridal chamber is forbidden to turn back. The prayer of the celebrant also reminds the candidate to keep Christ her spouse always alive in her heart, to fix the mind always on Him, to gaze always at Him and to enjoy His glory and beauty. In short she is advised to have single-mindedness and a Christ-alone-oriented life.³²²

³¹⁹ Cf. Rahner, *Meditations on the Sacraments*, 99.

³²⁰ *Profession of Vows*, 17.

³²¹ Cf. Murray, “A Marriage for All Eternity”, 65-66.

³²² Cf. Gothoni, *Paradise within Reach*, 69; Paikkatt, *Life, Glory and Salvation*, 290.

The prayer discloses also the underlying tensions of the committed life. It indicates the frailty of human nature and the necessity of divine grace for the consecrated ones. It also warns, that disorientation in the virginal life, will be disastrous as in the case of Lot's wife. As Ephrem states: "If the virgin looks for the bridegroom other than in her Heavenly One, that will be like a dove that went out from the nest in love for a serpent. The result will be disgrace and remorse."³²³

3.6. The Rite of the Holy Communion

The Rite of Holy Communion for the newly professed, though not given separately as a rite of incorporation in the Service of Profession, is here treated as a part of the incorporation of the candidate into the monastic community.

Three reasons impel us to include this theme in this section. First of all it is due to the baptismal foundation of the Rite of Profession. After the baptismal liturgy, the neophytes are solemnly invited to Holy Communion as a sign of their union with Christ, involvement in the Church and their participation with the Christian community of the faithful. St. Ambrose in his Sermons on Baptism beautifully expresses in nuptial language Christ's receiving of the newly baptized in association with their reception of Holy Communion. Quoting the Song of Songs he pictures the baptized saying: "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His lips" (Cant 1:1), that is "Let Christ kiss me." St. Ambrose envisages the reception of Eucharist as a sign of Christ's loving acceptance of the baptized into the Church.³²⁴

Secondly in the Rite of the Consecration of Monks, Pseudo-Dionysius mentions the Communion of the consecrated as participation in the divine mysteries in a unique way. He says:

³²³ Cf. Ephrem, *HVirg* 3:15; Cf. also Paikkatt, *Life, Glory and Salvation*, 290.

³²⁴ Ambrose, *Baptismal Homilies* in Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 142. Yarnold did not indicate the details of the homily.

At the end of all, the priest invites the consecrated person to the supremely divine Communion, showing in a holy way that if the one consecrated would truly arrive at monastic and uniform elevation, he will not merely be contemplative of the holy things pertaining to himself, nor will he stop at communion in the most sacred symbols of the middle order, but with a divine knowledge of the holy things in which he shares, he will attain to participation in the supremely divine Communion in a manner different from the holy people.³²⁵

In *Ad Virginem*³²⁶ Evagrius gives us a quotation from the Cantic of Canticles to present the passionate love of the virgin dedicated to Christ, and her union with Him. He quotes: "The mouth of virgins will kiss their Bridegroom" (Cant 8:1).³²⁷

Thirdly, the Eucharist is not only a sacrifice but it is also a banquet and thus involves a communion and communitarian dimension. It is the sign of the communion with Christ and others.³²⁸ It is the marriage supper of the Lamb, (Rev 19.9) the banquet prepared for those who returned to the Father's house like the prodigal son. The reception of the *Qurbano* witnesses one's membership in the kingdom of God and communion with the followers of Christ.³²⁹ This, in fact, is an effect of incorporation.

In the context of the professed virgin's receiving Holy Communion, we can say that Christ himself in the Eucharist approaches the newly professed virgin and lovingly accepts her as His own. In the words of Ephrem it is because, "in her the pearl (virginity) remained

³²⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 77.

³²⁶ According to Driscoll *Ad Virginem* was an address of Evagrius (346-399) a Father of the Egyptian desert (Nitria and Chellia) in the last decades of the 4th century to a member of Melania's community of Mount Olives. Melania was an ascetic woman renowned for her sanctity who is mentioned in the Lousiac History of Palladius. Cf. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 5:2; 46:1; Chediath, *Pracheena Sanyasa Charithram*, 28; 125.

³²⁷ Evagrius, *Ad Virginium*, 55 in Driscoll, "Spousal Images", 245.

³²⁸ Yousif, *L' eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem*, 317; Panicker, *The Holy Qurbano*, 65.

³²⁹ Yousif, *L' eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem*, 317.

hidden”.³³⁰ With this acceptance, Christ gives the virgin the grace to enter into communion with the heavenly community of the saints and into the Church, the earthly community.

3.7. The Kiss of Peace

The ritual of exchanging the kiss of peace is involved in the rite of incorporation of the newly professed virgin into the community. The kiss of peace in the Liturgy of Profession is not the customary kiss exchanged by friends in public. It is distinct from the kiss of reconciliation exchanged before communion in the Eucharistic liturgy.³³¹ It is to be seen as a remnant of the ritual of baptism in the early Church adopted in the Liturgy of Profession.

It was a practice in the early Church that, when the neophytes came out of the water, all who were present for the rite embraced them, greeted them, kissed them, congratulated and rejoiced with them. This is because they had become the children of God and their comrades and are no more slaves to sin, but are free.³³²

In the Liturgy of Profession the rite of peace involves greeting and congratulating the newly professed. It is significant as a sign of love and acceptance of the co-members of the community.

The custom of exchanging greetings through *kaikasuri*³³³ is a practice which has prevailed in the religious communities of the

³³⁰ Ephrem, *HVirg* 15:4.

³³¹ Cf. Edward, *The Ritual Kiss*, 1-12.

³³² John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Homilies* in Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 162-163. Yarnold did not give the details of the Homily.

³³³ *Kaikasuri* derived from the word *kaikasthuthi* means praise through folded hands. It is an age-old custom of the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala, India. It is the way of exchanging greetings of praise, of joy, love and of peace by placing one's folded palm in another's palm among family members, and among the members of the Church in the liturgical rituals. According to the nature of the ritual, the meaning of the rite changes but its form remains officially the same. In the consecration of bishops and in the ordination of

Malankara Church. Here, *kaikasuri* is a mark of fusion of human souls, and it proclaims their oneness and communion with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Up to now, the rite of giving *kaikasuri* is confined to the members of the congregation only and they do it according to their seniority as members of the congregation.³³⁴

3.8. The Concluding Rites

There are three rites at the conclusion of the Liturgy of Profession: The Rite of Farewell, Procession into “Paradise” (Religious House) and the Blessing and the Concluding Prayers by the Superior General of the Congregation.³³⁵ The celebrant concludes the rites in the church, while the Superior General of the congregation concludes the rite after the procession. The concluding rite in the monastery includes the recitation of the Our Father and the giving of a blessing by the Superior General or her delegate to the newly professed.

priests they are greeted by a holy kiss among themselves and the community usually greets them by kissing their hands.

³³⁴ *Acharangal*, 17. Unless it is a matter of time, we don't see any problem in giving the kiss of peace to all those who are present in the Liturgy of Profession because, as the rite indicates, it is not only to a monastic community that one is consecrated, but it is to the “house of God” that one is being consecrated which includes not only the members of a community but the whole people of God.

³³⁵ Usually the Service of Profession concludes with the rite of communion. So practically, the prelate prays the concluding prayer in favour of the candidate before Holy Communion. After Holy Communion, the bishop blesses and dismisses the assembly. When the whole assembly is being blessed, the newly professed stand according to their seniority in one row while the members of the congregation give them peace and congratulate them. After that they are led in procession to the interior part of the religious house where the rite concludes. This, we think, is for the sake of convenience. We are given the structure in the way it has to be. Instead of making a conclusion before the end of the whole rite we bring the concluding sessions together. For this we make a slight variation from the liturgical text.

3.8.1. The Rite of Farewell

The rite of farewell includes the bestowing of a blessing by the celebrant and the dismissal of the assembly of the faithful.³³⁶ It takes place in the inside of the church. The celebrant, who presides at the profession liturgy, after bidding farewell to the altar within the veiled sanctuary, ascends to the *hayklo* of the church to bless the faithful. The celebrant with his pastoral cross blesses each one who comes in procession one after the other. At this time, the Church praises God with songs proper to the occasion. With this gesture, the celebrant dismisses the assembly. This is the usual practice at the closing of the liturgical celebration in the Malankara tradition.³³⁷

The final blessing and dismissal of the congregation imply the immediacy of the *parousia* and the hope of meeting the believers in the eschatological Kingdom.³³⁸

3.8.2. To “Paradise”

After the rite of farewell, the newly professed are led out of the church by the community of religious to the interior part of the religious house, where a specific place is prepared for the concluding rites. The place to which the newly professed are led can vary.³³⁹

³³⁶ There are two forms of bidding farewell to the assembly. The one which is normally done in the ordinary Eucharistic liturgy of the week-days is, blessing the faithful in the name of the Holy Trinity and bidding farewell to them with the greeting of peace. This is the form of blessing “by word”, and it does not involve conferring a blessing on each participant of the liturgy before their departure. The other form includes the blessing by word and also the giving of a blessing to each participant, using a cross. This is the form of blessing in all solemn liturgical celebration.

³³⁷ Panicker, *Holy Qurbono*, 70

³³⁸ Panicker, *Holy Qurbono*, 70

³³⁹ When the liturgy of profession is celebrated outside the religious house in the parish or some other important place then, the superiors choose a proper place for the concluding rites.

In the procession, the newly professed proceed from the front row and the other members follow them according to their seniority as members of the congregation.³⁴⁰ All carry with them lighted candles, and the newly professed carry with them the wooden cross which they received at the ceremony. All proceed to the interior part of the religious house, singing the following hymn:

The abode of the saints is paradise
 The abode of the just is paradise
 The abode of the holy departed ones is paradise
 The uninterrupted life is paradise
 The eternal Bridal Chamber is paradise
 And the one who inherits the same is blessed!³⁴¹

The procession of the religious members to the monastery lighted is compared to the virgin’s procession to paradise, the Kingdom of God. Moreover, the Hymn of the Syrian Fathers on Paradise which we have quoted above, also helps us to understand the significance of this ritual.

The Hymn on Paradise used in the procession is also seen in the liturgical prayer of the Malankara Church.³⁴² It presents paradise as an “abode” or dwelling place and defines the different perceptions of this abode. It is the abode of the saints, of the just, of the solitaries and of

³⁴⁰ If the temporary and final profession are celebrated on the same day, then for the procession, the junior most newly-professed sisters stand in front of the row and the major superiors stand at the back of the procession. The members, according to their seniority as members of the congregation, follow the newly professed in procession. Carrying lighted candles and the wooden cross (only the newly professed) and singing the hymn, all proceed to a specific place, which is being kept for the assembling of the members. The hymn used in the procession is “The Abode of the Saints is Paradise” Cf. *Acharangal*, 56.

³⁴¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 52; *Profession of Vows*, 17. For a detailed study of the theme of paradise, See Ephrem, *The Hymn on Paradise* ET by Brock (see details in the Bibliography).

³⁴² *Prarthanakramam*, 75.

the holy departed ones; hence, it is a sacred place of the holy ones. It is also described as a state of uninterrupted life. In that way, it can be compared to the monastic or the single-minded life. It is also the eternal bridal chamber; hence, the state of union with Christ.³⁴³ Combining all these aspects with regard to our topic, we can say that monastic life is understood as representing both primordial and the eschatological state at the end of time, for it has now also become the abode of the righteous.³⁴⁴

3.8.3. The Prayer of the Community

When the procession comes to the meeting place, all stand prayerfully in silence while the Superior General initiates the Lord's Prayer, and the assembly recites it together. When the prayer ends, the newly professed one approaches the Superior to receive a blessing from her. The Superior blesses her by giving her *Kaikasuri* in the name of God.³⁴⁵

This concluding session is a private ritual of the religious community. Only the religious and not the laity participate in this function. All members who were present in the Liturgy of Profession also take part in this ritual as a gesture of their concern and love for the new members of the monastic community. The superior, as the head of the community, blesses the newly professed virgin and accepts her into the community in the name of all the members. When the superior accepts the virgin, she also entrusts her to the love and to the providence of God the Father. The Lord's Prayer (*Abūn d'bašmāyo*) manifests this. The Liturgy of Profession ends with this concluding prayer.

³⁴³ The paradisaical aspects, though not in a sequence, are mentioned in the *Hymn of Paradise*. In the second strophe we sing: "Blessed is he for whom paradise yearns." See Ephrem, *HParad* 2:1. The Hymn is unique in the service of profession in the Malankara Church and is used for the procession of the newly professed to the monastery. Cf. *Acharangal*, 17.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian*, 50

³⁴⁵ *Acharangal*, 17.

CONCLUSION

We have been analyzing the Liturgy of Monastic Profession in the Malankara Church by examining the specific services of the profession liturgy, namely the Service Prior to the Profession of Vows, the Service of the Profession of Vows, and the Service Following the Profession of Vows.

The Service Prior to the Profession analyzed in the first part is the receiving of the candidate to profession. We did not find a rite parallel to the rite of receiving in any other Eastern or Western monastic tradition, which prompts us to conclude, that the Service of Receiving is unique in the Malankara Liturgy of Monastic Profession.

The prayers, hymns, gospel images, and bible lessons portray the love of God, the primordial blissful state of man, his fall, conversion and finally his return to God. God is depicted in the Service as a loving Father who receives his child who has strayed into His house and bestows upon him the privilege to be with Him. The Service highlights conversion as a means to receive God's mercy, and it is the key to enter into the house of God.

The Service of the Profession of Vows and the Rites of Monastic Initiation constitute the subject matter of the second part. The Service of the Profession of Vows which we have studied in its entirety, highlights the theology of discipleship and the ascetic spirituality of the Syrian tradition. Analysis of the Service shows that the Profession Liturgy is not only a ritual to profess three vows, as a loving response of man to God, but it is also a liturgy of monastic consecration. This service in a new and experiential way deepens the baptismal consecration of the candidate and at the same time confers upon the professed candidate the monastic charism of single-heartedness (*iḥīdōyūtō*) for the service of God. The monastic habit signifies the newly-gained life and status of the professed candidate.

The rites following the profession of vows are analyzed in the third part. With the profession of vows and the receiving of the monastic charism, the one who enters the monastic cōmūnīy is accepted and incorporated into the life and activities of the community with proper gestures and ceremonies. The rites involved in this part communicate that it is God who calls and separates one for His service, and the one who has responded to his call has to fulfill it by a life of union with God and communion with others in this life.

The initiatory rites also induce the candidate to meditate upon the salvific actions of God in her life. The Church through her liturgy reveals that Christ her Bridegroom has made a nuptial covenant with the candidate as He did with the Church His spouse. And to this love the newly professed has to respond freely by acts of love through ascetic ways. This we see in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

THE MYSTICAL THEMES IN THE SERVICE OF PROFESSION

INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter we have studied the Liturgy of Profession in the Malankara Catholic Church. Analyzing the prayers, liturgy of the Word, and rituals, we found the Liturgy of Profession as the communication of the love of God towards man, which invites him to a total conversion and divine union. Thus the whole liturgy becomes a manifestation of God's infinite love towards man.

Since the Liturgy of Profession is a divine communication of God's love, there are manifold themes that man cannot perceive except through faith. This does not mean that this divine communication is thoroughly secret, inexplicable or hidden, or that it is revealed to only a few. Rather, the whole liturgy communicates and also pre-figures divine realities that pertain to the actual and eschatological life of man and thus draws the participants to delve into a divine experience of ineffable spiritual joy. This is what we mean by the study of the "mystical themes" in the rite. Accordingly, we see three prominent themes that the Liturgy of Profession communicates to the faithful. They are: 1) Monastic profession: a mystery; 2) Liturgy of Profession: witnesses to the nuptial mystery; and 3) the Professed virgin: the bride of Christ. The typology of Christ and the Church as prototype of Christian husband and wife is given as an excursus at the end of the chapter to better illuminate the nuptial content of the profession liturgy.

1. MONASTIC PROFESSION: A MYSTERY

Monastic Profession has been considered a mystery from early times. In order to understand this concept we need to know what the term "mystery" designates.

1.1. The Concept of Mystery (*Rōzō*) in the Syro-Antiochene Tradition

The Greek word *mysterion* or its Syriac correspondent *rōzō* (ܪܙܐ) from the Persian root *rz* (رز) designates secret or hidden action. In its passive form, the word *mystikos* means to be mystically shown forth. The term “mystical” is a qualifier deriving from the verb *myō* meaning, “to close” (especially the eyes). In short, these terms, either ‘mystery’ or ‘mystical’, imply something hidden or secret.¹

The term ‘mystery’ was first used in early pre-Christian circles in connection with the Hellenistic mystery cults to denote the secret ritual actions of the cults, which were utterly forbidden to reveal to any uninitiated person.²

In Christian sphere this term, though first used to denote the hidden depths of meaning in the scriptures, is now used widely not only to signify the inner experience of the individual Christian, but also to designate the saving acts of God in Christ which even extend to the hidden yet transformative encounter with Christ in the sacred action of worship in which the redemptive work of God is made present in a sacred rite.³ We understand the Liturgy of Profession in this dimension since it discloses through rites and symbols the ineffable and unfathomable depths of God’s love which races to rescue the lost sheep and hurries to welcome and embrace the prodigal son.⁴ In this encounter with divine reality, the one who consecrates and the Christian community move together into a transformative experience which gives ineffable spiritual joy. In this chapter, our main intention is to bring out the mystic character

¹ For a detailed understanding of the term mystery refer to Fiedler, “Mysterion” in the *EDNT*, 446-449; Egan, *Christian Mysticism*, 1-3.

² Egan, *Christian Mysticism*, 3-7.

³ Cf. Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, 141-142.

⁴ McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 43.

of the Liturgy of Profession through a study of its Trinitarian, ecclesial and anthropological dimensions.

The concept of monastic profession as a *mysterion* in terms of a grace-producing action can be traced back to the time of Pachomius.⁵ Later, Pseudo-Dionysius affirmed this concept in his treatise *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and included the rite of monastic profession as a mystery along with the mysteries of baptism, eucharist and confirmation.⁶ Following the line of Dionysius, the concept of the monastic state as a *mysterion* had been firmly established by the time of Theodore the Studite (+826). According to Theodore, one cannot doubt that monastic profession is a true *mysterion* along with baptism and the other mysteries.⁷

In view of the renunciations, resolutions and entrance to a new life, and thanks to a wider understanding of the horizon of sacrament or *mystery*, monastic profession was and is, along with baptism, considered a mystery by many authors in early and modern times.⁸

In the Eastern Church, especially in the Syrian Churches, the term mystery *rāza* or *rozo* designates those divine interferences whose meaning can be fathomed only by those who are under the guidance of God’s Spirit. Thus, it has a more extended meaning than in the Western Church, which limits the term only to the seven sacraments.⁹ However, in the Liturgy of Profession in the West Syrian Churches one cannot

⁵ Rothenhäusler, “Die Anfänge”, 21-28.

⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 6:3.

⁷ Theodore the Studite, *Epistle* 135 (PG 99) 1524 B.

⁸ A significant number of authors since the Second Vatican Council have suggested that religious life can or should be understood as a sacrament. Various writings on the topic have been published during these years. For example, Tillard, “In the Wake of Sacramental Life”, 61-81; Meyer, “Is Religious Life a Sacrament? 1100-20 and so on. Cf. Foley, *Rites of Religious Profession*, 33-37.

⁹ Luke, “The Technical Term Raza”, 11-12.

find the terms *qudōšō* or *rōzō* to present the Liturgy of Profession as a *sacramentum* or *mysterion*.¹⁰ But the Church's prayers are imbued with the overtone that monastic profession is a mystery or *rōzō* due to its various features.

1.1.1. A Divine Involvement and A Separation

The Church's continuous consciousness of evangelical life as "a way of life practised personally by Jesus and proposed by Him to his disciples" as well as a gift of the Triune God to the Church is from the Sacred Scripture and divine tradition.¹¹ The consciousness that God is the source of the divine call and of monastic consecration is expressed in the prayers of the Service.

At the very beginning of the Service the Church prays: "O holy God, {...} receive these your servants who have approached you and are set apart to pursue your holiness; grant them grace for the religious life".¹² The term "to set apart" used in both noun and verb forms, occurs many times in the prayers of the Church, affirming that God is the source of consecrated life. According to John Paul II, "the divine consecratory action is not brought about only by the Holy Spirit or indiscriminately by any of the Divine Persons, but the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all active in their distinctive roles."¹³ This Trinitarian involvement is the basic ground upon which consecrated persons can build deepening responses of recognition and appreciation of the Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁴

¹⁰ We find neither the term *qudōšō* nor its equivalents in the Rite of Profession of the West Syrian Churches at all.

¹¹ *LG*, no. 43-44.

¹² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 1; *Profession of Vows*, 1; 8.

¹³ John Paul II, *VC*, no. 21.

¹⁴ Cf. Conner, "Vita Consecrata: An Ultimate Theology", 251.

1.1.2. Role of the Father

The Service holds the view that God the Father, Yahweh, the God of our Fathers, and the Father of Jesus Christ and our Father, is the source and goal of consecrated life and the one who consecrates those dedicated to follow Christ.¹⁵ God the Father acts invisibly in the liturgy of consecration and is often invoked solemnly by the minister and the faithful. For addressing Him, the Church in her prayers uses different titles which in fact reveal His image and role in the profession liturgy.

1.1.2.1. Titles Attributed to the Father

God is neither an object of knowledge nor can He be described by names or titles. However, He willed to be known to human beings through names and titles. According to Ephrem: "He put on our names that we may put on His names. This divine descent is for human ascent."¹⁶ Using various names and titles for God does not imply a claim to describe Him aptly nor is it a way to grasp Him fully with our limited intellect, but it is a way of knowing Him, being seized by wonder and love.¹⁷ In short, the titles used for addressing God the Father are intended to uplift the believer through perceptible and material image to conceptual and immaterial truths towards a contemplative transcendental movement of knowing God, who is bound in mystery.¹⁸ In the liturgical celebration, God the Father is invoked using the titles: Lord God, the Holy One, and Almighty God.

¹⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 4; Cf. John Paul II, *VC*, no.14.

¹⁶ Cf. Ephrem, *HFide* 62:2; *HEccl* 47: 8-15. For this quotation, see Koonammakkal, "Divine Names and Theological language", 318.

¹⁷ Cf. Koonammakkal, "Divine Names and Theological language", 318-319.

¹⁸ Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 54-56; See also Rorem, "The Uplifting Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius", 133-134.

a) O Lord God

The title Lord, in Greek *kyrios*, in Hebrew *adonai*, and in Syriac *mōryō* is the common name of Yahweh in the Old Testament.¹⁹ Though in the secular context the term denotes owner, master and lord, in the religious context it has a deep divine and cultic significance.

In the liturgy, the celebrant and the candidate, through different prayers, address God as “Lord” (ܡܘܪܝܐ, *mōryō*), “My Lord” (ܡܘܪܝܐ, *mōry*), and “Our Lord” (ܡܘܪܐܢ, *mōrān*) which signify the relation of God to His people and the confidence they place in Him (Am 7:2; Dt 9:26; Ps 140:8).²⁰ The title also designates the sovereignty of God over creation, over the chosen ones and also over each individual soul consecrated to Him.²¹

God is addressed as “Lord God” in almost all the prayers and hymns of the Liturgy of Profession. Hence, it is unclear whether the title denotes the Father, the Son, or the Spirit. But the content of most of the prayers suggests that the Church uses the title to refer to God the Father. For example, in the *bo'ūtō* of Jacob, the Church prays: “Lord God, we call upon you, come to our aid; hear our prayers and shower grace on our souls. O Lord God of the vigilant angels, hear our prayers and shower your grace on our souls. {...} Lord, grant us pure hearts and grant us from your perfection the wisdom of your salvation. We praise and glorify you, O Master of life and Father of the world.”²²

God the Father is presented as the one who calls and consecrates the virgin through His minister. Therefore, the naming, the sealing, the

¹⁹ Cf. Murphy, “Lord”, 988-989. See also Kakkanatt, *Christological Catechesis*, 112.

²⁰ Cf. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 301-302; *Profession of Vows*, 6-8.

²¹ Ternant, “Lord”, 282-283.

²² *Profession of Vows*, 7-9

tonsuring, and the investment are done primarily in His name, which is associated also with the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.²³

b) The Holy One

God the Father is most solemnly addressed in the doxologies, *sedre* and other prayers as the Holy One (*qadišō*). In the Old Testament, Yahweh is the Holy One of Israel (Is 43:3). God revealed Himself to Hosea the prophet saying: “I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst (Hos 11:9).

It is from the Semitic root *qdš* (קדש) meaning “to cut off”, and “to separate” that the word “Holy One” (*qadišō*) comes.²⁴ This title reveals God’s divinity and His transcendence. The title “holy one” also designates a man set apart for the service of God. But far from being reduced to separation, the divine holiness includes all the riches and life, the power and goodness that God the Father desires to share with human beings.²⁵

The prayers portray God the Father, the Holy one of Israel, as the source of holiness. God is by nature holy and the One who loves holiness and holy people. He wishes to share holiness with those who draw near (ܩܪܒܐ *qreb*) to Him. He enables them to lead a holy life, by granting them wisdom in spiritual matters, grace to live in uprightness, purity of heart, doing works of justice.²⁶ So in the Liturgy of Profession the whole Church acknowledges God the Father as the Holy One and is invoked to set apart the virgin for monastic life to pursue His holiness by purifying her from all her sins and transgressions.²⁷

²³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 9; 46; 51; *Profession of Vows*, 8; 14; 15.

²⁴ Valux, “Holy”, 207.

²⁵ Valux, “Holy”, 208.

²⁶ *Takso D’ tulbosho*, 254 -255; Cf. *Profession of Vows*, 8.

²⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 5; *Profession of Vows*, 10.

c) Almighty God

In the Liturgy of Profession the Church calls upon God, “the Almighty.” Through this title the wonderful works of God in creation and in the salvation of humanity are remembered and recalled. One of the prayers says:

Almighty God, you liberated us from the bondage of sin by sending your only-begotten Son whom the angels worship in heaven. You ordered us to live an angelic life on earth doing works of justice. Bless these your servants with your spiritual and heavenly benediction, for you have chosen them to lead a holy life.²⁸

Here the prayer is addressed to the Almighty Father. He is described as the One who sends His Son to liberate mankind, the One who ordered man to live like angels doing works of justice and the One who has chosen the candidate to lead a holy life. The Church thus presents the Father as a mighty God who liberates and elevates not only all humanity but also the individuals who have drawn towards Him.

1.1.2.2. The Father Draws the Candidate Near to Him

In the Liturgy of Profession, God the Father is portrayed as the one who draws near (*qreb*) those persons whom He desires to be with Him. In the prayers, we often see God as the “One who opens the door day and night” the “One who welcomes, who receives.” These titles designate the nature of God the Father as the One who draws near to His children.²⁹ In the tonsuring ceremony, we hear the candidate saying: “I wish to draw near to God, O Lord my refuge” (Ps 73:28).³⁰

In the Gospel of St. John we hear Jesus saying: “No one can come to me unless my Father draws Him” (Jn 6:44). In the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, God the Father is characterized as the

²⁸ *Profession of Vows*, 8.

²⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 12-17; *Profession of Vows*, 4-7

³⁰ *Profession of Vows*, 14.

one who draws everyone to Him.³¹ Comprehending these aspects we can say that the candidate’s desire to draw near to God is not of her own initiative but is that of the Father. Thus, we see God the Father as the initiator attracting the human person to Him for a life of consecration.

1.1.2.3. The Father Renders the Candidate “A Blessed One of God”

In the Liturgy of Profession the Church invokes God the Father, the source of every blessing, to shower His blessing upon the candidate for a dedicated life. Receiving the blessing from God, the Church through her minister imparts the blessing of God to the candidate in the name of the Father at different moments of her consecration. This can be seen as an offshoot of the Aaronic blessing of the Old Testament in which the power to bless the Israelite community or individuals is reserved to the priest, who blesses them in the name of God.³² In St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians we read:

Blessed be He, *Aloho*, the Father of our Lord *Yeshu Meshiho*, who hath blessed us with all blessings of the Spirit in heaven, in the *Meshiho*; as He before elected us in Him, from before the foundation of the world, that we should be saints, without blemish before Him, and in love pre-designated unto Himself, and constituted as children in *Yeshu Meshiho* (Eph 1:3-6).³³

Blessing, (بركاثون *burkthō*) which comes from the root *brk* is probably related to the words “knee bent in adoration” as well as to the vital force of the genital organs, and denotes all forms of words and gifts which always make life gush forth.³⁴ The blessing is seen primarily as a divine salvific action of God the Father or creator (*Borūyō*) the source of life. It is bestowed upon those whom He wills through words of blessings or through symbolic acts.

³¹ John Paul II, *VC*, no. 17.

³² Harrelson, “Blessings and Cursings”, 446-447.

³³ Cf. Peshitta Version of the Bible.

³⁴ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Dictionary*, 55-56; Guillet, “Blessing”, 35-36

In the Book of Genesis we see that God blessed all living beings, especially Adam and Eve, that they might live and be fruitful. But their sin brought a curse upon the ground and punishment upon the human race. With Abraham, however, the divine blessing once again crosses the threshold of human history, which had been moving toward the valley of death. Abraham embraced the divine blessing in faith, redirected it towards life, its very source, and thus became for God an instrument to inaugurate His salvation.³⁵

God grants His blessing to each and all of His creation, including man. This in fact is His salvific action. In the Syrian milieu *toubānē* was the technical term used to represent the covenanters and monks as well.³⁶ According to Aphrahat, the term blessed ones (*tubāne*) indicates those who follow Christ in the spirit of the beatitudes (Mt 5:3-11).³⁷ In the Liturgy of Profession, God bestows His blessings and graces on all the participants but in a special way on the virgin who is consecrated by His choice and will.³⁸

To bless (*bārek*) the individual in the consecratory rite is God's action, and this act is not only seen as a sign of divine favour, but as the divine will of the Father to make the chosen one "a blessed one" (ܒܪܝܚܐ *brikhō*).³⁹

1.1.3. Role of Christ

Christ, who has said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24), is the main protagonist of monastic consecration. The candidate who desires this discipleship with the pure intention of loving the Lord and glorifying Him through dedicated service is being received and consecrated by

³⁵ Cf. CCC, no. 1080.

³⁶ Cf. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 168.

³⁷ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes* VI: 4 (PS I, 261).

³⁸ Cf. *Profession of Vows*, 7.

³⁹ Cf. Guillet, "Blessing", 38.

Christ.⁴⁰ Christ's presence in the Liturgy of Profession and His role are acknowledged by the candidate and the assembly in various ways.

1.1.3.1. Titles Attributed to Christ

Syriac Christianity shows a uniquely abundant proliferation of names and epithets applied to Christ, especially in its liturgical prayers. Though they are inadequate to reveal him properly, they nevertheless communicate his loving condescension and redemption of man as is stated in the Acts of Thomas: "It is for our sake thou wast named with names."⁴¹ Ephrem sings:

The Lord, the Merciful One, hence he put on our names
Humbled himself by images, even to the mustard –seed
He gave us His names and accepted our names from us.
His name made us great while our name made him small.
Happy is he who has spread your good Name over his own
And has made his names beautiful through yours!⁴²

In the Service of Profession, Christ is addressed as Divine Physician and Shepherd. We will discuss these titles demonstrating Christ's salvific action, which extends not only to humanity as a whole, but also to individuals.

a) Divine Physician (*Ōsyō*)

In the Liturgy of Profession, Christ is presented as the "Divine Physician" (*Ōsyō*). The Gospels present the image of Christ as physician in various contexts (cf. Mk 2:17; Lk 4:23). This is because of the healing power and the healing activity of Christ. Christ is physician on two levels. He gives both physical healing and spiritual healing and thus surpasses the level of a physician in the natural order, who only heals a

⁴⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 9; *Profession of Vows*, 3.

⁴¹ AJT 5: 48 ; Murray, *Symbols*, 161.

⁴² Ephrem, *HFide* 5: 6-7.

person physically. Christ heals both the body and the soul. That is why he is called the “Divine Physician”.⁴³

“Physician (ܕܫܝܘܐ *ōsyō*) and “Medicine of life” (ܫܘܒܗܘܢܐ *sāmo d-hayye*) are favourite titles used for Christ in the Syriac literature. Other than the Gospel, it is from the Addai’s Legend concerning the coming of Christianity to Edessa (c. 4th century AD) that these titles are widespread in the Syriac world.⁴⁴ St. Ephrem uses these titles very often.⁴⁵ Through this imagery, Ephrem praises the mercy of God, who heals all those who approach Him with faith. He cures them not surgically or with scientific medicines but with His words of gentle mercy and grace, the divine medicine. As the Divine Physician, Christ treats the physically and spiritually sick by giving His medicine of kindness and justice (CH 51,1).⁴⁶ Through a hymn the candidate praises Christ the Physician.

Behold my distress O Lord, for I have made you angry by committing sins of various kinds and there is no refuge for me. I approached several physicians and they tried all kinds of medicine on me. But there is no improvement in my condition and now my state is hopeless. But, O Good Physician, I heard of you that those who approach you should certainly be cured. Absolve all my sins on account of the love of your Father and the prayers of your mother.⁴⁷

⁴³ Murray, *Symbols*, 199-203.

⁴⁴ According to the legend, Addai, the king of Edessa, sent a letter through H’nan his *tabularius* (scribal official) to Jesus inviting Him to Edessa. In this letter Addai addresses Jesus as Physician who heals not with herbs but with His words the blind, the dumb, the crippled, the leper, those possessed by evil spirits and so on. Titles such as physician (*ōsyō*) good physician (*ōsyō tobo*) are employed in this letter. For the text, see Healey, *First Studies in Syriac*, 118.

⁴⁵ Murray, *Symbols*, 199-203; Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 25-26. Ephrem uses the term *sāmo d-hayye* to denote Christ and the Eucharist. Cf. Yousif, *L’eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem*, 317-319.

⁴⁶ Cf. Paikkatt, *Life glory and Salvation*, 154.

⁴⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 15-16; *Profession of Vows*, 5.

Here Christ is presented as the “Good Physician” (ܕܫܝܘܐ ܬܘܒܘ *ōsyō tobo*) who cures the internal wounds (sins) of man. Christ cured sinners and even the first encounter with Him caused the remission of sins and *metanoia* in Zaccheus (Lk 19: 1-10; *HArm* 25, 40-49). Christ is the hope of sinners (*SDN* 43; 46). We also see an allusion to the cure of the woman with the issue of blood in the Gospel of Mark (Mk 5:25-34). Realizing that those who approached Christ are cured, the virgin approaches Him with confidence.

The virgin acknowledges that Christ is above all that ordinary physicians and only in Him will she find hope and salvation. Only before Christ does one find unity of mind and peace of heart and thus integrate the whole person, who is divided by sin.⁴⁸

b) Christ the Good Shepherd

“Christ the Good Shepherd” is a very powerful title used in the liturgical prayers of the Service of Profession. In the prayers of the receiving ceremony especially, the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd and the virgin as the sheep is very well depicted. Thus we see how the Service portrays Christ as the Good Shepherd.

The shepherd figure is exceedingly frequent in the Bible as well as in the Mesopotamian literature. The Hebrew word *roeh*, translated as “shepherd”, occurs more than 160 times in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁹ In the Scripture God and the king are both addressed as “shepherd” of the people. The Old Testament presents Yahweh as the Good Shepherd (Ps 23). The prophets Isaiah, Micah and Ezekiel also bring out the image of God as the Good Shepherd (Is 63:11f; Micah 5:2-4; Ezek 34:23ff).

The shepherd image is a very familiar image through which God manifests His love and concern for the people of the Old Testament.

⁴⁸ Cf. Paikkatt, *Life glory and Salvation*, 154

⁴⁹ Chempakassery, “Church the Sheepfold”, 37.

The Good Shepherd is always loving and shows compassion to the sheep. The joy is that God the Shepherd fills the people with delight and consolation (Ps 23). The deliverance of Yahweh is understood in terms of the care of the shepherd for the sheep (Is 40:11).

The New Testament, especially St. John, presents Christ as the Good Shepherd in association with the sheep (Jn 10:15; 21:15-17). John uses sheep and shepherd epithets for Jesus in various contexts in relation to His life-giving mission and pastoral role. Very common among them are lamb (*amnos*) sheep (*probaton*), and shepherd (*poimen*). Christ as “Good Shepherd” not only specifies the salvific function of Christ but also indicates a correlative relationship of the Shepherd to the flock.⁵⁰ Christ is also called the lamb (ܐܘܢܝܡܝܡ *imro*), which specifies Christ’s sacrificial function in the redemption of humanity. Thus, mutual knowledge, an intimate personal relationship and a sacrificial aspect are veiled in these intimations.⁵¹

The Syrian Fathers also praise Christ the Shepherd in their writings. St. Ephrem in the Hymn of Nativity sings: “Blessed is the shepherd who became the sheep for our absolution.”⁵² Christ is the chief Shepherd (ܪܒܐܘܬܘܬܝܐ *rab ro’awoto*) of the flock and is the door to the sheepfold (*dayrō*) (cf. Jn 10:1). The term *dayrō* later became the designation for Syrian monasteries.⁵³

In the Liturgy of Profession the titles of Christ mentioned to signify His life giving and pastoral role are “Shepherd” (ܪܘܥܝܢܐ *rō’yō*); and “Good Shepherd” (ܪܘܥܝܢܐ ܬܘܒܘܐ *rō’yō tōbo*).⁵⁴ At the very outset of the Service the virgin prays to Christ the Good Shepherd, to seek

⁵⁰ Murray, *Symbols*, 187

⁵¹ Chempakassery, “Church the Sheepfold”, 36-38.

⁵² Ephrem, *HNat* III, 15: 1.

⁵³ Murray, *Symbols*, 187.

⁵⁴ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 13; 17.

and bring her to the true sheepfold.⁵⁵ The prayers are given in the light of the Gospel parable of Christ’s bringing back the stray sheep. Christ is presented as the Good Shepherd who guides, leads, watches and saves the sheep by giving His own life.⁵⁶ The sheep- shepherd image of the Antiochene liturgy is basically a Johannine imagery through which the Church presents Christ as the lamb who through His ministry became a shepherd.

The shepherd image of Christ encourages the candidate to an utter dependence on and a total dedication to Christ the Good Shepherd. The Charfet edition of the Rite of Profession says: “True Shepherd and Way and Door and Sheepfold, we invoke Thee for the search of our lost state.”⁵⁷ The prayers reveal the image of Christ not only as True Shepherd, but also as the Way, the Door and the Sheepfold. This reveals the whole picture of the role of Christ as the Good Shepherd in the mystery of salvation.

1.1.3.2. Christ is Present in the Liturgy of Profession

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, to accomplish so great a work, the dispensation or communication of His work of salvation, “Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations.”⁵⁸ In the Liturgy of Profession, Christ is present in the Eucharistic sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Word, in the minister, in the prayers and hymns of the Church, for His “promised presence” is where two or three are gathered together in His name.⁵⁹ Unfolding the paternal image of God, Christ made His presence most distinct.

⁵⁵ *Profession of Vows*, 4 -5.

⁵⁶ *Profession of Vows*, 4 -6; Cf. also Kakkanatt, *Christological Catechesis*, 110-111.

⁵⁷ *Takso d’ suporo*, 329.

⁵⁸ CCC, no. 1088.

⁵⁹ CCC, no. 1088.

1.1.3.3. Christ Unfolds the Mystery of Paternity

The role of Christ in the Service of Profession is primarily in unfolding the mystery of paternity. Human beings cannot investigate God the Father nor can He be comprehended by angels. But God willed to be known through Jesus Christ, who knows the Father and reveals Him.⁶⁰

Jesus' union with the Father, the source and summit of His saving mission, appears in His own words. Jesus says: "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30). "To do the will of Father is my food" (Jn 4:34). This testimony of oneness is from Christ's intimate *abba* experience, for there exists no duality in them but only unity.⁶¹

In His turning towards sinners, the godless, and the lost, Jesus revealed the image of the Father. In the Gospel of Mathew we read: "All things are delivered to me from my Father"; and "no man knoweth, except the Son and he (to) whom the Son pleaseth to reveal (Him)" (Mt 11:27). It is Jesus Himself and Jesus alone who shows us who the Father is. It is through Jesus, that is, from what he does and how he does it, that God the Father is revealed to all people. According to Russell, for creatures the Son stands in the strictest sense *in loco parentis*.⁶²

The Service of Profession presents Christ not merely as a protagonist of consecration but as a loving Father who calls the candidate for His service and receives her.⁶³ Christ is portrayed as the Father who cares and listens with compassion to the failings of the candidate. He is the Father who waits at the "door of mercy," opens the door and receives the candidate. He is the One who names the candidate, seals

⁶⁰ Russell, "The Son as the Revealer", 135-138.

⁶¹ Russell, "The Son as the Revealer", 136-138

⁶² Russell, "The Son as the Revealer", 138.

⁶³ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17-21.

and accepts her, clothes her in the robe of glory and enables her to partake of His own body and blood.⁶⁴ Moreover, through the liturgy of the Word and prayers of the Church Christ bestows His blessing, grace, trust, love, compassion, joy, perseverance and hope upon the virgin and assists her and the assembly of the faithful to experience the loving Father of Jesus Christ.⁶⁵

The virgin's paternal experience of God is not to be kept to herself but to be transmitted to others in a spiritually generative order. She thus reveals the Father in heaven, "who causeth His sun to arise on the good and the evil and who sendeth showers on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:45).⁶⁶

1.1.3.4. Christ Initiates the Candidate into His Nuptial Mystery

In the Liturgy of Profession Christ unveils the nuptial-paschal mystery to the candidate and to the faithful. The mystery of the betrothal of the Church through the cross occupies a central theme of the celebration.⁶⁷ Christ unfolds these mysteries in a pedagogical way through the Word of God, liturgical prayers, images and symbolic actions. Christ's invitation to follow Him carrying one's own cross is manifested in the rite of naming, sealing, tonsuring, and conferring of the cross. The virgin's response to the invitation of Christ is expressed in the signing of the vow document with a cruciform signature.⁶⁸ Through these actions, Christ invites the virgin to conform to Him as spouse through a dedication of her body, soul and spirit.

⁶⁴ *Profession of Vows*, 4 -9; 14 -15.

⁶⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17-21; *Profession of Vows*, 8-11.

⁶⁶ Ibarondo "Trinità", 1758-1759.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 29.

⁶⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 29; 45-50.

1.1.4. The Role of the Holy Spirit

The term “Spirit” (*ruho*) is related to the Hebrew word *ruah* and means primarily “breath”, “air”, “wind” etc.⁶⁹ Jesus uses the image of the wind to suggest to Nicodemus the transcendent newness of him who is personally God’s breath, the divine Spirit (Jn 3:1-4). “Holy Spirit” is the proper name of the third person of the Trinity. The Church receives this name from Christ and professes it whenever she offers praise to the Godhead.

In the Liturgy of Profession the image and the role of the Spirit is distinguished in many different ways. To indicate this, the Church in her prayers uses various titles.

1.1.4.1. Titles of the Holy Spirit

When Jesus promises and proclaims the coming of the Holy Spirit, He calls the Spirit the “Paraclete”, meaning “he who is called to one’s side,” *ad-vocatus* (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Christ also called the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of Truth” (Jn 16:13).

St. Paul uses titles such as the Spirit of Promise (Gal 3:14; Eph 1:13), the Spirit of Adoption (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9), the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor 3:17), and the Spirit of God (Rom 8:9, I Cor 6:11; 7:40). St. Peter refers to the Spirit as the Spirit of Glory (I Pt 4:14).⁷⁰

In the Liturgy of Profession, we see the titles *ruho*, the Spirit of sanctification, the Spirit of purification, the Spirit of knowledge and wisdom, the Spirit of strength and fortification, the remitter of sins, the Spirit of conversion, and the Spirit of divine virtues.⁷¹ Compared to the

⁶⁹ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 533; Cf. CCC, no. 691.

⁷⁰ Cf. CCC, no. 691-692.

⁷¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 4 -13.

common titles, these titles of the Spirit are more contextual and proper to the actions the Spirit performs.

1.1.4.2. The Life-giving Principle

Holy Spirit is the pledge of our participation in the divine life. St. Paul says: “It is God who has set His seal upon us, and as the pledge of what is to come, has given the Spirit to dwell in our hearts” (2 Co 1:22).

The life-giving action of the Spirit, though is mentioned all throughout the celebration implicitly rather than explicitly to present the Spirit as the life-giver. In the very outset of the rite the virgin asks God for the “life giving water” (Jn 4:10), that is, the life-giving Spirit which Jesus offered to his followers.⁷² In John we read: “If any one thirst let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scriptures has said, from his belly shall flow rivers of water” (Jn 7:37-38). The evangelist confirms that Jesus is speaking of the Spirit whom his believers are to receive (Jn 7:38). So as to receive the life-giving Spirit, the celebrant prays:

O Lord, gentle and merciful, you are pleased with the life of every creature You are the one who dwells in every one, the one who showers your grace on everything. You are merciful to all, the blessed one who blesses everyone. Lord, have pity on these servants and guard them standing with their necks bent to carry your joyful yoke of the religious life.⁷³

The prayers underline the fact that the Holy Spirit, who is gentle and merciful, the One who dwells in the believer, is the source of life. The life here implied is the divine life *hayye*, which the Holy Spirit offers to the believer. Only when one becomes aware of the indwelling of the

⁷² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 12; *Profession of Vows*, 4. Here we can assume that the candidate asks for the Spirit of God to give her the gift of monastic life for which she thirsts.

⁷³ *Profession of Vows*, 10.

life-giving Spirit and his actions within him, will he then be able to lead an exalted life.⁷⁴

The celebrant through an exhortation reveals to the virgin the action of the Spirit in her life. He says: “Dearly beloved of the Lord, it is the Holy Spirit who has put this desire (for religious life) in you and has called you to this state of life. May God grant to you the necessary graces and lead you lovingly throughout your life.”⁷⁵ The celebrant recalls also that it is the Spirit who teaches the virgin to fulfill the will of God. So for the virgin (s) he prays: “Teach them to fulfill your will; grant them the pledge of your Holy Spirit.”⁷⁶

The virgin, who is aware of the Spirit’s life-giving action also responds explicitly to His working. While making the vows she says: “By the grace of the Holy Spirit {...}, I dedicate myself totally to the Congregation, so that by serving God and His Church, I shall reach the perfection of charity.”⁷⁷ Therefore, we can say that the Spirit of God who works in the heart of the religious renders her a new life ontologically and existentially.

1.1.4.3. The Spirit of Purification and Sanctification

Purification denotes the action by which a person or an object is made pure from a state of impurity.⁷⁸ In Christian understanding it is primarily an action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit purifies (تطهر, *hast*) man from moral and spiritual sins and evils that render him impure, and sanctifies (*qadeš*) him in grace so that he may be made worthy of Christ’s partnership. The Odes of Solomon view the purification of man as removing the “garment of skin” from him.

⁷⁴ Vadaketh, “The Holy Spirit”, 112-113.

⁷⁵ *Profession of Vows*, 13.

⁷⁶ *Profession of Vows*, 14.

⁷⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 43; *Profession of Vows*, 13.

⁷⁸ Rordíguez, “Purificazione”, 2094.

And I was covered with the covering of Thy Spirit
And I removed from me my garments of skin.⁷⁹

The allusion here is to the circumcision of man, but it is to be perceived as the circumcision not of the body but of the heart, for the action of the Spirit is not external or superficial but internal in the heart of human beings.⁸⁰ It is the Spirit who purifies one’s heart, opens it to God’s love and to His commands and thus keeps it unclogged and liberated.

Before the service of baptism, the Church offers prayers to the Spirit to cleanse the candidate so that the candidate may become pure from all sins and impurities of body and soul and thus become for God a living temple.⁸¹ The same idea is employed in the Rite of Profession. In one of the prayers it says:

{...}. We entreat you therefore, Lord, be pleased with them and cleanse them from all their sins and transgressions. They have come near to you to be sanctified by you. Bless them that they may not be found guilty in their deeds.⁸²

The prayer signifies that sin impedes the virgin from receiving Christ in her life. Thus, prayers are offered to the Holy Spirit to purify the virgin from all foul deeds and sins and to sanctify her by God’s grace in order to make her worthy of the dedication.⁸³

2. THE LITURGY OF PROFESSION WITNESSES TO THE NUPTIAL MYSTERY

From early times the consecration of virgins to a life of covenant (*qyōmō*) was considered a marriage with Christ. The 6th Demonstration of Aphrahat, Ephrem’s writings on Virginité and Jacob of Serugh’s

⁷⁹ *Ode*, 25:8, in Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 102.

⁸⁰ Hyatt, “Circumcision”, 631.

⁸¹ *Koodasakal*, 16.

⁸² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 30; *Profession of Vows*, 10.

⁸³ *Profession of Vows*, 6.

Homily on the Ten Virgins all speak of Christ's betrothal to the virgins or the virgin's betrothal to Christ.⁸⁴ On the occasion of the virginal commitment of a Syrian covenanter Ephrem sings:

My brothers, we are invited to the marriage of this sister
who is betrothed not to a mortal bridegroom but to the
Son who gives life to all.⁸⁵

The covenanters and virgins of the early Church presented themselves as those betrothed to Christ. In the accounts of the martyrs too, the espousal aspect is very much emphasized.⁸⁶

Not only in the early documents, but also in the recent ecclesiastical documents on the religious life, the Church highlights the nuptial aspect of the religious profession of the virgins. In *Lumen Gentium* we read: "The religious through the evangelical counsels, especially through the vow of chastity, witness to the faithful of that wondrous marriage between the Church and Christ her only spouse, a union that has been established by God and will be fully manifested in the world to come."⁸⁷ Thus we see that in the West as well as in the East, monastic life has been perceived as a betrothed life, and monastic consecration has been viewed in terms of Christ's marriage to His Church.

⁸⁴ We have already quoted from these works in the first and second chapters.

⁸⁵ Ephrem, *HArm* 46:1-2, in Murray, "A Marriage for all Eternity", 65.

⁸⁶ Here we have in mind Martha and other daughters of the *qyômô* of the mid-fourth century. When Martha was sentenced to death by Shahpur II for her refusal to offer sacrifice to the patron deity of the empire and for her refusal to marry. When asked by the judge to marry in order to escape death she said: "I am in truth betrothed to Jesus. He has gone away to heaven ...and He will indeed come in glory. He will shake the dust from the bodies of all those who are betrothed to him, wash them in the dew of heaven, anoint them with the oil of gladness." Cf. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* (=AMS), 2:236-37 (70-71). The page number given in brackets refers to the English translation of AMS by Brock & Harvey, *Holy Women*, 70-71.

⁸⁷ *LG*, no. 44; *PC*, no. 12.

It is a fact that the conjugal union of two individuals on the natural level in Christian marriage is presented by the Church as a symbol of Christ's union with the Church (Eph 5:24-25). At the same time, it is also a pre-figuration of Christ's union with the Church or with the individual soul in heaven. This is because the marriage union is only temporal, for Christ says: "There is no marriage in heaven" (cf Lk 20:35). Hence, it is an undeniable fact that what human marriage symbolizes on earth is realized in the life of consecrated virgins, and its actualization will take place in heaven.

The Liturgy of Profession does not state explicitly that it relates to the nuptial mystery of Christ and the Church, but we find that many of its prayers and rituals embody themes of the nuptial mystery. Considering this, in the following parts of our study we will analyze first the prayers and then the symbolic actions in the Liturgy of Profession to see how profound the nuptial themes are as presented in the liturgy.

2.1. The Prayers

The liturgical prayers of the Service of Profession, in their content, implicitly embody the mystery of Christ's betrothal to the virgin in the image of His betrothal to the Church. In the following section, we study those prayers which convey the nuptial themes.

2.1.1. Doxologies and Opening Prayers

The doxologies and opening prayers in the Service of Receiving and the Service of Profession do not mention explicitly the spousal nature of profession. They acclaim God as holy (*qadīšo*) and man (here the virgin) as desiring to become holy. The virgin's yearning for the holy life is envisaged in her drawing near (*qreb*) to God and to His house for a life of singleness (*ihīdōyūtō*).⁸⁸ Here the prayers emphasize the need

⁸⁸ See Chapter II, pp. 106-110.

of drawing near to Christ, who is presented by the Church as essential for holiness.⁸⁹

Through these prayers the Church implores God to make the virgin holy by integrating her life and actions so that she may respond to Him with a unified heart. Man's undivided response to God is the basis of union with God, and union and intimacy (ܒܝܬܘܬܘܬܐ , *baytōyūtō*) with God in the Syrian understanding is betrothal of the human soul to Christ.⁹⁰

2.1.2. Psalms

The psalms in the Liturgy of Profession, especially Psalm 51 recited at the very beginning, highlight the aspects of purification and sanctification of the virgin as in the liturgy of marriage. The virgin here acknowledges her sinful state: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." And she implores God for purification: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps 51:2; 6).⁹¹

Acknowledging that Christ has radically washed the virgin not only with water (baptism) but also with His blood (Eucharist), she says: "O Bridegroom who hast saved me by thy own blood, to Thee be praise."⁹² Here we see that through Christ's (the bridegroom's) blood, the virgin is made a bride, clean and holy like His bride, the Church.

Purification before betrothal is a tradition in the Syrian consecratory rites, especially in the nuptial liturgy. The spouses take a bath as a sign of cleansing themselves from all impurities.

⁸⁹ See Chapter II, pp. 107-108; *Prarthanakramam*, 38; *LG*, no.39. *Lumen Gentium* visualizes the progress of human holiness in terms of one's union with Christ in the Church.

⁹⁰ Cf. Vanchipura, *Notion of Holiness*, 24 -25.

⁹¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 24.

⁹² *Takso d' suporo*, 352; *The Ritual of the Tonsure*, 9. See also *Profession of Vows*, 11.

In the Liturgy of Profession of Monks, there exists the holy bath as a rite of purification from every stain of sin, and a sign of pouring the life-giving water (Holy Spirit) upon the candidate.⁹³ This part is removed from the Malankara liturgical service of the virgin's profession. Instead, the psalms, penitential hymns and prayers serve as purifying elements.

Evoking repentance in the virgin, the psalms and the penitential prayers provide tears for her to clean not only her body but also for her whole being to become pure and clean. Thus, before betrothal Christ through His Spirit purifies the virgin totally. Here we see, that in addition to baptismal purification and the social custom of cleansing oneself before the sacred rites, Christ leads the virgin through prayer, repentance and compunction of heart, to cleanse herself from all sins and defilement.

One of the hymns runs: "O Son of God, behold my sin has increased and multiplied. Wash me with your hyssop and cleanse me with my tears, I pray you for the love of the Father."⁹⁴ John Climacus writes: "Greater than baptism itself is the fountain of tears after baptism."⁹⁵ In the Orient, tears of repentance are a continuation of the waters of baptism. Regarding the Syrian concept, S. Abouzayd writes that the tears of a sinner, like the waters of baptism, symbolize a rebirth in the heavenly world and a new baptism in Christ.⁹⁶

The Holy Spirit is the active agent who effects the purification of the virgin. Furthermore, the threefold signing with the sign of the Cross, the conferring of the white monastic habit and the receiving of the Eucharist, which according to St. Ephrem, is the "Coal of Fire" that

⁹³ Here, holy bath does not mean taking a bath or giving the candidate a bath, but it is the foot washing of the monk by the celebrant within the liturgy. *Takso d' tulbosho*, 316-317; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 41-42; 79-81.

⁹⁴ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 16.

⁹⁵ Climacus, *Scala Paradisi*, 7 in Luibeheid, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 137.

⁹⁶ Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 241.

purifies and sanctifies Isaiah (cf. Isaiah 6:6)⁹⁷, are constitutive elements which effect the purification of the virgin.

2.1.3. *Hussoyo* Prayers

The Syriac word *hussoyo* is derived from the Syriac root *hâsi* means to make atonement, expiation, propitiation, absolution or remission of sin.⁹⁸ *Hussoyo* prayers are those prayers offered in the context of sacrificial or sacramental acts which remove sin and promise reconciliation with God.

In the Liturgy of Profession, prayers for the remission of sin and for reconciliation with God are offered in the context of the eucharistic liturgy. Thus, themes such as remission of sin, divine mercy, recompense for those who do good are contained within the *hussoyo* prayers. The *hussoyo* (*qôlô*), *sedre* and the prayers of incense (*slawoto d-besme*) come primarily under the category of *hussoyo* prayers.⁹⁹

The *proemion*, *sedre* prayers and hymns (*qôlô*) of a penitential nature in the Service of Profession convey not only the purifying act of God, but also the sanctification of the virgin. More than imploring God's forgiveness, the prayers put much emphasis on the aspects of making the virgin holy, just and blameless (Eph 1:3-4). In a *sedro* it says:

“Lord, they (the virgins) have come near to be sanctified by you. Bless them that they shall not be found guilty in their deeds {...}. O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, let your name be praised and glorified now and forever, on account of the graces that are showered upon these your servants.”¹⁰⁰

Thus, the *hussoyo* prayers in the Liturgy of Profession have the primary objective of assuring the virgin rebirth by grace so that she may become a new creation.

⁹⁷ Cf. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 103.

⁹⁸ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 150.

⁹⁹ Mateos, “Sedre” 277; Obeid, “Un sedro-d-hussoyo”, 185-186.

¹⁰⁰ *Profession of Vows*, 10.

2.1.4. Prayer for Eternal Bliss

The celebrant makes a petition to God, invoking for the virgin eternal bliss. He prays:

O merciful Lord God {...} allow them to live in you alone, always concentrating their gaze on you. Protect them that they may stand always in your presence without shame. May they be worthy of eternal and heavenly blessing. Let them enter into the bliss of the unending bridal chamber through the love of your Son and the Holy Spirit forever and ever.¹⁰¹

The prayer is a petition to God the Father, that He may safeguard the virgin from all temptations so that she may live faithfully in His presence and may attain through the love of His Son and the Spirit the blissful eternal bridal chamber. To attain eternal bliss, the virgin needs to keep Christ her spouse always alive in her heart, to fix her mind always on Him, to gaze always at Him and enjoy His glory and beauty. The prayer of the Church reminds the candidate that companionship, the enjoyment of beauty and bliss (Cf. Cant 5:8; 2:16; 6:3; 7:10), the three facets of human love, are mystically applicable to the love of Christ and the virgin.¹⁰²

In the Armenian Hymn 46, On the Consecration of a Syrian Bride, Ephrem mentions that eternal bliss is the ultimate goal of virginal consecration. Ephrem sings:

She (the bride of Christ) is promised eternal bliss and a crown that lasts for ever; a table where she is at home and a bridal chamber lasting for ever.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Profession of Vows*, 17.

¹⁰² Cf. Gothoni, *Paradise within Reach*, 69; Edakalatur, *The Theology of Marriage*, 182.

¹⁰³ Cf. Ephrem, *HArm* 46:27-29 in Murray “A Marriage for all Eternity”, 66.

The reference to the bridal chamber (ܩܘܢܘܐ, *gnūnō*) the marriage bower, significant primarily within the nuptial context, is often used by the Fathers of the Syrian Church along with the term, “wedding feast” (ܡܫܬܘܬܐ, *meštūtō*) to depict consecrated life and also the hoped-for joy of paradise in the eschatological Kingdom.¹⁰⁴

2.2. Services

The Service of Profession is composed of several different services, each involving specific liturgical rites. Here in this part we study those specific services in the Liturgy of Profession, which convey the nuptial themes.

2.2.1. Service of Tonsure

J. Meyendorff compares monastic tonsure to a marriage.¹⁰⁵ This does not however, mean the specific act of tonsure but the whole liturgy, of which monastic tonsure constitutes the climax. As we studied tonsure, we found that, apart from the renunciation themes, the Service presents the nuptial content explicitly in the rite of tonsure. For example, in the monastic consecration of the monks the celebrant prays:

Like a young bridegroom may he enter Your indestructible bridal chamber, and with the chaste virgins, with lamps shining with the oil of faith, may he be seen in Your presence at the feast which is full of joy and gladness. We will offer You a new praise and thanksgiving without ceasing, and God the Father who begot You, and Your Holy Spirit, and always and forever.¹⁰⁶

In the Order of the Tonsure of Nuns (*Takso d'suporo*) and the Malankara Service of Profession it is written:

Keep Lord, this handmaid whose head is inclined before Thee, having committed herself to Thee O Celestial Bridegroom, and give her, Lord, the peace and joy that come from You and gladden

¹⁰⁴ Murray, *Symbols*, 132-134; 256-257.

¹⁰⁵ Meyendorff, *Marriage*, 70.

¹⁰⁶ *Takso d'tulbosho*, 310-311; Acharya, *The Ritual of the Clothing*, 38

her in Thy bridal chamber of life, which never fails nor is dissolved, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁷

Thus, we see that the rite of tonsure is a type of marriage commitment of the bride of Christ to her bridegroom Christ, who gladdens her with unending love and joy here on earth and offers her a blissful life with Him in the eternal bridal chamber, which is to come.

2.2.2. Service of Clothing and Crowning

As Christ adorned His bride with splendid spiritual clothing, the Church clothes and adorns the virgin with spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit, and clothes her in the monastic habit so that she may become a perfect bride of Christ, vested with His splendour and glory.¹⁰⁸

Although one may notice in the blessing prayers of the monastic habit the traditional themes related to baptismal clothing, such as putting on of Christ, new life, etc., the major part of the prayers are given in nuptial language and are related to the themes of Christ's clothing of his bride the Church.

The prayers are: (for the outer garment) “May He (Christ) in His immense mercy and grace, adorn you with the radiance of His glory.” (Girdle) “O heavenly bridegroom, strengthen and enable them to serve you with undivided heart and readiness of spirit.” (Scapular) “Lord, bless this scapular as the robe of glory by the strength of the Holy Spirit in order to please you with virtuous deeds.” (Crown) O Almighty God, crown these servants with the incorruptible crown of good deeds.” (Veil) Lord God... Hold them close to you so that their minds shall always be in your sweet company.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *Takso d'suporo*, 3554; *The Ritual of the Tonsure*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Profession of Vows*, 5-7.

¹⁰⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 48-50. The crowning of the virgin as a separate ritual is not given in the Malankara liturgy, but occurs in the Maronite and the Syro-Oriental Churches. It attributes princely status to the virgin who seeks religious life. The one who becomes the bride of Christ is considered “as

The clothing and crowning of the virgin imply a kingly significance as well. About the royal status of monks, John Chrysostom says:

A monk is a king who truly keeps his mind free and does not allow the power of pleasures to dominate his soul. Such a one I would gladly see ruling people and earth, sea and cities and soldiers. For the person who has put the reasoning power of his soul in charge of his passions will also more easily rule over men as well with divine laws, so that he will be to the ruled as a father frequenting the cities with all kindness.¹¹⁰

2.2.3. Receiving of the Holy Mysteries

Although we have already referred to the reception of the holy mysteries (Communion) in the context of incorporation, we will treat it here as a wedding banquet since the Eucharist is also a banquet in and for the Church, as well as for the individual.

Prepared by Christ, the banquet is at the same time Christ's own body and is also the "fruit of the Tree of Life." According to Aphrahat, these fruits have been given to the faithful and to the virgins who do the will of God as an anticipatory experience of paradise.¹¹¹

The Church, citing the prophesy of Isaiah, invites the virgin to enjoy the banquet, which is free. It says: "All who thirst, go to the water; any one who has no money go, buy and eat without money, and wine and milk without any cost" (Is 55:1-3).¹¹²

To this free banquet which quenches one's hunger and thirst, Christ invites the virgin. This food gives her joy and life here in this

the most beloved of God, who lives in the King's palace attended by princesses." Cf. Chapter 2, 1:1:2. As Christ has crowned the Church, so the Church now crowns the virgin. It points to the eschatological reality that, "She (the virgin) is promised eternal bliss and a crown that lasts for ever." Cf. Ephrem, *HArm* 46:27-28 in Murray, "A Marriage for all Eternity", 66.

¹¹⁰ John Chrysostom, *A Comparison between a King and a Monk*, 70-71.

¹¹¹ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VI: 6 (PS 1, 266) ; Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat Demonstrationes*, 118.

¹¹² *Takso d' suporo*, 340.

transient world and assures her eternal life. For Jesus says: "This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever." (cf. Jn 6: 54).

The liturgical celebration is followed by a social banquet for all the guests who have been invited. This too can be related to the nuptial character of the profession ceremony.

2.3. Symbolic Actions

Symbols are not realities, but as images and actions they are pointers to reality. They can be natural movements of the body but in some patterned and non-verbal way are intended to reveal or communicate the message of love and of adoration during corporate worship.¹¹³ As communicative elements they reveal the mystery of God's love and saving actions.

In the Syrian liturgical context there are functional signs such as the washing of the hands before the Anaphora and attitudinal signs like the bowing of the head. Each sign or gesture forms part of the liturgical worship and thus symbolizes realities which one cannot perceive adequately without faith.¹¹⁴

The Liturgy of Profession involves symbolic actions common to other liturgical services as well as to specific ones. In a hidden way, they symbolize according to our conception the nuptial mystery of Christ to the Church as well as the betrothal of the individual soul to Christ. Here we see how the symbolic action in the liturgy conveys the nuptial mystery of Christ and the Church.

2.3.1. Standing Facing the East

Standing has been the normal posture in Judeo-Christian prayer. In the Old as well as in the New Testaments, the standing posture

¹¹³ Cf. Lang, "Posture in Worship", 512.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Vergote, "Gestes et actions symboliques", 39-49.

continues to be the model for prayer in the liturgical assemblies (Neh 8:5-7; Mk 11: 25; Lk 18:11-13).¹¹⁵

Qwm (ܩܘܡ) the Syriac root for “stand”, means “to rise up” or “to stay up” which primarily indicates a state of physical uprightness and a joyful disposition of man. From *qwm* is derived the word *qyomta* meaning resurrection.¹¹⁶ Resurrection is the Christ event that enabled man to rise up from the fall. According to St. Paul, Christ through His glorious resurrection abolished all kinds of bondage and rendered man free to stand upright before Him (Cf. Gal 5: 1; Eph 6: 14). Standing signifies a posture of spiritual and physical freedom.

Facing the east is a very symbolic and meaningful posture in the Syriac liturgical traditions. Principally, it points to a geographical site and denotes turning to the eastern direction of the universe, especially for prayer. The English word “east” has its equivalent in the Hebrew words *mizrah* and *qedem* and in the Greek word *anatole*. The Hebrew words *mizrah* and *qedem* mean “rising”, “shining” and *qedem* means “before”, “in front of” etc. The Greek word *anatole* indicates “the rising of the stars”, “the sunrise as a quarter of heaven”; “morning” and also the “region of the east”. Thus, turning to the east means facing not only the region of the east, but also the sun (light), which arises in the east.¹¹⁷ Thus, east relates to sun and light. In the Syrian understanding, east and light go together. For, the term (ܡܐ ܕܢܗܘܐ , *ma'denho*) means east, the place of sunrise and also light.¹¹⁸

Abdišo, the Syrian writer viewed east as the place which reminds man of his finite time of sojourn on earth and of the infinite time with

¹¹⁵ Cf. Lang, “Posture in Worship”, 512.

¹¹⁶ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 494. The Syriac root *qwm* is used by Aphrahat throughout his discussion (VIII) On the Resurrection of the Dead. See Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VIII (PS1, 359-406) See also Griffith, “Monks, Singles”, 150-151.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Drinkard, “East”, 248; also Cf. Rose, “Kizhakkinte Daivasasthram”, 26-27.

¹¹⁸ Rose, “Kizhakkinte Daivasasthram”, 26-27.

God, for it is from the east that Christ will come at the Second Coming. According to Abdišo the east also reminds man of his first abode, the paradise from which he was expelled because of sin, and his final abode to which he has to be returned through virtuous life.¹¹⁹

Facing the east for prayer as a common gesture of Syrian Christians is given various symbolic meanings. According to the Old Testament, God created Paradise in the eastern region (Gen 2:8), so the eastern region inculcates in the mind of a believer the memory of God’s presence and divine communion. In the Book of Revelation the author, while mentioning the heavenly Jerusalem, points out that its three doors are in the east (Rev 21:13).¹²⁰ As the region of Paradise and as the principal direction towards which the heavenly Jerusalem stands, the eastern region has a heavenly significance. The early Christians also associated the east with the resurrection of Christ and for them Christ in His Second Coming will be coming from the east, for the Lord himself said: “As lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Mt 24:27).

In the vision of John the evangelist, Christ is the light of the world (Jn 8:12). The eastern direction is then associated with Christ. Facing the eastern direction also reminds man of his original abode and his final destination. Facing the east symbolizes one’s movement towards God.¹²¹

In the Service of Profession the virgin (s) stand facing the east not only for prayers as all do, but for the service of entering into the church, for spiritual instruction, for making vows, for tonsuring and so on. This symbolizes her movement or fundamental orientation towards the “Sun”, Christ, her bridegroom.

¹¹⁹ Abdišo, *The Book of Marganitha*, 64-65.

¹²⁰ Rose, “Kizhakkinte Daivasasthram”, 26-27.

¹²¹ Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy*, 136-137; Chediath, *Prarthana Sabhayil*, 309-310; Kakkanatt, *Christological Catechesis*, 254-255.

2.3.2. Standing at the Closed Door (*tar'ô ahîdô*) of the Church

The virgin's standing at the closed door *tar'ô ahîdô*, points out her status as an outsider coming and desiring to enter into the church. Her standing in front of the church designates her sense of waiting which means she is not radically an outsider or an insider but one who moves forward, towards the church. The prayers of the profession liturgy speak of the Church in terms of the house of God (Gen 28:17; Jn 2:16; I Tim 3:15; Heb 10:21; 1Pet 4:11) where God dwells, reveals and communicates.¹²²

The progression is the result of a departure, a departure from the place where the virgin was to a place where she wishes to be. For being in a place, one needs to move from within and from without. The prayers indicate that the virgin has moved from herself (her former life), has departed from her secular realm (her own family, friends) and has come to the house of God.¹²³

Departing from the paternal family to marry one's spouse and then moving to the house of the bridegroom is a custom which still prevails in the marriage celebration. Vesting in a beautiful dress and ornaments, saying farewell to the parents and her house, the bride goes to the house of her bridegroom (cf. Gen 24: 59-60; Tb 7: 14-15). The transfer to the bridegroom's abode in order to live with him therefore involves renunciation of those things which belonged to her and were dear to her.

The aspects of renunciation are explicit in the Service of Receiving. Through the prayers the virgin offers her own being, her sinful past, her ethos of life which she practised, and her future to God.¹²⁴ Psalm 45 in the *Takso d'suporo d'dairoyoto* impel the bride of Christ (the virgin)

¹²² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 15-17.

¹²³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 13; 29-30.

¹²⁴ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 12-14.

to forget her people and her father's house in order to be united with the bridegroom.¹²⁵

Since the door of the church is closed, the virgin stands in front of it waiting for it to be opened for her. Though the closed door primarily refers to man's sinfulness and hard heartedness (Rev 3:20), it has some salvific and moral significance too.

In the Book of Numbers the closed door is pictured as the door of the tent, a meeting point of God with man (Num 12:5). In Ezekiel, it is the door reserved for the entrance of God alone (Ez 44: 2-3).¹²⁶ In the Gospel of John, it indicates the door that Christ entered after resurrection (Jn 20:19). The Virgin Mary is depicted as the house with the door closed in which Christ the great mystery is preserved.¹²⁷

In Aphrahat, the closed door is the symbol of the human heart devoid of external distractions.¹²⁸ Taking all these aspects together in the scriptural context, the closed door signifies a house (place) reserved for Christ alone. In our context we see the closed door as a meeting place for the virgin to encounter Christ the bridegroom. It also symbolizes the virginal life of the bride of Christ.

2.3.3. Knocking at the Door

The virgin who stands at the closed door offering prayers and supplications, knocks at the door in order to be allowed in. Knocking at the door is a technical term used often by Jesus in the context of prayer. It signifies asking grace from Christ Himself; hence, He is the Door to the Father (Jn 10:9).

¹²⁵ *Takso d'suporo*, 349.

¹²⁶ This closed door symbolizes Mary's perpetual Virginity. See *Šhīmo*, (*šubahō*) 161.

¹²⁷ *Šhīmo* (*šubahō*) 211.

¹²⁸ Aphraates, *Demonstrations*, IV: 10 (PS 1, 57-60).

Aphrahat says: “Let us knock at the door of heaven so that it may be opened before us and we can enter in” (Mt 7:7).¹²⁹ In the Liturgy of Profession “knocking at the church’s door” signifies one’s knocking at the door of heaven (bridal chamber of Christ) in order to be received by Him.¹³⁰

The knocking reveals that the virgin is a heir to the bridal chamber. In contrast to the foolish virgins to whom the door was not opened, the virgin of Christ who stands and knocks at the door of God’s house is prudent and the door is opened for her (cf. Mt 25:1-13).¹³¹

2.3.4. Signing with the Cruciform Sign

The virgin who is initiated into monastic life is signed with the sign of the cross and is later given a cross. This practice is related to the Syrian Christians’ practice of signing the couple with the sign of the cross. As a sign of bestowing blessings on the bridegroom and the bride, the elders and the parents sign them with the sign of the cross before they set forth from their houses for the wedding.¹³²

In the marriage liturgy, the couples are signed with the sign of the cross at several moments. The *Tali* tied upon the neck of the bride by the groom as a sign of his binding relation with her has a cross on the back of it.¹³³ The liturgy itself finishes with the blessing of the priest in the form of the sign of the cross.

The virgin, the bride of Christ, is given a cross to wear around her neck and is also given a cross to carry with her to her cell (*towono*). This shows the acceptance of the sweet yoke of Christ as a sign of joyful submission to Him.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Aphraates, *Demonstrations*, VI: 1 (PS 1, 246); Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat Demonstrations*, 107.

¹³⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 13.

¹³¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 3.

¹³² Podipara, “Customs”, 225.

In marriage and in the Rite of Profession the significance of the cross, is to a great extent, the same. Primarily, the symbol of the cross reminds the espoused bride of the abiding presence of her eternal bridegroom. It is for her a sign of protection, a shield to fight against the evil powers which pull her away from the bridegroom, and a reminder to live in love and holiness.¹³⁵

Summarizing the significance of the wider use of the cruciform sign and the cross in marriage and in the profession liturgy, one can say that both married couples and religious alike place themselves under the control and guidance of Christ, their Eternal Bridegroom.

2.3.5. Leading the Newly Professed to the Monastery

The procession of the newly professed virgin (s) to the interior part of the monastery is paralleled to and symbolizes Christ’s leading the Church his bride to the eternal bridal chamber. The bridal chamber signifies the intimate and total union of the bride with the bridegroom. Ephrem addresses Jesus himself as the bridal chamber.¹³⁶ The Church who awaits the bridal chamber foreseeing the union with Christ sings:

In Your Cross You sealed my dowry and in Your passion You set me free;
And You made my bridal chamber in heaven and invite me that I may be Yours.¹³⁷

In the Liturgy of Profession, especially towards the end of the service, the newly professed accompanied by the community members,

¹³³ See about Tali in Chapter 2, 2.4.4.4.

¹³⁴ We have already quoted this hymn “The Abode of the Saints is Paradise” in the second chapter of our thesis. See Chapter 2, 3.8.2. Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 50-51.

¹³⁵ *Koodasakal*, 51-52; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 47-50.

¹³⁶ Ephrem, *HVirg* 24:5; Cf. Brock, *Spirituality*, 41.

¹³⁷ *Koodasakal*, 76.

is led to the bridal chamber (monastery) with the hymn; the “Hymn of Paradise.”¹³⁸

In Psalm 45, the virgin’s entrance into the bridal chamber is described as follows:

She shall be brought to the King with gifts, and her virgin companions shall follow in her train. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the King’s palace (Ps 45: 14-15).¹³⁹

According to Ephrem, the virgins will be brought to the eternal nuptial chamber in paradise by the angels, with luminous garments and with the body, which is made elegant and holy, without stain.¹⁴⁰

Though these passages do not directly refer to the profession rite, the inclusion of the psalm in the profession liturgy and Ephrem’s writing help us to understand the eschatological significance of the procession. It symbolizes Christ leading His brides (the Church, as well as the virgins) to the eternal bridal chamber in His Second Coming. According to Aphrahat, paradise, the eternal bridal chamber, has been promised to the blessed, to virgins and *qadiše*.¹⁴¹

In the case of marriage between Christ and the Church or Christ and the individual soul, the bridal chamber referred to is spiritual and eternal. It is a delightful dwelling in heaven, glorious and lighted, fashioned by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴² It is set up above, and guards are appointed to

¹³⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 52. See Chapter 2, 3.8.2.

¹³⁹ *Breviarium*, III, 427; Engberding, “Kirche als Braut”, 37; Theckanath, *Bride of Christ*, 394.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Ephrem, *HParad*, 7:15. The Service for the Burial of *Bnot qyōmō* is imbued with the themes of her entry into the bridal chamber. See Brock, *Burial Service for Nuns*, 1992.

¹⁴¹ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VI: 6 (PS 1, 266); Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat Demonstrations*, 118.

protect it. The Church is awaiting the coming of her bridegroom to take her to the bridal chamber, the heavenly Jerusalem.

Various images symbolize the eternal bridal chamber. The tent built by Moses to represent the divine presence at Mount Sinai, the edifice of the Church with the divine presence of the Eucharist, the sanctuary where the wedding feast takes place, the monastery where the incessant heavenly liturgy is being celebrated, all these typify the heavenly bridal chamber.¹⁴³

3. VIRGO CHRISTI: BRIDE OF CHRIST

In the above section, we have seen the nuptial aspects contained in the Liturgy of Profession. Here in this part we see how the virgin who binds herself to Christ through the profession of vows becomes a bride of Christ.

As John Paul II observed, if the reference to the nuptial union of Christ and the Church gives marriage its highest dignity, for the sacrament of matrimony itself initiates the Christian spouses into the mystery of Christ’s union with the Church, then the liturgy of consecration of a virgin can in no way be viewed differently. The profession of virginity or celibacy enables consecrated persons to share more directly in the mystery of this marriage. John Paul II further explains:

While conjugal love goes to Christ through a human union, virginal love goes directly to the person of Christ through an immediate union with him without intermediaries: a truly complete and decisive spiritual espousal. Thus, in the person of those who profess and live consecrated chastity, the Church expresses her union as Bride with Christ the Bridegroom to the greatest extent.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² *Breviarium*, III, 410; Cf. Theckanath, *Bride of Christ*, 363. For more details of the nuptial relationship of the Christian virgins to Christ, See KOCH, *Virgines Christi*, Braunsberg, 1906.

¹⁴³ *Šhīmo*, (*subahō*) 189; *Breviarium*, III, 432; Engberding, “Die Kirche als Braut”, 36-37.

¹⁴⁴ John Paul II, *L’Osservatore Romano*, November 30, 1994, p.19, col. 4; Cf. also Cole & Conner, *Christian Totality*, 36.

From the liturgical prayers of the marriage service, it is evident that the Church's status as the bride of Christ is due to Christ's betrothal of the Church, and to the Church's faithful following of the bridegroom. Christ the bridegroom has chosen the Church as His bride. So the Church sings: "I am the Church, I am the Church, the Spouse of the Most High."¹⁴⁵ And the Church, unlike Israel, is faithful to Christ. The Church expresses her faithfulness: "Thieves had fallen on me and they wanted to corrupt my beauty. With your love I dispersed them."¹⁴⁶ Totally committed to Christ, the Church follows her groom wherever He goes with the hope of being united to Him in the eternal bridal chamber.

Likewise, Christ has betrothed each soul to Himself through baptism, and for those whom He calls to follow Him, through monastic consecration. Those who are sealed for eternal life in baptism are signed and sealed through the monastic rites for a life of union with Christ.¹⁴⁷ According to Ephrem, a virgin through her consecration is the daughter of God and a bride of Christ.¹⁴⁸ Assuming the mind of the consecrated virgin, Ephrem sings:

Instead of a mortal husband,
I am betrothed to the Son of the Life-giver;
Instead of the joyful days
I desired joys eternal.¹⁴⁹

Seized by Christ's love for his bride, the virgin bride of Christ, like the Church, must also faithfully follow her bridegroom wherever He goes until she is united with Him in the kingdom. In this section, therefore, we deal with the theme *virgo Christi* in the context of her journey for union with Christ.

¹⁴⁵ Koodasakal, 52.

¹⁴⁶ Koodasakal, 76

¹⁴⁷ Vritha Vagdanam, 46.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Ephrem, *HArm* 46: 1-80 in Murray, "A Marriage for all Eternity", 65-67.

¹⁴⁹ Ephrem, *HArm* 6:32-35.

3.1. Mary-Christ's Bride

One of the specific titles the Syrian Church ascribes to Mary, the blessed Virgin, is the Bride of Christ. The title does not diminish her status as Mother of Christ but it indicates how close she was to her Son. Mary is the bride of Christ; hence she is fully Christ-oriented. She bore Christ not only in her womb but also in her heart. Mary's close relation to Christ and to what Christ has done in her, prompted the Syrian Fathers like Ephrem to attribute to Mary the title "the Bride of Christ." In the 11th Hymn of Nativity St. Ephrem sings:

She alone is Your mother
But she is Your sister with everyone else.
She was Your Mother, She was Your bride too,
Along with all chaste souls.
You, who are Your mother's beauty,
Yourself adorned her with everything.¹⁵⁰

Mary is comprehended as a bride of Christ because of her virginity and Christ's holiness (*qudšo*). She bore the Virgin Child and He, for His part, purified her and adorned her with the glory of virginity. Thus, the Virgin Child (Christ) transformed her to be His virgin bride (ܟܠܬܐ ܩܘܕܫܐ, *kalat qudšo*).¹⁵¹

Ephrem emphasizes that Christ's presence in Mary, instead of spoiling her virginity, confirmed her as a virgin. Her pearl is secured in His treasury (*HNat* 12:2). Christ poured on her virginity and purity; with holy waves He filled her and purified her (*HNat* 28:6). According to Ephrem, Christ who made His abode in the body of Mary, abides in the body of men and women who are virgins (*CNis* 46:1). Ephrem calls Christ the Blessed One, for, He the Word came forth from the Father's bosom, put on a body in the bosom of Mary and is now conceived in virginal bosoms.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Ephrem, *HNat* 11:2.

¹⁵¹ Ephrem, *HNat* 8:18. Cf. also Paikatt, *Life, Glory and Salvation*, 300-301.

¹⁵² Cf. Ephrem, *HVirg* 44:20.

Mary's virginity and her motherhood converge in the same person. She is the virgin bride of Christ and at the same time the Mother of Christ and the mother of the whole creation. According to P. Yousif, all virgins who conceive Christ spiritually and give birth to Him in human hearts are both brides and mothers of Christ.¹⁵³

One can see in Mary the perfect single mindedness of a virgin-bride. She gave herself to Christ fully, both body and mind (Lk 1:38; *HNat* 19:8), and became for all virgins the perfect example of what it means to set their eyes on Christ alone.¹⁵⁴ It is possible to say: "Let the image of Mary be depicted in your heart, all you virgins of Christ."¹⁵⁵

The Church in the Liturgy of Profession through *quqiltiyōn*, the *Magnificat*, and Psalm 45, depicts Mary's life as the bride of Christ and gives her as an example for the consecrated virgin to follow. While making the vows the candidate says: "By the grace of the Holy Spirit and by the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary I dedicate myself to the Congregation, so that by serving God and His Church I shall reach the perfection of charity."¹⁵⁶

Here we see that the professed virgin, by the power of the Holy Spirit and with the help of Mary, sets off on the narrow road to reach the perfection of charity, which she attains fully at the eternal bridal chamber.

3.2. The Journey of the Pilgrim Bride

The monastic virgin, as the liturgical service depicts, is consecrated to stand by the side of Christ the bridegroom at His bridal

¹⁵³ Ephrem, *HVirg* 25:10-11; See also Yousif, "La Vierge Marie et le disciple bien-aimé", 307-309. Yousif

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Paikatt, *Life, Glory and Salvation*, 302.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Ephrem, *HVirg* 2:15.

¹⁵⁶ *Profession of Vows*, 13.

chamber in the eschatological life.¹⁵⁷ For this "standing" the Church requires a journey towards the kingdom. Through the Scriptural lesson of Abraham's journey (Gen 12:1-10) the virgin is challenged to launch out on a pilgrimage in total love and absolute faith.¹⁵⁸

The journey the virgin makes does not consist only of walking in space and time as all do, but it is primarily an exodus from the virgin's own inner space, her own kingdom where she resides, from the rule of the selfish ego, to the Kingdom of God. According to the *Liber Graduum*,¹⁵⁹ asceticism is the straight and narrow way, to the city of our Lord.¹⁶⁰

In the Syrian understanding, the heart is not only a human organ but is also the "Kingdom of God" the city of our Lord and the bridal chamber within man. Jesus says: "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:21). This is because through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, "the Lord has left the heavens and descended into human hearts and resides in us continually."¹⁶¹ So the bride has to be pure in heart, vigilant, attentive, alert and awake in order to meet the bridegroom each moment of her life and to stand at His side in the fulfillment of the divine kingdom, paradise.

Journeying to the kingdom signifies the unfailing fidelity, love and trust of the bride. In the marriage liturgy the pilgrim nature of the bride is expressed in her searching and finding the groom.¹⁶² The eastward

¹⁵⁷ *Profession of Vows*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 32; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 60.

¹⁵⁹ *Liber Graduum* or Book of the Steps is a collection of thirty homilies or discourses written towards the second half of the fourth century by an anonymous author. It speaks of the degrees of spiritual life. Cf. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia*, 89; Brock, *The Syriac Fathers*, 42.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. *Liber Graduum*, 19: 35; Cf. also Murray, *Symbols*, 262

¹⁶¹ Ephrem, *HArm* 47: 46-47, Cf. also Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 128.

¹⁶² *Koodasakal*, 53-55.

orientation in the liturgical celebration also points out the symbol of the bride's journey towards the eternal bridal chamber.

3.2.1. Intimidation On the Way

According to Ephrem, Jesus is the Way (cf. Jn 14:6) and also is the Lord of the way. Treading over the waters and crossing the land, Christ opened the way for His bride (the Church, and the individual soul) towards the kingdom.¹⁶³ The bride is then on the way to the kingdom, following in the footsteps of Christ who through His sacrifice, death and burial and resurrection opened the way for her.¹⁶⁴

On the way towards the bridegroom through the Word of God, the Church gives intimation to the bride of Christ that the path is "narrow" and only a few travel along it (cf. Mt.7: 13-14).¹⁶⁵ The narrow way is characterized as constricted and difficult to walk but it is specified as the way to eternal life.¹⁶⁶ It is because of the sin of Adam and his banishment that this way was made necessary. So the virgin needs to set out on the way in faith. On the way she will face the fiery arrows of the Evil One, serpents and scorpions. She is asked not to run away from the threats but to equip herself to face them with full confidence in Christ and in His grace, knowing that her journey will not lead her to damnation, but to eternal life.¹⁶⁷

3.2.1.1. Fiery Arrows of the Evil One

Prayers are offered to God to strengthen the virgin bride of Christ against the fiery arrows of the Evil One. In the Syriac and the Malayalam

¹⁶³ Ephrem, *CH* 25:10; Cf also Valuparampil, *The Way*, 475.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Ephrem, *HNat* 22:20.

¹⁶⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 18.

¹⁶⁶ Keener, *A Commentary*, 250-251.

¹⁶⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 5; *Profession of Vows*, 12.

versions, instead of using the term Wicked One ܒܝܫܘܢܐ , *bišō*) the name (ܐܟܠ ܩܪܫܐ *okel qarso*) the accuser, the devil, is given.¹⁶⁸

Derived from the Accadian term *akalu karsi*, "to accuse, slander and calumniate", the word *okel qarso* literally means, "to eat the pieces of flesh torn off from somebody's body."¹⁶⁹ The brutal nature of Satan is evident from this title. The Syrian monastic writers like Sahdona termed Satan a murderer, adulterer, and misleader.¹⁷⁰ It was through food that Satan exercised his authority over man and he still carries out his nefarious activities against man.

According to the liturgical prayer, Satan shoots fiery arrows¹⁷¹ towards those who approach to serve God. The arrows of Satan mentioned in the liturgy are envy, enmity, deceit, calumny, pleasure-loving attitude and avarice.¹⁷² Like ignited arrows, they are attractive (for the wicked ones), and when hurled at others they pierce human hearts, creating deep wounds disastrous enough to kill them. To the virgin the Church offers God's grace, spiritual wisdom, courage and prayers of the community so that as a shield, true faith may protect her and with it she may quench the fiery arrows of the Evil One, her Enemy.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ *Profession of Vows*, 7.

¹⁶⁹ Luke, "Word Studies in Syriac", 40.

¹⁷⁰ Vossel, "Le moine Syriaque", 206.

¹⁷¹ The words "flaming sword" (Gen 4:24) "stone of fire" (Ez 28:14, 16) are biblical expressions parallel to fiery arrows and thus indicate the fierce work of Satan. Cf. *Profession of Vows*, 12. The use of the term "arrows" to denote both virtues and evils is a characteristic feature of Syrian spirituality. For example, in the Hymns on Virginitly Ephrem says: The Wicked One hurled a weak arrow against Jesus (in the context of His temptation) and Christ hurled against Satan one arrow of humility and two arrows of calmness. This is because Satan's activity is always seen as a war against human existence, and man therefore should retaliate not with the same arrows of evil but with the arrows of virtue. The piercing nature of the arrows (evil / good) into man is evident from this expression. Cf. Ephrem, *HVirg* 12, 14.

¹⁷² Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 5; *Profession of Vows*, 7.

¹⁷³ *Profession of Vows*, 10; Brock, *Burial Service*, 6-7.

3.2.1.2. Serpents and Scorpions

In early Syrian spirituality animals play an important part. Rather than indicating the pagan cultic influence upon Syrian spirituality, they are associated with man and his nature in a symbolic way. Whatever God created, including animals, as such is good. But certain animals are symbols of sin and evil. The ascetics consider as harmful serpents and scorpions, since they cause harm to many.¹⁷⁴

The serpent is the symbol of evil more than of physical harm. He is Satan,¹⁷⁵ the enemy of humanity who seduces God's chosen ones (Gen 3:1). He seduced Adam and Eve and out of jealousy diverts man from God as he did the first parents. According to Ephrem he is the one who was bruised by Mary on his heel and the one on whom Christ has trampled.¹⁷⁶ He is young in every generation and also accompanies everyone and does harm at every moment (*HVirg* 1:4). Satan arouses temptation in man by weakening his confidence in God.¹⁷⁷ In the early monastic writings such as the Book of the Governors, personification of all the antagonistic forces that threaten the people of God are termed

¹⁷⁴ Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 172-173.

¹⁷⁵ The word "Satan" is derived from the Hebrew word *satan* meaning "rival", "accuser", the one who puts obstacles in the way of others etc. Other equivalent words in Greek and in the New Testament are *diabolos*, *satanas*, *daimon* etc. The word Satan in the Scripture indicates one who barred one's way, i.e. an opposer. So according to the Semitic view the trampling down of the serpent under foot is essential in one's attempt to tread the way of God. (Cf. I Sam 29:4; Mt 16:23; Mk 8.33) Cf. Chempakassery, "Bibilum Pisachum", 5-6. In the Hymns of Paradise, Ephrem views Satan and Serpent differently. According to him the serpent was only an instrument in the hands of Satan; therefore they are not identical. See *HParad* 15: 14; *CNis*. 68, 21-22. But in some other hymns Ephrem counts the serpent as Satan. See Ephrem, *HNat* 13: 2; *CNis* 38: 5. Thus we notice an inconsistency in Ephrem's thinking on the identity of the serpent and Satan.

¹⁷⁶ Ephrem, *CNis* 38:5; Ephrem, *CH* 43:5.

¹⁷⁷ Vossel, "Le moine Syriaque", 195-198.

as the work of Satan. Satan is also a symbol of the heretical views which aim to destroy the Church, the Bride of Christ.¹⁷⁸

In the prayers of Profession, the Church hopes that the virgin bride "may trample the serpents and scorpions which are a threat to the regular and holy religious life."¹⁷⁹ Serpents and scorpions indicate evil creatures, which lie hidden in the ground until a favourable situation arises, at which time they spring from the ground causing harm to the passersby.

The liturgical prayer while mentioning the virgin's trampling of the serpents and scorpions refers also to the annihilation of the evil desires that are hidden in man. In the writings of Ephrem, evil desires are given the image of serpents (cf. *HVirg* 3:6). In the Hymn of Virginity Ephrem points out in different strophes that evil desires are the greatest enemy of the virgin. They have their root in the Evil One and if not repelled at the proper time they threaten to destroy virginity. So Ephrem counsels the virgin: "Chaste woman, do not complete your course in the trackless waste of desires, lest your enemy then work in you, and take your power."¹⁸⁰

3.2.1.3. Evil Men

On the way towards the bridegroom the bride faces evil men. Scripture and liturgical prayers describe the evil men as those who

¹⁷⁸ See Thomas of Margā, *Book of the Governors*, 499-509; Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 172-173, *Profession of Vows*, 12.

¹⁷⁹ *Takso d' suporo*, 358; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 4 -5; *Profession of Vows*, 7. The word trample is the same in Gen 3:15 and in the Liturgy of Profession. In Genesis it is the "Son of the Woman" who tramples the head of the serpent but here the virgin is given the grace to trample the head of Satan. This may be because the "Son has already trampled the serpents head" with His death and glorious resurrection. Now it is to the virgin that the mission to trample the powers of evil is entrusted. The virgin mentioned here is presumed to be both the Church and the individual Christian.

¹⁸⁰ *Profession of Vows*, 7; Cf. Ephrem, *HVirg* 2:13.

have deceit in their hearts and smiles on their faces, and while pretending to be a brother, trap the virgin.¹⁸¹

Ephrem also warns the virgin to be careful about evil men. He mentions for example the crafty Ammon “who in a lamb’s garment” sought the service of Tamar, and seeing her virginity secure, made her enter his den and caught her. He is characterized as a deceiver who heartlessly raped his sister. Stealing from her the precious pearl of virginity, he drove her out of the door and closed the door against her.¹⁸² Thus Ammon becomes an example of the evil men.

The Church, the Bride of Christ, also mentions the thieves whom she met on the way to find her groom.¹⁸³ She says: “Thieves had fallen on me and they wanted to corrupt my beauty.”¹⁸⁴ Foreseeing the deceitful men, the Church prays for the virgins: “Spare them from every deceit and temptation of evil men.”¹⁸⁵

3.3. Unavoidable Contests

On the way of union with the Bridegroom the bride confronts contests which are unavoidable. The Syrians termed this as “spiritual battle” (*igano*) from Greek, while the Greeks called it a contest (*agōn*), wrestling (*pale*) and strife (*polemōs*).¹⁸⁶ As St. Paul puts it, the contest is “not against human enemies, but against the sovereignties and the powers which originate from the darkness in this world, the spiritual army of evil in the heavens” (Eph 6:11-12). John of Apamea (+ 6th century) envisioned spiritual combat for purifying the perverted corporal

¹⁸¹ *Šhīmo* (‘men’ōlam’, the second part of the divine office) 225.

¹⁸² Ephrem, *HVirg* 2:1-3.

¹⁸³ *Koodasakal*, 54.

¹⁸⁴ *Koodasakal*, 76. Here beauty signifies virginity.

¹⁸⁵ *Profession of Vows*, 10.

¹⁸⁶ Špidlík, *The Spirituality*, 233.

passions and imaginations to attain “total purity (*šapyūtō*), where begins the life of resurrection.”¹⁸⁷

The Liturgy of Profession speaks of contests both visible and invisible contests that await the virgin who dedicates her life to God. The Church reminds the virgin that she has to be fortified by God’s strength against the attacks of the Enemy.¹⁸⁸

The combat is against those enemies which have already been unmasked in Scripture: Satan, the world, and the flesh (cf. Rom 7-8). A vivid dramatization of the struggle in terms of the struggle against Satan, flesh warring with the Spirit (Rom 8:5-13), stripping of the old man and putting on the new man (Eph 4: 22-24) is given in the liturgical prayers of profession.¹⁸⁹ Relying upon the grace and the protection of God, the virgin says: “Do Thou protect me and preserve me from my enemies; encompass me with salvation, so that I may have understanding of Thee.”¹⁹⁰

The strategies of the contest include both fight and flight so as to attain a crown in paradise.¹⁹¹ The liturgical prayers also enumerate the names of those weapons that the virgin may use to gain victory over her adversaries. They are not material weapons but spiritual weapons which we will study in the following section.

3.3.1. Protective Weapons

Besides the robe of glory and the protective armour

¹⁸⁷ For the citation, see Vossel, “Le moine Syriaque”, 211.

¹⁸⁸ *Profession of Vows*, 10

¹⁸⁹ *Profession of Vows*, 6; 10.

¹⁹⁰ *Takso d’suporo*, 331-332; *The Ritual of the Tonsure*, 3.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Ephrem, *HParad* 6:24.

(ܙܝܢܐ, *zayno*)¹⁹² received at baptism, the Liturgy of Profession exhorts the virgin to put on spiritual weapons against the arrows of Satan and the invisible enemies. These weapons linked to the robe of glory, shield the virgin from Satan and his allies.

3.3.1.1. The Power of the Holy Spirit

The Church invokes God to let the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit descend upon the virgin.¹⁹³ In *Takso d'suporo* we read: “Bless her (Thy handmaid) Lord with Thy abundant and never failing blessing; cause to tabernacle over her the gifts of Thy Holy Spirit, clothe her with the stole of virtue, gird her loins with the power of Thy Holy Spirit, fortify her so that she may stand against all the fiery darts of the devil.”¹⁹⁴

Aggen (ܐܓܓܝܢ) meaning “cover over” in the sense of overshadowing (Lk 1:35) or “rest upon” in the sense of indwelling (Jn 1:14),¹⁹⁵ is the word used in the *Takso* to denote the activity of the Holy Spirit upon the virgin. According to Isaac of Nineveh the term *aggen* can refer to the spiritual power, which hovers over and protects a person continuously and also to a sanctification caused by Spirit of God by which someone is sanctified in his body and soul. According to

¹⁹² The Syriac word *zayno* is a variant of Avestan *zaçna* meaning “weapon” or “armour.” This term is used rather metaphorically in the Scripture and in the writings of the Fathers to indicate instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13), armour of light (Rom 13:12) and thus designates protection. In the writings of the Syrian Fathers Christ is understood as having deposited armour against the devil in the waters of the Jordan at the moment of His baptism, so that those who receive baptism will acquire it. See Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 115; Luke, “Persian Words” 240-242. Brock, “Baptismal Themes”, 24.

¹⁹³ Cf. *Profession of Vows*, 7.

¹⁹⁴ *Takso d' suporo*, 334; *The Ritual of the Tonsure*, 4.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 3; Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 110.

Isaac, only Mary has experienced the overshadowing of the Spirit fully, but holy men and women of Christ are also called to this.¹⁹⁶

In the prayers, we see that the word “tabernacle over” has the same sense that we perceive in Isaac’s explanation. The Church prays to the Spirit that He may cover over the virgins and adorn them continuously with His manifold divine grace and gifts for a life in Christ.

Adorn them with true faith, unailing hope and with a genuine love which does not seek selfishness. Grant them wisdom in spiritual matters which you gave to your prophets, the sanctity you gave to your apostles who lived with you, the courage you gave to your martyrs, the holy fear and devotedness you granted to the confessors who bore witness to you everywhere, the perfect holiness you gave in your abundant mercy to your servants and the brightness of spirit which ensues from all these virtues. Make them worthy to follow the life-giving commandments, strengthen them to detest every occasion of sin.¹⁹⁷

Faith, hope, love, wisdom, sanctity, courage, holy fear and devotedness are also the gifts of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who bestows these graces on the candidate.

The theme of “covering over of the virgin with the robe of the Spirit” can be found also in the rite of conferring of *mantrakodi*¹⁹⁸ in the Malankara liturgy of marriage. In the marriage ceremony the bridegroom covers the bride with a bridal cloth made of fine silk, namely *mantrakodi*. This is adopted from the Jewish custom of covering the bride with the cloak of the husband as mentioned in the Book of Ruth (Ruth 3:9). The marriage rite of the West Syrian tradition remarks: “And you (Christ the bridegroom) put on her a glorious robe and you gladden

¹⁹⁶ Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises*, 261-262. See also Brock, *The Syriac Fathers*, (intro.), xxvii-xxviii.

¹⁹⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 30; *Profession of Vows*, 10.

¹⁹⁸ For the details of the rite of conferring of *mantrakodi*, a fine silk bridal vestment, See Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, especially pages 142-143; 169; 211.

her and make her shine gloriously with your magnificent light.”¹⁹⁹ The adorning of the bride with the nuptial cloth can be seen as a symbol of God’s “covering” of the bride with His divinity and with the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In the Liturgy of Profession, while handing over the veil to the virgin, the celebrant says: “Put on this cover of Christian virtues, good behaviour, discipline, peaceful demeanor, sanctity and good conduct as a keepsake of your purity of intentions and of your angelic virtuous life.”²⁰⁰ Thus we see that the covering of the bride with *mantrakōdi* in the marriage liturgy and the veiling of the virgin in the Liturgy of Profession resemble each other. Both of these rites symbolize Christ’s covering of his bride with the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

3.3.1.2. Robe of Virtues

In order to protect the virgin from adversaries, God is implored to adorn her with the mantle of religious virtues. The Church prays:

Adorn her with the virtues of religious activities. Let her conscience be rooted in true faith and her life strengthened by true charity. Lord God, grant her patience and perfection, prompt obedience to your commandments and constant earnestness in practising Christian virtues.²⁰¹

A virtuous life is the aim of all Christians. The one who is virtuous is compared to a blessed tree that produces for God good and virtuous fruits.²⁰² It is the greatest offering that a Christian can give to God and he is rewarded for the same. St. John Chrysostom holds the view that one’s desire to acquire virtues signifies his desire to put on Christ.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ *Koodasakal*, 45.

²⁰⁰ *Profession of Vows*, 16.

²⁰¹ *Profession of Vows*, 7.

²⁰² *Profession of Vows*, 7.

²⁰³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans*, no. 24 in *NPNF*, Vol. 11, 518.

Therefore, the practice of the virtues; faith, charity, obedience, patience enable the virgin to participate in the very life of Christ.

Through the prayer, the Church invites the virgin to lead an unblemished life, for the virtuous life is a pure life, and without purity no one could please God.²⁰⁴ Though in the prayers there is mention of the acquiring of different virtues, the emphasis is on the virtues of love, purity of heart and humility, which foster the committed life of the virgin.

a) The Virtue of Love

Since Monastic Profession is envisaged as an assimilation of the union of Christ with his Bride the Church, the aspect of love is very much emphasized in the liturgical prayers. The image of Christ the Bridegroom, who through His blood saved and united the bride to Himself, is proposed to the virgin as the model for her to grow in love. His love is a total and self-emptying love.

To Christ who exalted the Church through sacrificial love the Church reciprocates in love. She says:

O font of truth and faithful groom
To thee am I in love betrothed;
In none other have I put my trust,
Shower on me thy mercies great.²⁰⁵

To the love of the Church, Jesus responds in the same way: “How beautiful you are, O daughter of the Gentiles! How beautiful you are! You are like the Sun which gives light to the whole world.”²⁰⁶ More than mere words of external appreciation of beauty, they are words about the bride that spring from intimate love and interior knowledge of the Bridegroom.

²⁰⁴ *Profession of Vows*, 12

²⁰⁵ *Koodasakal*, 54.

²⁰⁶ *Koodasakal*, 64. also Cf. Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 180.

The virgin's love for Christ is revealed in the liturgical prayers of the Burial Service. It says:

You saw the world as transient
Like a dream or like a shadow
You spurned its pleasures
Desiring instead the love of Christ.²⁰⁷

The virgin's love is not exclusive to Christ alone. Through the *bo 'ūtō* of Mar Jacob the Church exhorts the virgin diligently to keep her lamp lit, to brighten the world and others so that she may with all the virgins assemble like the brides before her Spouse who loves light.²⁰⁸ The very nature of love is vindicated here since it is of a light shining in the darkness and giving light and life to others.

b) The Virtue of Fidelity

The virtue of fidelity required for virginal life is highlighted in the liturgical prayers. This is because the Church has in her mind the infidelity of Adam and Eve, who listened to Satan and spoiled their union with God, as well as the infidelity of Israel the people of God, and the election of the gentile Church the New Israel. In the Holy Week Liturgy, the Church repeats the words of God saying: "The bride I had chosen left me in hatred. I chose another one."²⁰⁹

In the marriage liturgy, the Church reveals her faithful adherence to her Lord and in eschatological expectation sings to Him:

From me my Lord, do not depart.
From thy presence cast me not away;

²⁰⁷ Brock, *Burial Service for Nuns*, 6; also Cf. *Profession of Vows*, 8-10.

²⁰⁸ Light implies holiness, purity of heart, good behaviour, works of justice and so on. Cf. Chapter 2, 3, 4; see also Jacob of Serugh, "Homily on the Virgins", 375-377.

²⁰⁹ Acharya, *Prayer with the Harp*, Vol. 3, 383; Cf. also Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 121.

Should thy love's fervour decrease,
My heart will freeze and I shall die.²¹⁰

Through her words the Church reveals her faithfulness to Christ who assures His abiding presence. Christ tells the Church: "Do not be afraid, O faithful Church, and let not your heart be disturbed. I do not exchange you for another."²¹¹ These words of Christ remind us also of Christ's words to His disciples "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn 15:4). Thus, faithfulness is nothing but life in Christ and those who do not live in Christ are cut off as a branch which withers and dies (cf. Jn 15:6).

In the Profession Liturgy the Church reveals her faithfulness and she instructs the virgin to be faithful. The virgin is instructed to keep the commandments faithfully and to live her commitment without duplicity. Through the celebrant the Church exhorts her: "Anyone who looks back after having put his hand to the plough is not worthy of the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62).²¹²

The virgin is also aware of the unfailing fidelity that Christ requires on her part. In the initial part of the Liturgy of Profession we hear her saying: "My sole intention is to glorify my beloved Saviour through loving Him. May His holy name be glorified."²¹³

Here we see fidelity as a vital virtue, which the virgin needs to have in her journey towards the kingdom.

c) The Virtue of Humility

The Liturgy of Profession exalts the virtue of humility as essential for the virginal life. It beseeches God to crown the handmaid "with the

²¹⁰ *Koodasakal*, 76.

²¹¹ *Koodasakal*, 47-48; Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 177-178.

²¹² *Profession of Vows*, 16-17.

²¹³ *Profession of Vows*, 3.

virtuous life of humility.²¹⁴ The virgin who stands before the throne of the divine majesty with bowed head, submits herself to the “yoke of Christ” who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death (Phil 2:8). From the heights of heaven Christ came down and chose the Church, the daughter of the Gentiles, and by giving His own life, Christ betrothed Himself to her.²¹⁵ It is this submission or self-emptying (*msarqūtō*) of Christ that exalted the Church to the status of Christ’s bride.

The reading in the liturgy from the Epistle to the Colossians “to put on compassion, kindness, meekness and patience” (Col 3:12) and the exhortation of the celebrant to practice “humility, serenity and forbearance” remind the virgin of the necessity of humility.²¹⁶

In the Syrian understanding, humility is the authentic expression of love, which manifests itself in one’s surrendering of the self (*msarqūtō*). It is an interior disposition of allowing God to be the Lord of man. According to P. Evdokimov, “Humility is the greatest power because it moves the axis of life away from man into God. It is no longer man who makes the universe revolve around his ego; but it is man who places himself within the sacred center of proximity to God, and thus finds himself precisely in his place.”²¹⁷ A humble person is seen as the one who abandons himself into the hands of God and proceeds with Christ’s humility and with His self-emptying.²¹⁸ That is why the whole liturgy pictures the virgin as a sinner pleading for the mercy of God.

Humility of the intellect and of the heart is expected from the monastic virgin. In the Liturgy of Profession we hear: “Blot out from their intellect all burden of worldly care. Remove far from them all

²¹⁴ *Profession of Vows*, 15.

²¹⁵ Cf. *Koodasakal*, 44.

²¹⁶ *Profession of Vows*, 12.

²¹⁷ Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation*, 88.

²¹⁸ *Liber Graduum*, 1: 2.

transgression of your commandments. Let them make your precepts and holy will and solicitude the object of their thoughts.”²¹⁹ Here the Church considers the transgression of God’s commandments by Adam and his descendents, a form of pride. Thus, the Church inspires the virgin to turn away from her intellectual pride and be obedient to God’s will and be submissive to His commandments. According to Aphrahat, Christ promised the blessings of God to those who are poor in spirit and humble, for Christ dwells in a humble heart.²²⁰

3.4. Life of Divine Union: Bliss

Christ bestows upon the Church His bride the bliss of union with Him even in this world as an anticipation of His eternal union with her. Experiencing the joy of the divine union, the Church confesses: “O thou great Lord of Eden, Thou art my groom most beloved.”²²¹ And she says to Christ that her soul is thrilled with burning love and her heart is set on fire and she pleads to Christ.

At my beauty deign to cast thine eyes,
And lead me gently to the bridal chamber;
And as I receive thy embrace sweet
In reckless slumber may I fall.²²²

Through this song of bliss, the Church portrays the ardent desire of the human soul to be in union with Christ. Like the Church, all Christian, including the virgins of Christ are destined for this divine union due to their baptismal consecration.

3.4.1. The Way to Divine Union

²¹⁹ *Profession of Vows*, 16.

²²⁰ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes* II:19 (PS I, 89-90). Aphrahat’s ninth demonstration speaks of humility extensively. See also Vanchipurackal, *The Notion of Holiness*, 53.

²²¹ *Koodasakal*, 75.

²²² *Koodasakal*, 75-76.

There are manifold expressions in the Liturgy of Profession that indicate the blissful nature of divine union which the virgin attains through monastic initiation. The liturgy also presents implicitly the way to this divine union. It is the way of Christ who is himself the Way to the kingdom. Ephrem interprets the way (*urho*) as that of life, of truth, and of the commandments.²²³

3.4.1.1. Angelic Life

The Liturgy of Profession impels the virgin to live an angelic life. Before the making of the commitment the celebrant states:

“Religious life is the life of angels... Jesus our Lord is the perfect model of this life.”²²⁴

Through this statement, the minister makes clear that the virgin’s entrance into the monastic status through vows is an initiation into an angelic state of existence. This does not mean that she becomes in appearance an angel or a spiritual being before God or man. Nor does it imply an asexual existence or a life motivated by a desire to remain unmarried. Rather, it designates a life in accompaniment with God, conforming to His will with freedom and in accordance with the nature of an angel.²²⁵

In the Syrian understanding, angels (*mal’ake*) are those spiritual beings who are with God. Derived from the Semitic term l’k’ meaning to send, and *la’ aka* the person sent with a commission, they are the messengers (*mal’ake*) of God as well as the wakeful ones (*‘ire*) who worship God without ceasing.²²⁶ Even though the term does not make intrinsic reference to their nature, they are considered pure beings.

²²³ Cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 247.

²²⁴ *Profession of Vows*, 8.

²²⁵ *Profession of Vows*, 13.

²²⁶ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 275; Brock, *Spirituality*, 57; Wagner, *The Mission of the Holy Angels*, 2

Neither anger nor envy or pride is ever seen in them. They do not have any desire for earthly vanities, honour, glory or anything of that kind. Their delight is in self-control, their glory is to be unknown and their wealth is to possess nothing. Their engagement is only with God, and their work consists only in attention to the things of God.²²⁷ The angels are renowned for their marriage-less state and therefore are witnesses of the resurrected life (cf. Mt 20:30, Mk 12:25, Lk 20:35-36). Severus of Antioch alluding to the monastics as resembling the resurrected life of the angels, says:

These people (monastics) in this world are already similar to the angels because they have received the impassibility (*lā hāsūšūpā*) and the joy (*tābtānūpā*) of the resurrection and rejoice in anticipation the good that we all await. In fact, they have also renounced the rapport between man and woman which causes the birth of the children.²²⁸

The Syrian Fathers have also seen the angels as models of sacramental life since they are a mingling of both “Fire and Spirit” which are symbols of the Eucharist.²²⁹

The prayers of the liturgy often bring to mind the nature of the angelic state of life. As we discussed above, their nature involves closeness to and communion with God, wakefulness in His service, freedom from passions and worldly cares and purity of life.

Although the angels and the virgins both belong to the created order of God, there exists an essential gap between them.²³⁰ But this gap according to the Syrian Fathers is crossed by baptism. Hence,

²²⁷ Cf. Frank, *Angelikos Bios*, 8-12; Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 267-269.

²²⁸ Severios of Antioch, “Les Homelie Cathedrales” Hom. LXI in (PO 8) 257; See also NIN, “Monaci e Monachesimo”, 215.

²²⁹ Cf. Ephrem, *HFide* 10:9-11.

²³⁰ Here we do not forget that even though angels and men are both God’s creation, there exists a huge polarity between them. The angels are of pure nature, and are purely spiritual beings, where as man is created from the dust and is corporeal. Cf. Botha, “Fire Mingled with Spirit”, 98-99.

born of water and the Spirit, the baptized are considered equal to the angels. Through virginity, the virgin is destined to be one with the angels. Like the angels the virgin can also preserve her innermost virginity and chastity of the soul, and thus can betroth herself to the heavenly bridegroom.²³¹ So, the virgin is called forth to manifest angelic qualities. Integrating in her corporeal being the incorporeal nature of the angels, the virgin is challenged to witness to an angelic life on earth.

3.4.1.2. Prayer

The Liturgy of Profession does not specifically mention prayer as a way to unite oneself with God. But in various prayers the Church reveals her mind about prayer. The very beginning of the profession liturgy says: “To dwell a day in your (God’s) house is better than to dwell in another’s house a thousand days” (Ps 84:10).²³² The opening prayer says “Bless them that they may always serve you with steadfast heart and holiness.”²³³ In the *sedro* again we hear, “In their deeds and behaviour, while they are wakeful and asleep, let them approach you assiduously and victoriously so that they be made thereby means of your glory and serve your holy name in sound health during their lives.”²³⁴ And towards the end of the liturgy we hear the virgin saying: “I wish to draw near to God, O Lord my refuge; Your name is good to me” (Ps 73:28).

As we see in the above lines, there is nothing given about prayer in general or in specific terms, but from what we have quoted above one may deduce several things about prayer. To pray means to be in the presence of God. This can be possible either in the sanctuary of God (the church) or in the sanctuary of man (the heart). According to

²³¹ Botha, “Fire Mingled with Spirit”, 100-101.

²³² *Profession of Vows*, 2.

²³³ *Profession of Vows*, 8.

²³⁴ *Profession of Vows*, 10.

the *Liber Graduum*, the person who is united with the Lord and ponders Him continuously ministers to God in his heart. For the author, the Christian’s body is the temple of God, for God’s Spirit resides in man and the heart forms the altar of this temple.²³⁵ Prayer is referred to as the liturgy of the heart and is characterized as the offering acceptable to God. For God’s acceptance of one’s offering of the heart, purity of heart is indispensable. Purity of heart means the transparency or simplicity (*šabruto*) of the whole person whose understanding (*buyono*) is attuned to what is from above. According to Aphrahat, of all offerings pure prayer is the best and purity of heart contributes to pure prayer.²³⁶

According to Ephrem, prayer is the giving of pure praise and thanksgiving (*tawdito*) to God in faith and love.²³⁷ Ephrem mentions the nature of prayer as continuous. He exclaims: “How can my harp, O Lord, ever rest from Your praise”?²³⁸ Ephrem also confirms faith as the foundation of continuous prayer. According to him, faith is conceived in the silence of the interior heart and gives birth to prayer, just as the sap from the womb of the tree brings forth its green buds.²³⁹

Prayer is the incessant encounter of God and man and it is one’s fundamental option *to be* with Him. Ephrem sees in those who choose to be with God at every moment of life, the image of the Lord depicted in their heart and he calls them blessed.²⁴⁰

In short, the teaching on prayer in the Liturgy of Profession is not just one activity among others, but is a beholding of the face of the Lord in one’s heart and encountering Him in each moment of daily life. Life and prayer go together without any dichotomy.

²³⁵ Cf. *Liber Graduum*, 12:1. See also Brock, *The Syriac Fathers*, 42-43.

²³⁶ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, IV:I (PS 1, 137-138); Brock, *Syriac Fathers on Prayer*, 5.

²³⁷ Ephrem, *HEcc1* 27:11.

²³⁸ Ephrem, *HFide* 14:9.

²³⁹ Beck, “Glaube und Gebet”, 15-20.

²⁴⁰ Ephrem, *HVirg* 2:15.

In *Takso d'suporo d'dairoyoto* there are aspects dealing with the salvific significance of prayer. Prayer is mentioned here as the running of the virgin towards God in order to be protected under His wings, taking refuge in His mercies. *Takso d'suporo* also sees prayer as a means of liberation from the oppression of the devil, and a means of residing in God so that one finds life and redemption.²⁴¹

3.4.1.3. Eucharist

Derived from the Greek word *Eucharistia*, the name Eucharist means thanksgiving.²⁴² In the Syrian language there is no definite word for Eucharist, but the terms *qurbono*, (offering), *rozo* (mystery), body of Christ, (*HNat* 3:9) medicine of life (*HNat* 3:15), refer to the Eucharist.

In the Syrian as in the general Christian understanding, the Eucharist is the center of the Christian life. In the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy, the faithful remember and offer their life to God and thus relate the mystery of their life to the mystery of the Eucharist.²⁴³ Conforming to the Christian perspective, the Malankara Church celebrates profession in the context of the Eucharistic liturgy and thus presents the Eucharist “as the heart of monastic life.”²⁴⁴

Christ betrothed the Church to Himself and He gave her His body and blood. The Church sings: “And rings He put on my fingers, His Holy Body and Blood”²⁴⁵ The body and blood of Christ are the ornaments with which Christ adorned His bride, and at the same time they are the symbols of the eternal covenant between Christ and the Church.²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ *Takso d'suporo*, 328.

²⁴² Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek- English Lexicon*, 717.

²⁴³ Piana, “Rito, Fede”, 294.

²⁴⁴ Foley, *Rites of Religious Profession*, 57.

²⁴⁵ *Koodasakal*, 53.

In the earliest Syriac tradition, covenant was thought to be the most suited expression for the consecrated life, which we study in the coming section of our study. The term “covenant” occurs in various parts of the Liturgy of Profession. The profession of vows itself is seen as making a covenant with God.²⁴⁷ Against this background, the consecration of the virgin in the context of the mystery of the Eucharist also symbolizes a covenant of love through which Christ graciously gives Himself to the virgin.

Through the new covenant the Church is being taken into a distinctive relationship (bride). She becomes Christ’s possession and partner to whom is revealed true knowledge of Christ’s life, passion, death and resurrection on her way of union.²⁴⁸ The covenant relationship also imparts to the virgin a profound knowledge of Christ’s paschal mystery, for it is His desire that all shall arrive at true knowledge.²⁴⁹

In the Liturgy of Profession, the Eucharist is depicted as the nuptial banquet freely given to the virgin bride of Christ as well as to the wedding guests. By sharing in it the virgin is delighted.²⁵⁰ Here we see Christ the Eternal Bridegroom nourishing the virgin through the same body and blood through which He nourishes His Church.

The Eucharist is the mystery of love and is an offering (*qurbono*). The virgin consecrated in and through the mystery of the *qurbono* substantially becomes an offering to God and an offering to others.

The offering leads the virgin to communion and she becomes one with Christ. For Christ by His compassion unites Himself with each individual. This communion strengthens her communion with others.

²⁴⁶ Cf. Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 183.

²⁴⁷ *Profession of Vows*, 14.

²⁴⁸ *Koodasakal*, 54-55.

²⁴⁹ *Profession of Vows*, 7.

²⁵⁰ *Takso d'suporo*, 340.

Thus, we perceive that the Eucharist and the Eucharistic life are indispensable for the bride of Christ on her way of her union with Christ and others.²⁵¹

3.4.1.4. Works of Justice

In the Syrian thinking, doing works of justice is essential for man's union with God. In the introductory prayer of the liturgy itself we see the Church urging the virgin to live on earth a divine life by doing works of justice.²⁵² We have already dealt with the efficacy of charitable activities in the second chapter, but here we would like to see what the Liturgy of Profession means by the works of justice.

The term "justice," of Hebrew root *zdg*, signifies giving others what is due.²⁵³ The term also involves a civil and moral connotation and is mentioned in a wider sense in the liturgical prayers of profession. In the prayers the term "justice" and those expressions related to it, for example, "perfection", "uprightness", "holiness", are used extensively.²⁵⁴

In the *Proemion*, Christ is addressed as the Just One, who answers prayers, forgives transgressions, justifies sinners, welcomes the penitent, and pardons wrongdoers. The virgin is depicted as the one who attains justice through faith in God and out of His divine mercy.²⁵⁵ Here we see justice as a divine attribute.

The prayers also indicate that the one who seeks justice is the most beloved of God and the one who is justified by God through works of justice needs to please God.²⁵⁶ Here works of justice signify acts of kindness in the eyes of God. In Proverbs we read: "He who follows justice and mercy shall find life, justice and glory" (Prov 21: 21).

²⁵¹ Yousif, *L'eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem*, 317.

²⁵² *Profession of Vows*, 8.

²⁵³ Descamps, "Justice", 244-245.

²⁵⁴ *Profession of Vows*, 9-12.

In the Semitic view, justice is understood not as a passive attitude of impartiality towards others but a positive commitment towards the other as it is depicted in the Bible. So deeds like love for the poor, almsgiving, visiting the sick, hospitality are highly recommended by the Syrian Fathers.²⁵⁷ Hence, Fathers like Ephrem believed that the chaste reputation of virginity alone is inadequate for entering into the bridal chamber of Christ. About the acts of justice Ephrem sings:

Give joy to Him in those who are grieved
Visit Him in the sick, feed Him in the hungry
Invite Him and delight Him; kiss Him and
Let Him go.²⁵⁸

In *Takso d' suporo*, the reading from Isaiah is included to encourage the virgin to do works of justice. Thus we read in the liturgy:

Thus says the Lord: keep judgment and perform justice because my salvation is close by and my justice to be revealed. Blessed the man who does this and the person who is strengthened by it (Is 56:1-2).²⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

To illustrate the main mystical themes in the Liturgy of Profession was the main concern of this chapter. From the studies made from such a perspective, we are able to find three themes, namely: 1) Monastic profession is a mystery, 2) the Liturgy of Profession witnesses to the nuptial mystery; and, finally; 3) the Christian virgin is a bride of Christ.

In both theological and spiritual respects the Syrian Church sees mystery not as involving secrecy, i.e. something hidden or unrevealed, but as divine communication which man can comprehend

²⁵⁵ *Profession of Vows*, 9.

²⁵⁶ *Profession of Vows*, 6.

²⁵⁷ Ephrem, *HEccl* 4:12-13. See also Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* Vol. II, 361-364.

²⁵⁸ Ephrem, *HEccl* 4:13.

²⁵⁹ *Takso d' suporo*, 341.

not through intellect but through faith. The Liturgy of Profession even in its small details conveys to us that whatever transformation happens in the virgin or the interior spiritual joy experienced by her in the liturgy is due to the work of the Triune God. By the term “work of God” we mean not a moral action in the natural order but the theandric energy that pervades the whole liturgy.²⁶⁰ The presence and salvific action of God in the context of the mystery of the Eucharist and the eternal values conveyed through the liturgical prayers further confirm this mystic dimension.

Monastic profession as a mystery is not an instant revelation of God. It had already been revealed in the life and teachings of the Son of God and was presented by the Fathers of the Church as a symbol of Christ’s betrothal of the Church. Against this background we studied the Liturgy of Profession to see how the nuptial themes are given and integrated in the prayers, services and symbolic actions in the liturgy. From this study we found that monastic profession witnesses before the faithful to the wondrous marriage between Christ and the Church, her only Spouse. Since there is no direct implication of the marriage of Christ to His Church in the profession liturgy such as is given in the marriage liturgy, we have put the nuptial theme as an *excursus* at the end of the chapter.

The unbreakable union that exists between Christ and His spouse the Church and her journey towards the eternal kingdom is to be manifested in the life of each individual soul here on earth. The Christian virgin who is consecrated to be the bride of Christ is destined to do this. So we present the Christian virgin as spouse of Christ who with Mary journeys to the kingdom. Journeying towards the eternal kingdom is not an easy task for the Church, for she finds enemies and thieves on her way, but as presented in the liturgy of marriage, the Church, the Bride of Christ, at last will find Him. Likewise, the Christian virgin

hopefully treads forward on her way, facing difficulties while using narrow yet straight ways (sacramental life and moral actions). Thus she hopes to reach the eternal bridal chamber and to be united with her bridegroom.

Since the mystery of divine love is communicated to the virgin through the Liturgy of Profession, she experiences a truer relationship with God, with her fellow-beings and with the Church. With all her limitless potential for creativity of love and of service, she commits herself to manifest this mystery of love in the world. This theme is the content of our next chapter.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation*, 86.

EXCURSUS

**TYPOLOGY OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH AS
PROTOTYPE OF THE CHRISTIAN COUPLE**

The West Syrian Liturgy of Profession does not state anywhere that monastic profession is a symbol of the betrothal of Christ and the Church. But some prayers of the Service of Profession occur in the liturgy of the consecration of the Church (*qudōš 'īdtō*)²⁶¹, and in the liturgy of marriage. For example, the Service of Profession says: “O heavenly bridegroom, you who have saved me by your precious blood, let me be worthy to behold you at that time in your kingdom.”²⁶² The *Proemion* of the marriage liturgy says: “O Lord Messiah, heavenly bridegroom, you have chosen the daughter of the Gentiles as your Church and cleansed her from all defilement and transgression by your innocent and holy blood.”²⁶³

The prayers in the profession and the marriage liturgy differ little in form and are the same in their content. Both of them indicate Christ as the heavenly Bridegroom of the Church and of the individual Christian. S. Brock says: “Every individual member of the Church as well as the collective Church could be regarded as the bride of Christ, for Christ has bought the Church and the individual soul as His brides through the payment of His own precious blood as a bridal price.”²⁶⁴ Likewise the Syrian Orthodox liturgy of marriage addresses Christ, “O Bridegroom... to whom the souls of pure virgins are betrothed.”²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ *Qudoš 'īdtō* means the sanctification or consecration of the Church. The Syrians commemorate the sanctification of the Church on the Sunday in the beginning of the liturgical year. Cf. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Dictionary*, 493; *Penkeesa*, 1-2.

²⁶² *Profession of Vows*, 11.

²⁶³ *Aradhanakramam*, 44.

²⁶⁴ Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian*, 27.

²⁶⁵ *Syrian Orthodox Service*, 24.

Therefore in the following section we study the typology of Christ and the Church as prototype of Christian husband and wife to understand the nuptial basis of the Liturgy of Profession and the consequent marriage relationship between Christ and the monastic virgin, the bride of Christ.

1. Christ the Bridegroom and the Church His Bride

Christ's relation to the Church is based on a nuptial covenant. Christ is the bridegroom of the Church and the Church is His bride (Eph 5:21-30). This bridegroom-bride relationship is based on the supreme love of the bridegroom towards the bride and the bride's unfailing fidelity and gratitude towards the bridegroom.²⁶⁶

1.1. Christ the Bridegroom (*Hatnō*)

The title bridegroom (*hatnō*) denoted an ancient Semitic custom of circumcision prior to an alliance (marriage).²⁶⁷ The Hebrew word *hâtan* designates father-in-law, and literally means circumciser.²⁶⁸

The idea of Jesus as Bridegroom has its origin in the Old Testament concept of Israel as the bride of God (Is 54:5, 62:5, Hos 2: 19-20). The relation that existed between Yahweh and Israel was characterized as a marriage bond.

The title “bridegroom” is an imagery which Jesus Himself used to present the relationship between Jesus and His disciples (cf. Mk 2:18-20). The New Testament root of the imagery is in Mt 9:15 which is parallel with Mk 2:19 and Lk 5:34. The context of Jesus' revelation as bridegroom is seen in His reply to the Pharisees' question to Him about fasting. “Can the children of the bridal chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?” (Lk 5:34).

²⁶⁶ Velliyan, “The Church as Bride”, 62.

²⁶⁷ Hyatt, “Circumcision”, 629; Overstraetan, “Les liturgies nuptiales”, 262.

²⁶⁸ Overstraetan, “Les liturgies nuptiales”, 262; Theckanath, *Bride of Christ*, 258.

In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the image of the bridegroom is very prominent (Mt. 25:1-13). Verse 10 is particularly significant: “While the foolish virgins were away buying oil, the bridegroom arrived and those who were ready went in with him to the bridal chamber.”²⁶⁹ John the Baptist identifies himself not as the Messiah but rather as the friend of the bridegroom to whom the bride belongs (Jn 3:29).

Christ used the title “bridegroom” to reveal his intimate relationship with His beloved ones, a relationship that is akin to the marriage relationship. The presentation of Jesus as the bridegroom and the Church as bride is prominent in the Syrian tradition as well.

1.1.1. Christ the Bridegroom of the Church

The Syrian Churches acknowledge Christ as the bridegroom of the Church. The Order of the Service of Marriage in the Mar Thoma Syrian Church vividly highlights this aspect. It says: “Jesus Christ is the true bridegroom and the Church is the bride. He loved the Church and gave himself to her. We remember this ideal in the marriage service.”²⁷⁰ It is by paying His own blood as bridal price that Christ bought the Church His bride. This act signifies Christ’s supreme love, faithfulness and sacrifice as the bridegroom of the Church.

The Breviary of the Syro-Oriental Church says: “O Christ, who made your holy Church your bride in your love and gave her the incorruptible dowry and imperishable pledge...”²⁷¹ Here also Christ is depicted as the bridegroom. In the liturgical prayers of the Malankara Church, Christ is addressed as the Heavenly Bridegroom.²⁷² This is

²⁶⁹ Jacob of Serugh, “Homily on the Ten Virgins”, 42. Unlike the wedding feast mentioned in the Greek translation, the Peshitta Version mentions the bridal chamber. See Chapter 2, 2.2.6.2. (c).

²⁷⁰ *Order of Services*, 24, See also Engberding, “Die Kirche als Braut”, 22-25.

²⁷¹ *Breviarium*, III, 398. See Theckanath, *Bride of Christ*, 258?

²⁷² *Koodasakal*, 44, 46, 74.

because Christ is not from this earth. He came down from heaven in order to be betrothed and to be united with his bride the Church and his bridal chamber is in heaven.²⁷³

1.2. Church: The Bride (*kaltō*) of Christ

The Syrians generally uses the term ‘*īdtō*’ to present the Church as the people of God and the material building. The word ‘*īdtō*’ has its origin from the Hebrew term ‘*edah*’ which is a substantive derived from the verb *y’d* denoting both assembly and the church building.²⁷⁴ The word ‘*īdtō*’ corresponds also to the Hebrew word *knuštō* literally meaning ‘gather’ (Ez 22:21) and the derivative *knušyo*, which in the Syrian liturgical sense designates the congregation assembled.²⁷⁵

Other synonyms for the Church based on the Old and New Testaments are also used in the Syrian liturgy. They include “People of the Lord,” which is equivalent to *qahal Jahweh*, kingdom of God, and “Mother of the Faithful” since she gives birth through the work of the Holy Spirit who descends and forms the immortal child in the womb of the water.²⁷⁶

The Syriac words *kalto* and *mkīrtō* designate bride.²⁷⁷ The word *kaltō* denotes the crowning ceremony in the marriage as well as in the baptismal rites. The term (*mkīrtō*) comes from the root (*mkr*) and though used in the marriage context has a commercial significance in Semitic culture. It reflects the common Semitic background of buying and exchange.²⁷⁸ Thus, it refers to an Oriental custom of buying the

²⁷³ Cf. *Koodasakal*, 53; 62-63; Cf. also Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 115-116.

²⁷⁴ Cf. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 400; Overstraetan, “Les liturgies nuptiales”, 261; Theckanath, *Bride of Christ*, 156-157.

²⁷⁵ Overstraetan, “Les liturgies nuptiales”, 261-262; Velliyan, “The Church as Bride”, 59.

²⁷⁶ Velliyan, “The Church as Bride” 59.

²⁷⁷ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 216; 271.

²⁷⁸ Murray, *Symbols*, 132.

bride from her father. In marriage negotiations, either the father or the bridegroom decides the bride-price.²⁷⁹ The Malankara Liturgy of Marriage depicts the Church as a bride in her Liturgy of the Hours. “Holy Church, bride of the one Beloved Son, on this day of Thursday invites all her children to offer praise with joy to the Holy Bridegroom.”²⁸⁰ The Church is here presented as a bride who rejoices in Christ, her bridegroom.

2. Betrothal of the Church to Christ

The theme betrothal to Christ in Syrian understanding involves two separate aspects: the betrothal of the Church and the betrothal of the individual Christian.²⁸¹ The betrothal of the Church to Christ is seen as taking place at several different moments in the historical time of Christ. Two moments are regarded as especially important: His baptism and the piercing of His side on the Cross.²⁸² An Epiphany prayer says: “O Church of true believers, sing praise to the heavenly Bridegroom who betrothed Himself to you in the river.”²⁸³ Thus, the baptism of Christ is a point of betrothal of the Church, for, from water and the Spirit Christ made the Church His glorious spouse.

Christ’s betrothal to the Church referred to the Old Testament betrothals that had taken place at pools or wells. The Syrian Oriental Church makes this aspect clear in the Breviary. At the well, Eliazer chose in betrothal Rebecca for Isaac (Gen 24:10), at the well Jacob betrothed to Rachel (Gen 29:10) and it was at the well that Moses

²⁷⁹ Engberding, “Die Kirche als Braut”, 13-14.

²⁸⁰ Acharya, *Prayer with the Harp*, Vol.1, 126.

²⁸¹ On the betrothal of Christ to the Church, see Engberding, “Die Kirche als Braut”, 5-48; Graffin, “L’ Eglise épouse du Christ” 313-336; Cf. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 92-106.

²⁸² Engberding, “Die Kirche als Braut”, 5-8; Graffin, “L’ Eglise épouse du Christ”, 318-321.

²⁸³ Acharya, *Prayer with the Harp*, Vol. 2, 180.

betrothed to Zipporah (Ex 2:15). Likewise, Christ the bridegroom betrothed Himself to the Church in the Jordan through the mediation of John the Baptist.²⁸⁴

Christ’s death on the cross is another focal point of betrothal. The prayers of *qudōš ‘īdtō* say: “Peace be unto thee, O worthy woman, who hast been betrothed to Me on the cross.”²⁸⁵ The time thus alludes to the betrothal of the Church to Christ in the two different moments of Christ’s baptism and His death on the cross.

2.1. Purification and Sanctification of the Bride

The marriage liturgy of the Malankara Church highlights the status of the bride before purification. Before betrothal she was covered with dirt, impurity and wounds (cf. Ez 16:6). She was in prison with bitter fetters. This alludes to the state of mankind after the fall and of Israel before the advent of Christ. Christ’s advent cleansed the bride from all defilement and transgressions. He washed and purified her in the waters of the Jordan and by His innocent and holy blood at Calvary.²⁸⁶ The Church prays:

O Lord Messiah, heavenly bridegroom, you have chosen the daughter of the Gentiles as your church and cleansed her from all defilement and transgression by your innocent and holy blood. You offered yourself as the Bridegroom and betrothed yourself to

²⁸⁴ *Breviarium* I, 403. Conybeare, *Rituale Armenorum*, 352. Jacob of Serugh also had written about this. According to Jacob of Sarugh, Eliazer was sent by Abraham in search of a bride for his son Isaac. Likewise John the Baptist was sent by God to choose the Church as bride for Christ. Here John the Baptist is compared to Eliazer, who himself refers to the friend of the bridegroom. See *Ms. Vat. Syr.* 117, fol.90v-93r. For the typologies of Jacob of Serugh see Zingerle, *ZKTh* 11 (1887), 92-108. See also Graffin, “L’ Eglise épouse du Christ”, 324-325; Vellian, “The Church as Bride”, 61.

²⁸⁵ Cf. *Koodasakal*, 56.

²⁸⁶ Overstraeten, “Les liturgies nuptiales”, 263-264.

the earth-born Church, having redeemed her from all bondage to all unclean spirits and set her free from all debts and sin.²⁸⁷

Christ not only purified the Church but He sanctified her as well. The prayer in the Breviary says: “O Church, O adorned one and betrothed to the King of Kings, and daughter of light, glorify and thank the heavenly spouse who purified (*hasī* = justified) you with the water of baptism and sanctified (*qades*) you in His grace.”²⁸⁸ The Church is thus cleansed and made holy so that she may be a worthy partner for Christ the Holy One (Cant 4:7; 16:1, Eph 5: 25-27, 2 Cor 11:2;). This is why in the Odes of Solomon the Odist called her the “perfect virgin” destined to be united to Christ the bridegroom.²⁸⁹

2.2. Adorning and Beautifying of the Bride

Christ not only purified and sanctified the Church but He gave the Church beauty, excellence or brightness and splendour. According to the Breviary: “He (Christ) dressed you with the gown of glorious and unending light and He placed on your head a glorious and brilliant crown, and there is no beauty equal to yours, O Church, holy spouse of the King.”²⁹⁰ It is on seeing the fully adorned Church that David marvelled and asked: Who is this, the king’s daughter, who with great dignity, stands at the Lord’s right hand? (cf. Ps 45:9).

Vested with the gown of glory made by the Holy Spirit and wearing the royal ring (body and blood of Christ),²⁹¹ the Church becomes like the daughter of the king who stands in glory. The East

²⁸⁷ *Koodasakal*, 44; *Order of Services*, 28.

²⁸⁸ *Breviarium* III, 410. For the citation, see Vellian, “The Church as Bride”, 61.

²⁸⁹ *Ode*, 33:5-7; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 120.

²⁹⁰ *Breviarium*, III, 430; Graffin, “L’Eglise épouse du Christ”, 319-320; see also Vellian, “The Church as Bride”, 61.

²⁹¹ Christ’s giving of His body and blood to the Church is referred to as the putting on of the wedding ring. The wedding ring is a sign of the marriage covenant and it designates fidelity. Cf. *Koodasakal*, 45.

Syrian rite says: “Give thanks, O Church, the queen, to the Son of the Kings.”²⁹² The Church is also exalted as a queen in the house of God surrounded by three fortresses, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to safeguard her from the attacks of evil men.²⁹³

2.3. The Wedding of the Church

Christ the Eternal Bridegroom married the Church. The Church says: “He has come from on high and married me and made me His bride.”²⁹⁴ The death of Christ on the cross is considered the sacred time of Christ’s marriage to the Church. By offering His own life, Christ married the Church. About this self-giving, the Church is astonished and asks herself: “Who has ever seen a Bridegroom offering himself in sacrifice at his marriage feast, or a bride rejoicing in the slaughter of her spouse”?²⁹⁵ Because of this unique act the Church glorifying her bridegroom proclaims: “You are my husband, O glorious one, who established the Garden of Eden. . . My bride-price you have paid with your Cross. You have set me free by your suffering, and have prepared a bride-chamber for me on high.”²⁹⁶

Christ the bridegroom has established for His bride two bridal chambers; one in heaven and the other on earth. This is to please His Father in heaven.²⁹⁷ The heavenly bridal chamber refers to the heavenly kingdom and the earthly bridal chamber refers to the sanctuary where Christ abides (the Eucharist).²⁹⁸

²⁹² Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 266.

²⁹³ *Koodasakal*, 45; 67.

²⁹⁴ *Koodasakal*, 52-53 (my translation).

²⁹⁵ Acharya, *Prayer with the Harp*, Vol. 2, 229.

²⁹⁶ *Koodasakal*, 75-76.

²⁹⁷ *Penkeesa*, 6.

²⁹⁸ According to Narsai, sanctuary is a type of the heavenly bridal chamber. He writes: “A beautiful bridal chamber he has fitted on earth as a type of that which is above, that they (Christ and the Church) may delight therein

2.3.1. Clothing and Crowning of the Bride

The Church proclaims her crowning and clothing by Christ the bridegroom in her liturgical prayers: “Blessed are you (the Church) because He has clothed you with the garment of glory within Jordan” (cf. Is 61:10).²⁹⁹ Christ has clothed the Church with a spiritual and imperishable garment. It is Christ who Himself has woven this garment. It is of glorious purple and is made of fine gold.³⁰⁰ The glorious vestments of the Church show her likeness to Christ the bridegroom and also her role at the coming of Christ to stand as His companion and helper.³⁰¹

The *qudōš ʿidtō* prayers refer to the crowning of the Church. They say: “He (Christ) placed on your (the Church’s) head the excellent and praiseworthy crown of glory (Is 62:3). The Son of God hath crowned the Church { . . . } He hath made her a crown of the glorious rays of the light of His hidden Father, and hath set it upon her head and adorned her therewith.”³⁰²

The Odes of Solomon refer to the image of crowning of the Church: “The Lord is my head like a crown and I shall never be without him.”³⁰³ Christ puts on His bride’s head a crown that will last forever (1 Cor 9: 24-25), a crown of honour (Ps 8:5), of righteousness (2 Tim 4:7-8), a crown of glory (1 Pt 5:4), and of life (Rev 2:10). Thus crowns are linked to humanity as the apex of God’s creation, to the future glorification of the Church and to the martyrs’ reward.³⁰⁴

mystically unto the end.” Narsai, *Homiliae et Carmina* (Homily 21) 349. See also Kruse, “Das Brautlied”, 310.

²⁹⁹ *Breviarium* III, 410; Cf also *Penkeesa*, 168; Theckanath, *Bride of Christ*, 362.

³⁰⁰ Cf. *Breviarium*, III, 410; *Penkeesa*, 10-11; Engberding, “Die Kirche als Braut”, 21-22.

³⁰¹ Sorci, “Chiesa–Sposa”, 88. See also Edakalathur, *The Theology of Marriage*, 119.

³⁰² Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 262.

³⁰³ *Odes* 1: 1; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 17.

³⁰⁴ Cf. *Koodasakal*, 72; Meyendorff, *Marriage*, 41.

2.3.2. Guests of the Marriage

The liturgy of *qudōš ʿidto* and the marriage liturgy in the Malankara Church speak of the invited guests of the marriage between Christ and the Church. They include both heavenly and earthly beings. Guests singled out for mention are priests, prophets, apostles, martyrs, angels, the gentiles and people of all nations.³⁰⁵

These guests bring gifts with them to the banquet. The priests come with the dignity of their ordination, the prophets bring their revelation, the apostles their preaching, the martyrs their lifeblood, the angels their glorious praise, and the people their adoration.³⁰⁶ The guests are received and seated for the wedding banquet.

2.3.3. The Wedding Banquet

The Syrian liturgy speaks of the wedding banquet in relation to the wedding of Christ to the Church. According to the rite, it is Christ Himself who prepared the wedding feast in honour of the bride whom He has married.³⁰⁷ The Church praising Christ for this says: “Praise to you, Heavenly Bridegroom, who call all peoples to your marriage feast where you yourself are immolated and given to them as the food of immortality.”³⁰⁸ The food served is manna and flesh; and the drink is the blood of the Spouse mixed with water.³⁰⁹ The marriage liturgy assigned the role of waiters to the angels, and there were also volunteers from among men. Only those guests who carry with them the robe of baptismal purity are allowed to enter the banquet hall.³¹⁰ Hence, the

³⁰⁵ Cf. *Penkeesa*, 1; *Koodasakal*, 44.

³⁰⁶ *Breviarium*, III, 432.

³⁰⁷ *Breviarium*, III, 432. In the wedding banquet, the reference is to the Eucharist.

³⁰⁸ Acharya, *Prayer with the Harp*, Vol. 1, 76. The reference to the wedding banquet and the food of immortality are to be seen in the context of the Eucharist.

³⁰⁹ Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 264 -265.

³¹⁰ *Koodasakal*, 48.

liturgy mentions the appointment of the keepers for the gate of heaven. “At the door of the Church custodians stand day and night, protecting the bride from the evil one. They are Simon, its foundation, Paul, its architect, John, its sponsor, and David, its friend.”³¹¹

2.3.4. Leading the Bride to the Bridal Chamber

Christ leads the Church to the bridal chamber. It is here that the nuptial union of Christ and the Church takes place. The bridal chamber prepared by Christ for His bride is on high and is spiritual. It is also called “the heavenly Jerusalem.”³¹² Here the eschatological nature of the bridal chamber is exposed. The Church has a temporary bridal chamber where she enjoys the union with Christ her bridegroom.³¹³ In the Second Coming the Church will be taken to the heavenly bridal chamber for eternal union.

2.3.5. Unfailing Fidelity of the Bridegroom

Jesus the Bridegroom assures the bride of His faithful and eternal love. The Church is also asked to be faithful and grateful to Him. In the Liturgy of Marriage Christ tells the Church: “Do not be afraid, O faithful Church, and let not your heart be disturbed. I do not exchange you for another, since you did not exchange me for another. And if at the end of time heaven and earth are dissolved, you should not be afraid. See, I have prepared for you a throne; the house of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”³¹⁴ This is the covenant of fidelity that Christ offers to the Church.

³¹¹ *Šhīmo* (*šubahō*.) 269; In the *Šhīmo* the identity of John is not clearly stated. It only names “Youhanon”. It is assumed that John Baptist is meant, hence in the Chaldean Breviary the name of John the Baptist as friend and sponsor of Church the bride is clearly mentioned. See *Breviarium*, III, 441 also see Graffin, “L’Eglise épouse du Christ”, 319.

³¹² *Koodasakal*, 56; 61; *Order of the Service*, 44.

³¹³ This reference is to the sanctuary. In the Eucharistic liturgy Christ is united with the Church his bride in the sanctuary, the bridal chamber.

³¹⁴ *Koodasakal*, 49.

The Syro-Oriental liturgy also highlights the fidelity required on the part of the Church to Christ her bridegroom. It says: “You who are espoused to Christ should not look for another spouse, because he is the true Bridegroom.”³¹⁵ Christ has united the Church to Himself by His death on the Cross and He cares with an unfailing faithfulness for His bride.

2.3.6. The Faithful Bride

Unlike Israel, the previous bride, the Church, the new bride, is faithful.³¹⁶ Seized and filled with love for her bridegroom she always contemplates the beauty of her bridegroom.³¹⁷ In the *sedrō* of the Dedication of the Church (*hudoth ‘īdtō*) we read, that as the Church ponders the love of her bridegroom, she will never forget her bridegroom, and until His coming she will remain faithful and will not unite herself to anyone other than Christ her only Beloved.³¹⁸ Through enduring faith she resists the evil powers and remains faithful to the Bridegroom and follows Him in each moment.

The Church’s constant following of her Bridegroom, which expresses her deep love and faithfulness towards her beloved, is given in the Malankara Liturgy of Marriage.

I went around by sea and land
None could tell me where he was;
I searched for Him in Bethlehem;
They said to me, he has departed for Egypt.³¹⁹

The image of the search is reminiscent of the quest of the beloved in the Song of Songs. “I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him,

³¹⁵ *Breviarium* III, 397.

³¹⁶ Acharya, *Prayer with the Harp*, Vol. 3, 420, 425, 427; Cf. Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 121.

³¹⁷ *Koodasakal*, 76-77.

³¹⁸ *Penkeesa*, 27.

³¹⁹ *Koodasakal*, 54.

but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer (SoS 3:1). The Church searches in Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, Jordan, the wedding feast (at Cana), the wilderness, Zion, and is always one step behind. As she moves, she hears that her lover is crucified. She weeps bitterly at the news of her lover's crucifixion and burial but finally she meets the risen Lord.

An angel answered me and said, "weep not!
He is risen from the tomb."
I heard his voice and rejoiced.
My face shone and I was full of joy,
I answered him and embraced him,
He answered me lovingly and said:
Peace be to thee, O worthy woman,
Who hast been betrothed to me on the cross,
I ascend to the Father and send to thee the Holy Spirit.³²⁰

The last part of the hymn is based on the encounter of Mary Magdalene and Jesus (Jn 20:10-17) but aptly fits the context of the bride's searching and finding of the Lord.

Here in the above-cited hymn, we see the Church's faithful searching for Christ. In order to find Him she passed through many difficulties to various places, which symbolized the mystery of Christ's birth, passion, death and resurrection. Finally she succeeded in finding Him whom she sought. Through the hymn, the Church conveys to the faithful that a "passage" through Christ's paschal mystery is indispensable for union with Christ.

The typology of Christ and the Church has a pervasive influence on the marital life of the Christian couple. Likewise, through the Liturgy of Profession of the Monastic Virgin, the Church envisages a marriage bond uniting Christ and the virgin, which permeates her whole life towards her journey to the eternal union.

³²⁰ *Koodasakal*, 55-56.

Chapter Four

MONASTIC VIRGIN PROFESSION A LITURGICO-THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter we have studied the "mystery dimension" of the Liturgy of Monastic Profession and we have traversed the Trinitarian foundation—the role of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit—in the vocation and in the monastic initiation of the virgin. We have also dealt with the nuptial understanding of the rite in accordance with that of the Church.

Our study of the liturgical service led us to the conviction that the liturgical celebration of monastic initiation is not a momentary event in historical time that becomes just a reminiscence of the past when the rite is over. Rather, it effects an entry into a sacred time and space, and the ensuing life of the professed after the monastic initiation should be a striving to make this entry into sacred time and space effective in their lives in historical time in manifold ways.

Thus, poignant with the "mysterion consciousness", the liturgy of monastic initiation makes it easier for the consecrated virgin to conceive that she is called, consecrated and sent by God out of love to serve Him. This knowledge of love urges her to live for God and with God and to share with others the experience of that divine love through her God-given and limitless potential of creativity of love and service.

The Liturgy of Monastic Profession that we have analyzed in the previous chapters is going to be analyzed here under three headings, namely: 1) Monastic Profession: Relation with God 2) Monastic Profession: Relation to the Church 3) Monastic Consecration and

Mission: Implications and Paradigms, in order to view the liturgico-theological significance of the Service.

1. MONASTIC PROFESSION: RELATION TO GOD

Monastic profession, by virtue of its consecratory aspect, relates the virgin effectively and totally to God. We comprehend this divine-human relation in the following manner.

1.1. Profession: A Covenant

Virginal life and initiation into it is considered a covenant (*qyōmō*) in the Syrian tradition. But, we know that it is not a covenant of the same category as the covenant that God made with the Israelites. Thus, it is advisable to probe the covenantal dimension of monastic profession. To understand this aspect we first analyze briefly the general notion of covenant, and then we see how profession is a covenant.

The term covenant, in Hebrew *berît*,¹ in Greek *diathēkē*,² and in Syriac *qyōmō*, is widely used in the Old Testament context to depict a pact or a formal relation contracted between friends (personal covenants) (Gen 21:27; I Sam 23:18); between equals known (parity covenants) (Gen 31: 43-50); between lords and vassals (suzerainty covenant) (2 Sam 3:12-15).³ A covenant in whatever form it was made was always initiated by one of the parties involved in it, affirmed by an agreement, followed by a unilateral or bilateral solemn promise made binding by an oath which may be either a verbal formula or a symbolic action.⁴

¹ The term *berît* is related to the root *brh* and indicates food and eating. According to L. Köhler the original idea of covenant stemmed from the covenantal meal. Cf. Köhler, "Problems in the Study of the Language", 4-7; McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant*, 3.

² *Diatheke* means testament and it is used in the Septuagint to translate the term *berît* meaning covenant. Cf. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant*, 1.

³ Cf. Mendenhall, "Covenant", 714.

⁴ Cf. Mendenhall, "Covenant", 714-715; McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant*, 2-4.

Surpassing all prevalent covenants of the social order, God made a covenant with His chosen people comprised of promises, signs, precepts and conditions for saving them and making them His own possession. In the covenant given through Moses Yahweh exhorts:

If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6).

Yahweh the covenant partner was so powerful, mighty, and loving that the people of Israel had only to accept the elective demand of Yahweh. The divine covenant demanded from Israel an unrestricted, unconditional love directed to God alone. They said "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient" (Ex 19:8). But in the course of time periodic infidelity to covenant occurred which led to its break up and resulted in the formulation of the new covenant (cf. Jer 31: 31-35).⁵

In the New Testament, God's covenant with Israel is fulfilled in Jesus' covenant with the Church collectively and with human souls individually. The new covenant is no longer given orally nor is it written on stone tablets, but it is carved upon the hearts of human beings (Jer 31:33). Instead of eternal instruction, this covenant contains an interior principle of personal regeneration. Far from being a legal contract, it establishes a profound interior relation between the parties.⁶

Among the Syrian writers, it is Aphrahat who deliberately speaks of the covenant in his *Demonstration on the Covenanters*. Aphrahat used the word *qyōmō* 77 times and the Greek loan word *diathēkē* 35 times.⁷ As we have mentioned elsewhere, different etymological meanings such as "to rise up", "to stand", "to remain stable" are attached

⁵ McKenzie, "Covenant", 152-154.

⁶ McKenzie, "Covenant", 154.

⁷ Nedungatt, "The Covenanters", 193-195.

to the term *qyōmō*. Aphrahat also used *qyōmō* to designate Christ, the Church, and the Christian faith in the context of the pact. Covenanters were those faithful followers of Christ, the New Covenant.⁸

Summing up the biblical and the patristic view, we assume that in the Syrian understanding, *qyōmō* signifies an irrevocable relation, a loving pact that God establishes with His chosen people Israel, with the Church and with individuals in the history of salvation.⁹ Vööbus, perceives that God's covenant with the individual is made at baptism and effects in the baptized an all pervading covenant-consciousness of Christian life. It urges the person to commit totally to Christ the true covenant (ܩܝܡܘܢܐ, *qyōmō-šariṛō*) in person, repudiating the physical natural conditions of the world such as marriage, possessions, and personal autonomy for the sake of union with Him.¹⁰ In the following part of our study we pinpoint how covenantal life finds expression and realization in and through the different elements of monastic profession.

1.1.1. Elements of the Covenant Seen in Monastic Profession

The basic elements constituting a covenant include: God's initiative, a series of promises, a relationship between the person involved and God, and an act of affirmation of the covenant either verbal or symbolic.¹¹ We notice these elements in our monastic profession.

1.1.1.1. Divine Initiative of Love

Covenant, in whichever terms the concept appears, in the monastic profession for example, "pledge",¹² "promise" and "contract"¹³

⁸ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes* VI: 3-6 (PS 1, 255-266). See also Nedungatt, "The Covenanters", 196.

⁹ Nedungatt, "The Covenanters", 195.

¹⁰ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* I, 12.

¹¹ Cf. Mendenhall, "Covenant", 714; Van Roo, *The Mystery*, 13.

¹² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 24.

¹³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 38.

is God's benevolent initiative of love (*hesed*). This theme is emphasized in God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1-10) the first reading in the Service of Profession.

Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you, and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing (Gen 12:1-2).¹⁴

This Scriptural reading and the liturgical prayers to set apart the virgin to pursue God's holiness vindicate God's initiative of love. In fact, God's call of the virgin from a way of sinfulness to a life of holiness (cf. I Thess 4:3) is key to the Rite of Monastic Profession.¹⁵ In the very outset of the service, the virgin sings:

Lord, I am a habitual sinner
And I knock at your door seeking mercy
I confess that I have gone astray from your right path
Grant me grace to confess my sins and live anew.¹⁶

Apparently, the virgin's coming near to God and seeking His mercy and grace for a new life stems out of her own initiative. But actually, it is God's initiative—His grace because, no one can draw near to Christ unless God the Father draws him to His Son (cf. Jn 6: 44).¹⁷

We see a further reference to God's initiative of love in making the covenant with the Christian virgin in the conferring of the ring or the cross.¹⁸ The acceptance of the ring/cross by the virgin is a symbolic

¹⁴ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 32.

¹⁵ Cf. *Chapter 3*, 1.1.1.

¹⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 13, *Profession of Vows*, 4.

¹⁷ Cf. *Chapter 3*, 1.1.2.2.

¹⁸ Presenting a ring to the religious as part of God's nuptial covenant with her is a common tradition in the liturgical rite in almost all Churches of the East and the West except in the Malankara Church. The Malankara Church

gesture of her consent to the covenant.¹⁹ This can be seen as her call from among God's people to bear God Himself most intimately and to give Him to the world.

1.1.1.2. A Series of Promises

A series of promises *مواثيق* (*mulkōne*) constitute an essential part of the covenant. They express the acceptance and the mutuality of the relationship. God promised to Israel:

I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, ... and I will be your God and you shall know that I am the Lord your God who has brought you from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into a land, which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; I will give it you for a possession (Ex 6:6-8).

In the later promises to Abraham and his descendents too, the content of the promises remains the same (Gen 12:1-10).

Deliverance from bondage, new land and new life had been God's promises to those with whom He made the covenant. This is true in the case of profession. At the beginning of the profession, through the recitation of the Beatitude (Mt 5:3-11), the Church urges the Christian virgin to be detached from the world, to be humble and gentle so that Christ may cause her to inherit the land of life.²⁰ Later with the monastic initiation, Christ through His minister signs the virgin in the name of the Trinity so that she may be an inheritor of the holy dwelling of God forever. The celebrant announces:

(Name) you are being sealed so that you may be an inheritor of the holy abode of God forever, in the name of the Father + and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit + for life everlasting.²¹

objectively considers the nuptial reality even though avoiding the ring, an external symbol of marriage. Cf. *Rite of Religious Profession*, 94.

¹⁹ Cf. *Chapter 2*, 3.2.

²⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 28.

²¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 46, Cf. *Chapter 2*, 3.3.

With this signing, the virgin becomes heir to a new status in the monastic community to the point that "she is no longer a stranger and sojourner, but becomes a fellow citizen with the saints and a member of the household of God" (cf. Eph 2:19).²²

1.1.1.3. A Relationship with Specific Conditions

The covenantal relation between Yahweh and Israel was based on certain conditions. The conditions urged Israel's obedience and fidelity to the pact in order to perfect the union between Yahweh and Israel.²³ "...If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all people... you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6). Rather than a reward emerging from the covenant relationship, this blessing, conditioned on obedience and fidelity, is the very continuance of the essential relationship of Israel and Yahweh. The conditions demanded in God's covenant with Israel were further expressed in the Decalogue (Ex 24: 1-8).

Not only did the conditions endure in the Old Covenant, but they continued in the history of man, for God did not tire of offering man the possibility of being one with Him. God in His graciousness and faithfulness through Christ the mediator stabilized a new and an eternal alliance of love and union with man (cf. Heb 8:6).

Monastic profession reveals the nature and characteristic feature of the union between God and the religious. The essentials of the conditions involve: "Love the Lord with your whole heart, mind and strength; remain close to Him and be faithful to His ways."²⁴ Regarding the law of Christ, it says:

²² Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 38-39.

²³ Van Roo, *The Mystery*, 15.

²⁴ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 38; *Profession of Vows*, 12.

A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:34-35).²⁵

The monastic virgin is exhorted to accept the fundamental transcendental precept: “Accept love or be loved or let yourself be loved.”²⁶ In this way she is advised to have “charity and obedience” to live to perfection all the commandments.²⁷

1.1.1.4. The Making of a Contract

The term contract, involving both legal and moral connotations, is an agreement, which creates an obligation. The contracts can be made either by means of an oath or by a promise, or by a vow oral or written. Whether unilateral or bilateral, the contract is to be made and the obligations be fulfilled deliberately and with certain knowledge by the involved parties.²⁸

God’s covenant with Israel confirmed by an oath (cf. Hos 2:19ff; 11:8) was reflected in His selfless, creative, and redemptive love (cf. Mal 2:14). Likewise, Christ promised to His bride the New Israel (the Church) and to each individual, His unfailing love and fidelity.²⁹

Christ’s love, extended to each individual Christian at baptism, is responded to in a concrete way by the virgin through her making of the contract at the monastic initiation. The instruction of the celebrant to the candidate is helpful in understanding the nature of this contract. The celebrant exhorts:

²⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 39.

²⁶ Johnston, *Christian Mysticism*, 74.

²⁷ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 39.

²⁸ Connell, “Contracts”, 276-277.

²⁹ Cf. Conybeare, *Rituale Armenorum*, 352.

Beware in whose presence you are; you stand before Christ the Lord who examines the conscience of human beings and not before any mortal man. You are making your contracts and taking vows before the holy angels, before your fellow sisters and before this sanctuary. You promise to live your whole life as members of this Congregation.³⁰

Two aspects of this exhortation “Making contracts and taking vows” are important with regard to our theme. We conceive “making contracts” in terms of covenant; and “taking vows” in terms of promising the evangelical counsels. In making a contract or covenant, God the initiator, makes a covenant out of love with the candidate who in turn, through the promise of the evangelical counsels, responds in love to God. In taking vows, the initiative comes from the candidate but with the grace of God.

The contract is made before God, which makes it equivalent to a covenant. The celebrant reminds the candidate that her contracts and promises are taken before God, his angels, the fellow members and *madebhō*.³¹ According to A. Calmet, this is to make the contract more solemn and more certain, so as to inspire the candidate with respect for her vows, to secure God’s help in her endeavour and to beg the saints to obtain for her from the Almighty, the graces she needs to persevere in His service.³²

1.1.1.5. Insistence on Interior Divine Law and Faithfulness

The new covenant of God as we see in Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-35) is no longer an outward covenant written on stone tablets, but an inward covenant written on human hearts. This means a personalization and interiorization of the divine laws which should be the guiding principle of the subjects of the new covenant.³³ Since God’s own Spirit puts the

³⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 38; *Profession of Vows*, 12.

³¹ *Profession of Vows*, 12.

³² Cf. Calmet, *Commentaire*, II, 317 in Yeo, *The Structure and Content*, 214.

³³ Cf. Palatty, *Discipleship and the New Covenant*, 162-163

law into the hearts of God's people, He himself is their teacher and guide (cf. Ez 11:19; 36:27).

In the Liturgy of Profession, the virgin is urged to accept the covenant of Christ, referred to as the "yoke of Christ" (ܢܝܪܘܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ, *niro-da-mšihō*).³⁴ This covenant is Christ's new command of love. The virgin is urged to "engrave it on the walls of her heart."³⁵

Instead of the periodic infidelity of Israel which resulted in the profanation of God's name among the nations, the virgin is called to observe faithfully the divine law without blemish and stain so that the name of God will be glorified. The virgin also exclaims her sole intention of glorifying her beloved Saviour.³⁶

1.2. Monastic Profession: A New Consecration

The hallmark of consecration according to the traditional liturgical approach is the use of chrism, and the fact that the minister is a bishop. The effect is that the object concerned is reserved for use in the worship of God.³⁷ Clearly, consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels is not a consecration in this sense. So, in which sense is monastic profession a consecration? To clarify this we need to look at the judgment of the Church regarding the nature of a consecratory rite. According to the statement of the Sacred Congregation of Divine Worship:

³⁴ Here the yoke of Christ can be regarded as the law of Christ. The term yoke occurs in various contexts in the Demonstration of Aphrahat. Aphrahat calls the covenanter "the man on whom the yoke is laid" (PS1, 272:23-24) The yoke he carries is the yoke of saints or continents (PS1, 249:1, 253:2) a celestial yoke (PS1, 276:19), the yoke of Christ (PS1, 262:13) It also denotes celibacy which is freely undertaken by the covenanter.

³⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 38.

³⁶ Cf. *Profession of Vows*, 3.

³⁷ Finance, "*Consécration*", 1576.

To judge whether a rite is a consecration or not, one must first of all look at the intention of the Church, and see if there are present in the thing or person the elements that are necessary for the concept of consecration (a total and permanent dedication to God).³⁸

In the Syrian Liturgy of Profession, we see the aspect of monastic consecration in a twofold way. First of all, the Church itself brings out the pneumatological perspective of consecration and thus testifies that the Service of Profession is a consecration. Secondly, the symbolic rites and the liturgical gestures of profession manifest the reality of a new consecration of life through the mediation of vows, and signify that the liturgical rite is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration.³⁹ In this part of our study, we investigate the pneumatological perspective and the baptismal foundation of consecration in a comprehensive way so as to understand better monastic profession as consecration.

1.2.1. Pneumatological Perspective

Both the Old and New Testaments make reference to the charismatic endowment granted by God to those who are called and given His mission. By extending his force, his power, his glory, that is, His Spirit, God has empowered the "chosen ones" to fulfill their mission (cf. Is 61:1ff, Jer 20:7; Lk 4: 18-19; Acts 2: 38-39). Likewise, the life and mission of each Christian and each consecrated person is totally subjected to the working of the Holy Spirit. Hence, God the Father has promised a new spirit and a new heart transformed and filled with His own Spirit (cf. Ez 36: 26-27); the Church consecrates the Christian virgins in a new and special way in order to fulfill their vocation and mission.⁴⁰

³⁸ SCDW, "Circa Ordinem Consecrationis", 109.

³⁹ *PC*, no.5

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *VC*, no. 31.

The pneumatological perspective of consecration is very evident in the liturgical service. The liturgical terms of consecration such as ܩܕܫܐ *qadeš*, to sanctify, ܒܪܟܐ *bārek*, to bless, ܫܪܐ *shra* to reside, ܐܓܓܢ *aggen* to tabernacle upon, used in the liturgical prayers refer to the action of the Holy Spirit in effecting consecration.⁴¹

The pneumatological dimension of religious consecration is evident also in the Roman Liturgy of Profession. The celebrant prays: “Father we earnestly pray you send the fire of the Holy Spirit to warm into flame the resolve he has kindled in the hearts of your daughters.”⁴²

The fire in the Old Testament sanctified the offerings and rendered them holy and acceptable to God (cf. Lev 9: 24). The effect of the fire causes the change of form and the cessation of the object. But the monastic consecration effected by the “sending of the fire of the Holy Spirit” does not procure any change of form or cessation of the object (here the person). Instead, the Holy Spirit takes possession of the virgin, keeps her under His protection, gives her new life, and adorns her with His innumerable gifts and graces.⁴³

1.2.2. Monastic Profession and Baptism

Multifaceted baptismal themes and their characteristic features coalesce in the rite of profession. The choice of an ascetic life in the early Syrian Church frequently coincided with the reception of baptism; hence baptism was considered a door through which to enter into monastic life, and monastic life was conceived as a radical living of one’s baptismal consecration.⁴⁴ This idea is further highlighted in the writings of the Fathers such as Jerome, Bernard, Pseudo-Dionysius, Theodore the Studite etc. About this G. Morin writes:

⁴¹ *Takso d’suporo*, 328; 334; see also Chapter 3, 3.3.1.1.

⁴² *Rite of Religious Profession*, 93.

⁴³ Cf. *Takso d’suporo*, 328; Chapter 3, 1.4.

⁴⁴ Cf. Connolly, “Aphraates and Monasticism”, 533.

The Fathers of the Church from St. Jerome to St. Bernard are unanimous in comparing monastic profession sometimes to baptism sometimes to martyrdom, which is itself nothing but a baptism of blood. The commentators on the Rule, the great monastic synods, the liturgies of the various religious institutes echo this teaching of the Fathers.⁴⁵

The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar documents acknowledge that religious profession “is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it.” At the same time, they also specify profession as a special form of baptismal consecration, which renders visible, tangible, and operative, the paschal mystery of Christ—total self-giving in love for God and man — that lies in the very heart of the Church.⁴⁶ Writers like Vandenbrouke point out the aspects involved in the profession ceremony and thus compare monastic profession to baptism.⁴⁷ In the following section we see how monastic profession resembles and differs from baptismal consecration.

1.2.2.1. The Notion of Martyrdom in Baptism and Profession

Martyrdom is an offering of one’s life for the sake of faith on the part of a Christian from whom a denial of Christ by word or conduct was demanded. It was conceived in the early Church as an expression of loyalty to Christ. Martyrs (ܫܘܚܕܐ , *sohde*) were assured of having their sins forgiven and were the inheritors of the kingdom, for they loved God above all, proclaimed the truth of faith, gave testimony of fidelity to Christ and through suffering, witnessed the glorious death and resurrection of Christ.⁴⁸ In the course of time, martyrdom became equated with baptism and eventually, the rites involved in the baptismal service such as the profession of faith, renunciation of Satan, pre-post baptismal anointing, immersion into the baptismal font, putting on of the

⁴⁵ Morin *L’idéal monastique*, 60 in Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 143.

⁴⁶ *PC*, no. 5; John Paul II, *RD*, no. 7.

⁴⁷ Vandenbrouke, “La profession second baptême”, 250-258.

⁴⁸ Ishai, *Traite sur les martyrs*, 21; Cf. Yousif, “East Syrian Spirituality”, 60.

baptismal cloth, signing with the cruciform sign, crowning of the neophyte were viewed and interpreted in terms of death and of new life in Christ.⁴⁹

The idea of martyrdom is significant in the Liturgy of Profession. Before the profession of the vows the celebrant enquires of the virgin: “Are you aware that you have to spend yourself for the sake of God and that your whole life should be one dedicated to Him as a sacrifice?”⁵⁰ The virgin replies: Yes, “I do know it. I ardently desire it and have come prepared for the same.”⁵¹ In another part of the liturgy, the Church, encouraging the virgin for a life of martyrdom exhorts: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:10).⁵² Through another exhortation the Church reminds the virgin that monastic life is a continuous struggle, and she has to equip herself to face all the tests through enduring faith.⁵³ The profession of the faith, donning of the cross, the signing with the sign of the cross on the forehead, the shouldering of the cross, all these rites made visible that the consecrated virgin is as a “sacrificial lamb” dying daily to this world for Christ in love, faith and in hope.⁵⁴

Through monastic vows the virgin also commits herself to live in the likeness of the martyrs who witness their covenant (*qyōmō*) to “stand” for Christ and to stand against the powers of the world.⁵⁵ The blessing and conferring of the crown in the Service of Profession also involves the idea of martyrdom; hence, it symbolizes that the virgin is offered the coronet as a crown of salvation and a shield of victory.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Cf. *Koodasakal*, 2-31; Varghese, *Baptism*, 8-19.

⁵⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 41. The translation is mine.

⁵¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 41; *Profession of Vows*, 13.

⁵² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 24.

⁵³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 38. *Profession of Vows*, 12.

⁵⁴ Cf. Chapter 2, 3.2; 3.3.

⁵⁵ Cf. Harvey, “The Edessan Martyrs”, 200.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Profession of Vows*, 15; *Koodasakal*, 35.

1.2.2.2. Spiritual Formation

Though formally different, spiritual formation is imparted to the candidates of baptism and of profession. Those who are initiated into baptism are given catechetical formation for a sufficiently long period. This consists of a period of Pre-Catechumenate, of Catechumenate, and of “Enlightenment.”⁵⁷

The Pre-Catechumenate period applies to that period in which the candidates are accepted and given formation in faith and morals and later, with special rituals, are enrolled into the Order of the Catechumens.⁵⁸ During the Catechumenate, the candidates are given instructions with a view that they may comprehend the teachings, which should resonate in their minds and find expression in their lives. The six week period of Enlightenment for the spiritual preparation of the candidate, consists of external and internal purification through exorcism and scrutiny.⁵⁹ During the probation period, the candidates are to prove their sincerity, avoid the danger of abandoning faith and refrain from the danger of profaning the Christian mysteries. After this period, the candidates are accepted into the sacrament of initiation with proper rites.⁶⁰

The Syrian monastic tradition always insisted on a period of probation for the seekers of monastic life. According to Vööbus, the system of formation was based on a master-discipleship relation and was informal. An ascetical formation based on the Scripture and liturgy was the tenet of Syrian formation. He reports:

⁵⁷ Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rite*, 1-16.

⁵⁸ The acceptance into the Order of the Catechumens involves four elements: signing with the sign of the cross, giving of salt, imposition of hands and exorcism. Cf. Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 3-4.

⁵⁹ Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 3-16.

⁶⁰ Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 3-16.

It was always the task of the monastic masters to teach their disciples elementary knowledge in reading, to introduce them into the most necessary and basic information in the Scriptures, and to acquaint with them with the liturgical and ascetic practice.⁶¹

In the Syrian communities, the formation of the members is currently organized under three successive periods of probation, namely, aspirancy, postulancy and novitiate.⁶² The motif behind the probation period is instructing the candidate in the ethos of religious life for conversion to the extent that Christ is to be formed in them, (cf. Gal 4:19) and to test their sincerity and their desire for ascetic life, their perseverance, and their aptitude for a virtuous life in the community and in the service of God and of others.

1.2.2.3. Renunciation by the Catechumens and the Professed

Another resemblance between baptism and profession is the three-fold renunciation of Satan, his works and his pomps through a declaration followed by the interrogation of the minister.⁶³ Through the act of renunciation, the catechumens renounce Satan and attach themselves to Christ and to His teachings.

In the same way the candidates of profession, when scrutinized by the minister, declare their will to renounce the world and their own very selves to become perfect disciples of Christ.⁶⁴ The Service of the Profession calls attention to the words of Christ exhorting the candidates: “Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my (Christ’s) disciple” (Lk 14:33).⁶⁵ It also portrays the example of Christ who says: “The foxes have their dens, and the fowls of heaven a bower,

⁶¹ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* II, 407.

⁶² Cf. Chapter I, 3.3.3.4.

⁶³ Koodasakal, 15; Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites*, 18-19.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Profession of Vows*, 42; Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 128-129.

⁶⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 40.

but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay his head” (Mt 8:20).⁶⁶ Through the recitation of the Sermon on the Mount, it also emphasizes that: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God” (Mt 5:3).⁶⁷ Through these exhortations, the Church urges the virgin, to offer herself to God in total faith.

The Syrian Fathers hold the view that monastic renunciation essentially leads to continuous *metanoia*, a total change of behaviour and attitude and to a Christo-centric life. John of Antioch (12th century) has made a comparison between the renunciation at baptism and at monastic profession saying:

It is a (fact) made clear, that the sacred initiation of monks, by way of reminder, in imitation of holy baptism, is composed of renunciations and resolutions unusually burdensome and fearful; this (initiation) our holy fathers have named a second baptism and a renewal of the first. For there in (baptism) he says: I renounce Satan and all his works and all his service, and all his pomps, and I believe in one God and so on. Here (in monastic profession) among the things said, I renounce my parents, my brothers, relatives friends, usual pursuits, possessions, properties, empty and idle pleasure and glory and I repudiate not only these things but also my very soul according to the command of the Lord. And I await every tribulation of the monastic life, and I guard myself in purity and virginity and poverty for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and I remain in the monastery and in the practice of asceticism until my last breath.⁶⁸

The content of the renunciation at baptism and at profession is not a renouncement of the world and people (*fuga mundi*) but a continuous and progressive withdrawal from a world that we all carry in our hearts: the concupiscence of the flesh, the complacency of the

⁶⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 40. See Peshitta Version.

⁶⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 28.

⁶⁸ Cotelier, *Ecclesiae Graecae*. I, 165. Our citation is from Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 123-124.

eye, the ostentatious possession of wealth which are termed in the rite, as “fetters of the world and of the nefarious activities of Satan”,⁶⁹ so that one may be liberated from the restraints of worldly affairs and draw near to God (*fuga ad Deum*).

1.2.2.4. Symbolism of Death-Resurrection

The symbolism of death-resurrection, the Pauline teaching in Rom 6:3-8, is central in the rite of baptism. Baptism as a sacrament delivers the baptized from the slavery of sin, death and the powers of evil and confers the grace of regeneration. Like the dead, the baptized have to die to sin and evil and to grow and live in goodness (cf. Rom 6:4).⁷⁰ St. Paul describes the effects of Christian baptism.

Do you not know that all of us, who have been baptized in Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:3-4).

In the words of John Chrysostom: “Baptism is a burial and resurrection; the old man is buried with his sins and the new man is resurrected; we strip off the old man stained by our sins and put on Christ... We arise at the same moment that we are buried.”⁷¹ Chrysostom’s words highlight the deeper meaning of baptism for Christian existence in space and time. It involves a death of the “old person” and the birth of the “new person” which means also of an emergence of an identity through a new set of relationships with the divine persons and with the Church.⁷²

⁶⁹ *Profession of Vows*, 12. Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, *On Ascetical Life*, 1:1-4 in Hansbury, *St. Isaac of Nineveh*, 25-26.

⁷⁰ *Koodasakal*, 10-11.

⁷¹ Cf. John Chrysostom, *Catech. Hom. 2*, 25 in SC, 50, p. 147.

⁷² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles to the Romans*, no. 10, in *NPNF*, Vol. 11, 405-406; Zizioulas, “The Early Christian Community”, 28.

Monastic profession in general is considered as a call to live the death-resurrection mystery of Christ, a call to participate in the victorious resurrected life of Christ by conquering sinful human nature. According to Jean Beyer, promising the vows and living them at a deeper level means a total abandonment unto the hands of God and expresses also a new life of liberation.⁷³

The Liturgy of Monastic Profession in the Malankara Church can also be viewed as a baptismal “re-birth” which leads to a spiritual growth, combined with the discovery of the true meaning of baptism and the charism it confers.⁷⁴ Throughout the Service of Profession, the content of the mysteries of death and new life are highlighted. The inclusion of the Scripture readings; Deut 30:15-19, (choose life), Col 3:5-17, (the mystery of rebirth) along with the monastic investiture and the tonsure, reflect the theme of removing the sinful old man and putting on the new man.⁷⁵ The attainment of the religious status through profession of vows and the incorporation into a new community also give to the religious a new identity and thereby open the candidate to a transfigured life.⁷⁶

1.2.2.5. Baptismal Garment and Monastic Habit

The stripping of secular garments and the putting on of the baptismal garment symbolizes the stripping of the old man and the putting on of Christ the new man (cf. Gal 3:27). The early practice of conferring the white dress, which Cyril of Jerusalem called the “spiritual white garment” signifies the catechumens’ commitment for a life of resurrection and of innocence.⁷⁷ The conferring and vesting of the “garment of

⁷³ Cf. Beyer, “Premier bilan”, 75-76.

⁷⁴ Cf. Brock, “Baptismal Themes”, 210.

⁷⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 32; 46.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 51-52

⁷⁷ Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catéchèses*, 4: 8 in SC 126, p. 143.

salvation and robe of gladness” (cf. Is 61:10) in baptism has become the foundation for the conferring of the monastic habit.⁷⁸

1.2.2.6. Remission of Sins

Remission of sin is another aspect, which links profession to baptism. In baptism, the washing in the baptismal water, the inward unction of the Holy Spirit and the Eucharistic feeding, remit all the sins of the baptizand. The candidate receives cleansing from the defilement of flesh and spirit, liberation from bondage, forgiveness of sins and enlightenment of soul and body.⁷⁹ According to Ephrem: “In the womb of baptism the debt of mankind is repaid. Through the baptismal water and oil, mercy wiped out the great bond of Adam and it was torn off.”⁸⁰

The rites of tonsuring (nuns and monks) and of the holy bath (monks) stress the remission of sin. In the Syrian understanding, sin (*htīō*) is an impediment, which also curtails one’s path to holiness. The liturgical prayers of profession view sin as a straying away of man from divine love and thus bringing a chasm between God and the human person; an ailment and a wound inflicted upon the human heart which through repentance (*tyōbūtō*) can be cured by Christ the true Physician, with grace, His medicine.⁸¹ So the Church admonishes the virgin:

If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live”
(Rom 8:13.)⁸²

To enable the religious to live according to the Spirit, in the rite of tonsure, the prelate cuts the hair of the virgin in the name of the Trinity

⁷⁸ The outer monastic garment is referred to as the garment of joy and salvation thus its relation to the baptismal garment. Cf. *Chapter 2*, 2.4.4.1.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Koodasakal*, 25

⁸⁰ Ephrem, *HEpi* 13: 2.

⁸¹ Cf. *Chapter 3*, 1.3.1.

⁸² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 40.

as a “sign of rejecting the pleasure of the flesh and as a sign of her religious vows.”⁸³

In the rite of the holy bath (monks) the celebrant washes the monk’s feet, so that Christ may remove from him “the Serpent’s venom and all the foulness of sin forever.”⁸⁴ While wiping the monk’s feet, the celebrant prays: “May Christ our God, wipe away from you all evil and bitterness and all defilement of sin forever.”⁸⁵ Here we see that the Syrian Profession Liturgy envisages in its prayers the remission of the sin of the candidate, hence, it emphasizes the sanctifying, purifying and curing actions of God.

1.2.2.7. Profession and Baptism: The Contrast

Just as baptismal life constitutes the basis of Christian life, monastic profession constitutes the basis of monastic life. Though there are elements like Trinitarian signing (*rušmō*), profession of faith, exhortation by the prelate, conferring of the new name, investiture, incorporation into the community, handing over of the lighted candle common to the order of baptism and of profession, monastic profession, while deepening the baptismal consecration goes beyond the ordinary demands of baptismal consecration.⁸⁶

Baptism unites the baptized to Christ and he is ontologically consecrated and separated for God and for His mission. Therefore, the baptized have to live out with the Spirit’s gift, chastity appropriate to their state of life, obedience to God and to the Church and reasonable detachment from material possession. But baptismal consecration does

⁸³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 40; *Profession of Vows*, 14; *Takso d’suporo*, 355. See also *Pontificale*, 326.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Takso d’tulbosho*, 317-318; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 41.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Takso d’ tulbosho*, 318; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 42.

⁸⁶ John Paul II, *VC*, no. 30.

not call one necessarily to celibacy or virginity, to the renunciation of possession or to obedience to a superior.⁸⁷

While monastic consecration involves a call, a separation and a mission, it is an action of the Triune God expressed and realized in the Church through the liturgical blessing to which the candidate responds subjectively through the profession of vows. This constitutes in its content a new consecration: the consecration and giving of the human person to God.⁸⁸ This consecration is new and special because unlike in baptism this giving of self to God, the heart of consecration, is done with awareness and by choice. It is new because of love and vocation, new by reason of unceasing “renewal.”⁸⁹

2. MONASTIC PROFESSION: RELATION TO THE CHURCH

The solemn liturgy in which the Christian virgin is consecrated to God through the ministry of the Church unites the virgin in a profound way with the Mystical Body of Christ. Therefore, in this section, we consider briefly how through profession, the consecrated life witnesses to the Church.

2.1. Monastic Communion: Witness to Ecclesial Communion

Communion means fellowship, sharing, and participation. In the liturgical text the word “communion” as such does not occur. But through Psalm 132 and through St. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians 3: 5-17 the liturgy acclaims the goodness of unity and communion, and it reminds the consecrated of the need of witnessing the same in their lives.⁹⁰ By employing different concepts for community such as “house of God”,

⁸⁷ Galot, “Consecrazione”, 590-600; John Paul II, *VC*, no. 31.

⁸⁸ Cf. John Paul II; *VC*, no. 31.

⁸⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *RD*, no.7.

⁹⁰ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 27-33.

“sheepfold”, “king’s palace”, “angelic life”, “paradise”, bridal chamber”, the liturgy brings out the true nature of religious life in the Church.⁹¹ At the same time, it reminds the consecrated that their spirit of communion has its source not in the natural bond of blood relation but in their communion with the Triune God.⁹²

The ecclesial character of the community is further vindicated in the Service. At the beginning of the exhortation to the candidate, the celebrant reminds the religious that she makes her profession in the presence of the community of her sisters and promises to live her whole life as a member. The significance of this community is great, hence, in the Service, it is mentioned as a community united with Christ, with the holy altar (earthly Church), and with the company of all the holy angels and saints (heavenly Church).⁹³ It is in the name of the Church that the superior of the Congregation in the presence of the ecclesial hierarchy accepts the dedication of the virgin while she makes the profession of vows.⁹⁴

By the profession of vows, the Christian virgins are potentially freed from what might be an obstacle to the fervour of charity; therefore they become architects and experts of communion in the Church and in the world.⁹⁵ As experts of communion, they are bound to witness the intrinsic nature of the Church rooted in the Trinitarian mystery, a sign of union with God and of unity of the whole human race, and to dedicate themselves for her service.⁹⁶ This means that each consecrated Christian virgin and the community as such becomes a replica of the Church.

⁹¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 6; 13; 17; 51, 52.

⁹² Cf. Lampe, “Communion”, 664.

⁹³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 37-38; *Profession of Vows*, 12.

⁹⁴ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 42.

⁹⁵ Cf. *GS*, no. 19, 32; *The Contemplative Dimension*, 24.

⁹⁶ *LG*, no.1; *IL*, no.57; Cole & Conner, *Christian Totality*, 283.

2.1.1. Monastic Community: Meaning and Imageries

The term *communitas*, derived from the Latin word, has various meanings. It can be a group of people having a common organization, living in the same place under the same laws and rights, a society, a state enjoying a joint relationship of rights and a common character.⁹⁷ Generally speaking, a community is a social organization whose members are permanently bound by various unifying bonds, ontological, theological, affective, moral, organizational and communicative.⁹⁸ But the monastic community, unlike any social or cultural unit, is not a collective entity of people gathered together by different causes for different purposes but it is essentially comprised of a people “of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32) of the same purpose, called to witness to the unity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.⁹⁹ Witnessing to the reconciling power of grace, which overcomes the divisive tendencies present in the human heart, monastic communities are called to fulfill their mission as unifying organs in the Church.

Eventhough organized communities were a later development in Syrian asceticism,¹⁰⁰ the liturgical prayers shed light on the proper nature and characteristic features of the monastic community through certain imageries. Among the many imageries, we specify the following ones.

⁹⁷ Webster's Dictionary, “Community, Communitas”, 265; 267.

⁹⁸ Messner, “Community”, 80. Varickaplanthadathil, *Religious Community*, 3-4.

⁹⁹ LG no. 4.

¹⁰⁰ In its origins until the second half of the fourth century Syrian asceticism did not seek to build up an organized coenobitic system. Gradually however, as the number of ascetics increased by thousands, the early ascetics tried to adopt the coenobitic life and this situation forced the masters of asceticism to develop coenobitic structures to assist the beginners. See Vööbus, *History of Asceticism I*, 229ff; Canivet, *Le monachisme Syrien*, 50ff; 147ff. Colombàs, *El monacato*, 132-139.

2.1.1.1. Sheepfold (*Dayrō*)

Sheepfold, in Syriac ܕܝܪܐ (*dayrō*) a collective noun which literally means house of the sheep, is used to denote the gathering of the sheep.¹⁰¹ This term occurs in the Jewish Christian literature as well as in the Mesopotamian (Gentile) literature.¹⁰² However, the term “sheepfold” in the Christian understanding comes from the biblical tradition and it specifies a correlative relationship between the shepherd and the sheep.¹⁰³ In the Old Testament, the word flock represents the sheepfold as a “community of Yahweh” which Yahweh feeds and leads (Num 27:15-20).¹⁰⁴ In the New Testament, the term flock indicates the little flock of the disciples, which Christ gathered together (Lk 12:32).

The AJT mentions “entering into Christ’s fold” and being joined to the number of His sheep.”¹⁰⁵ It is put in a baptismal context to convey the Christians’ enrollment in the Church, the sheepfold of Christ.¹⁰⁶ Vööbus holds the opinion that the ancient use of the epithets “sheep” and “flock” refers to the true Christians who are full members of the Church.¹⁰⁷

In the Liturgy of Profession, the word sheepfold, which designates the monastery occurs eight times.¹⁰⁸ The term alludes to the house of

¹⁰¹ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 91.

¹⁰² Murray mentions that hero Gilgamesh the king of Uruk, and the central character in the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh* who probably lived sometime between 2800 and 2500 BC was the shepherd of Uruk. Ur is constantly referred to as the sheepfold of the gods. Cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 187. See also Abouzayd, *Ihdayutha*, 310; Dalley, “Gilgamesh”, 25-26.

¹⁰³ Cf. Chapter 3, 1.1.3.1 (b).

¹⁰⁴ Lesquivit, “Shepherd & Flock”, 477.

¹⁰⁵ AJT, 6:59; Klijn, *Acts*, 96.

¹⁰⁶ Klijn, “Baptism in the Acts”, 61.

¹⁰⁷ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism I*, 190.

¹⁰⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 13, 17, 21, 22, 31, 46, 51. In the Syrian understanding, the monastery is looked upon as an image of the Church, so it is termed as the

God, and to the Kingdom and is characterized as “life-giving” due to the presence of Christ the Shepherd. To this sheepfold the religious seeks entrance and membership. She says: “Lord I am the lamb... count me in your sheepfold.”¹⁰⁹ In the rite of signing the virgin with the cross, the celebrant assures her that she is reckoned to enter into the sheepfold.¹¹⁰ The virgin acknowledges that Christ is the one who allows her to enter into the sheepfold. She exclaims: “He will (Christ) bring me to His sheepfold and associate me with His sheep.”¹¹¹ The reception of the virgin by the members giving *kaikasuri* is the sign of God’s acceptance and association with His sheep.¹¹² It is to be noted in the Syrian understanding that no one enters into the assembly of the consecrated unless God receives him. The signing of the candidate in baptism to enter into the sheepfold of Christ parallels the signing of the religious for the incorporation into the monastic community.

The double connotation of the term sheepfold for the Church and for the monastery has a pastoral significance; hence, it points out the authority of Christ the Shepherd over the Church and over the monastery, and also unfolds the message to Christians, both the baptized faithful and the consecrated, to follow Christ the Shepherd and to sacrifice their lives for Him. It also highlights the ecclesial dimension of monastic life and of consecration. It is only in the Church that monastic life finds its meaning; it is for the Church that the monastic community exists and it is through the community that the consecrated ones sense their belonging to the ecclesial community and find the meaning of their dedication.

sheepfold, and the inmates of it are considered as the flock of sheep. See Peña, *The Amazing Life*, 114.

¹⁰⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 13.

¹¹⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 46

¹¹¹ *Takso d’suporo*, 336; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 31.

¹¹² Here the term “sheep” designates the monastic virgins, the members of the community. Cf. *Chapter 2*, 3.3.

2.1.1.2. Paradise (*Pardaysō*)

Of Iranian origin and adopted into Syriac, the word ܦܪܕܝܫܐ (*pardaysō*) consisting of the preposition *pairi*, and the substantive *daēza* is a loan word in Christian languages. In the Hebrew, *pardcs*, (Aramaic *pardēsa*, Armenian *partēz*, Greek *paradeisos* and Malayalam *parudīsa*) the term designates a place rounded by a wall (probably a King’s park or forest), which in the Christian connotation is the garden of God (Gen 13:10, Is 51:3, Ez 28:13, 31:8-9).¹¹³ According to the Book of Genesis, Yahweh planted a garden (*pardysā*) in Eden at the beginning. (Gen 2:8). The New Testament uses *paradeisos* in the conventional sense of heaven (Lk 23: 43, 2 Cor 12:4, Rev 2:7), the kingdom of God.¹¹⁴

The term “paradise” and its indirect usage “your garden” are explicitly used in the liturgy to denote the monastery. In fact, these terms point out the primordial and the eschatological state at the end of time, which is to be anticipated in the life of the virgins. The features of paradise are also given. It is primarily an abode (*bytō*), an abode of the saints (*bet qadiše*), of the just ones (*bet zādiqe*), of the solitaries / monks (*bet ‘anwōye*), and it is the eternal nuptial chamber (*bet gnūnō*).¹¹⁵ According to Ephrem, “the assembly of saints bears resemblance to paradise, for in it, each day is plucked the fruit of Him who gives life to all.”¹¹⁶ Hence Eucharist is termed as the “life-giving fruit” in the Syrian liturgical tradition, the Eucharistic presence renders the monastic community a sacred locale and anticipates thus Paradise here on earth.

¹¹³ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 458, Luke, “Etymological Studies”, 131-132.

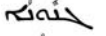

¹¹⁴ Luke, “Etymological Studies”, 134.

¹¹⁵ See *Chapter 2*, 3.8.2.

¹¹⁶ Ephrem, *HParad 6: 8*. Our citation is from Brock, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 111.

The paradise concept of the community also entails communal and social dimensions. The joy that is derived from community feasts, banquets, gatherings, celebrations, helping and supporting others as part of the monastics' social concern is also included in this view.¹¹⁷

2.1.1.3. Bridal Chamber (*Gnûnô*)

The liturgical rite designates the monastic community as a bridal chamber. The Syriac term  (*gnûnô*) from the root  (*gn*) means to lie down, to conceal oneself and thus is attached to a bridal bed or chamber. Metaphorically, it is the heavenly resting place and also signifies the bridal feast.¹¹⁸ The term *gnûnô* is very prominent in the writings of the Syrian Fathers (especially in Ephrem) and is used as synonymous with the term Paradise and thus refers to the Kingdom in its eschatological and realized or realizable dimension here on earth by individuals.¹¹⁹ The term *gnûnô* is also used to denote Christ; the interior heart of the human person; the sanctuary of the church and to the joyful state of human life. According to Ephrem, the virgins being betrothed to Christ the Living One having exchanged a temporal marriage bridal chamber for Christ *the* Bridal Chamber may experience never ending blessed joy.¹²⁰

In the Liturgical Rite, prayers are offered to God to receive the virgin in His bridal chamber to serve Christ the eternal bridegroom. It says: "O Heavenly bridegroom, strengthen and enable them to serve you with undivided heart and readiness of spirit."¹²¹ In that sense, bridal chamber is related to bridal feast. This is not only in the *eschaton* but also here and now upon the earth. In the prayer of the Renewal of the

¹¹⁷ Cf. Mcvey, "Images of Joy in Ephrem's Hymns", 69.

¹¹⁸ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 74.

¹¹⁹ Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 116.

¹²⁰ Ephrem, *HVirg* 5:10; 24:5. See also Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 122-123.

¹²¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 48.

Vows, the monastic community is explicitly referred to as "the inner chamber of the heavenly kingdom" destined for the blessed ones.¹²²

The cell (*tawonô*) of the monastics is also compared to the bridal chamber. The word *tawonô* derived from the Syriac root *avo* and the noun forms *awonô*, *tawonô* literally mean a dwelling place, a habitation, a mansion.¹²³ In a spiritual sense the term also means "to be in the interior chamber with the beloved", "to be in union". In the Syrian thinking, it is the dwelling place of the monastics (*dayrôye*), where they live in the presence of and in joyful union with God.¹²⁴

In short, the imageries of the community as "sheepfold", "paradise" and "bridal chamber" indicate a dwelling place of God here on earth where union with God and unity among human persons is realized. The *eschaton* anticipates a bridal chamber on high that does not pass away, a dwelling place of joys and also a banquet of delights to which the virgin looks forward in hope.¹²⁵

2.2. Unifying Factors of Common Life

The imageries of the communities are incentives for experiencing and realizing the life of communion there in. They convey that it is in God that the human person finds the origin of his relationship both vertically and horizontally. There are various aspects both natural and supernatural to nourish this communion among the monastics in the community. In the subsequent section we discuss the prominent unifying factors of fraternal life.

¹²² *Beth. Ms.*, 1, 118.

¹²³ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 5.

¹²⁴ Jnanadas, *Sanyasa Darsanam*, 41-42.

¹²⁵ Cf. Brock, *Burial Service for Nuns*, 5

2.2.1. Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours has a particular significance and efficacy; hence, it is a source and manifestation of the unity of the religious family “gathered together in the name of Christ” (cf. Mt 18: 20). E. Gambari says, “Every religious is by profession, an *orante*” hence, is called to offer spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God through Christ (I Pt 2:5).¹²⁶ By commencing the Service of Profession with the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church reminds the religious of her vocation to be an incessant *orante* in and for the Church.¹²⁷

The Liturgy of the Hours in the Syrian monastic communities has attained a systematic form since 5th century. According to J. Mateos, the evolution of the office of the seven liturgical hours in Syrian monastic tradition is due to the fusion of two monastic traditions of Egypt and of Capadoccia. In Egypt, the monks used to celebrate a triple synaxis; afternoon, morning and the crook crow, and the Capadoccians used to celebrate the hours of *Terce*, *Sext*, *None*, and *Compline*. From the blending of these two traditions evolved the hybrid office of seven hours. It is upon this tradition that the Syrian communities structured the hours of prayer as seven.¹²⁸

The **ܫܝܡܘ** (*Shimo*), the participle form of the Syriac verb **ܫܝܡ** (*S'ham*), **ܢܫܝܡ** (*Nes'ham*), meaning ordinary or common is the prayer used presently in the West Syrian monasteries. The book used for the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours is the **ܟܬܘܒܐ ܕܫܝܡܘܐ ܫܝܡܘܐ** (*Ktobo d'slootho Sh'imtho*) ' meaning “The Book of Common Prayer.”¹²⁹ These prayers are a combination

¹²⁶ Gambari, *Unfolding the Mystery*, 115.

¹²⁷ Cf. Chapter 2: 1.1.

¹²⁸ Mateos, “L' office monastique”, 80. For a detailed study of the Liturgy of the Hours in the East and West, see Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Collegenville, 1978.

¹²⁹ Thaikoottathil, *Sheemoyile Utharanikal*, 16.

of psalms to which were added prayers and hymns of the early Syrian Fathers, Ephrem, Balai, and Jacob of Serugh.¹³⁰ The prayers contain themes of Christian faith and salvation, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Cross and Redemption, the Resurrection, the Second Coming, the Church as the Bride of Christ, Mary the Mother of God and the Saints of the Old and the New Testament.¹³¹ Linked to the specific events and accounts of the salvific actions of Christ, each hour is constituted in a way that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praises of God. The prayer of the whole day is structured as follows: *ramšo* (vespers) for thanking the Lord for the light, *sūtoro* (complines), for the protection of God from harmful thoughts and dreams, *liliyo* (nocturnes), for calmness, *sapro* (matins) for the light, and the three minor offices; *qutto 'o* (terce), to ponder the judgment of Christ, *eddano* (sext) for recalling the death of Christ and *none* (nineth),¹³² for the calamities that happened at the death of Christ. All of these themes confirm Christ as the Lord of creation.¹³³

The arrangement of the liturgical hours enables the religious, associating with the song of Christ and all the angels and creation, to sing together that hymn of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the monasteries in seven successive hours.¹³⁴ Special care is given to the faithful recitation of the Divine Office at proper times. No one is exempt from the Liturgy of the Hours unless with reasonable cause, and those who are exempt have to pray it alone.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Thaikoottathil, *Sheemoyile Utharanikal*, 19.

¹³¹ Thaikoottathil, *Sheemoyile Utharanikal*, 16-18.

¹³² Refer *Shimo* for the names of the prayers at each liturgical hours. See also Bar Hebreus, *The Ethicon*, 23.

¹³³ Thaikoottathil, *Sheemoyile Utharanikal*, 16-18. Vossel, “La spiritualité monastique”, 178-179.

¹³⁴ Cf. *SC*, no. 84.

¹³⁵ Cf. Rabbula, Can. 26; *HRSIC*, art.163.

The Liturgy of the Hours not only unites the religious with God but also with the entire Church. Severus of Antioch testifies that the divine worship in the monasteries of Antioch was a symbol of communion of the monastics with the Church and says:

In their unending praise they give glory to the Lord...with the singing devoid of any sorrow or suffering, and with frequent prostrations, they adore Him in the presence of whom every knee shall bow in heaven, on earth and under the earth. They end their singing with tears in prayer, which cleans the lips of him who grew old and weakened through sin; and they start again their singing with a pure heart. When they finish their singing, they read the divine books.¹³⁶ (...) They remember frequently (the Church in Antioch) in their prayers and requests.¹³⁷

By adopting the Liturgy of the Hours as a constituent part of their common life, the monastics or religious manifest their prayer-life in communion with the liturgy of the Church and of the universe.¹³⁸

2.2.2. Eucharistic Celebration

The Service of Profession in the Malankara Church is conducted in the context of the liturgy of the Eucharist, the covenant of the “unbreakable union that exists between Christ and His bride, the Church.”¹³⁹ It is in and through the “Eucharistic covenant” that the Word becomes body and blood and becomes one with man. It is also through the Eucharistic covenant that man is given the privilege to become one with God.¹⁴⁰ The religious who commits to Christ in and through the eucharistic mystery is thus committed to become “one body” with Christ

¹³⁶ Severios of Antioch, “Les Homelie Cathedrales” Hom. LXI in (PO 8) 258.

¹³⁷ Severios of Antioch, “Les Homelie Cathedrales”, Hom. LXI in (PO 8) 265, See also NIN, “Monaci e Monachesimo”, 215.

¹³⁸ Gambari, *Unfolding the Mystery*, 115.

¹³⁹ Cf. Chapter 2, 2; *LG* no. 44.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. NIN, “Spiritual Trends”, 226.

through participating in the sacred mysteries with the body of Christ, the Church and the religious community.

From the writings of Ephrem and Aphrahat we deduce that in the proto-monastic period, the *ṭhūdōye* had a profound sacramental life, for they participated actively in the liturgy of the visible church. But later, as part of the ascetics’ radical life, the withdrawal from the society and from the visible church led to a neglect of sacramental spirituality.¹⁴¹ Regarding the eucharistic participation the Charfet manuscript gives us an account. It says:

They (monastics) serve as priests. They celebrate their sufferings and always they give to themselves absolution from tears; their fastings are their eucharists and their vigils their assistants; their faith is the sanctuary, their minds are altars, their virginity their perfect sacrifice, their chastity a veil (of the altar or the sanctuary) and their humility a censer of incense.¹⁴²

This quote which is an explanation of the early eucharistic celebration contains aspects of the eucharistic life of the monastics. In the later development of monastic life, the lives of the consecrated as well as their community are centered upon the Eucharist, the greatest sacrament of unity and of love. Ephrem observes the indwelling of the Fire and the Spirit in the Eucharist. According to him, Fire in the bread

¹⁴¹ E. Farrugia reviews the changes that occurred in primitive Syrian asceticism in its passage to classical monasticism. See Farrugia, “Monastica”, 232- 233.

¹⁴² *MS. Charfet* 19.1 fol. 79a-79b. in Vööbus, *History of Syrian Asceticism* III, 50. Details of the Sharfeh manuscript are given in the catalogue by I. Armalet, *Al-Turfat fi mahtutat dayr ash-sharfa*, Junich (1936), pp. 178 ff. According to S. Brock, this text in 19.1 is seen also in Charfet 302 and in some other mss. For example Vat.Syr. 566 and Paris Syr. 197. This passage, which Vööbus quotes on page 50 has several similarities with a *memro* on Solitaries edited by E. Beck. See Ephrem, *Sermons* IV, no.2, lines 99, 489 (CSCO 148-149). S. Brock holds the view that, even though the *memre* are attributed to Ephrem, they are not his own, hence, they are of later addition. For this information I am indebted to Dr. S. Brock.

purifies and remits all kinds of debts and liberates us from the chains of sins.¹⁴³ The liberation from sin leads man to union with God and others, to new life. Speaking of the importance of Eucharist, in *Evangelica Testifica* Paul VI exhorts:

The Eucharist is the heart of the community and source of life. Your communities, since they are united in Christ's name, naturally have their center in the Eucharist, the sacrament of love, the sign of unity and the bond of charity. It is therefore normal that these communities should be visibly united around an oratory, in which the presence of the Holy Eucharist expresses and at the same time makes real that which must be the principal mission of every family, and also of every Christian assembly.¹⁴⁴

The daily participation in the eucharistic celebration is presented as an ideal norm and expectation of those consecrated to the Lord. The significance of the eucharistic celebration and the daily participation in it by the consecrated indicates their meeting with God and humanity including the whole creation. In the eucharistic liturgy, the whole creation is remembered and offered in prayer: the past, the present and the future, the living and the dead, human activities, the whole of nature, brothers, enemies, friends, sick people, those in prison, for the crops. Thus, the whole creation is summoned and sanctified through communion with God.¹⁴⁵

2.2.3. Intercession and Asceticism

From the beginning, Syrian monastics were powerful mediators before God. Even though direct access to God through baptism is afforded to all Christians, the Syrian monastics had won this access through their self-denial, total rejection of earthly goods and through a

¹⁴³ Ephrem, *HEccl* 32:2; See also Yousif, *L'eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem*, 320-325.

¹⁴⁴ Paul VI, *ET*, no. 48.

¹⁴⁵ *Anaphoras*, 73-76; The *proemion* and the *sedro* of the Holy *Qurbono* bring out beautifully these aspects. 124.

life of unceasing prayer. This, in fact, enabled them to become powerful mediators before God in life and also after their death.¹⁴⁶ Testifying to this aspect Ephrem writes:

Their prayers like offerings that are raised up give pleasure at every hour to the Godhead. {...}. And from their bones now flow forth succour for all creation. The inhabited land where, injustice rules is by their prayers upheld. And the world buried in sin is by their prayers preserved. And the earth, which is shaken by controversies, by their prayers is supported. And the land, which is troubled by vain enquiries the vigils of these men fill with calm.¹⁴⁷

This aspect of intercession considered essential to monastic life is brought out deliberately in the *Takso d' tulboshho d' dairoye*. In the ritual of the clothing of the monks, led by a deacon, the congregation makes a series of intercessions to God. Intercessions are made for the restoration of the oneness of the human family with God; for the candidate's continued progress in sanctity, strength in spiritual warfare, and perseverance in monastic life; for tranquility, peace and concord in the church and in the whole world, for the living and the departed hierarchs.¹⁴⁸ The intercessory prayers of the monastics testify to the primacy of God in their life and manifest their role as mediators before God for humankind.

Prayers are accompanied by ascetical gestures like prostration, genuflections, and standing. I. Pina points out that the ascetical gestures were "indispensable elements of the sanctity of the monks."¹⁴⁹ In the Syrian understanding, asceticism is a furnace in which man is refined everyday.¹⁵⁰ Though not the strict asceticism as in the ancient Syrian milieu, the moderate asceticism aims not to torture the body but to

¹⁴⁶ Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa* VI (introduction) in Price, *A History*, xxvi-xxvii.

¹⁴⁷ Ephrem, *Serm* IV, no. 2, 494-506. The citation is from Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 220.

¹⁴⁸ *Takso D' tulboshho*, 290-295; Acharya, *The Ritual*, 31-33.

¹⁴⁹ Pina, *The Amazing Life*, 92.

¹⁵⁰ Paikkatt, *Life Glory and Salvation*, 227.

discipline it and to remove every hindrance, which could be an impediment to the activity of the Spirit.¹⁵¹

2.2.4. Silence and Perception

Even though the Service of Profession does not highlight the theme of silence specifically, it praises common living and fraternal harmony, and advises the virgin that an unperturbed mind is required for the religious life. It appeals to the virgin: “You should practice humility, serenity and forbearance.”¹⁵² These aspects presuppose the need of a life of silence (ܫܠܝܘܬܐ *šelyō*) in the monastery.

Silence (*šelyō*) is considered neither as the cessation of noise and words, nor a state of emptiness, but rather it is a quality of the outer as well as the inner man. To be silent according to Isaac of Nineveh means, to be still from the converse of bodily thoughts and the uninterrupted movement of the mind towards the things which give delight to the soul.¹⁵³

Silence is valued in the Scripture for a life of perfection. It is recommended for the right use of the word (Pr 10:6-32), to avoid inconsistency of the word (Sir 5: 9-15) and sinful and vain talk (Sir 23: 7-15), and to fortify one’s interior strength (Is 30:15).¹⁵⁴ As a means to transcend resentments, egoism, hard-heartedness, silence aims to advance one in mutual love, knowledge of God and progress in divine life attained through secret reflection of the divine Word in human hearts.¹⁵⁵ As indicated in the rules of Rabbula (Can. 25), in early monasticism, silence in its external form (words and actions) as well as in its internal

¹⁵¹ Špiklik, “East Syrian Asceticism”, 134.

¹⁵² *Profession of Vows*, 12.

¹⁵³ Cf. Isaac of Nineveh, “Centuries of Knowledge” IV: 32, in Brock, *The Syriac Fathers*, 264.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Giovanna, “Silenzio”, 2309.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Giovanna, “Silenzio”, 2311.

form (possession of internal faculties and aspirations of the soul) had a great importance.

The importance of reading and meditating on the Word of God is central in monastic life. The Service often impels the virgin to blot out from their intellect all burdens of worldly care. Instead it recommends that she meditate on the divine commandments and “make God’s precepts, holy will and solicitude, the object of her thought.”¹⁵⁶ This is necessary for acquiring a pure heart, life-giving wisdom and bright consciousness.¹⁵⁷ The Christian virgin also prays to God to give His Books to her so that she may read and learn them and live according to them.¹⁵⁸ These elements shed light on the necessity of personal and common reading of Sacred Scriptures. As stated by Vatican II: “In the first place let them (religious) have the Sacred Scriptures at hand daily, so that they might learn ‘the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus’”¹⁵⁹ (Phil 3:8).

The reading of the Scriptures either personally or communally helps the religious to purify their minds, to illumine their hearts, to receive insights on God’s love and thus to grow in divine knowledge and love.¹⁶⁰

2.2.5. Fraternal Life

Communal fraternal living is another distinctive factor, which unites consecrated persons in communion. Chosen by God, consecrated and incorporated into the religious community by Him, the Christian virgin is called to perfect her whole life with good deeds and to please God

¹⁵⁶ *Profession of Vows*, 16.

¹⁵⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 21.

¹⁵⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 21.

¹⁵⁹ *PC*, no. 6.

¹⁶⁰ Isaac of Nineveh, “Centuries on Knowledge”, IV: 63 in Brock, *The Syriac Fathers*, 265.

with true faith, righteous behaviour, good will, plenitude of love and just deeds.¹⁶¹

Though religious are called in the one body (the Church) to live as one body (community), the Liturgy of Profession foresees that love and unity cannot be attained without tension and sacrifice within the mystery of the Christian life itself. So the Church, using the words of Paul, urges cultivation of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, and forbearance. It also urges the consecrated to forgiveness, gratitude, spiritual joy, simplicity, interior peace and counsel to allow the Word of God to dwell in their hearts while cautioning them against the pitfall of doing things for complacency and self-glory (cf. Col 3: 12-17).¹⁶²

The Liturgy of Profession sets forth the basic principles of Christian life under the New Commandment and manifests the beauty of communal life. It exclaims: “Behold how good and pleasant it is where the brothers dwell in unity” (Ps 132.1)! This engenders an egalitarian community of Christians where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ” (Gal 3:28).¹⁶³ Such a community experiences intimacy (ܒܫܘܚܘܬܐ *baytoutho*) with God and others; hence, the consecrated can say that “we are no more strangers and sojourners, but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (cf. Eph 2:19).

2.2.6. Authority and Service

Authority is the exercise of power of a delegated person or a body of persons oriented by the humble recognition that their source of authority is from God, (Rev 4:11) and who understand their ministry as

¹⁶¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 25; *Profession of Vows*, 9.

¹⁶² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 34.

¹⁶³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 34.

service (cf. Mk 10:45). According to Martyrius, those who are charged with a public office in the monastic community should serve their brothers with simplicity of heart, humbly and in purity, as if they serve our Lord.¹⁶⁴ The ministerial exercise of power witnesses to the Trinitarian communion in the monastic community and in the Church.¹⁶⁵

The imageries used in the Liturgy of Profession to denote Christ such as “Good Shepherd”, “Divine Physician”, “Prodigal Father” who lavishes his love for the strayed son are incentives to understand the concept of authority in the Syriac tradition. However, authority in the Syrian understanding is more a matter of a spiritual paternal/maternal concept than a matter of law. In this context, the superior’s designation, as father (ܐܒܐ *abō*) or mother (ܐܡܐ *emō*) is noteworthy. In the religious profession of the sisters, when the superior general asks the candidate her consent to follow Christ by living in the congregation in accordance with its rules and regulations and her willingness to undertake the obligations of the religious life bound by the evangelical virtues, the candidate expresses deliberately her consent and makes the pledge.¹⁶⁶ The superior addresses the candidate as “sister” when she asks for her consent to vow and to live community, and the candidate addresses the superior as “mother” when she gives her consent to vow and to live in the institute.¹⁶⁷

Through the promising of vows and the undertaking of religious life the monastic virgin expresses her will “to live in accordance with the direction and guidance of the superiors” and “to nurture in her heart the spirit of sisterly love and affection towards all the members and enrich it so that the sweet odour of this love and affection may go out from her heart and spread to the entire house so as to promote the spiritual progress of the whole community.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Leloir, “Martyrius”, 740.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Guerrero, “Autoritá”, 108-109.

¹⁶⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 42-43; *Profession of Vows*, 13.

¹⁶⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 42-43.

¹⁶⁸ *HRSIC*, art. 73: 3-4.

2.2.7. Hierarchical Communion

The aspects of hierarchical communion included in the Liturgy of Profession in the Malankara Catholic Church are probably taken from the *Takso d'tulbosho d'dairoye*. About this feature the *Takso d'suporo d'dairoyoto* keeps silence. As religious profession is an ecclesial act celebrated by the whole Church, it is relevant that the Service of Profession highlights the elements of the hierarchical communion. These elements are: obedience to the magisterium, communion with the local hierarchy and communion with the faithful.

2.2.7.1. Obedience to the Magisterium

A dynamic communion of the consecrated with the teaching authority of the Church on a universal and local level testifies practically and concretely to their communion with the Church. Far from the concept of a rigid authoritative perspective, the Liturgical Service encourages the religious to an adherence of mind and heart (filial co-operation) to the official teachings of all Fathers of the Church, especially of the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church.¹⁶⁹ It says:

You have to accept the official teachings of all Fathers of the catholic, apostolic one and holy Church, especially of our Holy Father...and all the Episcopoi regarding her governance.¹⁷⁰

By virtue of the consecration and insertion into the life and holiness of the Church, and called to witness to the Gospel values of obedience, and filial submission to those who are chosen as the leaders of the Church, it is requisite that consecrated persons as well as Institutes be

¹⁶⁹ *Profession of Vows*, 12. CCEO distinguishes the teaching authority of the Church from the hierarchs such as the Pope, a major archbishop, a metropolitan, an eparchial bishop, major superiors of the institutes of consecrated life who have the power of governance and all those who in law succeed them in governance. Cf. *CCEO*, 984: 1.

¹⁷⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 39; *Profession of Vows*, 12

faithful to the teaching and directions which the Roman Pontiff, united with all the bishops, gives the Church.¹⁷¹

2.2.7.2. Communion with the Local Hierarchy

The word hierarchy is derived from the Greek term *hieros-archia* meaning holy principle. The local hierarchy involves the bishop of the respective Church, the vicar general, the clergy and the laity. The Liturgical Service speaks of the acceptance of the ecclesial teachings and of obeying all the *Episcopoi* regarding the governance of the Church.¹⁷² This statement reveals the mind of the Church, that a zealous and a diligent co-operation of the consecrated with the local hierarchy of a particular Church is essential for the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ.¹⁷³ Moreover, the presidential role of the ecclesial authority, namely the bishop or abbot and the participation of the clergy, deacons, and the faithful in the liturgical service points also to the ecclesial dimension of communion implicated in the commitment.

Even from the time of their inception, ascetic communities of both men and women in the Syrian Churches were under the protection and guidance of the bishops. Ephrem offers evidence of the hierarchical relation of the *bnay qyōmō* saying that Bishop Abraham of Nisibis was the protector of the *bnay qyāmâ* of his diocese.¹⁷⁴ Canon 4 of George the Bishop of the Arabs (686-724), and Canons 9 and 10 of Jacob of Edessa (683-708) clearly affirm the obedience, mutual rapport and dependence required from the monastics towards the authority of the bishops.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ *IL*, no. 72, pp. 72-73.

¹⁷² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 39.

¹⁷³ Cf. *CD*, no. 33

¹⁷⁴ Ephrem, *CNis* 21:5.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* III, 420; see also Yakoub, *Il Monachesimo Siro*, 70-71.

The communion of the monastics with the local hierarchy calls also for collaboration with the priests. In the 15th Canon of Rabulla, the priests and deacons were asked to provide sustenance for the monastics of their territories and they were also to encourage the lay people to share with the monastics from their goods.¹⁷⁶

The recent Church documents also stress the need to adopt an attitude towards the pastors of the Church similar to that towards the bishops. The religious should give respect, esteem and due obedience and support to the priests in their mission, especially through prayer and sacrifice. The priests are reminded to acquire a deep knowledge of consecrated life and to promote vocations.¹⁷⁷

2.2.7.3. Communion with the Faithful

Since hierarchy involves all the baptized, consecration implies that the religious be in communion with the *Christifidelis laici*. The Liturgy of Profession does not speak explicitly of a collaboration of the religious with the faithful. But it characterizes Christ as “lover of men,” intending that the consecrated also should follow His model.¹⁷⁸

A constructive collaboration with the lay faithful requires respecting the dignity and the vocation of the laity, co-operating with the youth and the elderly in ecclesial movements which foster in them spiritual renewal and ecclesial communion. Collaboration is also desired with those lay faithful who wish to share in the spirituality and mission of the Institute in the promotion of vocation and formation.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* III, 73.

¹⁷⁷ *CD*, no, 15, 3.

¹⁷⁸ *Profession of Vows*, 12

¹⁷⁹ *IL*, no. 80

3. MONASTIC CONSECRATION AND MISSION: IMPLICATIONS AND PARADIGMS

Mission is not only an inseparable part of consecration but it is the dynamic totality of it. By her divine calling, the consecrated is sent into the world with plans for realizing the kingdom of God. The Old and New Testaments provide us with examples. In the sending of Moses (Ex 3:10), Jeremiah (Jr 1:6) and Isaiah (Is 6.8) we observe the beautiful co-mingling of the triple aspects of vocation, consecration and mission which in a most sublime way are fulfilled in Christ (Lk 4; 18-19; Jn 17: 18-19).

In the Syrian Church, there is always a basic link between consecration and mission. According to P. Yousif, the basis of any mission or ministry is the respective consecration, and for each service there is a corresponding liturgical dedication of the person. He continues: “The idea of delegating a person to an ecclesial ministry or function without consecration or mission is not found in the Church.”¹⁸⁰ From this perspective we see that monastic consecration integrally forms a part of one’s commitment to the divine and the ecclesial ministry.

The religious called and consecrated by God, primarily through baptism and then to its fullness through the Liturgy of Profession is a missionary, that is, a herald or an envoy of God with a new and special title, proclaiming and witnessing the kingdom and participating in the salvific works of God in the Church and in the world. To quote John Paul II: “It can be said that consecrated persons are in mission by virtue of their consecration, to which they bear witness in accordance with the ideal of their institute”¹⁸¹

The above mentioned aspects confirm the missionary dimension of the Syrian Liturgy of Monastic Consecration in which we pinpoint

¹⁸⁰ Yousif, “East Syrian Spirituality”, 40.

¹⁸¹ John Paul II, *VC*, no. 72.

two different facets of mission, the existential dimension in terms of witnessing and the dynamic dimension in terms of ministries.

The term mission is derived from *mittere* the Latin verb meaning to send. It corresponds to the Hebrew term *šlah* and the Greek term *apostellein*.¹⁸² Both terms have a wider ecclesial connotation different from one another but congruent in reality. Mission is innate to all consecration which begins with baptism, while ministry is its expression. Therefore, even when one does not undertake a specific ministry, mission is existent.

Ministry as the word corresponds to the Greek *diakonos* and the Hebrew *Mešāret* is applied to the services performed by the servants (*šamšōne*) of God (Acts 11:29; 12:25; I Cor 16; 15) in the world.¹⁸³ It is in this sense that the Gospel envisages ministry (Cf. Lk 1:9; Lk 1:23; Jn 16:2), Paul speaks of it and calls Moses the minister (*šamšōno*) of the first Covenant (Cf. 2 Cor 9:12; 2 Cor 3:7; 9) Aphraat and *Liber Graduum* also enunciate the concept.¹⁸⁴ The Service of Profession envisages the consecrated religious woman as the servant of God and her ministry as service. Since it is essential to know the mutual link and the basic difference between mission and ministry, we should refer first to the missionary paradigms and study those aspects pertaining to the expressions presented in the Liturgy of Profession.

3.1. God the Father: Origin of Every Mission

The Liturgy of Profession presents God the Father as the sender; therefore, He is the source of mission. Being the Saviour and Benefactor of all creation including man, it is His will and desire that no one should die but “that all should live and arrive at true knowledge” (I Tim 2:4).¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Cf. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 580.

¹⁸³ Grelot, “Ministry”, 315.

¹⁸⁴ See Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, 1:4 (PS 1, 10-11); *Liber Graduum*, 28:8.

¹⁸⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 4.

To reveal this God of salvation and transmit His ineffable love, the Father consecrated and sent into this world His only begotten Son “whom the angels worship in heaven.”¹⁸⁶ God also sends the Spirit to dwell in everyone and to shower grace on everything so that “all have life in abundance.”¹⁸⁷ Thus mission has its source in the Triune God and its goal is “giving life in abundance.”

3.2. Christ and the Apostles

Consecrated by the Spirit and sent by the Father to become the “Word of God” Christ is the missionary of the Father (cf. Jn 17:18-19). So also the apostles, whom Christ sent into the world are missionaries. (Mt 28:19-20). Like the apostles, Christ also sends the consecrated into the world. The Church recalls Christ’s sending of the virgin and for her she prays: “Grant her (virgin) the preparation of the Gospel of peace as sandals to her feet.”¹⁸⁸ In this section, we deal briefly with the mission and ministry of Christ and the apostles, to understand better the mission of the consecrated virgin as it is depicted in the Liturgical Service of Profession.

3.2.1. Christ: The Apostle (Šlīhō) of the Father

Christ is presented as the apostle (*شليح*, *šlīhō*) of God in the Hebrew text (cf. Heb 3:1). He is the one consecrated and sent for mission (cf. Jn 17: 18-19). Christ’s mission as mentioned in the liturgical prayers is revealing God the Father who is rich in mercy and leads humanity towards Him.¹⁸⁹ The Son has made the Father known in the fullest possible way (cf. Jn 1:18; Mt 11:27). He has revealed to humankind *who He is*.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ *Profession of Vows*, 8.

¹⁸⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 4.

¹⁸⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 4

¹⁸⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 4-5.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *RM*, no. 12.

Christ's mission implicitly pointed out in the liturgical prayers involves a double dimension: an existential witnessing of the living God, and a dynamic witnessing of His love through salvific actions (cf. Jn 14:10-11).¹⁹¹ Witnessing to God is the same as witnessing to the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is neither a concept nor a doctrine, but as stated in *Redemptoris Missio*, it is before all else a person with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, 'the image of the invisible God.'¹⁹² He made manifest this kingdom in His very person by serving and giving His life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). The secrets and the demands of attaining this kingdom are explicitly put down in the Liturgy of Profession through the Bible lessons:- Mt 7:13-14; Mt 7 24-27; Mt 6: 19-21.¹⁹³

According to E. Farrugia, Jesus' concrete mode of existence witnesses to His very being as God's missionary. Jesus' coming or proceeding from the Father, His remaining with the Father (Jn 10:38; Jn 16:32) and His eventual return to the Father (Jn 16:5; Jn 7:33), reveal Christ's being with His Father. Jesus is obedient, poor and virgin. Through His obedience He made Himself the Word of His Father. Through the stripping of His divine glory, Jesus witnessed how non-possessive He is. By making all human persons the sons of God Christ witnessed how chaste He is. It was and it is in Christ's mode of existence that Christ revealed that He is the "missionary" (ܫܠܝܗܘܢܐ, *šlīhō*) of the Father.¹⁹⁴

The apostles (*šlīhe*) are called, consecrated and sent out by Christ, so they are also missionaries of Christ (Mt 28: 18-20). Their mission of witnessing Christ as described in the liturgical prayers involves total renouncement, faithful following and living with Christ in the spirit of the

¹⁹¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 24.

¹⁹² Cf. *LG*, no.5; John Paul II, *RM*, no. 18.

¹⁹³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 18.

¹⁹⁴ Farrugia, *Monasticism as a Bridge*, 6-7.

Beatitudes.¹⁹⁵ Their renouncement for the kingdom and their faithful following and living with Christ shows their preferential option for God as total, irreversible, unconditional, absolute, definitive and exclusive. According to John Paul II, there is no other mission equal or above it.¹⁹⁶

3.2. 2. Christ: The Divine Farmer (*Akôrô*)

Even though the titles used in the Liturgy of Profession such as Shepherd, and Physician, conform to Christ in accordance with His salvific ministries of mission, we consider here the title *akôro* (ܐܟܘܪܘܐ) or divine farmer, specified explicitly in the second strophe of a hymn in the Liturgical Service referring to the parable of the labourers in the vineyard.¹⁹⁷ In the hymn, Christ is depicted as the owner of the vineyard who calls labourers to work for Him and rewards them at the end. The title *akôro* points out the incorporation of the Old and New Testament imagery of God as Vinedresser or ploughman in the Liturgical Service. The Syriac word, ܐܟܪܐ (*akr*) has the root meaning to dig or plough.¹⁹⁸ *akôro* is the ploughman or husbandman metaphorically used to present Christ and the apostles. Isaiah gives the picture of the Vinedresser whom St. Mathew proclaims in the gospel, as the "Son of Man" (cf Mt. 20:17). He "dug the vineyard and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines." He "put a hedge around it", "built its tower", "dug its winepress", and let the rain fall on it (cf. Is 5:1-3). Not only did He nurture the vineyard, but He also laid down His own life for it to gather good fruits.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 28; 30; 40.

¹⁹⁶ John Paul II, "Al Vostro Fiat", 297.

¹⁹⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 6; *Profession of Vows*, 10.

¹⁹⁸ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 17.

¹⁹⁹ Prophets used this vinedresser's imagery to establish God's works of Israel's salvation. Here we do the same to show the role of Christ in the salvation of mankind. Cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 195-197.

Christ's mission as Vinedresser can be viewed as an imagery of His ministerial life. To Christ belongs the vineyard, the Kingdom of God. He Himself is a minister in this vineyard, He calls labourers at different hours to work with Him and He rewards them for their labour.²⁰⁰ As part of their joint labour in the vineyard, it is logical that Christ expects good fruits for which He waits until the end.

Like Jesus, apostles are also "farmers"; hence, they are also called to plant the "seeds of the Kingdom" in God's own field, human hearts, and to water them. Paul characterizes himself and other apostles as God's fellow workers (I Cor 3:9). The Acts of Judas characterizes Judas Thomas as a planter. "I have planted thy vine in the land; may it cast its roots downward, may its tendrils twine upwards, and may it be seen in the land."²⁰¹ Ephrem views the apostles as farmers of the whole world. He exclaims in the Hymns of *Carmina Nisibene*: "Blessed be he whose harvest is high!"²⁰²

The Syrian liturgical prayer for Wednesday also describes the apostles as hardworking farmers who uproot the thorns of sin (idolatry) from the accursed land and sow in people's heart seeds of faith and knowledge of God.²⁰³

3.3. The Mission of the Monastic Virgins in the West Syrian Churches as Reflected in the *Ordo* of Profession

In this section, we discuss briefly the mission and ministry of the consecrated religious in the West Syrian Churches not from a historical point of view but from a theological viewpoint.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Mt. 20: 1-16; see also *Vritha Vagdanam*, 6.

²⁰¹ AJT 12:146 ; Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, 143.

²⁰² Ephrem, *CNis* 29: 35-36; See also Murray, *Symbols*, 195.

²⁰³ *Šhīmo* ('*men'ōlam*), 128; See also Murray, *Symbols*, 198.

3.3.1. Witnessing of Life: Irreplaceable Form of Mission

In a society where authentic witnessing of life is considered more valuable than theories and teaching, it is very significant to comprehend religious life as having the mission of witnessing Christ in the new form of His existence.

We have mentioned already that in the Syrian view monastic life was and is still considered to be a life of covenant. At the nascent period of consecrated life those who embraced this life did not separate themselves from their fellow Christians except for their dedicated virginity and continence were respected and designated as the "chosen ones." Within the Syrian Christian society the covenanters functioned as a kind of small church within the Church, a sort of Church elite.²⁰⁴ In later monasticism too, the monastics found the ways of the world incompatible for a life of union with God so radically set themselves apart from a society which rejoices in luxury and ease. They lived in affliction, in oppression, in weariness, in poverty, in contrition of heart, bodily hardships, renunciation of relatives and sorrowful thought. In their appearance and in their actions they were a sight of spiritual stimulation to those who encountered them. Their many virtues shone forth like sunbeams. The enemies of truth (the heretics), considered the monks as saviours and defenders of faith. From every side the faithful rushed to them as centers of refuge.²⁰⁵ Every monk tried to be blameless as far as his life was concerned and to be good example for lay people.

The Liturgy of Profession does not mention specifically the aspect of witnessing, but we see in the liturgical prayers of profession, the Christian virgin's inherent thirst for union with God, the Church's call that she lives her way of holiness (a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for fulfilling the mission of salvation),²⁰⁶ by fleeing

²⁰⁴ Cf. Nedungatt, "Covenanters", 202-203.

²⁰⁵ Alfeyev, *The World of Isaac the Syrian*, 44.

²⁰⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *CL*, no. 17.

away from the vanities of this world and from the abominable exercise of hateful things by living in repentance, with assiduous fasting, prayers, continuous supplications and with abundant almsgiving.²⁰⁷ The Church through the liturgical prayers also invites the virgin to be the light of the world and salt of the earth (Mt 5, 13-16), and also admonishes her to be an instrument of God's glory.²⁰⁸ By revealing these elements underlying the fact of consecration, the Church makes it clear that she consecrates the Christian virgin so that she becomes a faithful witness of Christ.

John Paul II also challenges, consecrated persons saying that more than in external works, the mission and primary task of the religious consists in making "Christ the witness" *par excellent* (Rev 1:5, 3:14) present to the world.²⁰⁹ It is by virtue of her baptismal dignity that the religious is obliged to witness Christ primarily by participating in the threefold mission as Priest, Prophet and King. This we articulate in the following part.

3.3.1.1. Priestly Witness

Being anointed by the Holy Spirit each baptized person participates in the priesthood (ܟܘܢܘܬܐ, *kohnūthō*) of Christ. Derived from *kohen*, the term *kohnō* indicates a person who abounds in wealth, and one who enriches others with his wealth. It involves also the connotation of consecration, immolation, proclamation and offering sacrifice.²¹⁰

The Liturgy of Profession clearly indicates the priestly function of the consecrated one as staying at the house of God and serving Him in purity, steadfast love and holiness; drawing near to God to proclaim

²⁰⁷ *Takso d'suporo*, 328; Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 23.

²⁰⁸ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 1; 22; 30-31; *Takso d'suporo*, 333-334;

²⁰⁹ Conner, "Vita Consecrata", 264.

²¹⁰ Payne Smith, *A Compendious Dictionary*, 206.

His wonderful deeds, taking up the Cross of Christ (Mt 16:24), and drinking His cup (cf. Mt 20:22; 26:27).²¹¹

The religious share also the priesthood of Christ personally through the commitment of vows. Through obedience they offer themselves as a sacrifice pleasing to God, through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 12:1). By the choice of virginity with an undivided heart (cf. I Cor 7: 32-34), they commit their own body to be the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. Through the option of evangelical poverty, they deprive themselves of human idols and commit their whole heart to serve God (cf. Mt 6:24).²¹²

The priestly bond of the religious to Christ is ontological and continual. It is ontological in the sense that the essence of their royal priesthood is rooted in the priesthood of Christ. According to Ephrem, it is a marvel in man, that though he is one, he is to himself a priest, he is to himself a sacrifice, he is the offering, and he is the offerer of the offering; for he is like that Lamb of God, who was to himself everything.²¹³ The priesthood of the virgin is continual, hence, it is to be exercised fruitfully in her daily life of worship and sacrifices of praise, of joy, of sorrow, of work and its fatigues for God and for others.²¹⁴

3.3.1.2. Prophetic Witness

The ascetic life in the Syrian Church traces its origins back to the prophets. A prophet (ܢܒܝܐ, *n'bt'ō*) as the word indicates is one who is called by God and to whom a charism of revelation is bestowed (Am 3:7). They were men who love God passionately and adhere to His Word wholeheartedly.²¹⁵ According to Jacob of Serugh "the prophets

²¹¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 51; See also Chapter 2, 2.4.3.1.

²¹² Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 40-41.

²¹³ Ephrem, *Prose Refutations*, 189 in Russell, "Christology of Ephraem", 112-113.

²¹⁴ Cf. Cole & Conner, *Christian Totality*, 324-325.

²¹⁵ Beauchamp, "Prophet", 414.

were God's friends and shared in his secrets"; they, through constant vigilance and a sort of combat (ܩܪܒܐ , *qrōbō*) had achieved discernment and through the gift of the Spirit had acted as created Word of God.²¹⁶

The Liturgy of Profession presents the biblical prophets in the context of the virgins' dedication, thus stressing the prophetic nature of the monastic vocation. It presents Abraham as a man of exodus in faith (cf. Gen 12:1-10), Isaiah, a figure of God's transparency and holiness (cf. Is 6: 1-7), Samuel, a man of the sanctuary and the guardian of the ark and so on (I Sam 3:1ff).²¹⁷ The exclusion of the names of prophetesses in the service is abridged by the inclusion of Mary with the Magnificat as her prophetic hymn.²¹⁸ Through the portrayal of the prophets, the Service elucidates not only their prophetic charism and mission but it also challenges the consecrated virgin to a prophetic life, a life of transparency, of understanding, of holiness, of discernment, of unfailing faith, of enduring hope and of all an embracing charity.²¹⁹

In the Liturgy of Profession, God is invoked to send upon the religious spiritual wisdom, courage, thirst for righteousness and love for justice so that the virgin should know God and announce Him who is full of pity and mercy, abounding in truth and full of loving kindness (Ex 34:6-7).²²⁰ It is to be noted here that the gifts of the Spirit given in baptism for a prophetic life assume a dynamic turn in monastic life. The consecrated shares in a more profound and intimate way not only the prophecies of Christ but also to witness to Christ the Prophet who

²¹⁶ Jacob of Serugh, "Concerning the Veil on Mose's Face", Hom. 79:55 in Brock, "Jacob of Serugh", 73.

²¹⁷ See *Vritha Vagdanam*, 1; 32.

²¹⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 26-27.

²¹⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 30-31.

²²⁰ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 8; 12-15; see also Moraleda, "A Prophetic Witness", 29.

called his disciples friends, and who revealed to them all that He had heard from the Father (Jn 15:15).

Not only in the context of doing, but also in the context of being, the consecrated person gives a prophetic answer to the three principal challenges of the world: freedom deprived of any relation to moral norms and truths, sexuality which promotes the idolatry of human instincts, and selfish materialism. Through the joyful practice of the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty, they symbolize and signify the eternal values and the primacy of God over all things.²²¹

3.3.1.3. Kingly Witness

Kingship (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ , *malkūtō*) implying power and authority has its source in God (cf. Jn 19:11). It was bestowed on man at the very beginning of his creation (Ps 8:6); so that he could subdue the earth and have dominion over the world (Gen 1: 27-28). But man abused the divine power and authority through sin. Consequently, instead of becoming the king of the universe, he became its slave. From this slavery, Christ redeemed man through his passion and death and restored to him the kingship. It is in the baptismal anointing that the kingship of the human person is restored. As Ephrem notes: "With visible pigments, the image of kingship is portrayed and with visible oil is portrayed the hidden image of our hidden King."²²² The kingship in every tradition implies lordship; therefore it means to reign or to rule. But it has a rather specific meaning in Syrian spirituality.

The prayers in the Service of Profession contain the idea that the virgins, due to their consecration, are under the Lordship of Christ. They have Christ as their Lord, master, and teacher.²²³ They are made the brides and children of the kingdom (*bnay malkūtō*); therefore,

²²¹ Cf. John Paul II, *VC*, nos. 87-92; see also Moraleda, "A Prophetic Witness", 29-33.

²²² Ephrem, *HVirg* 7:5.

they have the duty “to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (cf. Mt 6:33).²²⁴ The virgin’s gesture of seeking the kingdom of God is depicted in the Service of Receiving. To the seeker (virgin), the celebrant says: “She who seeks religious life, i.e., holy wisdom of the life of dedication, justice and the perfection of virtues is the most beloved of God.”²²⁵ He also points out to the virgin that by her choice she becomes the princess of the King (Christ), able to live with Him in His palace, attended by the princesses.²²⁶ Since the kingdom is identified with Christ and the Church, seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness signifies the virgin’s quest for Christ and for the Church.²²⁷

The liturgical prayers also highlight the nature of the kingship of the virgin as glorious; however, this kingship is associated with struggles, not for conquering nations but herself, her passions, desires, ambitions, and witnessing to the kingdom of God in her own person in love, peace, justice, freedom, and brotherhood.²²⁸ Through the profession of the vows, religious also witness to the faithful that the “kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36). To inherit the kingdom, one needs to enter through the narrow gate (Mt 7: 13-14), to renounce oneself and one’s possession (Mt 13:44), to die to sin and to be born again (Jn 3:3ff), and to be vigilant (Mt 25:1-13).²²⁹ The crowning of the virgin, the giving of the cross, the putting on of the sandals and new garments underlie the symbolic presentation of the kingship of the religious as sharing in the kingship of Christ and inheriting the kingdom.

²²³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 47; *Takso d’ tulbosho*, 307.

²²⁴ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17-18.

²²⁵ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17

²²⁶ Cf. *Chapter 2*, 1.1.2.

²²⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *RM*, no.17.

²²⁸ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 30; 38.

²²⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 18; 37-38.

3.4. The Ministry of the Religious in the West Syrian Churches

Each religious by her divine consecration is an offering to others. The special access to God that she gained through the profession of monastic vows and ascetic practices has to have its outward expression in charismatic gifts which she will exercise for the benefit of the entire Church of God.²³⁰ The Syrian virgins were exemplary models of this ideal. According to S. A. Harvey, “women could be and were visible, active and venerable participants in the Christian community of the antique Syrian world.”²³¹ Their devotional work and ministry were clearly not confined either to women’s monastic communities or to the laywomen in the city, but it was extended to the broader social setting throughout the late antique period.²³² Therefore, as an essential part of their religious commitment, the monastic virgin dedicates herself to the service of the entire people of God by carrying on the works of Christ: “announcing God’s kingdom to the multitude, healing the sick and the maimed, converting sinners to a good life, blessing children, doing good to all and always obeying the will of the Father who sent His Son”²³³ As the Church proposes, the saving work of Christ, shared by means of concrete services, must be faithful to the Gospel, and be executed in profound union with Christ and in accordance with the signs of the times.²³⁴ The ministries of the monastics or religious, as described in *Evangelica Testificatio* have the goal “to transmit the message of the Incarnate Word in terms which the world is able to understand.”²³⁵

The Liturgical Rite of Profession does not specify any apostolic ministry for the monastic virgin, but through some ministerial images it

²³⁰ Cf. Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa*, V (introduction) in Price, *A History*, xxii.

²³¹ Harvey, “Women”, 55.

²³² Cf. Harvey, “Women”, 55.

²³³ *LG*, no. 46.

²³⁴ *EE*, no. 23.

²³⁵ Paul VI, *ET*, no. 9.

proposes to her to glorify God by serving His name; thus it emphasizes a ministerial life.

3.4.1. Images of Ministry in the *Ordo* of Profession

With regard to the religious' ministry, the Service of the Liturgy of Profession portrays several vivid images. Let us proceed to discuss the most significant of them.

3.4.1.1. Pilgrimage (*Aksnōyūtō*)

The image of the pilgrimage (ܐܟܨܢܘܝܘܬܐ, *aksnōyūtō*) is readily understandable in the light of certain themes and phrases found in the liturgical prayers of the Rite. They can be pointed out as prominent representations of ministry. As we have explained elsewhere, the Liturgy of Profession as such presents monastic life or religious life as a way to the kingdom of God. It is further considered as the way of righteousness, the way of life, the way opened by Christ, the way of love, the way of truth, and the way of holiness.²³⁶ We also encounter in the liturgical rite the themes of the exodus of Abraham, of going out from the ways of God, the ideas of coming to the Father's house, the demand for vigilance, and the virgin's urge for drawing near to God.²³⁷ These aspects are further represented and highlighted by the symbolic acts and the processions in various moments of the liturgy. Jesus is characterized in the liturgy as the opener and the leader of the way.²³⁸ The virgin who enters into the way of Christ by her commitment is also asked to imitate or follow Christ on the way of the cross. She is assured spiritual blessings, abundant mercy and brightness of spirit to follow the Way.²³⁹

The pilgrimage theme challenges the religious, to walk the way of love. The way of love is characterized in the Liturgy as a way of life

²³⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 12-18.

²³⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17-18; 48

²³⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 13; 56.

²³⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 30.

consisting in true worship of God, love of neighbour, charity towards the hungry, the thirsty, the poor and the needy. It also recalls the virgin to her duty as a guide and guardian, thus assisting those who are in pilgrimage with her on the way to the kingdom.²⁴⁰ As herald of the kingdom, she also has the ministry to remove the obstacles on the way. She as an apostle is called also to be a milestone and light on the way.²⁴¹

The dynamism of the image of the pilgrimage throws light on the different dimensions of the ministries of religious on their way to the kingdom. It challenges the monastic pilgrim to minister to the church and to the broken society where secularism, exploitation, power politics and many egoistic tendencies are at work. Thus, sharing the interior life of the "Pilgrim God" who is in search of man, the monastic virgin is responsible to walk with God and at the same time to keep up a creative concern for the fellow traveler, who is weak and marginalized (cf. Hb 12:12-13).²⁴²

3.4.1.2. Teaching (*Malphōnūtō*)

Teaching (ܡܠܦܢܘܬܐ, *malphōnūtō*) was an important ministry in the Syrian understanding. The early ascetics like Aphrahat, Ephrem, Rabulla were havens of knowledge of God. They did not despise learning and knowledge, nor consider it as part of the world that they had abandoned. Nor did they conceive like John Chrysostom that the ascetics needed only to know how to love God and to converse with nature, rather than acquiring a philosophic knowledge about God and the universe.²⁴³ They were promoters of divine knowledge, not only for their own countries, but also for the whole world.²⁴⁴ It can be said that rather than despising knowledge and wisdom, the Syrian ascetics were motivated to be healed from darkness and ignorance and to

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 1, 18-22, 38-39. See also Valuparampil, *The Way*, 409.

²⁴¹ Cf. Ephrem, *HFide* 65:1; *HNat* 22:21; Cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 97. See also Pulickal, "Dynamism of Pilgrim Theology", 114.

²⁴² Cf. Pulickal, "Dynamism of Pilgrim Theology", 123.

become teachers themselves, to carry Christ and to transmit the glory of God to others.²⁴⁵ It is in this sense that Jacob of Serugh calls the daughters of the covenant teachers (*malphōnyōtō*) among the faithful.²⁴⁶

The liturgical prayers in various contexts focus on “wisdom” and its transmission; hence, monastic life or religious life itself is described as “divine wisdom.”²⁴⁷ In the liturgical hymn (*Bo ʿūtō* of Mar Jacob) the virgins are referred to as the community of the “wise”, probably due to their choice to be chaste.²⁴⁸ Divine knowledge or spiritual wisdom in the Syriac *ܚܟܡܐ* (*hekmo*) is not the intellectual wisdom of the world gained from studies or readings, but is primarily a divine gift (Ws 8:21). According to the Liturgical Rite, it is not speculative but a profound existential knowledge of God acquired by fixing the mind on Christ alone.²⁴⁹ Thus, the object of divine wisdom is Christ the wisdom of God (I Co 1: 24).

²⁴³ In the beginning the oriental ascetics despised human learning, considering it as part of the sinful world they had renounced. Even John Chrysostom in his homilies discouraged the ascetics from acquiring knowledge, saying that to know and to love God and to dialogue with nature was more important for the ascetics than to acquire the wisdom of the Greeks and of the pagans. Cf. John Chrysostom, *Epist. ad Ephes.*, Hom. 21, col.152 in Peña, *The Amazing Life*, 134.

²⁴⁴ Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 288.

²⁴⁵ Cf. Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 280.

²⁴⁶ Jacob of Serugh, “Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem”, 102-13 (PO 47) 35. Cf. also Harvey, “Women”, 48.

²⁴⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17.

²⁴⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 35.

²⁴⁹ The word *hkm* meaning coition or sexual intercourse, a sign of mutual revealing, sharing and experiencing of the whole being of man and woman in the context of marriage, is the root of the term *hekmo* or knowledge. It therefore indicates that the knowledge of God is not superficial but one of profound existential experience of God. Cf. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 141.

The Liturgy of Profession urges the virgin to acquire spiritual knowledge and to become wise (*hakīmō*) like the wise virgins. A request is made to Christ the master (*mōrān*) to give to the virgins the Sacred Scriptures to study, and to give light to their eyes (Holy Spirit) so that they may be filled with spiritual wisdom and divine knowledge.²⁵⁰

The liturgical prayers also highlight spiritual wisdom as a treasure superior to all else. To attain this spiritual wisdom, it is recommended to the virgin to purify her heart (cf. Dt 30:6), to free herself from passions and sins, and to learn the ways of the Lord from the light of the Word and of the commandments.²⁵¹ This wisdom enables the virgin to attain life and happiness (Pr 8:32-36), security (Pr 3: 21-26), grace and glory (Pr 4:8) wealth and justice and all the virtues (Ws 8: 7).²⁵²

According to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the teaching of the consecrated must not be limited to the catechetical instructions at parishes or scientific knowledge at educational institutions, but it must be the divine knowledge that transcends the wisdom of the world. This should be transmitted faithfully “in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18; 5:28), and it should extend to Christian homes and other institutions according to the example of Christ, who taught in the Temple (Acts 5:21) in the Synagogue (Acts 13: 14), in private homes (Acts 5:42) and among the people.²⁵³

3.4.1.3. Prophecy (*Nabī’ūtō*)

Great emphasis is given in the liturgical prayers to the prophetic role (*ܢܒܝܐ*) of the monastic virgins. Presenting the prophets, their prophecies, and their mission, the liturgical prayers challenge the virgins to visualize the prophetic nature of their life and ministry. The prophetic

²⁵⁰ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 36.

²⁵¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17; 38; *Profession of Vows*, 12.

²⁵² Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 17; 38; *Profession of Vows*, 12.

²⁵³ Paul VI, *EN*, no. 44.

dimension of the consecrated life is broad, so, we would like to visualize here the ministry of religious as a witness to justice, as this theme is persistent in the liturgical prayers of profession.

The term justice has different connotations. Essentially it means delivering the people from any kind of bondage such as sin, captivity, oppression, and exploitation (cf. Is 45:22ff; 46:12ff; 51:1ff; 54:17; 59:9). Justice also signifies the bestowal of heavenly blessings such as peace and glory upon those people whose merit is that they are God's chosen ones.²⁵⁴

Justice, the prophetic virtue and the works of justice were considered by the Syrian ascetics as essential to attain the Kingdom.²⁵⁵ The Syrian hermits believed in equality among people and they always defended the rights of the oppressed, urging governors to act justly towards the subjects. Theodoret and Chrysostom depict the early Syrian hermits as liberators, defenders and protectors of the marginalized and the rejected. Among them the names of Ephrem, Macedonius, Maesymas and Jacob of Nisibis are renowned.²⁵⁶

The Service of Profession presents the monastic virgin herself as the "justified one"; hence, by God's grace she is forgiven all sins and is re-instated to a life of divine intimacy.²⁵⁷ God's justice forgave her sins and in His justice she has found life (cf. Ps 51:16; Dn 9:16; Ps 119: 40). This experience of divine justice in Pauline language is a gift of God, which, at the same time, requires from those who receive it a merciful fidelity to His salvific will (Rom 10:3).²⁵⁸ Therefore, as indicated in the various Church documents, the consecrated have to communicate

²⁵⁴ Cf. Descamps, "Justice", 248.

²⁵⁵ Chapter 3, 3.4.1.4.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa* XIII, 7; XIV, 4; in Price, *A History*, 154 – 166. See also Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 283-284.

²⁵⁷ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 29

²⁵⁸ Cf. Descamps, "Justice", 248.

through their ministries the divine justice of God to those who are captivated by sin, oppression, and injustice, by sharing and applying the Church's concern in the area of justice and peace.²⁵⁹

3.4.1.4. Cultivation (*Akōrūtō*)

The image of cultivation (ܐܟܘܪܘܬܐ) with regard to the ministerial service of the ascetics is pertinent to the Syrian thinking. The ascetics conceived of themselves as servants of Jesus Christ, working to spread His heavenly kingdom. Everything they did in their life, whether spiritually or physically, was considered a work of God in the field of God.²⁶⁰ The Odes of Solomon refer to the work of man as praising God perpetually and toiling for the spread of His wisdom.²⁶¹

The liturgical service depicts the monastic virgin as a good worker in the vineyard of Christ, called by Christ Himself along with other workers to labour in his vineyard.²⁶² The work is termed "worthwhile and blessed."²⁶³ Aphrahat in his VIth Demonstration, "On the Covenanters," speaks about how much diligence the covenanters should have to labour in the Lord's vineyard. He sings:

Let us be diligent workmen
That we may claim our reward with the earliest;
Let us bear the burden of the day
That we may ask for a greater reward.
Let us not be the idle workmen
For see our Lord has hired us for his vineyard.²⁶⁴

The theme cultivation (*akōrūtō*), as we have seen in the above section, is synonymous with sowing the seed of God (Word) in human

²⁵⁹ Cf. *RHP*, no. 3-4

²⁶⁰ Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa*, II, 16; III, 6, 9, 15; IV, 3,4; See Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 232-233.

²⁶¹ *Odes*, 11:20 ff; 16:1-6; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 53; 70-71.

²⁶² *Vritha Vagdanam*, 31.

²⁶³ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 41.

²⁶⁴ Aphraates, *Demonstrationes*, VI: I (PS 1, 243-244).

hearts; therefore, we perceive that the labour, which the Service of Profession confers upon the monastic virgin, is proclamation of the Word of God. It does not mean that she, like the ministerial priests, is endowed with the office of preaching, teaching, and interpreting the Word of God. However, the consecrated virgin has to proclaim God's name, and teach, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus as the "created Word of God", in her ministries of teaching, and preaching in different ways.²⁶⁵ The virgin has to place full confidence in God who "gives rain for the seed sown in the ground" (Is 30:23), and causes its growth a hundred-fold so that the virgin can rejoice and receive her wages at the end (cf. I Cor 3:8).

3.5. Specific Motives of Ministry

One could deduce explicitly from the prayers of the Liturgy of Profession the following aspects as the specific motives of the virgin's dedication to the service of God.

3.5.1. Acquisition of Perfect Charity

Religious profession necessarily involves the obligation to acquire perfect charity, the fulfillment of the law (cf. Rom 13:10). For the Syrians, the duty of charity has its foundation in human values.²⁶⁶ Hence, it is the basic fact that stimulates and motivates the virgin for apostolic mission.

According to Thomas Aquinas, a thing is absolutely perfect when it has acquired all those attributes that its nature necessarily implies. Concerning charity, there are two precepts: loving God and loving neighbour. The perfection of charity or love in action, therefore, consists in loving God with one's whole heart, and loving one's neighbour as

²⁶⁵ Paul VI, *EN*, no. 22.

²⁶⁶ Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, 40; Giving the account of Ephrem Palladius brings to light that the early Syrian ascetics were renowned for their charitable activities in the Church and in the society. See Peña, *The Amazing Life*, 121.

oneself (Lk 10:27).²⁶⁷ If one genuinely loves God he will love his neighbour as God would, because charity is sharing in God's own greatest love which is shared without reserve with all (cf. Mk 10:45). In the opinion of Ephrem, the purpose of every aspect of the ascetic life is to attain divine love. According to him, the love of God and the love of one's neighbour are the two wings of the *ḥīdōyō* with which he can fly to God.²⁶⁸

The virgin who professes vows explicitly expresses her dedication to acquire perfect charity, to seek the twofold love of God and neighbour.²⁶⁹ For this end, she dedicates her body, soul and spirit turning it from love of even the best temporal goods — possessions, marriage family and her own will — so that with her whole heart, mind and strength, she may love God and neighbour. Loving God with her whole heart means that whatever she does is virtually ordained to God, "whole mind" signifies the submission of the intellect and its faculties to believe everything that has been divinely revealed; (cf. 2 Cor 10:5) "whole soul" indicates relating all desires and affections to God (2 Cor 5: 13); and "whole strength" refers to all her words and actions being permeated with the love of God (I Cor 16:14).²⁷⁰ One who loves God with one's whole heart, mind, soul and strength loves one's neighbour with the perfect love of God, for no one can say: "I love God" and hate his brother (cf. 1 Jn 4: 20).

3.5.2. Building up of the Church

The Liturgy of Profession stresses the aspect of "serving the Church", thus emphasizing that consecrated life is a gift of the Spirit for the building up the entire Church through inspiration and apostolic

²⁶⁷ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, II-II, qn. 23; arts. 1-2. See also Conner, "Vita Consecrata", 267-268.

²⁶⁸ Ephrem, *Commentaire de l'Évangile*, XVI, 23.

²⁶⁹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 44.

²⁷⁰ ConnerR, "Vita Consecrata", 268; Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha*, 114.

works.²⁷¹ The term “building up of the Church” does not mean the building of an edifice, but rather the forming of the body of Christ. The apostle Paul had an authentic vision about the building up of the Church, which is described as follows in *Lumen Gentium*.

In the building up of Christ’s body various members and functions have their part to play. There is only one Spirit who according to His own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church (cf. I Cor 12:1-11). What has a special place among these gifts is the grace of the apostles to whose authority the Spirit himself subjected even those who were endowed with charisms (cf. I Cor 14). Giving the body unity through Himself and through His power and inner joining of the members, this same Spirit produces and stimulates love among the believers. From all this it follows that if one member endures anything, all the members co-endure it, and if one member is honoured, all the members together rejoice (cf. I Cor 12:26).²⁷²

R. Murray portrays more specifically the apostles’ role in the building up of the Church. He says:

They (the apostles) are the rays of the sun, which drive out the darkness of error. They are the shining lamps, which banish the dark night from the midst of his world. They are the tasty salt, which gives savour to the insipidity of creation, and the new leaven which changes the unleavened lump.²⁷³

Forged close to the Church through the profession of vows, each religious and religious community as such participate with God in the building up of the Church. Their role is akin to that of the apostles. The Liturgical Service of the Burial of the Nuns pictures the departed virgin as an apostle who with perfect love entered within the Church, beautified

²⁷¹ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 43; See also *PC*, no. 1; *LG*, no.43; *VC*, no. 3.

²⁷² Cf. *LG*, no. 7.

²⁷³ Murray, *Symbols*, 170.

and adorned the Church with precious jewels of charismatic gifts and thus made the Church like the daughter of the king.²⁷⁴

Beautifying and adorning the Church with the power of the Holy Spirit in manifold ways through holiness of life, witnessing of communion and participation in mission, the monastic virgins build up the Church as part of their dynamic ecclesial commitment.

3.5.3. Salvation of the World

The concept of salvation (ܩܘܪܘܬܐ , *phōrukūtō*) entails the aspect of removing one from a dangerous situation in which one risks perishing. According to the nature of the danger, the act of saving is manifested in protection, liberation, ransom, cure, health, victory, life and peace.²⁷⁵

The mystery of saving the universe from peril and death without exempting anyone, is truly God’s plan which the Scripture calls to mind. According to St. John: The Word (God) is the true light that enlightens everyone, giving life and grace. It becomes flesh in Jesus, sharing God’s abundant life (cf. Jn 1:1-6). St. Paul also emphasizes the mystery of salvation, that God desires everyone to be saved (I Tim 2:4), uniting all things in heaven and on earth in Christ (Eph 1:10), reconciling all things in Him (Col 1:20). These salvific themes resound often in the liturgical prayers of profession.²⁷⁶

The Liturgy of Profession reveals also in its different contexts the whole drama of the mystery of salvation, which originates in the account of creation and the fall and unfolds until it reaches out to the *parousia*. Christ is revealed throughout the liturgy as the Saviour. His saving acts described in the Service of Profession are “finding the lost sheep” (cf.

²⁷⁴ Brock, *Burial Service for Nuns*, 35; See the same theme in *Šhīmo* (*šubahō*) 214.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 459; Lesquirit & Grelot, “Salvation”, 457.

²⁷⁶ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 4; 24; 29.

Lk 15:4-7), “discovering the lost coin” (cf. Lk 15: 8-10), “bringing the strayed son to the father’s house” (Lk 15: 11-32), “saving Peter from being caught up in the storms” (Mt 8:25), “forgiving the sinful woman” (Lk 7:48ff), “saving Zacchaeus and his family” (Lk 19:9), “cleansing sinners” and “justifying the tax collectors” (Lk 17:14).²⁷⁷ Christ is portrayed as the “Door” and the “Door keeper”, who waits for sinners night and day.²⁷⁸ The consecrated virgin is portrayed as one of those who is saved by Christ.

The whole liturgical celebration conveys that Christ is the Saviour, that remission of sin is the fruit of salvation brought about by Christ through His salvific mission (His life, passion, death and resurrection) and that it is a gift also given to the consecrated one. Hence, brought to the salvation of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, the consecrated one must live in penitence and faith in a permanent *metanoia* and in a new reality of salvation by living in total relationship with the Triune God, participating in the mission of the Church and realizing the salvation of the poor, the meek, the little ones, the persecuted, the righteous, and the downcast.²⁷⁹

The principal means of bringing about the salvation of man is through the ministry of the word and of the sacraments, which in a special way is committed to the sacred ministers who act in the very name and person of Christ. This does not mean that the consecrated have no role in the salvific ministry of Christ. As Ephrem states, the virgin espoused to Christ is also espoused to humanity, since Christ as groom has given himself for humanity with great love. God requires this love for humanity even of him who lives in the desert. A passion for the

²⁷⁷ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 13-17; *Profession of Vows*, 6.

²⁷⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 16

²⁷⁹ Cf. *Vritha Vagdanam*, 28.

salvation of human beings is thus essential to the consecrated life.²⁸⁰ This means that the end of one’s commitment to God in consecrated life is not only one’s personal salvation, but also the restoration of the whole of creation, motivated by the love of God and the love of one’s fellow men.

3.5.4. Witnessing to the Eschatological Life

Eschatology is defined as those realities relating to the last end. Derived from the Greek term *eschatos*, it denotes the doctrine of the last or final things: death, resurrection and the last judgment.²⁸¹ Those ultimate realities that remain beyond human grasp are treated as part of the Christian faith, which is founded on the kingdom of God, announced, inaugurated and given by and in Christ.²⁸²

The Church is eschatological. A fundamental characteristic of the Church is that she is a bride in eager expectation. She lives here on earth for her perfect union with her divine bridegroom at His coming. St. John sums up the whole life of the Church in a sentence: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’” (Rev 22:17). “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).²⁸³

Since the virgin Church is in expectation of the coming of the Lord, so also the consecrated virgin, gives undivided attention to Him, awaiting the Lord’s coming like the five wise virgins in the parable of our Lord (cf. Mt 25:1-10). The Church recalls this parable in the Liturgy of Profession. Through the *Bo ’ūtō* of Mar Jacob of Serugh the Church sings:

²⁸⁰ See Lelpoir, “La pensée monastique” 118-120. It is from Leloir that we mention St. Ephrem’s monastic thought on the salvation of the world. See also Beggiani, *Christian Spirituality*, 24.

²⁸¹ Cf. Galot, “Eschatology”, 1020-1021; Lane, “Eschatology”, 321-323.

²⁸² Lane, “Eschatology”, 323.

²⁸³ Hinnenbush, *Religious Life*, 80.

He called the company of the just “wise virgins”
 Who in their bodies preserved a treasure that is full of light.²⁸⁴
 The Church continues singing:
 Great is the trembling when all souls appear
 As brides before that Bridegroom who loveth light
 And she that is fair, whose beauty hath been kept by her watchful
 With confidence openly showeth her fairness to the world.”²⁸⁵

Here in the hymn, the Church not only acclaims the wise virgins of the parable but also reveals to the consecrated virgin her blessed state of virginity for the kingdom.

The eschatological dimension of virginal life and its mission is not a new idea. According to the Odes of Solomon, virgins and those who practice continence will experience eschatological union with Christ the Bridegroom, and will enter with Him into the eschatological bridal chamber.²⁸⁶ The Syrian Church grasps the full meaning of consecrated virginity by seeing it from the point of view of the *eschaton*.

Further, through various themes such as “angelic life on earth” “coming to the harbour”, “entering into the Paradise”, and symbolic actions such as knocking at the door of the church and entering into it, and liturgical processions, the Church inculcates into the mind of the consecrated religious that they belong to the Lord, and He will come for His own, to take them to Himself.²⁸⁷ The Church also reminds the expectant Christian virgin that she must not be distracted by “worldly wealth, power, pomp beauty and glory” for these are transient; or “turn back like Lot’s wife or look back after putting her hands to the plough”;

²⁸⁴ Jacob of Serugh, “Homily on the Ten Virgins” (Syr. 243-244) 50; verse from the Syriac original is given in the bracket. See also *Takso d’ suporo*, 351; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 35.

²⁸⁵ Jacob of Serugh, “Homily on the Ten Virgins” (Syr. 401-404), 57; See also *Takso d’ suporo*, 352; *Vritha Vagdanam*, 36.

²⁸⁶ Cf. *Odes*, 38: 9-12; Charlesworth, *The Odes*, 132.

²⁸⁷ Cf. *Chapters*, 2, 3.5 ; 3, 3.4.

instead, she should concentrate on “the celestial beatitude that lasts forever and the incorruptible bridal chamber.”²⁸⁸

Bringing out the eschatological dimension of religious life in the liturgical service, the Church hopes that each religious and the religious community as well, will witness to the world the reality that:

The people of God have here no lasting city but seek the city which is to come. The religious state of life, in bestowing greater freedom from the cares of earthly existence on those who follow it simultaneously reveals more clearly to all believers the heavenly goods which are already present in this age, witnessing to the new and eternal life which we have acquired through the redemptive work of Christ and prelude our future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom.²⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

In this chapter on the study of the liturgico-theological significance of the rite of profession, we reflect on the tri-dimensional divine, human and ecclesial relation, which the Service of Profession constitutes and establishes.

Concerning the divine relation, the Service upholds certain characteristic features such as God’s initiative of love, a series of promises, specific conditions for mutual love, the prevalence of an interior law and the making of a contract, all of which constitute the monastic profession of the virgin in a covenant. The divine dimension of the monastic profession persuades us also to see the consecratory dimension of monastic profession. The pneumatological perspectives and the baptismal elements involved in the Service of Profession enable us to envision that monastic or religious consecration is primarily a consecration related to and at the same time distinct from the baptismal consecration. In a new and in a special way, monastic consecration gives to the

²⁸⁸ *Vritha Vagdanam*, 35; 37; 52.

²⁸⁹ *LG*, no. 44.

consecrated virgin the necessary grace to live fully and authentically her baptismal commitment.

Being drawn into the ecclesial life in a more profound way through dedication and the profession of vows, the monastic virgin is called to witness the communion of the Church. This is what we propound in the section on monastic profession and its relation to the Church. The communion of the Church is founded on union with God and unity among men. The call and the consecration of the monastic virgin is to live a life of communion, to witness and to foster the nature of the Church as “communion.” For this witnessing, the consecrated must value their life of communion in their own communities and preserve intact the factors that constitute them together as one body in the Mystical Body of Christ. Their life in union with the Church also has to find expression in the loving loyalty and obedience to the Supreme Authority of the Universal Church and to the respective hierarchy of the local Church.

The life of consecration is not inactive but dynamic; hence, the offering of herself to God and the charism of the Spirit received at the consecration prompt the virgin to distribute herself and her charismatic gifts in the service of God and the Church. Though we do not find explicit clues of mission in the liturgical service, many images force us to think about the mission of the monastic virgins. The monastic call involves an existential and a dynamic dimension with regard to mission. We also looked at the motives behind the mission and the ministry of the monastic virgin which to challenge the consecrated ones to a life of mission.

To conclude, the Liturgy of Profession in the West Syrian tradition impels the consecrated to envisage the dignity and nature of their consecration as a covenant, and their role in the Church as witnesses of communion and mission. Certainly, this persuades the monastic virgins to dedicate themselves totally to God as well as to the Church and to its saving ministry.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In the four chapters of this dissertation we have done a liturgico-theological study of the monastic virgin profession in the West Syrian Tradition. Through this research, based on relevant liturgical, patristic, theological sources regarding the monastic dedication in the West Syrian Churches and in particular the Malankara Catholic Church, we have arrived at the following conclusions.

The Service of the Rite of Monastic Profession in the West Syrian Churches, though belonging to an early period of the 5th century is based on a manuscript that came down in the 11th century. The manuscript (BN MS., Syr. 154) was found in 1001 AD at the monastery of Mar Schaino on the west of Euphrates. Translated into German by O. Heiming, it was entitled “*Der Ordo des Heiligen Monchs schema in der Syrischen Kirche*” and was published in 1951. The Syriac manuscript (BN 154), excluding some minor variations in the liturgy of the Word and the absence of diaconial intercessions, conforms to the Manuscript Vatican Syr. 51 of 1172 and to the Latin versions of J. M. Voste *Vestito monachorum* (for the monks) and *Tonsura Monialium* (for the nuns). In the *Pontificale Iuxta Ritum Syrorum Occidentalium id est Antiochiae*, Pars III. Since Voste had made the Latin translation based on both the excerpt of the rite of monastic clothing in the Pontifical of Michael the Great (1162-1199) and on the Latin version Borg. Syr. 167 (1173) of J.A. Assemani, we may say that the Syriac manuscript (BN 154) is the foundational source upon which the rite of monastic consecration is formulated.

The Charfet Ms 7/8 of 1878 also gives us information regarding the structure and the content of the Ritual of the Clothing of the Monks and the Tonsure of Nuns. The text was re-edited and published in the Book of Priestly Rites by the Charfet Patriarchate in 1952 entitled *Takso*

d'thulbosho d' dairoye and Takso d' suporo d' dairoyuto. The Charfet text of 1952 has a better text compared to all other versions of the rites and is to a great extent similar to the present liturgical text of the West Syrian Churches; especially the Syro- Malankara Catholic Church. We have in our hands the Syriac texts of the Charfet edition, their English translations made by F. Acharya and S. Brock, the Latin version of J.M. Voste and the German translation of O. Heimig.

With regard to the monastic profession of the virgins in the Malankara Church, the liturgical source is *Sanyasinikalude Vritha Vagdanam* (Profession of Vows: The Service for Nuns). This source, compiled by Mar Ivanios, the founder of the OIC and SIC in Syriac with the Malayalam translation was used for the first time for the profession of the Sisters of Bethany in 1925. This Syriac text was later copied by Mother Cybar SIC, the 8th member of Bethany at the convent of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ, Trivandrum. The text was re-edited in 1980 by the Malankara Liturgical Commission for the profession of the nuns in 1980 during the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Re-union at Kottayam, Kerala. The Syriac texts and the Malayalam version match all those early manuscripts that we have mentioned above. But the present liturgical text has adopted some changes in its prayers which go along with the proper liturgical rituals of the Malankara Church. For example the inclusion of the promising of three vows, the rite of receiving the candidate before and after the profession of vows are worthy of mention. However, the present liturgical text blended with the early Syriac liturgical sources and with the customs and traditions peculiar to the Malankara Church testifies to the Syrian and the Malankara identity of the rite.

Concerning the emergence and the development of the Service of Monastic profession in the West Syrian Churches, we see a possible influence of the rites of monastic initiation in Antonian, Pachomian, and Basilian monasticism; as it is in these monastic traditions that we found sources which attest to the systematic formation of and profession of the candidates to monastic life in the early periods.

The celebration of the liturgy of profession with its audible prayers and visible liturgical rituals demonstrates in a specific way, the importance given to the ascetic lure of the Syrian Christians and at the same time expounds the intrinsic relationship between liturgy and spirituality. The famous axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi* is intrinsically connected with *lex vivendi* and this is a reality in Religious life.

The mystical dimension of the rite of profession led us to understand the “mystery concept” in the West Syrian tradition. The service of profession is not a mystic rite in the sense of incomprehensible ritual or a mystery as we say about the sacraments. It is a mystery in the sense that the Church through the paschal mystery of Christ (Holy *Qurbano*) and through the Liturgy of Profession manifests and explains objectively God’s work of salvation history, which is to be subjectively appropriated and experienced by the person who is to be consecrated and by each Christian participant in the Liturgy of Profession.

We also found the prayers and the services of the Liturgy of profession embedded with nuptial themes. Each baptized person participating in the spousal status of the Church is called to witness Christ as the only one to be desired and to follow, and each consecrated virgin is called to live out that totality of love for Christ through a life of “seeking the beloved” in a state of singleness (*ihidoyutho*). This spousal relationship as the Church visualizes it enables the consecrated to share more directly and profoundly in the nature and life of the Church as a pure and holy virgin who always seeks to be united with Christ her beloved and with Mary, the bride and mother of Christ.

The proper celebration and understanding of the Liturgy of Profession inspires us to envisage the liturgical theology of the service which is the elucidation of the service on a theological basis. The liturgical service expresses three main theological aspects which we viewed as salvation economy in terms of covenant, pneumatology in terms of consecration and ecclesiology in terms of communion and mission.

In relation to covenant, we observed in the Liturgy of Profession, the aspects of divine call, series of promises, forming of a relationship with specific conditions, the making of a contract, insistence on interior law and faithfulness as its characteristic features. Throughout the prayers we see an unveiling of the divine plan concerning the salvation of fallen man, which is dealt with in a Christo-centric manner.

The consecratory dimension of profession is highlighted in two aspects; the descent and the hovering of the Holy Spirit upon the Holy mysteries and upon the virgin who is to be consecrated and on the rituals and prayers that remind us of the baptismal foundation of the monastic profession. The baptismal basis of profession highlights the Christian participation in the mystery of the death and life of Christ which invites the consecrated one to a total consecration of self.

The covenantal life invites the consecrated religious to witness to a life of communion in the Church after the manner of Trinitarian communion and in participation and sharing in the religious community. To highlight the nature of community ‘as the church within the Church’, the liturgy depicts the community as the sheepfold, paradise and bridal chamber. Here we see that the liturgical celebration brings to light a living ecclesiology based on the Trinitarian theology.

The liturgical service also brings missiology to the attention of the faithful. The mission of the religious more than being a legal or functional concept is based on a love response. As a bride of Christ her responsibility is not something below or above the mission of Christ, her bridegroom. It consists primarily in witnessing Him, ontologically as a priest, king and prophet and to minister to him through the Church. The images of ministry in the Ordo inspire and challenge the virgin to continue the ministry of Christ as pilgrim, prophet and planter and to fulfil the will of God, so that all arrive at true knowledge and life.

This study has its own practical implications. The religious life in the Malankara Church is the symbol of radical following of Christ for the realization of God through contemplation and action. It is a way of

life constituted by *sanyasa prathishtha*, monastic consecration and profession of evangelical counsels by which a Christian faithful enters into a life of covenant, to draw the fruits of the baptismal grace more radically and intensely. It aims at the sanctification of oneself and the good of the Church through the perfection of charity, witness to a Trinitarian life of love and communion. Our study can be seen as the first attempt to look into prospect for this understanding of a Malankara monastic theology/spirituality starts from and leads to the liturgy.

Our study can be of immediate pastoral assistance to those candidates who are in formation in the various religious institutes of the Malankara Church. The study points to the need for preparing the formation directives on religious life based on the faith celebration of the Malankara Church. Such a guide will assist the formators in preparing the novices to have a clear vision of the theological and spiritual dimension of their religious life. This will help the religious to live the mystery of their life more consciously.

Our study has its own contribution to ecumenical dialogue. The reality of life has its expression in the liturgy. Liturgy is a common patrimony or common ground for dialogue. Any theological endeavour that does not see an integral unity between liturgy and theology/spirituality will be alien to the experience of the non-Catholic Eastern Churches. Therefore our study which aims at an integral unity of liturgy and life, liturgy and spirituality will assist us in the field of ecumenical dialogue.

Our study also has its implications for inter-religious dialogue. One of the characteristics of the world religions is the existence of monasticism as a spiritual reality in all most all religions. Our research to see the various dimensions of monastic life and the dedication for such a life of unity and integration of faith and spirituality will be helpful in the inter-religious dialogue in which the Catholic Church is involved.

APPENDIX

**PROFESSION OF VOWS
THE SERVICE IN THE MALANKARA CHURCH**

The Service for the Temporary Vows

This service is conducted on the previous day either at noon or in the evening after the Canonical prayers. The novice/novices stand outside the closed door of the church in the western side facing the east. The presiding Prelate stands inside the church behind the closed door. The congregation also stand outside the church.

The First Service:

After reciting the Kaumo, the novice/novices say the following in two groups alternately.

O Lord full of mercy, open your door for me just as you opened to the sinner woman. Receive the tears I offer before you and grant remission of my sins just as you did to the sinner.

Lord, you have the living water. You have given me this Most Rev. Prelate, lest I need beg drinking water from Abraham after my death. For I understand from the parable you have narrated that rich man requested Abraham to ask Lazar to dip his finger in water and let a drop fall into his mouth in order to quench his thirst.

Hymn:

Lord, I am a habitual sinner and I knock at your door seeking mercy. I confess that I have gone astray from your path. Grant me the grace to confess my sins and live anew.

Where shall we knock except at your door of mercy, O King ? There is nothing other than your mercy to intercede for us.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are our refuge and safe fortress. When you segregate the good from the evil ones, protect us under your gracious wings from the allies of satan.

The voice of our request is the key that opens the door of heaven. For, the archangels from their row proclaim, "How sweet is the voice of men and the Lord answers him".

Qolo

Lord, I am lamb that has gone astray from the life-giving path and perished. O good shepherd, you came in search of me. Do not permit me to be utterly lost. Count me in your sheepfold together with the publican, the sinner woman and the wise virgins and make worthy to enter into your bridal chamber.

O God, restitute my sins and forgive all my foolishness. Lord, since I have made you angry on account of my sins, I cry out like the sinner woman. O lover of mankind, when you come in your glory, enable me to sing praises to your grace along with your saints.

Lord, I call upon you likethe prodigal son. O my father, have pity on me in your mercy. For I have sinned against you and against heaven. Consider me as a daily wage earner. I shall be a servant in your house. O merciful God, forgive me all sins I have committed against your will.

O my God, listen to the prayer of your servant who knocks at your door. Behold the tears we offer in repentance for our sins.

Petition of Mar Balai

He who pities the wicked, have pity on us on the day of judgment.

Those who are remorseful knock at your door, mercifully grant our petitions.

O heavenly Father, we pray to you, accept our service and have pity on us.

Lord of the heavenly beings and hope of the earthly ones, accept our service and pity us.

Thereafter the novices one by one knock two times each on the closed door. But the door is not opened. The prelate begins the second service.

Introductory Prayer

O vast ocean of mercy, behold I am drowned in this world. Rescue from the waves as you once rescued Peter. Lord you are the haven of peace for those who take refuge in you. Behold, I have come to your door; let me enter in it.

Hymn

Behold my distress O Lord, for I have made you angry by committing sins of various kinds and there is no refuge for me. I approached several physicians and they tried all kinds of medicines on me. But there is no improvement in my condition and now my state is hopeless. But O good physician, I heard of you that those who approach you should certainly be cured. Absolve all my sins on account of the love of your Father and the prayers of your mother.

I shall behold the ocean of mercy. O Son of God, behold my sin has increased and multiplied. Wash me with your hyssop and cleanse with my tears, I pray you for the love of the Father. Let me not be ridiculed by the enemy. Let the angels be pleased with the repentant human beings and say, "The Lord be praised because his door is opened day and night for those who repent".

Ekbo

My Lord I understand that you are full of mercy. You have your very existence in mercy. Jesus you are the refuge for those seek mercy. Shower your mercy upon this sinner who seeks mercy from you.

The novices one after the other knock at the door three times each and the Prelate opens the door partially and asks them the following questions.

Qn. Who are you? Why have you come here?

Ans. My Lord, I am a stranger; my Lord I am the prodigal son (Lk. 15, 11-24). Lord, I am the lost sheep (Lk. 15, 4-8). Lord, I am the lost coin (Lk. 15,9-10). I come seeking my Father's house. I come desiring to enter into your fold. For the good shepherd came seeking for me. He searched for the lost coin and found the same. Lord, receive me. Open for me the door so that I shall inherit the wealth of your abundant grace.

Holding the hand of each novice, the Prelate says:

She who seeks religious life i.e., holy wisdom of the life of dedication and justice, perfection of virtues, is the most beloved of God. She lives in the king's palace; princesses attend her. She becomes heir to the treasures that the world cannot acquire.

Then the Prelate opens the door wide and the novices one by one kisses the pastoral ring and enters inside the church. When all have entered, the congregation says:

Congr. Kurieleison, Kurieleison. Lord, have mercy on us; Christ, have mercy on us; Lord answer our prayers and have mercy on us. Glory to you O Lord; glory to you our refuge forever. Amen. Staumenkalos kurieleison.

Proemion

O Lord, who answers the prayers, retributes transgressions, justifies tax collectors and cleanses the sinners; you are the ocean of mercy, spring of compassion and the one who purifies all those who are contaminated by foul deeds. Grant to me who am weak as well as to this your servant who has approached here for the delightful religious

life, remission of sins. May she be made holy and be purified by you. We will offer you glory and thanksgiving together with your Father and Holy Spirit now and at all celebrations and times and seasons and all days of our lives. Amen.

Lord God, you are savior and benefactor. You desire that all shall live and arrive at the true knowledge. Receive this servant now, who stands before you and before the throne of your divine majesty and with her head bowed. Bestow upon her your plentiful and peaceful benediction.

Let the gifts of your Holy Spirit descend upon her in your power. May she dress herself with the virtuous garments of the religious life and adorn her with the same. Strengthen her to stand by your side fighting against the fiery arrows of satan. Grant her with the preparation of the Gospel of peace as sandals to her feet so that she may trample the serpents and the scorpions, which are a threat to the regular and holy religious life. Let her conquer all forces of the evil one. Adorn her with the virtues of religious activities. Let her conscience be rooted on the rock of true faith and her life strengthened by true Christian charity. Cleanse her soul from all stains of sins and her body from earthly impurities. Lord God, grant her patience and perfection, prompt obedience to your commandments and constant earnestness in practicing Christian virtues. Grant her your assistance and enable her to faithfully observe your life-giving precepts i.e., the holy rules of the religious life. Remove far from her every envy, enmity, deceit, calumny, pleasure loving attitude and avarice. Give her your incessant help. Nurture her in your garden so that she may grow as a blessed tree that produces for you good and virtuous fruits.

O heavenly bridegroom, grant her the grace always to receive you with lighted lamp whenever you visit her. Let her lamp shed forth light of holiness. May she be made worthy to enter into your heavenly chamber along with the wise virgins. May she ever shine with the crown of glory. Thus she shall be worthy to the lofty state of your saints in heaven. Lord Jesus Christ, may she and we be enabled to offer to you, your

Father and to the Holy Spirit chaste fruits of thanksgiving as gifts of glory. Amen.

Gospel : Mtt. 7, 13-14; 24-27; 6, 19-21; 5, 48

Petition of Mar Jacob:

Lord God, we call upon you, come to our aid; hear our prayers and shower grace on our souls.

O Lord God of the vigilant angels, hear our prayers and shower your grace on our souls.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind and answer me. For I am knocking at your door with faith.

Brighten our eyes so that we might see your truth and praise your holy name. I take refuge in your mercy. Guard my infancy.

Grant us pure hearts and grant us from your perfection the wisdom of your salvation.

We praise and glorify you O master of life and father of the world.

He who accepts our prayers and answers them, listen to our prayers and bestow on us your grace.

Then the Prelater seals the novices with the sign of the cross and gives them new names saying:

‘So that you shall have inheritance in the holy abode of God (name) is sealed in the name of the Father + and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit + for life everlasting. Amen.

After singing the kukilions of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, the Prelate concludes the service with Hutomo.

THE SERVICE OF THE PROFESSION OF RELIGION VOWS

The service begins with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The candidates for profession stand in front of the sanctuary after the recitation of the Creed.

Cel. O holy God, who loves holiness and holy people and is pleased with the saints, receive these your servants who have approached you and are set apart to pursue your holiness, grant them grace for the Religious life and give an unperturbed mind required for the life. May they remain close to your glory, O God, through their good deeds and exemplary behaviour. Bless them that they shall always serve before you with steadfast hearts and with holiness, just as Samuel was reckoned acceptable to serve you at your holy tabernacle in uprightness and purity of heart. Through them, let there be glory to your mighty and holy name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The wooden crosses of the candidates are now placed on the thronos and the celebrant continues the Eucharistic celebration. The proper service of the Religious Profession begins at the end of the Kukulion of the Saints during the H. Mass.

The Introductory Prayer:

Almighty God, you liberated us from the bondage of sin by sending to this world your only begotten Son whom the angels worship in heaven. You ordered us to live an angelic life on earth doing works of justice. Bless these your servants with your spiritual and heavenly benediction, for you have chosen them to lead a holy life. Enable them to live up to the solemn promise they make before you with fervor and let their behaviour be in accordance with you holy dignity. Let them be made worthy to receive the heavenly blessings through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord, now and at all times of their life. Amen.

Psalm 51

Hymn

The celebrant begins the hymn facing the congregation.

O merciful God, grant me grace and receive me like the prodigal son.

Merciful Lord who opens the door to the penitent sinner, shower your grace and absolve me from my sins and debts.

O God immensely rich in grace, have mercy on me and turn my debts into occasions of your blessings.

O merciful God I pray in my distress with tears, make me holy like the tax collector and the sinful woman.

I have made you angry, O God, on account of my sins and I entreat you to receive me like the robber on the cross and have mercy on me.

O merciful God, save me from all injustice which I committed in the world, full of evil and deliver me from my evil propensities.

Prayer

Cel. *(turning to the thronos)*

May God grant you the grace to perfect your whole life with good deeds and please Him with true faith, righteous behavior, good will, plenitude of love and with just deeds in accordance with His promise. Amen.

Psalm 63

Lk. 1, 45-55

Psalm 135

Matt. 5, 3-12

Ekbo

Lord, help me for I am being immersed in the whirlpool of my sins. Be you my peaceful haven lest I be drowned in it. I long for repentance;

stretch forth your hand just as you did towards Simon and have mercy on me. Staumenkalos Kurieleison.

Proemion

O Lord who welcomes the penitent, pardons who does foolish things, justifies the sinners, retributes the wrongs of those who return to you, receive mercifully these your servants who have come prepared to carry the blessed yoke of religious life and bless them. Enable them to faithfully observe your commandments. Deliver them from hard tests; for you alone are good and merciful. Praise and honor are yours at the time of the dedication of these your servants and at all times and seasons of the celebrations throughout our life. Amen.

Sedro

O Lord, gentle and merciful, you are pleased with the life of every creature. You are the one who dwells in every one, the who showers your grace on every thing. You are merciful to all, the blessed and who blesses every one. Lord, have pity on these your servants and guard them standing with their necks bent to carry your joyful yoke of religious life. They stand close to you longing for your blessed home dedicated life. We entreat you therefore Lord, be pleased with them and cleanse them from all their sins and transgressions. They have come near you to be sanctified by you. Bless them that they shall not found guilty in their deeds. Adorn them with true faith, unflinching hope and with a genuine love which does not seek selfishness. Grant them wisdom in spiritual matters which you gave to your prophets, the sanctity you gave to your Apostles who lived with you, the courage you gave to your martyrs, the holy fear and devotedness you granted to the confessors, who bore witness to you every where, the perfect holiness you gave in your abundant mercy to your servants and the brightness of spirit which ensues from all these virtues. Make them worthy to follow the light of your life-giving commandments, strengthen them to detest every occasion of sin. Let them firm to overcome every harmful passion; spare

them from every deceit and temptation of evil men. Let them be fortified by your strength against the attacks of the enemy. In their deeds and behaviour, while they are wakeful and asleep, let them approach you assiduously and victoriously so that they may be made thereby means of your glory and serve your holy name in sound health during their lives. Lord, make them instruments of your glory. Let them faithfully live up to the vows they make to you and obtain the strength of grace that proceeds from them. May the entreaties of theirs and ours ascend to your divine presence through this incense. Receive them into the life of your sheepfold of religious life. Count them as lambs of your kingdom. O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, let your name be praised and glorified now and forever on account of all the graces that are showered upon these your servants. Amen.

Qolo

Cel. Facing the congregation:

When I observed the world, I found it is contaminated with deceits and sins and I pray you Christ Lord, accept me as one in your sheepfold and save me from the sea of debts through out my life.

O Lord, I worked in your vineyard at the eleventh hour. O merciful one reward me along with the other labourers. You are my sole consoler.

Behold David, son of Jesse, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, sang thus:” It is desirable to serve a day in your house than to serve a thousand days in another’s house. Cleanse me from stains and make me shine by your sweet aroma.

The ten virgins went to welcome their spouse. Five among them who were wise took oil with them and the other five foolish ones did not. The wise ones entered the chamber and sang praise to their spouse.

Ethro

Lord God, we entreat you to accept the incense we, your humble ones, have offered to you. No body is worthy to stand in your presence. Yet,

do not turn away your merciful face from us, unworthy though we are. O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, your mercy is unfathomable and your divinity above our praises. Amen.

Liturgy of the Word

Gen. 12, 1-10

Num. 6, 1-9

Deut. 30, 15-19

Is. 19, 1-25

1 Pet 1, 13-21

11 Col. 3, 5-17

Matt. 25, 1-13.

Boutho

O Lord, God, we call upon you; come to our help; answer our prayers and have mercy on our souls.

The Lord called the community of the just, 'wise', like the five wise virgins who have safeguarded the shining virtues in their bodies and those unjust, 'fools', like the foolish virgins who have not preserved their glory.

Both the wise and the foolish virgins slept, so also, until resurrection, all of us shall sleep the sleep of death.

Some among those who were asleep, safeguarded virtues in their bodies like the oil of the wise virgins. The others stand among the foolish ones without virtues, like the empty bottles and they stand with their heads bent in shame.

The wise did not share their oil, because no one but oneself could help one before the scale of the eternal judge.

There shall be vigorous trembling at the time of judgment when all shall assemble like the brides before their spouse who loved the light.

Those who have diligently kept their lamps lit, brighten the world and the others resemble the foolish ones and stand outside the door of the bridal chamber in darkness and in shame. "Woe to us", they will say to themselves for, we are astringed from the marriage banquet. At that time worldly wealth, power, pomp, beauty and all transient glory remain in shame.

O heavenly bridegroom, you who have saved by your precious blood, let me be made worthy to behold you at that time in your kingdom.

Praise and glory to you O God. Protect me; hear my prayers and answer my petitions.

The celebrant then sits facing the congregation and the temporarily professed Sisters kneel down in front of him.

Admonition

Cel. Beloved Sisters, it is written in the H.Gospel, "Any one who looks back after having put his hands on the plough is not worthy of the kingdom of God".(Lk 9:62)

Now dear Sisters, beware in whose presence you are; you stand before Christ the Lord who examines the conscience of human beings and not before any mortal man. You are making you contracts and taking vows before the holy angels, before your fellow sisters and before this sanctuary. You promise to live your whole life as members of this Congregation. You are obliged to be perfect through enduring faith all tests that you shall encounter which originate from heretics or from men under the influence of satan. You have accepted the sweet yoke of Christ, the Lord, in order to renounce yourselves through self-abnegation. Remember these admonitions and engrave them on the walls of your hearts. For it is said by the wise, "My son, if you have approached to serve God, you should equip yourself to face all temptations and having sanctified your heart, you ought to be courageous". Do not lose heart when you face tests, but remain close

to the Lord and don't go away from Him. Finally you will become great before the Lord. Be faithful to His ways. He will raise you up and you will inherit His kingdom. You should practice humility, serenity and forbearance. Together with these and besides these, you should have obedience and charity which perfect all commandments. For the discipleship of the Messiah demands many virtues springing up from the grace of charity. Our Lord has told and testified to this, "By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another". (Jn 13:35) Hence you ought to be perfect models in accordance with His precept. Besides, you need to be firm on this foundation and accept every thing that happens to you with patience. For the apostle testifies that charity endures every things; it bears all things. More over you have to observe all promises you made before God. You have to have true faith and obedience and safeguard them truly and without blemish till the end of your lives. For without them no body could please God. You have to accept the official teaching of all Fathers of the catholic, apostolic, one and holy Church, especially of our Holy Father.....and of all the Episcopi regarding her governance. May God grant you the grace so tht you may engage yourselves in all right dealings which please God. May He grant you strength, courage and patience in order that you win over all the attacks of the evil one. May God drive away from you the nefarious activities of satan. May God give you humility and obedience befitting the disciples of Christ the Lord. May He the lover of men pardon your short comings and make you holy through His grace and abundant mercy. Amen.

Questions and Answers:

Cel: Dear children in the Lord, open the ears of your heart to His words. Open the eyes of your hearts and behold the most sublime example of the Savior.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes, and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matt. 6:19-20)

"So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." (Lk. 14: 33)

Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matt. 8:20)

"For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:9)

"For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." (Rom. 8:13)

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work." (Jn. 4:34).

Therefore you should truly and with reverence answer the questions that are put to you.

Qn. Dear children, why do stand on your knees before the holy sanctuary?

Ans. Your Excellency I desire to make the solemn religious vows in the Congregation of the Imitation of Christ.

Cel. Religious life is the life of angels. Many saints attained perfection through this life.

Jesus, Our Lord is the perfect model of this life and the Savior who grants grace to those who wish to embrace such a life. Are you then prepared to wear the religious habit and lead a life of obedience to the rules of the religious life?

Ans. I desire so with the help of God.

Cel. You have chosen some thing worth while, yes, the blessed path. Are you aware that you have to spend yourselves for the sake of God and that your whole life should be one dedicated to the Lord?

Ans. Yes, I do know it. I ardently desire it and have come prepared for the same.

Cel. Do you come on your own will and with earnestness for this life of dedication?

Ans. By the grace of God, I come near with my whole heart and mind.

Cel. Do you come with any selfish motive or by any one's instigation?

Ans. Your Excellency, no. I do not come with any selfish motive or under any one's instigation.

Cel. O my children blessed by the Lord, you have chosen the better portion May your choice be blessed. Are you determined to love and bear the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ your whole life through and to keep the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience?

Ans. Yes, I am so determined and I have come prepared to make the vows.

Cel. Dearly beloved of the Lord, it is the H. Spirit who has put this desire in you and has called you to this state of life. May God grant to you the necessary graces and lead you lovingly through out your life.

The Superior General or her delegate asks the candidates:

Dear Sisters, are you prepared to lead your lives in the Congregation of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ in accordance with its rules and regulations and to undertake the obligations of the religious life bound by the evangelical virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience?

Ans. Reverend Mother, I am prepared of my own free will and choice to make the (temporary / perpetual) vows and I express my consent thus:

I, (name) persuaded by an ardent desire to dedicate myself wholly to the glory of God and to Jesus Christ in order to closely follow Him, pledge to the Almighty, before the Mother General of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ, to observe the religious vows of obedience, chastity and poverty demanded by the holy rules of the Congregation (temporarily / perpetually). By the grace of the Holy Spirit and by the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I dedicate myself totally to the Congregation, so that by serving God and His Church, I shall reach the perfection of charity.

Each candidate puts four dots in the form of a cross and after prostrating before the celebrant completes the sign of the cross along the dots and seals her pledge.

Prayer.

Cel. O Lord God, you have created us instruments of your glory and by your wisdom, beyond description, you have set us apart for your reverence and glory. To you our creator, praise and exaltation are offered by chaste and God-loving souls now and at all times. Lord, you need no glory from us, But we glorify you in order that we may be exalted through glorious and wonderful deeds. We will offer you praise and thanksgiving and to your Son and Holy Spirit Amen.

The celebrant then seals on the fore head of each candidate with the sign of the cross saying:

“(name) is being sealed so that she may be an inheritor of the holy abode of God for ever, in the name of the Father + (cong. Amen); and of the Son + (cong. Amen); and of the Holy Spirit + (cong. Amen).

Cel. Lord, protect these your servants who stand with their heads bowed and offer themselves to you, their heavenly spouse. Lord, give them your peace and unity. Make them happy by your ever flowing spring of life, our Lord and our God. Amen.

Then each candidate kneels down before the celebrant and hands over to him the scissors while she recites the following prayer.

“I wish to draw near to God. O Lord, my refuge: your name is good to me. I will proclaim your wonderful deeds”. (Ps. 73, 28)

The celebrant cuts the hair of the candidate successively from the front, back and from either side of her head in the form of a cross, saying the following prayer:

“as a sign of rejecting the pleasures of the flesh and a sign of your religious vows, this hair is cut from you (name):

In the name of the Father (cong. Amen); and of the Son (cong. Amen.), and of the Holy Spirit (cong. Amen).

Cel. O Lord Jesus Christ, truly noble, teacher of justice and hope of the faithful, be to these your servants a model of nobility, justice and hope. Make them wise through devotion to your divinity so that they shall be made worthy to hang around their neck the sign of your venerable cross. Let them receive this sign of humility and remain your true followers through out their life. Teach them to fulfill your will; grant them the pledge of your Holy Spirit. Adorn them with the robe of noble deeds during their life on earth. They offer praise and thanksgiving to you and to your Father and to your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then, their religious habit is blessed and handed over to them:

Cel. Lord, bless your servants to accomplish their race of religious life through their good deeds and behaviour worthy of the angels. Make them worthy to receive the imperishable outer garments which you promise to the elect and let them wear the same to obtain your choicest blessings.

The celebrant blesses the outer garment saying:

The religious habit of joy and salvation is blessed in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

Handing over the same to the candidate:

May the Lord remove from you to old man who perished through temptation of deceit. Let Him clothe you with this garment of joy and salvation. May He, in His immense mercy and grace, adorn you, with the radiance of His glory.

Blessing the girdle

Lord God, give to these earnestness and faith of a perfect life as their girdle. O heavenly bridegroom, strengthen and enable them to serve you with undivided heart and readiness of spirit.

Handing over the girdle.

Wear this girdle of holiness and fidelity against all temptations of the flesh.

Blessing the scapular

Lord, bless this scapular as the robe of glory by the strength of the Holy Spirit in order to please you with virtuous deeds.

Handing over the scapular

Wear this scapular in the name of the Lord God as the robe of salvation and as the garb of virtues.

Blessing the crown

O Almighty, who descended from above, you received the crown of thorns as a sign of humility, crown these your servants with the incorruptible crown of good deeds i.e., the virtuous life of humility. Give them the crown of salvation as shield of victory so that they shall put their enemy into shame.

Handing over the crown

Wear the crown of salvation as protection from the snares of the evil one and as shield in the warfare against satan who fights against virtuous life.

Blessing the veil

Lord God, grant to these intense diligence so that they shall meditate on your commandments. Let them make your precepts and holy will and solicitude, object of their thoughts. Remove far from them all transgression of your commands. Blot out from their intellect all burden of worldly care. Hold them close to you so that their minds shall always be in your sweet company. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, enable them to follow the footsteps of your saints.

Handing over the veil

Put on this veil a cover of Christian virtues, good behaviour, discipline, peaceful demeanor, sanctity and good conduct and as keepsake of your purity of intentions and of your angelic virtuous life.

The Sisters then go out of the church to put on their religious habit and when they return, the celebrant blesses their cross to be worn around their neck.

Blessing the cross

Let the cross of the Son of God guard you. Let it be the unconquerable weapon to fight against the forces of darkness. May the Cross of the Son of God strengthen you to win over the forces of Satan and his allies. Accept this cross as a sign of obedience and wear it as a yoke around your neck so that you shall fulfill in every thing the sacred will of God who has said: "My yoke is light and my burden pleasing".

Putting on the cross

Wear this cross around your neck as a sign of your religious life, especially as a sign of your obedience.

The celebrant then recites the following prayer, which the newly professed sisters repeat:

Cel. "Lord God, I praise you for having received me and enrolled me in your paradise".

Repeating these words the Sisters prostrate before the sanctuary first facing the east.

Cel. "Accept my thanks for having received me".

Saying these words the Sisters prostrate facing the west, north and south respectively.

While handing over the wooden cross to the Sisters:

Cel. "He who wishes to follow me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me" says the Lord. You have taken upon yourselves this commandment. May God grant you the grace to live up to your commitment.

Then the celebrant seals each one with his hand cross saying:

May He sign you with His holy sign and mark his seal on you. Let Him enlist you in the sheepfold of the religious Congregation of the Sisters

of the Imitation of Christ, so that you shall praise and glorify our Lord and our God forever. Amen.

Giving the lighted candle

Cel. O Lord God, may this sister also be seen vigilant in your service at your glorious coming together with those wise virgins who kept their lamps lit.

CONCLUSION

O merciful Lord God, we pray and entreat you. Grant to these who made their religious vows, your help to live up to their profession without any duplicity. Guard them lest they look back like the wife of Lot. Allow them to live in you alone, always concentrating their gaze on you. Protect them that they shall stand always in your presence without shame. May they be worthy for the eternal and heavenly blessings. Let them enter into the bliss of the unending Bridal chamber through the love of your Son and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

The celebrant proceeds with the Eucharistic service and when it is over, the newly professed Sisters kiss his hand cross and stand according to their seniority and other Sisters having received the blessing of the celebrant, exchange kiss of peace with the professed as a sign of welcoming them into the community. Then they go out of the church with lighted candles and singing the following hymn:

The abode of the saints is paradise

The abode of the just is paradise

The abode of the holy departed ones is paradise

The uninterrupted life is paradise

The eternal Bridal Chamber is paradise.

And the one who inherits the same is blessed.

*Translated by Rev. Fr. Samuel Thykoottathil
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