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# HEKAMTHO

SYRIAN ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

*‘Everything is God’s handiwork’*



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*About the cover painting...*



## **||Crafted with Purpose: The Divine Artistry of Our Lives||**

by Ajiyan George | Acrylic on Canvas | 40x60 | 2017 |

***For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,  
which God prepared in advance for us to do. - Ephesians 2:10***

This painting "Crafted with Purpose: The Divine Artistry of Our Lives" refers to the idea that our lives are intricately and purposefully crafted by God Almighty. It suggests that, much like a work of art, our existence is shaped with intention, care, and design. This perspective emphasizes that every aspect of our being, including our experiences, talents, and challenges, is part of a grand, purposeful design by the divine, affirming that our lives are not random or accidental but are imbued with meaning and significance.

It highlights the belief in the divine care and intentionality in the creation of each person. As a potter meticulously shapes clay, God carefully forms each child, blending different elements to create a unique individual. The idea that God perfects humanity by bestowing His spirit emphasizes the belief in spiritual growth and the divine presence within each person, completing their journey towards fullness.

## Editorial

In a world often consumed by chaos and uncertainty, it is comforting to reflect on the notion that everything is a unique masterpiece, shaped with intention and care. Just as clay is molded by the hands of a skilled potter, each individual is crafted by a divine hand, with every element of their being mixed with purpose. This metaphor reminds us that our lives are not mere accidents of chance, but rather, a carefully designed work of art. As we navigate the complexities of existence, we are continually perfected, not by our own efforts alone, but by the spirit bestowed upon us. This issue of Hekamtho explores the profound implications of this belief in our ministerial lives, the responsibilities it places upon us, and the hope it offers in times of struggle.

The first article, *Empathy and Compassion: A Christian Virtue* by Thomas Abraham, explores the profound significance of compassion and empathy within the Christian faith. Drawing on scriptural references and theological insights, he illustrates how compassion is central to the teachings of Jesus and is a key element in the practice of Christian love and charity. The article also examines the compassionate nature of Jesus and its transformative power in His relationships.

Jenosh Johnson G, in his article *Contributions of Rev. Dr. K. P. Aleaz to the Indian Christian Theology* explores the significant influence of Fr. Dr. K. P. Aleaz in shaping a contextualized Indian Christian theology that integrates indigenous cultural and religious concepts with Christian thought, offering a unique perspective that bridges Eastern and Western theological traditions. The article further highlights the work of KP Aleaz as pivotal in fostering a theology that not only respects but also embraces the rich diversity

of India's spiritual heritage, making Christianity relevant to the Indian context.

In the third article, *Features of the Syriac Spirituality and its Significance Among the Christian Traditions*, Biju M. Parekkattil illustrates the unique aspects of Syriac spirituality, emphasizing its deep roots in early Christian practices, its distinctive liturgical traditions, and its influence on the development of Christian theology and monasticism, highlighting its significance within the broader spectrum of Christian traditions.

Through his article *Engaging the Intersectional Experiences of Ruth as a Migrant Labourer in the Book of Ruth and Indian Women Migrant Labourers*, Rency Thomas George shares a comparative analysis of the experiences of Ruth in the biblical narrative and contemporary Indian women migrant laborers. He explores themes of marginalization, resilience, and identity, highlighting how these experiences intersect across different historical and cultural contexts.

*The Ancient Flame: The Enduring Legacy of the Syrian Orthodox Mission* by Praveen Kuriakose Kodiyattil explains to how the Syrian Orthodox Mission has profoundly influenced by the religious and cultural landscape of India. He highlights the unique approach of the Jacobite Church in integrating traditional practices with local customs to create a distinct ecclesiastical identity.

In the last article, *The Bible Gives Importance for Keeping Good Health: A Survey on Major Christological Controversies*, Paul Baby explains how the critical theological developments of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries collectively contributed to forming a balanced and sound Christology that clarified the true nature of the person of Christ.

Hope this issue of Hekamtho benefits you to understand few of the concepts of the journal theme; *Everything is God's handiwork*.

- Fr. Dr. Ajiyan George  
Editor

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# **Empathy and Compassion: A Christian Virtue**

Thomas Abraham<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

The biblical understanding of empathy and compassion is deeply woven into both the Old Testament and New Testaments. These concepts are not merely abstract virtues but are central to the ethical and relational teachings found in Scripture. In Christianity, these qualities are deeply rooted in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ and the broader biblical tradition. The gospel account gives the idea that Jesus Christ spent much of his time with the poor, hungry, downtrodden, sick and the marginalised. In His time, as it is today, they were everywhere; they were on the hillside, by the road side, in the streets, in the synagogue, and in many crowded places. Though they were seen everywhere, no one acknowledged their presence except Jesus. From the beginning of His public

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Fr. Dr. Thomas Abraham is a professor in the department of Counseling and Ministry at MSOT Seminary.

ministry Jesus was with the people who were in need. Gospel accounts tried to reveal that Jesus Christ was very much convinced about His mission. Thus, at the Synagogue in Nazareth Jesus opened the scroll and read a passage from Isaiah, “the spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lords’ favour” (Lk 4:18-20). God the Father who sent Jesus to fulfil His mission was the source of His ministry.

### **1. Empathy**

Empathy and compassion are the two vital elements in Jesus’ ministry and are indeed central to Christian virtues. Empathy involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others. In the Old Testament, empathy is reflected in the call for understanding and justice, particularly towards the vulnerable. In Exodus 22:21-24, where God commands Israelites to be compassionate toward foreigners, orphans, and widows, emphasizing empathy as a response to their vulnerability. Here the people are asked to treat these vulnerable groups with kindness and justice. Again in Deuteronomy 10:18-19, God is described as one who executes justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves the stranger, urging the Israelites to love strangers as well. In the New Testament, empathy is often shown through Jesus’ interactions with people. He demonstrates a deep understanding of others’ suffering and needs.

Jesus showed a deep understanding of peoples’ struggles and pain. This is very much revealed in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus teaches the importance of being compassionate and understanding toward others, regardless of their background or circumstances. According to Drago, “empathy is the knowledge and application of a specific set of techniques that enable one to understand clients and create a suitable environment for healing.”<sup>2</sup> An empathetic approach is very much a prerequisite

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<sup>2</sup> Drago, C. *Healing Through Compassion*, 13.

for holistic healing. The word empathy comes from the Greek root word *empathia*<sup>3</sup> which means the ability to understand and share the feeling of another.<sup>4</sup> It is truly putting ourselves into the feelings and thought process of others so that we can understand others fully in a better way.

In empathy, we try to see others' life and experience through their eyes and give much importance for their priorities as if they were our own. It provides others a feeling that he/she is well understood and accepted by us. According to Carl Rogers, a famous psychologist, "empathy means understanding another person's feeling without passing any judgment on the appropriateness or otherwise of the feeling."<sup>5</sup> In a counselling setting, a counsellor's communication of empathy is necessary for creating a rapport with the client. For Rogers this is an unconditional positive regard for the client. It recognises the values and the strengths of clients that help them cope with anxiety and stress. It becomes the positive resource for change and growth.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Compassion

The word compassion derived from the Latin word *cum* (with) and *pator* (to suffer), means to love together with, to suffer with, or to have deep sympathy or sorrow with one another. Compassion is the response to the suffering of others that motivates a desire to help. It motivates people to go out of their way to help physical, spiritual, or emotional hurts or pains of another.<sup>7</sup> The Cambridge dictionary defines compassion as, "a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them."<sup>8</sup> Compassion in Christianity goes beyond feeling for

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word *empathia* originated from *im* (in) + *pathos* (feeling), means affection or passion.

<sup>4</sup> "Empathy," <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/empathy>.

<sup>5</sup> McGregor, Mac. "Defining Empathy Skills in Practice: Carl Rogers and Unconditional Regard." <http://hubpages.com/hub/Empathy-in-practice>.

<sup>6</sup> Drago, *Healing Through Compassion*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> "Compassion," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compassion>.

<sup>8</sup> "Compassion," <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/compassion>.

someone; it involves taking action to alleviate their suffering. Jesus's ministry was marked by acts of healing, feeding, and caring for the marginalized. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) contains teachings that encourage believers to act out of love and kindness, demonstrating compassion in their daily lives.

Compassion is not a sympathetic attitude or showing pity to those who are not able to cope up themselves to the social norm. On the contrary, compassion is identifying oneself with the poor, oppressed, marginalised, sick and the downtrodden and build a space with them, like when the word became flesh and lived among us (Jn 1:14). In common usage the word compassion means sympathy with the plight of others and to be able to move emotionally by others' tragic situations. The Christian understanding of compassion is a spiritual virtue which is rooted in the Biblical understanding about God and His nature.<sup>9</sup>

In the Bible the Hebrew words *hamal*, *rachuw* and the Greek word *splanchnisomai* are often used for "compassion" which means 'to show pity,' 'to love,' and 'to show mercy.' Other probable translations are 'to be loved by,' 'to show concern for,' 'to be tender-hearted' and 'to act kindly.'<sup>10</sup> Judaism considered it as a characteristic of God, "the Lord, the Lord, a God Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6). God's compassion is rooted in His relationship with His creation. In the Old Testament Yahweh's compassion is rooted in His covenant relationship with His people (2Kings 13:23). Hope for the future (Is 49:13; Jr 12:15) is also rooted in God's compassion. God's compassion is associated with deeds than mere saying. According to Murray, "compassion is the avenue by which God's grace and spirit – spiritually, emotionally, and physically – come to those in need."<sup>11</sup> All through the ministry Jesus showed His compassion into action by healing the sick,

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<sup>9</sup> Murray, Ezamo. "Compassion and Care for People Living with HIV," 210.

<sup>10</sup> "Compassion," <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/compassion.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Murray, "Compassion and Care for People Living with HIV," 210.

feeding the hungry, lifting up the downtrodden and accepting the rejected.

Compassion is a God given virtue in humans. According to Drago, compassion asks us to enter where it hurts, in places of pain, in order to share brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish. Compassion invites us to mourn with those who mourn, keep company with those who are lonely, to be weak with the weak, to be vulnerable with the wounded; in other words, to be immersed in the human condition so as to lift them up to a better way of life.<sup>12</sup> Human compassion is not an accidental or a coincidental feeling expressed in a situation of human weakness; rather, it is a divine way of life. This is the main thrust of Christian life as Jesus revealed to the world. All through the public ministry of Jesus, the attitude of compassion was very much evident in His words and deeds and also His teachings to His disciples, “be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36). As disciples of Jesus Christ we the Christians are called to look at others’ lives through the eyes of Jesus Christ. The place of compassion is the heart, not the head. It ascends from the centre of our deepest self, where God abides and advocates us to reach out to others as love in action.<sup>13</sup>

The Bible portrays the compassionate God as a perfect healer which is completely revealed in Jesus Christ. God pours this healing power to us in order to reach out to others. Healing through God’s way of compassion leads people to wholeness and assures them to have greater communion with God as well as with one another. The proclamation of Jesus is clear when He commissioned His disciples, “as you go, proclaim the good news, the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers...” (Mt 10:ff). According to the gospel narratives many of those who were healed by Jesus Christ were poor, oppressed and the downtrodden people of the then society. The compassionate nature of God is revealed in Jesus when he can be regarded as a

<sup>12</sup> Drago, *Healing Through Compassion*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Drago, *Healing Through Compassion*, 21.

companion to them. One of the greatest accusations against Jesus Christ by the then religious leaders was that He violated the laws by doing many unlawful things on Sabbath day; moreover, by associating with the sick and the unclean, He again ignored the laws of purity. His compassionate nature gave much importance for moral purity than mere ritual cleanliness. His compassionate approach helped him to identify with the unclean and the socially isolated people who would even lead Him to become a fellow sufferer.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus' approach to the sick, sinners and those who are in need shows the meaning and significance of God's compassion. The way Jesus healed the leper and the others who came to Him for healing, His dialogue with the woman with the haemorrhage and the Samaritan woman, etc. are the best examples for God's compassionate nature. Jesus' remarkable comment to the Jewish leaders, while he was healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath day, shows God's compassionate nature. Jesus said, "is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" (Mk 3:4). The Jewish leaders did not want him to be healed in the Synagogue because they gave more importance to the observance of the Sabbath than saving a life. Jesus even expressed His anger towards them for their inhuman attitude. Here Jesus gave more importance for life than merely observing the law. Thus He said to the man, "stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was restored (Mk 3:5b). Jesus showed that caring and healing is more important than mere religious rituals. Thus He said, "the Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). The compassionate God revealed in Jesus stood for proving fullness of life to those who are denied it.

The greatness of the ministry of Jesus was His availability and openness to offer space for everyone who approached Him, especially the diseased. These were the people who were doubly discriminated due to their physical, mental, social and religious

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<sup>14</sup> Longchar, Wati. "Unclean and Compassionate Hand of God," 133-134.

condition. Jesus didn't treat them as such and was not ready to abandon them with no one to help. Instead Jesus stood for the cause of the sick and protected them against the traditional understanding that suffering is due to sin (Jn 9:39-41). Isaiah's prophecy is really fulfilled in Jesus' ministry, "then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy" (Is. 35:5-6). Jesus willingly and compassionately responded to the sick and needy. He never looked down on any sick person; rather, he reached out and offered fullness in their lives.<sup>15</sup>

All through the ministry, Jesus himself was projected as a compassionate God who initiates the healing process. According to Tzudir, "God is the giver of life, not death. He builds up, not to tear down again, but to make perfect and complete. In the work of His hands we see majesty, exquisite beauty, and intricate harmony. God's healing demands that along with the physical healing, there should be a change of heart and one's lifestyle."<sup>16</sup> We, the Church, are called to imitate the compassionate nature of God in our relationship with others. Today, many need a compassionate attitude from people around them in order to lead a life of wholeness. It is the responsibility of each individual to extend an unconditional love to those who are in need. Here we need to note that Jesus accused not the victim or the affected one, rather the community or people who deliberately shamed others. The best example is His attitude towards the woman caught in adultery. There He criticized the community that had failed to extend to her compassion.

## Conclusion

Empathy involves understanding and sharing in the feelings of others, while compassion extends this understanding into actionable care. Together, they form a crucial part of the Christian

<sup>15</sup> Lasetso, Razouselie. "Jesus and Disease: A Search for a Place for HIV and AIDS in Jesus' Approach to Human Disease," 101.

<sup>16</sup> Tzudir, Atula. "Health and the Bible: Health in the Old Testament," 48.

ethic, urging believers to live out their faith through heartfelt and practical concern for others. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament depict God as the compassionate one, who extends His love to the people in need. In the New Testament the Church is called to be a healing community and become the agents of God to bring wholeness of life to the world. The biblical understanding of empathy and compassion is deeply embedded in the character of God and the teachings of Jesus. These virtues are seen as reflections of divine love and are essential to Christian living. Christians are indeed called to practice empathy and compassion in various aspects of life—through personal relationships, community service, and advocacy for justice. The idea is to reflect the love of Christ in all interactions, helping to build a more caring and just world. These virtues are not just about feeling for others but are integral to living out Christian faith in tangible ways.

## **Contributions of Rev. Dr. K. P. Aleaz to the Indian Christian Theology**

Jenosh Johnson G<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Among the few Indian Christian Theologians, Rev. Dr. Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz, who was also known as Fr. K.P. Aleaz was one of the well-known national and international figure in the field of Theology of Religions. In spite of different challenges from all areas of the theological arena, Fr. Aleaz was no less than a bold pioneer in the concept of Pluralistic Inclusivism, which was his greatest and unique contribution out of his relentless debate and of his extensive writings.<sup>2</sup> In this article I would like to highlight his life and work towards the Indian Christian Theology.

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<sup>1</sup>Rev. Fr. Jenosh Johnson G. is a research scholar in the field of Mission & Ministry and he is also serving as the Vicar of St James JSO Church, Sarjapura, Bangalore.

<sup>2</sup>D. Isaac Devadoss, "Life and Evolution of K.P. Aleaz's Thought," in *Many Ways of Pluralism, Essays in honor of Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz* (Kolkata: Bishop's College & ISPCK, 2010), 4.

## 1. Life of Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz

Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz was born on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1947 to Mr. Kalarikkal Cherian Poulose, a businessman who ran a grocery shop, and Mrs. Kunjamma Poulose, a housewife. Although his home town was at Peroor, part of Cochin in the district of Ernakulum, being the first child of his mother, he was born in his mother house in Kakkanad, Kerala. He was the eldest of five siblings having three brothers and one sister.<sup>3</sup> He married Bonita Ghosh a Bengali by birth and still working as head of the political science in the Calcutta University. They have been blessed with a daughter named Gargi Aleaz. As V.J. John, in his Preface to the book, ‘Many Ways of Pluralism,’ assumed that Aleaz married to a Bengali Christian as his life partner could be an evidence to prove his appreciation and integration into another culture. This could certainly be true because in many instances he never failed to do what he speaks which substantiate his nature as an action oriented theologian.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Early Life and Education

As a boy Aleaz began his primary schooling in K.M. Lower Primary School, Peroor, his hometown, later in 1962 he joined Maharaja’s College, at Ernakulum for his Pre-University Degree. In the year 1963, he went to Karnataka Regional Engineering College at Suralkal near Mangalore.<sup>5</sup> It was while he was in the Engineering College, he realized that this subject was not at all his interest of study and at the same time God is helping him gradually to become conscious of the call to become a priest, and therefore he left the College and discontinued his study in the year 1965.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *Some Indian Theological Reflections* (Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2007), 68.

<sup>4</sup>V.J. John, “Preface,” in *Many Ways of Pluralism, Essays in honor of Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz* (Kolkata: Bishop’s College & ISPCK, 2010), xii.

<sup>5</sup>Philip Vaidyan, “Contribution of Rev. Dr. K.P. Aleaz towards the Syrian Orthodox Church,” in *Vision* 32/04 (2005), 21.

<sup>6</sup>V.J. John, “Preface,” in *Many Ways of Pluralism, Essays in honor of Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz...*, xii.

He began to join the ministry of the local church and received the Deacon Ordination on 15th August, 1966. Being member of the Syrian Orthodox Church, he began his first theological studies in an Orthodox Theological Seminary at Kottayam, Kerala, in the year 1967 and completed his four-year course of Graduate in Sacred Theology in 1971. Later he wrote his BD comprehensive examination and got his degree in 1972. Soon after the completion, he was ordained as a Priest in response to his call and commitment in a Syrian Orthodox Ashram known as Bethany Ashram in 1971; there he served for two years. It was in his third year of studies he developed his interest in the field of Religion and Indian Philosophies. Therefore, as young priest he came to Bishop's College on 7th July, 1973 to join Sanskrit and studied for two years under the guidance of Rev. Y. D. Tiwari, later joined his M.Th. studies in 1975 in the branch of Religion and worked on his thesis entitled *Sankara's Advaita as a basis for the Development of Christian Theology in India: A Critical Evaluation of previous Christian interpretation of Sankara*. He then completed his D.Th studies under the guidance of Dr. R. De Smet, Professor of Jnanadeepa Vidhyapeeta, Pune, with a thesis entitled *The Jiva Brahma Relation in Sankara's Advaita Vedanta as an Indian Jesulogical Model*.<sup>7</sup>

Having spent altogether seven years as a student in Bishop's College, it was on 1st June, 1980 he began his teaching ministry as a faculty in Bishop's College. He got his retirement in the year 2013 after 33 years and as a student for seven years of his service as a friend, colleague, teacher, mentor, guide and a father. For the last four decades he was in Bishop's College giving all his efforts to build up the College in all areas, especially in academics, therefore he could be very much a part of the growth that we see in Bishop's College today.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>D. Isaac Devadoss, "Life and Evolution of K.P. Aleaz's Thought"..., 7.

<sup>8</sup>V.J. John, "Preface," in *Many Ways of Pluralism, Essays in honor of Kalarikkal Poulouse Aleaz*..., xiii.

### 3. His Professional Works

Rev. Dr. Aleaz, who accepted his call to the ministry more likely in the field of teaching, writing theological books, articles as well as essays than preaching, He contributes a lot in giving loyalty to his mother church (Jacobite Syrian Church) in the area of writing articles and sermons, teaching and training students of all denominations in Bible Colleges and Seminaries, bridging a link of inter religious faith and dialogue through his writings of articles and publishing books. Although he was not attached to his mother church as a full-time worker, he revered and followed the church traditions and customs with much care and concern. As a result, he keeps on writing articles mostly sermon in the monthly magazine of the Syrian Orthodox Church called ‘Vision’.<sup>9</sup>

Thirty three years of service to Bishop’s College as a teacher in the B.D. and M Th level, he was also a part and foremost person to mention who from its inception in the year 1980 to join the North India Institutes of Post Graduate Theological Studies (NIIPGTS) as a Professor of Religion and later as a Dean of Doctoral study from 1999 till 2012. His contribution and participation in the South Asia Theological Research Institutes (SATHRI) were enormous. In research methodology, he has been a resource person for a number of years. He was a research committee member for 13 years and a third member of supervisory committee for several years in SATHRI. He has been doctoral thesis examiner for almost every year apart from being D.Th. thesis supervisor. For about 20 years he has been involved in doctoral research programme and supervising doctoral students. Apart from his theological teachings, he was also involved with Ramakrishna Mission in Kolkata for a long time.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Vaidyan, “Contribution of Rev. Dr. K.P. Aleaz towards the Syrian Orthodox Church”..., 26.

<sup>10</sup>D. Isaac Devadoss, “Life and Evolution of K.P. Aleaz’s Thought”..., 10.

#### 4. His Theological Influence and Formation

It could be traced from the time of his BD third year that Aleaz was deeply influenced and convinced to study more on Sankara's philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. There were people like Prof. Y. D. Tiwari, who influenced him to delve down into the ocean of Western and Indian philosophies. Fr. Richard V. De Smet, a Catholic father, who gave him an orientation of understanding Sankara's philosophy later, became his greatest mentor and guide in his study of Sankara's philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from the above, D. Isaac Devadoss opines that Aleaz theology of Advaita Vedantic and the understanding of pluralistic inclusivism was highly influenced by theology of the great Indian Christian theologians such as Brahmabandha Upadhyaya, K. Subba Rao, J. G. Arapura, S.J. Samartha, Swami Abhishiktananda and Raimundo Panikkar.<sup>12</sup> But according to Fr. Aleaz there are of course some Indian Christian theologians whom he likes the most such as Brahmabandha Upadhyaya, P. Chenchiah, S.J. Samartha and many others who enriched him in his theological formation. But then he points out with a clear answer to the question of, who are the people who influence him (Aleaz) to come up with his pluralistic inclusivism as follows:

Pluralistic Inclusivism is gradually emerged from within me; nobody was influencing me in that. But there are many influences in my life, like Prof. Y.D. Tiwari who was my guru in Bishop's College; he taught me Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy. He influenced me on Western and Indian Philosophy too. Fr. Richard V. De Smet, who was a catholic father, specialist in Sankar's thought, was my mentor and my guide in my D. Th studies. He gave me an orientation of understanding Sankar's philosophy. Therefore, his theology of religion with regards to pluralistic inclusivism is entirely the product of his research and hard work in

<sup>11</sup> D. Isaac Devadoss, "Life and Evolution of K.P. Aleaz's Thought"..., 15.

<sup>12</sup> Carey L. Inbuon, "Life\_and\_Contribution\_of\_Kalarikkal\_Poulose\_Aleaz\_K.P. in\_the\_Theology\_of\_Religions," in <https://www.academia.edu/7657657/> (30/06/2019).

interpreting Christian Brahman, in interpreting the person and work of Jesus Christ, in interpreting Eastern theology or Western theology within the framework or perspective of pluralistic inclusivism, in which we can enrich each other and grow together with people of other faith. So, Pluralistic Inclusivism is a perspective from which interconnection can be made.<sup>13</sup>

## **5. Contribution in the Field of Literature**

Fr. K. P. Aleaz's contribution in the field of literature has been tremendous and significant for the young students and scholars in the expertise of Indian religious studies. It was in the year 1979 when he first began to write his article and later with much difficulty, he published his first book in the year 1991.<sup>36</sup> He had written 18 books along with 3 edited books besides some few manuscripts which were unpublished. He was awarded thrice (i.e. in the year 1998, 2000 and 2005) with the Frank Collision Award for creative Indian Theological writing for two of his books and one of his articles. He was also awarded most articles written award in the monthly Vision magazine published by the Syrian Orthodox church which is not published any more.<sup>14</sup> Rev. Dr. K. P. Aleaz was the author of 21 books and 195 articles. Some of his great works are given below:

1. Harmony of Religions, 1993
2. Theology of Religions: Birmingham Papers and other Essays, 1998
3. Christian Responses to Indian Philosophy, 2005
4. Some Indian Theological Reflections, 2007
5. Indian Biblical Reflections and other Essays, 2009
6. Other Literary Works

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<sup>13</sup>Sunil Caleb, "K. P. Aleaz's Perspective on Indian Jesuology: An Evaluation," in *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, Vol. 24 (2011): 59.

<sup>14</sup>Carey L. Inbuon, "Life and Contribution of Kalarikkal Poulose Aleaz in the Theology of Religions," in <https://www.academia.edu/7657657/> (30/06/2019).

published and as a resource person in seminars in and outside of India for more than 100 times.<sup>15</sup>

## 6. Important Contribution in the Field of Theology of Religion

Fr. Dr. K.P. Alias's contribution in the field of Theology of Religion is visible in the formation of Pluralistic Inclusivism, which is unique and different from the other existing schools of theology. Since from the early days of the Church till today, there are certain visible approaches adopted by the Christians towards the people of other faith, which simply proves and reveal the focus of attention in the theology of religion is the issue of inter- faith relations. Approaches like Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism may seem to look appropriate in a particular context to a particular group of people. But the limitation seems to be so narrowed that it often leads to misunderstanding than building a mutual understanding and a peaceful co- existence between other religions and one's own religious faith.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, with the conviction that there are limitations in all the three schools of theology, K. P. Aleaz knew that these three schools of theology will not solve the issue of the relationship between one's own religious faith and other faiths and Christian witness in building inter-faith relation. As a result he come up with a new school of theology known as the "Pluralistic Inclusivism" with the faith and belief that it could be an alternative in the theology of religion in solving the issue of the relationship between one's own religious faith and other faiths in bringing out a better development of inter-faith relations.<sup>17</sup> According to him, "Pluralistic inclusivism inspires each religious faith to be pluralistically inclusive i.e., on the one hand each living faith is to become truly pluralistic by other faiths contributing to its

<sup>15</sup>S. Robertson, "Theological Contributions of K.P. Aleaz," in *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, Vol. 24 (2011): 45.

<sup>16</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *The Gospel of Indian Culture* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1994), 177- 180.

<sup>17</sup>K.P. Aleaz, "A Theology of Religions for a viable theology of Mission," in *Mission and Evangelism*, edited by Somen Das (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 72-74.

conceptual content and on the other hand inclusivism is to transform its meaning to witness the fulfilment of the theological and spiritual contents of one's own faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths.”<sup>18</sup>

## 7. Understanding of Religion and Culture

In connection with the relation between religion and culture, Aleaz argues that ‘the basic feature of Indian culture is its integral relationship with Indian religions’. He further states, “religious enlightenment constitutes the fundamental source of creativity for Indian culture and the Indian psyche.” He is also of the opinion that “there was no imposition of Aryan culture on the existing Indian cultures, but only a diffusion of it through an acculturation process.”<sup>19</sup>

Fr. Aleaz's respect for Indian heritage is admirable, but it cannot be ignored that as there are many religions, there are many cultures. Similarly the infiltration of Aryan influence including culture in various spheres of Indian life cannot be denied. It is true that there is a connection between religion and culture in India. But promoting one religious culture as the Indian culture is dangerous and it is no way different from communalist tendencies. In fact the Sang Parivar in India is arguing for a single monolithic Hindu culture, although Hindu culture is not Indian culture.<sup>20</sup>

Fr. Aleaz perceives a double gospel emerging from Indian culture. According to him “one is the gospel of integral relation between religion and culture, resulting in cultural symbiosis and a composite culture through an ongoing interaction between religions. The second meaning of the gospel of Indian culture points to an understanding of the gospel of God in Jesus emerging from the Indian culture or rather the Indian hermeneutical context which in reality goes beyond the scope of the previous Christian

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<sup>18</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *Harmony of Religions: The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Punthi-Pustak, 1993), 234.

concepts like ‘indigenization’ or ‘inculturation’.”<sup>21</sup> The third gospel of Indian culture for Aleaz is ‘the gospel of interreligious harmony and integration’.

The two gospels-gospel of composite culture and gospel of God in Jesus emerging from the Indian hermeneutical context are limited to the outcome of the confluence of Christianity and Hinduism. But the fact remains that India has many cultures and many religious traditions/gospels. Aleaz also graphically reflects, without emphasizing the many religions and cultures, the possibility of inter-religious harmony. He also asserts, as indicated earlier that, theologically, Hindu culture accepts religious pluralism is vivid in the principles of ‘adikara bheda<sup>22</sup> and Advaita’.<sup>23</sup>

In the view of Fr. Aleaz ‘the most important feature of Indian culture is its integral relationship with Indian religions’. He calls this relationship as *Advaitic*. And affirms Advaita cannot be tied down to the narrow boundaries of any one particular religion. It stands for unity and universality in the midst of diversities. As a result it can very well function as a symbol of Indian composite culture. Aleaz, almost in line with the Sang Parivar, claims “it was its cultural unity based on religion that held India together historically as one.” Again “the survival of the political unity of India is based on its cultural unity within which there persists a ‘core’ of religion to which the sense of Advaita or ‘not-twoism’

<sup>21</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *The Gospel of Indian Culture...*, 283.

<sup>22</sup>*Adhikari-bheda*, the Sanskrit expression which is a combination of two words – “*adhikari*”, meaning the rightful or the qualified, and “*bheda*”, meaning distinction or difference, basically refers to the distinction between qualified persons or to the difference of the qualified aspirants capable of apprehending the same truth. The principle of *Adhikari-bheda*, universally accepted by the Hindus, is the foundation on which the teachings of the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita which texts contain though not contradictory various doctrines meant for people at different stages of spiritual evolution, are based, in which principle the method of *Arundhati-darsananyaya* i.e. the method of spotting the tiny star, *Arunadhathi*, with the help of bigger calling them *Arundhati*, applies. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adhikari-bheda> (3/7/2019).

<sup>23</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *The Gospel of Indian Culture...*, 285-86.

makes an enduring contribution.” The Advaitic explanation and political unity based upon cultural unity may amount to communal and fundamental nature.

Such notions are disadvantageous to Indian context. Aleaz also needs to analyze the dangers lurking behind such notions. It is a fact that India does not have one single culture. It houses many cultures. Unity in diversity is the principle that keeps India going. Seeking for a religious culture based upon Hinduism is the communalist blunder of religionised political parties in India. Hindu culture cannot be considered as Indian culture. Cultures can exist side by side by mutual respect and interaction. Whether cultures can create, a composite culture is a difficult question.<sup>24</sup>

## 8. Understanding of God and Christ

Jesus Christ is God’s appearance in the midst of appearances. In Christ the absolutely transcendental God serves Himself/Herself from Himself/Herself to produce the appearance and to become appearance. The event of Jesus as Christ has to be placed in the Ultimate Reality.<sup>25</sup> Creation is a case of *vivarta*<sup>26</sup> as Brahman remains unchanged by affecting the world and similarly Christ’s incarnation is also a case of *vivarta* because when the divine Logos takes unto Himself/Herself the human nature the novelty which follows this actuation is entirely on the side of the human nature. There is a progress possible from ‘Christo-monism’ to a Theocentric Christology.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *Christian thought through Advaita Vedanta* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), 1-2.

<sup>25</sup>K.P. Aleaz, “Mission among Hindus: witnessing Christ in the company of Hindus,” in *Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic World Christian Mission among Other Faiths*, edited by Lalsangkima Pachuau and Knud Jorgensen (UK: Regnum Books International, 2011), 164.

<sup>26</sup>*Vivarta* - means the cyclonic process of manifestation by which the one becomes the many. It is an essentially Vedantic concept of cosmogonic as well as psychologico-philosophical implications.

<sup>27</sup>K.P. Aleaz, “Mission among Hindus: witnessing Christ in the company of Hindus”..., 165.

Christ can be conceived as the True *Prajapati*<sup>28</sup> as the Vedas explains to us that *Purusa*<sup>29</sup>, who is later conceived as *Prajapati*, the Lord of creation, sacrificed himself for the *Devas*, i.e., emancipated mortals. The Christ of Hinduism is hidden and unknown. *Isvara*<sup>30</sup> is the unknown Christ of Hinduism. The role of *Isvara* in Vedanta corresponds functionally to the role of Christ in Christian thought.<sup>31</sup> Fundamentally the Hindu doctrine of *Avatara*<sup>32</sup> is akin to the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, the distinctiveness being Christ is the Incarnation of the whole Being of God for all times and he came to redeem the sinners. It has also been pointed out that the place of Jesus Christ in the Hindu religious heritage of India is as one of the *Ishta Devatas* or chosen deities or favorite deities. Hinduism readily grants such a place to Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup> From the side of a disciple of Jesus what is needed is, he/she must not deny other mediators between God and humans, other experiences of God's presence in the human heart, the validity of other *Ishta Devatas*. Such denials lie outside the positive experience of the Christians and therefore have no validity. As we have the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, others have their own Lords and Saviors. The theory of multiple avatars is theologically the most accommodating attitude in a pluralistic setting.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup>A vedic god personifying a creative force that evolves all things from itself.

<sup>29</sup>*Purusa* is a complex concept whose meaning evolved in Vedic and Upanishadic times. Depending on source and historical timeline, it means the cosmic man or Self, Consciousness, and Universal principle.

<sup>30</sup>*Isvara* is a concept in Hinduism, with a wide range of meanings that depend on the era and the school of Hinduism. ... In Shaivism, *Isvara* is synonymous with "Shiva", sometimes as Maheshvara or Parameshvara meaning the "Supreme lord", or as an *Ishta-deva* (personal god).

<sup>31</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *An Indian Jesus from Sankara's Thought; & Christian Thought through Advaita Vedanta* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), 54 – 56.

<sup>32</sup>A manifestation of a deity or released soul in bodily form on earth; an incarnate divine teacher.

<sup>33</sup>K.P. Aleaz, "An Indian Understanding of Jesus," in *Asia Journal of Theology*, 12/ 1 (April, 1998): 118.

<sup>34</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *An Indian Jesus from Sankara's Thought; & Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta...*, 64-65.

## 9. Understanding of Christian Mission

He firmly opines that whenever we think of an understanding of Christian mission in the context of religious pluralism, we are all for a preconception of it. It is in the one mission of the one God that Christians share along with people of other faiths; Christian mission has to be seen only as a part, perhaps a minute part of the total mission of God. Christian mission has to be seen along with and in collaboration and combination with the mission of the people of other religious faiths, forming different aspects of the one total mission of God.<sup>35</sup>

There is a need to reconceive the one mission of God in terms of one's context and in that preconception identify the particular role of Christian mission. In our preconception of the mission of God, God-experiences of people of other faiths have to help us and similarly in the preconception of the mission of God by people of other faiths, God-experience of Christians can also be a guiding principle. In the light of such reconstructed understanding of the mission of God alone can Christians perceive their particular mission. Consequently Christian mission becomes not only imparting what Christians have to others, but also receiving from others what they have. This receiving aspect is proposed today as the thrust of a Christian theology of mission.<sup>36</sup>

According to him, Bible can help Christians to overcome ecclesiocentrism. What the Bible speaks about is God's reign and God's mission and not the church's or our reign and mission. The important point to be noted in this connection is: we should not equate Christian mission with God's mission. God's mission may have to be conceived as much wider in scope as compared to a possible understanding of Christian mission. God's mission in all its dimensions may be beyond human comprehension, especially by one particular grouping of humans. Perhaps the different

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<sup>35</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *Dimensions of Indian Religion: Study, Experience and Interaction* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1995), 274.

<sup>36</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *Dimensions of Indian Religion: Study, Experience and Interaction...*, 275-79.

religious communities may have to come together to ponder over the one mission of the one God (Reality). Christians are only a part of a larger mission of God, and it is this conviction, which enables them to join hands and work with people of other faiths.<sup>37</sup>

The process of hermeneutics or understanding and interpretation is very important. Hermeneutical context decides the content of the gospel and what Christian mission is. It is the hermeneutical context or the contextual socio-politico-religio-cultural realities which decide the content of our knowledge and experience of the gospel as well as what our mission should be. Knowledge is formulated in the very knowing process and understanding the gospel of God in Jesus and Christian mission is a continuous integrated non-dual divine-human process. Nothing is pre-given or pre-formulated. We cannot accept some timeless interpretation from somewhere and make it applicable to our context. Understanding and interpretation belong exclusively to us, to our context, and there is the possibility for the emergence of new meanings of the gospel in this process.<sup>38</sup>

## 10. Understanding of Pluralistic Inclusivism

K.P. Aleaz proposed a new paradigm in interfaith dialogue, which is called the Pluralistic Inclusivism and according to him the Pluralistic Inclusivism “(It) is an attempt to make Christian faith pluralistically inclusive. The content of the revelation of God in Jesus is to become truly pluralistic by other faiths contributing to it as per the requirement of different places and times and it is through such pluralistic understanding of the gospel that its true Inclusivism is to shine forth. The basic affirmation here is that there is a possibility of the fulfillment of the theological and spiritual contents of one’s own faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup>K.P. Aleaz, “Relevance of a Theology of Religions to an Understanding of Mission since 1910,” in *The Indian Journal of Theology*, 29/2 (April-June 1980): 68-71.

<sup>38</sup>K.P. Aleaz, *Religions in Christian Theology* (Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2001), 295.

<sup>39</sup>K.P. Aleaz, “Pluralistic Inclusivism: A viable Indian theology of religions,” in *Asia Journal of Theology*, 12/2 (1998): 268.

Pluralistic Inclusivism stands for dialogical theologies that encourage the relational convergence of religions, conceiving on the one hand the diverse religious resources of the world as the common property of humanity and on the other a possible growth in the richness of each of the religious experience through mutual inter-relation. It inspires each religious faith to be pluralistically inclusive i.e., on the one hand each living faith is to become truly pluralistic by other faiths contributing to its conceptual content and on the other, Inclusivism is to transform its meaning to witness the fulfillment of the theological and spiritual contents of one's own faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths. It inspires Christian faith to be pluralistically inclusive i.e., the content of the revelation of God in Jesus is to become truly pluralistic by other faiths contributing to it as per the requirement of different places and times and it is through such pluralistic understanding of the gospel that its true inclusivism is to shine forth.<sup>40</sup>

Aleaz recognizes the contribution of other theologians in this tradition like Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, Chenchia and Subba Rao, who used the Vedic concepts to further Christian thought.

As the path of Advaita is *Jnana marga*<sup>41</sup>, it could be achieved only through negation and renunciation. Jesus is no excuse; only in the negation of him, we may be able to attain the being. He observes, "We have to sacrifice ourselves as Jesus did to discover our reality in being...Jesus was one of the avatars and a yogi of the highest type."<sup>42</sup> Renunciation of earthly life and realization of potential divinity of Jesus is the Indian path to salvation.

Pluralistic Inclusivism begins with the realization that God has not fully revealed God self in any one religion, not in Jesus or in Quran or elsewhere, so one has to experience the others faith also

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<sup>40</sup>K.P. Aleaz, "Pluralistic Inclusivism: A Suggested perspective in Theology of Religions," in *Asian Christian Review*, 2/1 (Spring, 2008):43-44.

<sup>41</sup>*Jnana* Meaning - origin and *Marga* means -Path.

<sup>42</sup>K.P. Aleaz, "Pluralistic Inclusivism: A viable Indian theology of religions," in *Asia Journal of Theology*..., 270.

in order to understand God. This can be done by remaining in one's own faith but accepting all religious expressions as human property.<sup>43</sup> Within Indian context it assumes importantly, he says,

“Indian Christian theology is a conversion of Christian theology to the Indian religion cultural context. It has to interact and be converted in terms of one another. Points of disagreement are discarded as unimportant realms, after analysing the disagreement in the proper historical and theological contexts.”<sup>44</sup>

One of the possibilities in Pluralistic Inclusivism, Aleaz says is developing a Christian Vedanta which can provide a model for other forms of religious interactions could follow in their own ways.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

One may be tempted to say that Aleaz has concentrated on Advaita and applied this paradigm in all his ideas, rather than aspiring for a systematic and gradual development of theological thinking. It may be also alleged that rather than promoting Kingdom values Aleaz has worked for the promotion of other religious values limiting himself to a select few concerns. The major shift in Aleaz's definition of religion is from content to applicability of a religion to the texture.

The underlying expectation in his integral method to study religion is religious harmony or relational convergence of religions. Correspondingly, in his definition of theology of religions, the focus has moved from the other to one's own faith tradition. The magnitude of pluralistic inclusivism is that all

<sup>43</sup>K.P. Aleaz, “Pluralistic Inclusivism: A viable Indian theology of religions,” in *Asia Journal of Theology*..., 271.

<sup>44</sup>K.P. Aleaz, “Pluralistic Inclusivism: A viable Indian theology of religions,” in *Asia Journal of Theology*..., 274.

<sup>45</sup>K.P. Aleaz, “Pluralistic Inclusivism: A viable Indian theology of religions,” in *Asia Journal of Theology*..., 275.

religions become pluralistically inclusive and inclusivistically pluralist.

Aleaz's Indian Christian spirituality based on inclusion of resources from Indian religions, his interpretation that Jesus is the reflection of Brahman, and his view that gospel has to emerge from the religio-cultural context of India are courageous proposals. His ultimate dedication for religious harmony is fully embedded in his view of proclamation and mission.

Fr. K. P. Aleaz, who was born in a humble family with nothing extraordinary in him; but today out of his relentless effort, brings out extraordinary ideologies in the field of theology of religions where he put a number of theological teachers, students and researchers in to a predicament especially with his idea of pluralistic inclusivism. His writings and practice in the formation of bridging the gap between different religious groups in order to have an inter-religious relation is worth appreciated. His scholarship and contribution in enriching the Indian Christian Theology in particular and to the world religions in general would always remain as a tool and a light to enlighten and guide any, who are interested in the field of religions as long as time itself.

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## **Features of the Syriac Spirituality and its significance among the Christian Traditions**

Biju M Parekkattil<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

The basic ecclesiastical traditions of the ancient Christianity can be divided in to three: Latin West, Greek East and Syriac Orient. But the Syriac Orient is often neglected owing to various reasons. Rejecting the binary model concept of Christian tradition, Sebastian Brock highlighted the Syriac Orient as the third “lung” for the church.<sup>2</sup> Christianity itself is born in a Semitic milieu and the language of Jesus Christ and the apostles was Aramaic, from which the modern east and west Syriac was evolved. Its distinctive

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<sup>2</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “The Syriac Orient: a third “lung” for the Church?”, *OCP* 71 (2005), 5-20.

features reveal its uniqueness and its significance to us among the Christian traditions.

## 1. Linguistic Significance

Language is an external expression of internal thoughts and plays a central role in human culture and cognition. Aramaic is the language spoken by Lord Jesus and it is considered as sacred language among the Christians.

### 1.1. Semitic, Aramaic and Syriac

Even though the people living Today in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq speak several dialects and use Arabic as their written language, they belong to one ancestral tongue. So, Philologists grouped under a general name of Semitic<sup>3</sup> and divided into three such as the Northern or Aramean, the Middle or Canaanitish or Hebrew, and the Southern or Arabic.<sup>4</sup> The Northern Semitic language, or Aramean can be classified into two: the Eastern or Babylonian and the Western or Syriac. The name “Aramean” seems to have very ancient origin and known even to Homer and also mentioned many times in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> When the Greeks invaded the Asia, they called by the name of “Syrians” the people, who called themselves “Arameans” and Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of all the nations from Asia Minor to Persia, from Armenia to Arabian Peninsula.<sup>6</sup> In other words, this

<sup>3</sup> The word *Shemetic* is derived from *Shem*, the son of Noah.

<sup>4</sup> John Wesley Etheridge, *Horae Aramaicae: Comprising Concise Notices of the Aramean Dialects in General, and of the Versions of Holy Scripture Extant in Them: With a Translation of the Gospel According to St. Matthew, and of the Epistle to the Hebrews, from the Ancient Peschito Syriac* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1943), 1-2; While Canaanite branch comprises Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Phoenician vernaculars, the southern branch includes all the forms of Arabic and Ethiopic (Ge'ez) languages. In addition to that we can add a distinct group of the East Semitic such as Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Eblaite. See more in, Wheeler M. Thackston, *Introduction to Syriac: An Elementary Grammar with Readings from Syriac Literature* (Bethesda, Maryland: IBEX Publishers, 1999), vii.

<sup>5</sup> Homer used it as ‘Απύροι in Iliad II. In the Bible, the word is found in 2 Kings 18:26; Isaiah 36: 11 and Daniel 2: 4.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 5; Theodor Noldeke, *Compendious*

Northern Semitic speech-stem, or Aramean i.e., Syriac in the later sense of the word, became a leading language of communication, extending far beyond its natural boundaries in the Western Asia for more than a thousand years.<sup>7</sup> The Eastern Aramaic or the Babylonian Syriac had been intermixed with words from the language of Northern Chaldeans.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Syriac, in the narrower meaning, is a dialect of Edessa (Urhay, modern Urfa in South East Turkey), which come closer to the Aramaic dialects of the Tigris regions than to those of Central Syria and Palestine.<sup>9</sup> The Aramean populations maintained their language despite being dominated by Greek speaking and Persian rulers.<sup>10</sup> Most of these Armenians became Christian and Syriac became a Christian language, as medium for Christian literature and theology. On the colloquial level, the Aramean language can be subdivided mainly into seven dialects such as the Babylonian or pure Mesopotamian, the Palmyrene, the Antiochian, the Hierosolymitan or the Jerusalemian, the Galilean, the Samaritan and the Syro-Phenician or Phenecian Aramaic.<sup>11</sup> The golden age of Syriac literature reached in the seventh century and the Syrians of that day belonged partly to the Roman Empire and partly to the Persian Empire.<sup>12</sup> After the great Christological controversies and divisions of the fifth century, the Aramean Christians in the Persian Empire became

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*Syriac Grammar*, trans. James A. Crichton (London: Williams & Norgate, 1904), xiii; J.B. Chabot, "Syriac Language and Literature", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia. Volume XIV :Simony to Tournely*, Ed.Charles. G. Herbermann (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), 1045.

<sup>7</sup> Theodor Noldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, trans. James A. Crichton (London: Williams & Norgate, 1904), xiii.

<sup>8</sup> John Wesley Etheridge, *Horae Aramaicae: Comprising Concise Notices of the Aramean Dialects in General, and of the Versions of Holy Scripture Extant in Them: With a Translation of the Gospel According to St. Matthew, and of the Epistle to the Hebrews, from the Ancient Peschito Syriac* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co.,1943), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Noldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, xxxi; Sebastian Paul Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Kottayam: SEERI, 2009 ), 1.

<sup>10</sup> John F. Healey, *First Studies in Syriac*, (Cardiff: University College, 1980), 5.

<sup>11</sup> J. W. Etheridge, *Horae Aramaicae*, 9-12.

<sup>12</sup> Noldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, xxxii.

more isolated and developed dialectical peculiarities and different scripts and vowel signs.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, basis of the distinction between the eastern or Nestorian and the western or Jacobite dialect is rather than that of different theological schools than of real dialects.<sup>14</sup> The West Syrian dialect is considered to be more consistent than the East Syrian and though the West Syrian language remodelled itself about the year 600 or 700 AD, it preserves the original Edessian pronunciation.<sup>15</sup> After the Islamic invasion and imposing the Arabic as the official language of these regions, the usage of Syriac was limited to liturgical language and which is spoken only in three villages in the neighbourhood of Damascus, in Tur Abdin (Mesopotamia, between Nisibis and the Tigris) , and in Kurdistan, especially in the neighbourhood of Urmiah.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.2. Syriac Literature

The Syrians claim to have invented the letters, and from Phoenician or Chaldee characters, they suppose, the Syriac were derived, also with the Arabic.<sup>17</sup> The works handed down to us in the Syriac language are essentially and most exclusively Christian religious literature.<sup>18</sup> The apocryphal letter, which King Abgar sent to Christ and Jesus's answer, can be considered as the most ancient Christian Syriac writings. Some are of opinion that gospel according to St. Matthew was originally written in Syriac and then translated it into Greek.<sup>19</sup> The earliest significant contribution of

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<sup>13</sup> John F. Healey, *First Studies in Syriac*, (Cardiff: University College, 1980), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Eberhard Nestle, *Syriac Grammar with Bibliography, Chrestomathy and Glossary* (London: William and Norgate, 1889), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Noldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, xxxiii. The proper name of the West Syrian (Jacobites and Maronites) letters is *Serto* and which is used mostly in Syriac printing. The City Edessa became the intellectual centre of the Syriac Christianity and even then the language of its people attained great perfection. See, J.B. Chabot, "Syriac Language and Literature", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia. Volume XIV :Simony to Tournely*, Ed.Charles. G. Herbermann (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), 1045.

<sup>16</sup> Chabot, "Syriac Language and Literature", 1045.

<sup>17</sup> George Phillips, *A Syriac Grammar* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, & Co, 1866), 5.

<sup>18</sup> J.B. Chabot, "Syriac Language and Literature", 1045.

<sup>19</sup> George Phillips, *A Syriac Grammar* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, & Co, 1866), 5.

Syriac Christianity is the version of the Bible called *Peschitta* (simple). Aphraates the Persian Sage (+350) and Ephrem the Syrian (+373) are the most brilliant of the fathers of the Syrian Church. The Syriac literature covers a long span of history even from the Second to the twenty-first century.<sup>20</sup> Sebastian Brock highlighted the influence of the Semitic and the Hellenistic traditions on the Syriac theology and distinguished it into three periods.<sup>21</sup> Before AD 400 is considered as the First Period and its chief characteristic is the absence of the Greek ways of thinking and of theological expressions. Odes of Solomon, Acts of Thomas, writings of Aphraates and Ephrem are the examples as the true heirs of the Semitic world. Second Period is during the fifth and early sixth centuries. During this time, Greek began to influence the Syriac world and its leaders like Philoxenos of Mabbug viewed Greek as prestigious. At the same time, authors like Jacob Serugh and Narsai of Nisibis maintained the Semitic line in their works.<sup>22</sup> The philhellenic trend was the characteristic of third Period (later sixth or seventh centuries) period and many of the Greek works were translated into Syriac on one side and the people showed a special attraction towards Greek philosophy on the other. In 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, the translations of the Greek books into Arabic by Syriac scholars paved the way for the Latin West to become familiar with the classical Greek philosophy and for the development of the Scholastic theology. From ninth to thirteenth centuries, the Syriac world presented great theological compendia, notably those of Bar Hebraeus in the West Syrian tradition and of Abo Ysaïa in the East Syriac tradition.

<sup>20</sup> Sebastian Paul Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Kottayam: SEERI, 2009), 1; To understand a brief history of this period and its main literary contributions, see, Robert Murry, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 24-38.

<sup>21</sup> Sebastian Paul Brock, "The Two Poles of Syriac Tradition", in *Homage to Mar Kariattil: Pioneer Malabar Ecumenist*, Charles Payngott, ed (Kottayam: OIRSI, 1992), 75.

<sup>22</sup> Abraham D. Mattam, "Historical Setting of the East Syriac Theology," in *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, Pauly Maniyattu, ed (Satna: Ephrem's Publications, 2007), 26.

### 1.3. True heir of the Judeo-Christianity

The Syriac Christianity can be considered as the true heir of the Judeo-Christianity and it maintained some of its characteristics in its liturgy and its theological outlook, even in the intense anti-Jewish polemical tone of so much Syriac literature.<sup>23</sup> The Syriac Christianity has three main cultural traditions: Jewish, Greek and ancient Mesopotamian. Up to the fourth century, both Jewish and ancient Mesopotamians played the prominent role, but after then prestige of Greek culture influenced them greatly.<sup>24</sup> After the discoveries of the Qumran and Nag Hammadi documents, the life and theology of the Jewish Christianity got special significance and its relationship with the Syriac Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Sebastian Brock opined: “Christian communities in the area of northern Mesopotamia whose origin was in Judaism, and whose orientation remained decidedly Jewish in character.”<sup>26</sup> According to McCarthy,

There existed in the regions of Mesopotamia and Syria a distinctive, independent branch of Christianity, ascetic in outlook and strongly influenced by Jewish ways of thought. The language of this community was Syriac, a form of Aramaic...its thought pattern and modes of expression were distinctively Semitic.<sup>27</sup>

Becoming an independent religion, the Christianity in Syria followed the Jewish legacy by using and refashioning it. The Syriac word for Church is ܥܕܬܐ ‘*edto*’, which also may have been a

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<sup>23</sup> Murry, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 4, 7; Danielou, *Jewish Christianity*, 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources”, *JSS* 30 (1979), 212.

<sup>25</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Sebastian Brock, “A Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac,” *JIS* 46 (1995), 282.

<sup>27</sup> McCarthy, “Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church: Ephrem’s Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount” in *Tradition of the Text: Studies offered to Dominique Barthélemy in Celebration of his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, G.J. Norton and S. Pisano (eds) (Freiburg and Göttingen : Universitätsverlag /Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) 106; See also in Elena Narinskaya, *Ephrem-a ‘Jewish ‘ Sage’: A Comparison of the Exegetical Writings of St. Ephrem the Syrian and Jewish Traditions*, PhD Diss. (University of Durham: Durham, 2007), 51

Christian development from *ܠܚܘܠ* *knušta*, meaning Synagogue.<sup>28</sup> In addition to that its liturgical celebrations, music and architectural style reflect the influence of the Hebrew tradition.<sup>29</sup> The Syrian Bema, the raised and enclosed area in the centre of the nave, seems to have originated in Synagogue and retained in the Syrian Churches.<sup>30</sup> Understanding its tradition is, therefore, far more than academic historical interest, but it provides us the possibility to live in continuity with the world of Scripture.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. Importance of the Geographical Location

According to Etheridge, “the region extending from the range of the Taurus to the coasts of the Red Sea, and between the course of the river Halys on the west and the Tigris on the east, was once inhabited by nations whose languages gave the plainest evidences of a common derivation. Thus, the people of Cappadocia, Pontus, Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Phenecia, and Arabia, may have been regarded, so far as speech was concerned, as one great community.”<sup>32</sup> The urban centres of these areas played a prominent role in shaping the biblical history and the Syriac Christianity. The East Syrians inhabited in the mountains of Kurdistan, the plains of Upper Mesopotamia and Persia.<sup>33</sup>

Mesopotamia was the one of the most significant region that played an important role in the Bible as well as in the life of the Aramaic people. The name Mesopotamia indicates its historical location “between two rivers”—the Euphrates River to the west and the Tigris to the east.<sup>34</sup> It is indicated in the Hebrew Bible as

<sup>28</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Taft, “Some Notes on the Bema in the East and West Syrian Tradition”, *OCP* xxxiv (1968), 326-359; D. Hickley, “The Ambo in Early Liturgical Planning,” *Heythrop Journal*” vii (1966), 407-422.

<sup>31</sup> Danielou, *Jewish Christianity*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Etheridge, *Horae Aramaicae*, 1

<sup>33</sup> Gabriel Oussani, *The Modern Chaldeans and Nestorians, and the Study of Syriac among them* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1901), 83.

<sup>34</sup> LaMoine F. DeVries, *Cities of the Biblical World* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1997), 5.

אַרַם נַהֲרַיִם *Aram-Naharayim* and among the Syrians as ܒܬܢܗܪܝܢ “Bet Nahreen”.<sup>35</sup> Some of the earliest development of culture happened here and where occupied by such a notable groups as the Sumerians, a non-Semite people, and the Akkadians and Amorites, both of which were Semitic.

In Edessa, Aramaic dialect played an important role as a literary language, even before the introduction of Christianity. Edessa became the intellectual and spiritual capital of Syriac Christianity and the Syriac is defined as the dialect of Edessa and its province Osrhoene and from where it spread to the Kingdom of Persia.<sup>36</sup> The Syrian region during the fourth and fifth centuries was divided into two in cultural and linguistic level. West Syria was bilingual speaking both Greek and Syriac.<sup>37</sup> Antioch was characterised by semi-Greek population and became a centre of Greek culture. The Syriac Christianity was there the substratum and its country side resisted to it and preserved to a certain extend its Semitic culture.<sup>38</sup> Robert Murray considers the ‘Syriac area’ as referring to northern Mesopotamia and Adiabene, the provinces to the east.<sup>39</sup> The province of Osrohene and its capital Edessa was between the East and the West Syria and resisted the Greek culture.<sup>40</sup>

As in the different parts of the Christian world, the Syriac region was also characterised by diversity of cultures and customs and which prompted to establish various churches. The Christological controversies were also factors in the formation of the diverse churches and liturgical traditions. According to William

<sup>35</sup> Psalms 61:1 ; It indicated also in Genesis 24: 10 as the country enclosed between the Tigris on the East and the Euphrates on the west. In Hosea 12: 12, it again noted as the open country of Aram; the Authorised Version translated it as country of Syria. Padan-aram ʾr'a] !D;P; was a part of this country (Gen. 25: 20; 28: 2, 5-7; 31: 18).

<sup>36</sup> Noldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, xxxii; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Seely J. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology with Special Reference to the Maronite Tradition* (Lanham: Univeristy Press of America, 1983), xi

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, xi

<sup>39</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 5-8.

<sup>40</sup> Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, xi

Macober, the Syriac region during the fifth century was featured liturgically by the presence of three centres in Antioch, Jerusalem and Edessa and the first two centres were in Greek and Edessa in Syriac.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, while the Jerusalem rite was limited predominantly to the areas of Palestine, the rite of Antioch was used in the Greek speaking cities of Syria, up to Laodicean and Mopsuestia. The Syriac speaking parts of the Syria practiced the rites of Edessa.<sup>42</sup> The political and social isolation from the Greeco-Roman world also contributed to the development of a specific theological tradition there.<sup>43</sup> The pro-Chalcedonians in the region of Second Syria centred the monastery of St. Maron near the shores of the Orontes River and organized an independent hierarchy and followed the Edessan rite.<sup>44</sup>

### 3. Continuation of the Biblical Thought Pattern

The significant position of the Syriac spirituality in the Christian tradition is nothing but it alone is the authentic representative of the Semitic world from where the Bible sprang.<sup>45</sup> Syriac spirituality especially before AD 400 is expressed in pure Semitic thought patterns, untouched by the Hellenistic culture. The Syriac theology is purely a biblical theology and not a product of abstract philosophical speculations.<sup>46</sup> The early Syriac theologians

<sup>41</sup> Macober, "A Theory on the Origins of the Syrian, Maronite, and Chaldean Rites," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* vol. 39 (1973), 238-239; Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, xiii.

<sup>42</sup> Macober, "A Theory on the Origins of the Syrian, , 238-239.

<sup>43</sup> Abraham D. Mattam, "Historical Setting of the East Syriac Theology," *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, Pauly Maniyattu, ed (Satna: Ephrem's Publications, 2007), 16.

<sup>44</sup> Macober, "A Theory on the Origins of the Syrian, 110-111.

<sup>45</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition* (Kottayam: SEERI, 2005), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Powathil, "Early Syriac Theology: Some Basic Features," *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, Pauly Maniyattu, ed (Satna: Ephrem's Publications, 2007), 34. In the view of the Syriac fathers, the proper way to approach Holy Scripture is through the "eye of the spirit", which is the eye of faith. Ephrem the Syrian considered intellectual scrutiny and theological definitions as dangerous methods because they can obstruct the human experience of God and the definitions can be blasphemous because they attempt to contain the uncontainable, to limit the limitless. In such way, Ephrem considered the speculative enquiry as an inappropriate method for theological study.

considered the Bible as the book of faith and its interpretation was based on both spiritual and practical.<sup>47</sup> A main feature, that everyone can easily recognize, is that the Syriac literary traditions share the Semitic vocabulary, structures, figures, and more principally their world view.<sup>48</sup> Therefore its literature reflects underlying features such as the unity of scriptures, unity of the Revelation, unity and correlative progress of the economy of salvation in the Old and the New Testament, etc.<sup>49</sup> In the writings of its fathers, the elevated position is always given to the Holy Scripture as incarnation of God in human language and, they regarded it as the primary source for the man getting knowledge of God.<sup>50</sup> In their homilies as well as in poetical works, they followed a biblical oriented theology, using extensively the biblical narratives and texts either by direct references or by allusions.<sup>51</sup> Therefore Van Rompey evaluated the Syriac literature as follows:

A wider description of the exegetical activity and its literary expression should also take into account other literary genres, such as various sorts of prayers, dispute poems, etc. As Syriac literature is, above all, of a religious nature, no literary genre can be excluded from a study of the Syriac interpretation of the Bible.<sup>52</sup>

In short, the Syriac tradition is rich in the perusal of Semitico-biblical literary genre.<sup>53</sup> Modern studies draw our attention to the

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See, Sebastian Paul Brock, *Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem Prayer and the Spiritual Life, Introduction* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publication, 1987), 32; T. Jansma, "Narsai and Ephrem: Some Observations on Narsai's Homilies on Creation and Ephrem's Hymns of Faith," *Parole de l'Orient* 1 (1970), 49-68.

<sup>47</sup> Powathil, "Early Syriac Theology, 34.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Kollamparambil, *Salvation in Christ According to Jacob of Serug* (Bangalore : Darmaram Publications, 2001), 40.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 32. Aphrahat calls himself 'a disciple of the Holy Scriptures.' (Demonstrations XXII 26)

<sup>51</sup> Kollamparambil, *Salvation in Christ*, 39.

<sup>52</sup> Lucas van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," in *Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament, The History of its Interpretation*. Vol. I ed Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 641.

<sup>53</sup> Kollamparambil, *Salvation in Christ*, 39.

fact that the Peshitta, the Syriac Old Testament, was a Jewish contribution.<sup>54</sup> By the fourth century, the Jews rejected the Peshitta as it was with the Septuagint, and it became the property of the Christian church.<sup>55</sup> But the first Peshitta Old Testament contained fewer books than that of later Massoretic canon and such an influence is clear in the writings of the early Syriac fathers like Aphrahat and Ephrem.<sup>56</sup> In the case of the New Testament also, they had only the Diatessaron, Acts and ‘Apostolos, i.e., the letters of St. Paul, including Hebrews.<sup>57</sup> Around this time, the gospels and the rest of the books were translated in to Syriac, and that version is called Old Syriac.<sup>58</sup> Both the East and West Syrian churches consider Peshitta as their standard biblical text, but it is not the only translation of the Bible in to Syriac. Philexinos of Mabbug (+523), a renowned Syrian Orthodox theologian, commissioned to translate the Bible into Syriac and that version is called Philoxenia. Paul of Tella, a Syrian Orthodox Scholar, did a translation of the Old Testament from the Greek Septuagint during 614-616 and which is called Syro-Hexapla. This is very literal translation of Origen’s revised Septuagint text of Hexapla.<sup>59</sup> Jacob of Edessa (+708), a Syrian Orthodox Scholar, revised the Syriac Bible basing

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<sup>54</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 10; M Black, “The New Testament Peshitta and its Predecessors”, *Bulletin of the SNTS*, 1 (1950), 51-62. Pentateuch and some other books have some extant Aramaic Targumim and have some sort of literary relationship between the Peshitta and Targumim. But in the case of the Book of Proverbs, the relationship is reversed and the extant Targum of this book is derived from the Peshitta. See more in, Sebastian P. Brock, “An Introduction to Syriac”, in *Horizons in Semitic Studies : Articles for the Student* . ed. John H. Eaton (Birmingham : Department of Theology, 1980), 2.

<sup>55</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 20; It is difficult to determine whether they have more epistles. Most probably, they used both James and 1 John. See more in Sebastian P. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition* (Kottayam: SEERI, 1989), 12.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 26-28; Agnes Smith Lewis (ed), *The Old Syriac Gospels* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1910 ) v-vi

<sup>59</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “An Introduction to Syriac”, in *Horizons in Semitic Studies : Articles for the Student* . ed. John H. Eaton (Birmingham : Department of Theology, 1980), 2.

the Greek Septuagint and the Peshitta. In addition to that Thomas of Harkel (+616), a Syrian Orthodox scholar, also did a complete translation of Bible, which included the rest of the books.<sup>60</sup> According to Eberhard Nestle, “No branch of the Early Church has done more for the translation of the Bible into their vernacular than the Syriac-speaking.”<sup>61</sup>

#### 4. Poetical Outlook

Poetical influence is one of the most attractive features of early Syriac theology. The usage of imageries and symbols was a standard method of Syriac fathers to expound the truths of salvation.<sup>62</sup> The types and symbols, found not only in Holy Scripture but in nature also, were used to illustrate their theology considering them as the pointers to the existence and creative activity of God.<sup>63</sup> In the words of Ephrem the Syrian, “Creation gives birth to Christ in symbols, as Mary did in the flesh.”<sup>64</sup> He employed the word ܠܝܬܐ ‘*rozo*’ to denote symbol, and this word is used in the Syriac tradition to indicate sacraments too. It reveals the aspect of divine reality hidden in the type or symbol and therefore, *rozo* is the hidden power or meaning of reality.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, Sebastian Brock pointed out that the Syriac writers of the golden age (fourth to seventh Centuries) of the Syriac literature used mainly two types of imagery as means of theological expression, namely, firstly letter imagery and secondly clothing metaphors.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Brock, *The Bible*, 12-14.

<sup>61</sup> Eberhard Nestle, “Syriac Versions,” *Hastings Dictionary of Bible*, vol IV (Edinburgh/New York, 1947), 645.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Murray, “The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem’s Theology”, *Parole de l’Orient* 6-7 (1975-1976), 1-20.

<sup>63</sup> Powathil, “Early Syriac Theology”, 43.

<sup>64</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 6.8; Kathleen E. McVey *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 290; Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>66</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition”, in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* Ed. Margot Schmidt and Carl Friedrich Geyer (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1982), 11.

The Syriac Fathers used both prose and poetry as a suitable vehicle for their theological description. For example, Aphrahat's demonstrations were written in prose, but used parallelism, rhythmic phrases, syllabic patterns, paradigmatic catenae, chiasmus, thesis-antithesis etc.<sup>67</sup> The rich application of poetic titles to Jesus can be traced even from the early Syriac literatures like Acts of Judas Thomas.<sup>68</sup> They approach the reality as an engagement of life and wonder involving a mutual interaction and participation. In the words of Hugo Rahners,

Wherever the fathers unfold their theology with its veils of imagery, we discover a wealth of symbols and of truths clothed in symbols, which could give new life to our modern dogmatic expressions, perhaps still all too much dominated as they are by apologetics and canon law.<sup>69</sup>

The theological approach of the Syriac fathers is aptly agreed with the well-known definition of a theologian by Evagrius of Pontus: "If you are a theologian, you will pray in truth; if you pray in truth, you will be a theologian."

## 5. Distinctive Exegetical Method

One of the main features of the Syriac Christianity is its distinctive biblical exegetical tradition. The early Syriac fathers like Aphrahat and Ephrem showed a keen interest in the biblical interpretation, and they tried to re construct historical events in the Bible.<sup>70</sup> They interpret the Bible its plain, literal sense, but there is no evidence of dependence on Antiochan School.<sup>71</sup> The early

<sup>67</sup> Powathil, "Early Syriac Theology", 45; M. M. Maude, "Rhythmic Patterns in the Homilies of Aphrahat," *Anglican Theological Review* 17 (1935), 225-233.

<sup>68</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 27-28;

<sup>69</sup> Hugo Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche: Die Ekklesiologie der Vater* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1964), 8; English version from Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 27-28.

<sup>70</sup> Lucas van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," in *Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament, The History of its Interpretation*. Vol. I ed Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 616.

<sup>71</sup> Pierre Yousif, "Exegetical Principles of St. Ephraem of Nisibis," in E.A.Livingstone (ed), *Studia Patristica* Vol. 18 (1990), 298; Thomas Kuzhuppil, "The Patristic

Syriac Christianity was much influenced by the Jewish exegetical tradition and their writings are ‘thoroughly Semitic’ in its idioms, imagery and language.<sup>72</sup> Both Rabbinical exegetical methods and the Midrashic way of exegesis had an effect on their exegetical method.<sup>73</sup> But after the fourth Century, the influence of Antiochean way of exegesis became a part of Syriac exegesis and both of them did not repudiate the literal sense of the Bible, in contrast to the allegorical interpretation.<sup>74</sup> Under any circumstances, they are not ready to reject the historical or literal sense of the Bible and which is a distinctive character of Antiochean Exegesis.<sup>75</sup> They developed a higher spiritual sense (*theoria*) without negating the underlying literal sense of the text.<sup>76</sup> While the western mind prefer for a logical order, the Semitic writers follow their argument not by exhausting topics successively, but “with frequent *inclusio*, circling round on itself like a conversation round a fire, gradually

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Foundation of the East Syriac Theology,” *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, Pauly Maniyattu, ed (Satna: Ephrem’s Publications, 2007), 56.

<sup>72</sup> Carmel McCarthy, “Gospel Exegesis from a Semitic Church: Ephrem’s Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount” in *Tradition of the Text: Studies offered to Dominique Barthelemy in Celebration of his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, G.J. Norton and S. Pisano (eds) (Freiburg and Göttingen : Univeritätsverlag /Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) 120; See also in Elena Narinskaya, *Ephrem-a ‘Jewish ‘Sage’: A Comparison of the Exegetical Writings of St. Ephrem the Syrian and Jewish Traditions*, PhD Diss. (University of Durham: Durham, 2007), 52

<sup>73</sup> Pierre Yousif, “Exegetical Principles of St. Ephraem of Nisibis,” 297; Sidney H. Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery: Reading the Bible with St. Ephrem the Syrian* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1997), 15.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Kuzhuppil, “The Patristic Foundation of the East Syriac Theology,” *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, Pauly Maniyattu, ed (Satna: Ephrem’s Publications, 2007), 56.

<sup>75</sup> Sten Hidal, “Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Antiochene School with its Prevalent Literal and Historical Method,” in *Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*. Vol. I. From the Beginnings to the Middle of Ages ed Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 547; Dimitri Z. Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of his Old Testament Exegesis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 105.

<sup>76</sup> Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 67. The word *qewri,a* means ‘the act of seeing’. Therefore, the Antiocheans used it to indicate the prophetic vision of the Bible and used it as principle of their hermeneutics.

advancing and going deeper.”<sup>77</sup> All these elements of the exegetical traditions are continued thereafter in both East and West Syrian traditions.

## 6. Enthusiasm for Asceticism

The enthusiasm for asceticism is another major feature of Syriac Christianity. Some scholars called this earlier tendency as ‘enocratism’<sup>78</sup>. In the writings of both Aphrahat and Ephrem, there is ample evidence of a peculiar Syrian ascetical life style, in which a life consecrated to Christ as a virgin (ܒܫܘܠܐ *bsulo*, fem. ܒܬܘܠܐ *Btulta*) or ‘single one’ (ܐܝܬܝܢܐ *ihidaya*).<sup>79</sup> It was a distinctive practice of a personal ascetic commitment at baptism and even more than that at one time only those who vowed virginity or marital abstinence were admitted to baptism.<sup>80</sup> Such a community is called ܒܢܝ ܩܢܘܡܐ *bnai qnomo*.<sup>81</sup> Though they recognized the dignity of marriage, ascetical life was observed as the highest charism, and it is considered as life of ‘holiness’ or ‘consecration’ (ܩܕܕܝܫܘܬܐ *qaddiṣuta*).<sup>82</sup> In such a way, there was a distinctive monastic life style among the Syrians even before the emergence of monasticism as we know it. Sebastian Brock called it Proto

<sup>77</sup> Murry, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 2; Powathil, “Early Syriac Theology”, 43.

<sup>78</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 11; Buda Lorenzo, *Mar Ephrem and the Early Syriac Ascetic Tradition*, diss (Kottayam: Mahatma Gandhi University, 2016), 38.

<sup>79</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources”, *JSS* 30 (1979), 217.

<sup>80</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 14-15; Robert Murray, “The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church,” *New Testament Studies* 21 (1974-1975), 59-80.

<sup>81</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East Vol. I Origin of Asceticism and Early Monasticism in Persia* (Louvain: Secretariat Du Corpus SCO, 1958), 12-13; Alexander Golitzin, “A Monastic Setting for the Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel,” *To Train His Soul in Books : Syriac Asceticism in Early Christianity*, Robin Darling Young & Monica J. Blanchard (ed) (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 74-75.

<sup>82</sup> Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 12; Sebastian P. Brock, “Early Syriac Asceticism”, *Numen* Vol 20, Fasc. 1(1973), 7.

monasticism.<sup>83</sup> In later centuries, the Syriac monasticism was heavily influenced by the Egyptian monasticism. As per the evidences provided by Arthur Vööbus, the cradle of monastic movement was not in Egypt, but in Syria, especially in Mesopotamia. In his words,

“...the cradle of monastic movement stood in Mesopotamia where the first anchorites appeared near Nisibis. From this form of life moved to Egypt. Ascetics in the deserts in Egypt betray their true origin through their name *abba* “father”, which is a Syriac term. And the Greek term is a literal translation of the Syriac *ihidaya* “a single one.”<sup>84</sup>

The driving force of the asceticism is very much influenced the Syriac theology which centred on the whole hearted discipleship of Jesus Christ.<sup>85</sup> It is a dominant theme in almost all the Syriac literature.<sup>86</sup> Arthur Vööbus illustrates the ascetic character of early Syriac Christianity as follows:

Such an estimate of Christian life is best reflected in the military terminology they employed. The terms adequate for their theology and practice were: ‘struggle’, ‘fight’, ‘battle’ and ‘war’. This gives a taste of the military thought world in which these warriors of God lived. The important thing to notice is that these requirements were not reserved only to the consecrated heroes of the religious life, i.e., for the elite among the ordinary believers, but were made normatively for the

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<sup>83</sup> Brock, *Spirituality*, 49-59; Ignacio Pena, *The Amazing Life of the Syrian Monks in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Trans. James Sullivan (Milano: Holy Land Publications, 1992), 11

<sup>84</sup> Arthur Vööbus, “The Contribution of Ancient Syrian Christianity to West European Culture,” *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 2 (1988), 8. He argues that the ancient Syrian community was the hotbed of vital stimuli behind the European monasticism, especially in Italy, Gaul, and Germany. Irish monasticism followed this typical model of Syrian monasticism, and its church life itself reflects this particular physiognomy. See more in the above mentioned article.

<sup>85</sup> G. Kretschmar, “Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung frühchristlicher Askese“, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 61 (1964), 24-27; Powathil, “Early Syriac Theology”, 41.

<sup>86</sup> Powathil, “Early Syriac Theology, 41.

ordinary members of the members of the ancient Syrian church.<sup>87</sup>

The share of the Syrian monasticism in the literary culture and in teaching and the growth of the liturgical families of the East and West were tremendous.<sup>88</sup> The Syrian monks played a key role at the time of theological controversies and in the development of the theology.<sup>89</sup> According to Vööbus' evaluation,

In various ways it made a real contribution to the treasury of spiritual and intellectual culture. Particularly important are the activities in book-production, in the creation of literature, in the pedagogical field by their establishment of schools and in the field of learning and scholarship—many monasteries were the centres of learning, craft and art. There is no area of spiritual culture that has escaped the area of Syrian monasticism, not even the history of the New Testament text.<sup>90</sup>

## 7. Theological and Liturgical Peculiarity

Robert Taft highlighted the view that the eastern spirituality, theology and ecclesiology are centred on liturgy and it has never known a separation from it.<sup>91</sup> The West Syrian Church of Antioch followed the liturgical tradition of Antioch; whereas the East Syrians practised the Edessian rite and organized themselves in the Persian Empire. Macober considered the East Syrian rite as 'the product of a fusion of Judeo-Christianity with the Assyro-Babylonian and Iranian cultures.'<sup>92</sup> Not only its language, but its thought categories and imageries also reflect its close relationship

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<sup>87</sup> Vööbus, *History of Asceticism Vol. I*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 388- 414.

<sup>89</sup> Cornelia B. Horn, *Asceticism and Christological Controversy in Fifth-Century Palestine: The Career of Peter the Iberian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2-3.

<sup>90</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East Vol. II : Early Monasticism in Mesopotamia and Syria* (Louvain: Secretariat Du Corpus SCO, 1960), v-vi.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Taft, "The Continuity of Tradition in a World of Liturgical Change: The Eastern Liturgical Experience," *Seminarium*, Vol. 27 (1975), 451-452.

<sup>92</sup> Macober, "A Theory on the Origins of the Syrian, 238-239.

with Jews of Mesopotamia.<sup>93</sup> The most important factors that contributed to the theological development among the Syrians was the presence of a theological school in Edessa, earlier in Nisibis.<sup>94</sup>

One of the significant features of Syriac theology is its symbolic character.<sup>95</sup> The Syriac fathers employed a number of imageries and symbols to explain their theological views. They understood the truths of salvation from the Scripture as well as nature and both of them became their sources for their types, symbols and paradoxes. The Syrians have reluctance to speculative methodology in theological exposition and, they developed method to explain the divine realities in a more cyclic way or circling round the matter through the imageries in order to advance gradually to the centre.<sup>96</sup> To approach the Scriptures using symbolic method is transmitted to the Syriac Christianity from Judaism. According to J. Danielou, three worlds played their distinctive role in making of the Christian church: three cultures, three visions and three expressions of truth—the Jewish, the Hellenistic and the Latin. And each of them created its own distinctive theology.<sup>97</sup> The Syriac theology is the first form of the Christian theology, which is Semitic in structure and eschatological and apocalyptic in character.<sup>98</sup>

The Christological interpretation caused much dispute and divisions among the Syrians. The early Syriac fathers explained their Christological perspectives without using any metaphysical notions. In order to define the relation of divinity and humanity of Christ, they illustrated the unity by preserving both natures without any mixture and confusion. In the words of Ephrem, “He gave us

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<sup>93</sup> Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, xiii

<sup>94</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *The Statutes of the School of Nisibis* (Stockholm: ETSE, 1962), 13; Mattam, “Historical Setting of the East Syriac Theology,” 16.

<sup>95</sup> Powathil, “Early Syriac Theology”, 43.

<sup>96</sup> Powathil, “Early Syriac Theology”, 43.

<sup>97</sup> Jean Danielou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, Vol. 1 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 1.

<sup>98</sup> Powathil, “Early Syriac Theology”, 32.

divinity. We give him humanity.”<sup>99</sup> But for the Antiochian theologians like Theodore of Mopsuestia, followed a *Logos-Anthropos* Christology in which the full humanity was assumed by the divine Logos with its capacity to operate autonomously.<sup>100</sup> Their explanation of the mystery of the incarnation was their attempt to preserve the properties of both divine and human nature of Christ, considering His manhood as an instrument for His salvific act.<sup>101</sup>

## Conclusion

Syriac Christianity reflects the Semitic outlook and patterns of thought which can be considered as their Syriac patrimonial. The usage of the Aramaic language, in its modern forms, itself reveals its distinctive position among the various Christian traditions. Their cultural and linguistic proximity to the biblical world and tradition helped them to continue the Judeo-Christian theology, spirituality and liturgical styles. They followed a distinctive biblical exegetical method, which was also highly influenced by the Jewish exegetical tradition, and it showed no interest in Hellenistic speculative interpretative methods. Early Syriac theology was poetical in character and it was expressed in types and symbols taken both from the Scripture and nature. Therefore, their theology and liturgy are filled with biblical imageries and allusions to the biblical figures and persons. In addition to that, their enthusiasm for monasticism also contributed a lot for the formation of a distinctive life style and spirituality among the Syrians. All these features reveal to us the various factors that contributed for the development of the Syriac spirituality and its

<sup>99</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 154.

<sup>100</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, Vol. 1. trans. John Bowden (London: A.R. Mowbrey and Company Ltd, 1975), 219-248; 329-360.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Kuzhuppil, “The Patristic Foundation of the East Syriac Theology”, in *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, Pauly Maniyattu, ed (Satna: St. Ephrem’s Publication, 2007), 62.

relevance and unique position among other Christian spiritual traditions.

## **Engaging the Intersectional Experiences of Ruth as a Migrant Labourer in the Book of Ruth and Indian Women Migrant Labourers**

Rency Thomas George<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

India's history is intricately woven with the tales of migration, with waves of migrants from around the world contributing to the nation's narrative. The poignant images of jobless migrant labourers trekking back home, carrying their meagre possessions in worn-out rucksacks, have exposed the harsh reality of these "disenfranchised invisible" internal migrants. In the Indian context, among the lives of migrant labourers, one can observe a web of exclusionary structures stemming from the intersection of various oppressions, including those related to gender, caste, ethnicity,

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disability, sexuality, and more. Ruth as a book has been received by communities seeking emancipation that ranges from feminist concerns of agency of women, solidarity under multiple levels of oppression and subjugation, and negotiating a place in ‘man’s world, to more liberationist agendas of social justice and equity in the context of migrant labourers. This article embarks on a profound exploration, an interaction between the ancient tale of Ruth and the present-day realities of Indian women migrant labourers journeying through the intersections of their experiences, navigating the complexities of ethnicity, gender, caste, class, religion, language and so on. Moreover, the paper essays to reimagine a vital Christian response in a world where migration is both a historical reality and a pressing contemporary concern.

## **1.Methodology**

The paper employs intersectionality to engage with the multi-axial issues that the migrant women face and to read the book of Ruth to integrate the same to the contemporary context of the migrants. According to Grace Ji – Sun Kim and Susan Shaw, “Intersectionality is a tool for analysis that takes into account the simultaneously experienced multiple social locations, identities, and institutions that shape individual and collective experience within the hierarchically structured systems of power and privilege.”<sup>2</sup> Intersectionality can be perceived as a lens for identifying and locating the dynamics of gender race, social class, sexual identity and any other form of differences that work concomitantly to define individuals, communities and social institutions within multiple relationships of power.<sup>3</sup> Vivian May

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<sup>2</sup> Grace Ji – Sun Kim and Susan Shaw, *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Patricia Hill Collins has given another dimension to intersectionality with her own theory of the ‘matrix of domination. “Intersectional paradigm reminds us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. In contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are organised.” According to her in any context the matrix of domination works through four interconnected domains of power; the structural, the disciplinary, the hegemonic and the interpersonal. She further explicates that each domain has a particular role to play. The structural domain construes and materializes

defines intersectionality as a “justice-oriented approach to be taken up for social analysis and critique for political strategizing and organising, for generating new ideas, and for excavating suppressed ones, all with an eye toward disrupting dominance and challenging systematic inequality.”<sup>4</sup>

One comes across the intersection of many identities of gender, race, ethnicity and so on which had multifaceted impact in the lives of the people of Israel.<sup>5</sup> Therefore such an approach may help one to identify the multiple layered of subjugation which ultimately would result in the othering of individuals and groups.<sup>6</sup> The overtly simplistic model of oppressors and oppressed is not sufficient to address the intricacies of the matrix of domination which construes the identity of individuals and communities.

## 2. Definition of Migration and Migrant Workers

Migration literally means the relocation of peoples from one place to another place.<sup>7</sup> Irudaya Rajan and Didar Singh defines

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various forms of oppression, whereas the disciplinary domain maintains it. The structural domain for Collins gives the rationale for the oppression and the interpersonal domain reiterates the epistemology of oppression in the lived experiences and the individual consciousness that perpetuate it. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Vivian M. May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 228.

<sup>5</sup> M.C. Thomas, *Othering and Embodiment: Intersectional Imaginations in the Old Testament Narratives* (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2021), xv.

<sup>6</sup> Gale A. Yee says, “In the politics of power and empowerment people could simultaneously be both oppressors and oppressed, powerful and powerless, because of their different and shifting locations in a matrix of domination.” Gale A. Yee, *The Hebrew Bible; Feminist and Intersectional Perspectives*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 10.

<sup>7</sup> It is a rational decision made by an individual to move from a less advantageous situation, to a more advantageous one after weighing risks and benefits. Bill Jordan and Frnak Duvell, *Migration: The Boundaries of Equality and Justice* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2015), 26. Migration can be categorised into various forms. Generally, there are two basic factors of migration: i) Distance ii) Duration. From the distance point of view, migration can be classified under four categories: i) Rural to Rural ii) Rural to Urban iii) Urban to Rural iv) Urban to Urban. Besides, migration can be divided into following categories: i) Intra-district, ii) Inter-district iii) Intra-state iv) Inter-state v) National and International. From the duration point of view migration can be studied

migration as natural, continuous, and spatial phenomenon in which people move from one place to another, alone or with others, for a short visit or for a long period of time.<sup>8</sup> This term generally refers to a person who is engaged in low-wage in a nation/state in which he/she does not belong to and on the other hand is not used to describe people who are getting high wages even if they are migrants.

### 3. Migration in India: An Overview

Migration of labour started in India during the period of British colonial rule. It was aimed at meeting the requirements of capitalist's development both in India and abroad.<sup>9</sup> Agriculture is the main source of the population of India which is itself largely dependent on the precipitation and distribution of rainfall.<sup>10</sup>

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under three categories: i) Casual-temporary ii) Periodic- seasonal iii) Permanent. Migration in developing countries is understood in terms of push and pull factors, respectively. The motives of migration are classified as push factors (which emphasize on the situation at the origin, that is, place from which migration started) and pull factors (which emphasize on the situation at the destination). Unemployment, flood, earthquake, drought, (i.e., natural calamities) etc, are the push factors. Pull factors that determine migration such as attraction of city life, for education, health, development of backward community, job opportunities and training facilities and so on. The push and pull factors of migration among tribal and lower income groups of population are categorized under the following heads (i) Ecological factor (ii) Demographic factor (iii) Social and Cultural factors. Nandan Kumar and R. B. Bhagat. "Livelihood Diversification and Out-Migration" in *Migrants, Mobility and Citizenship in India* edited by Ashwani Kumar and R.B. Bhagat (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 120.

<sup>8</sup> A. Didar Singh and S. Irudaya Rajan, *Politics of Migration: Indian Emigration in a Globalized World* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

<sup>9</sup> The labour was moved from the hinterland to the sites of mining, plantation, and manufactories. It was recruited from the rural areas and regulated in such a manner that women and children remained in the villages while males migrated to the modern sector. Nandan Kumar and R.B. Bhagat. "Livelihood Diversification and Out-Migration," 122.

<sup>10</sup> The various causes of migration of labour, like agricultural poverty, the decline of village and cottage industries, poverty of the people, drought affected villages in which absentee of work for about six months per annum, and the existence of a large size of small cultivators whose holdings are extremely inadequate and landless labour in economically weaker sections of the community, and oppressed caste people the children and migrant workers. John Mohan Razu, "Changing Contour of Agriculture and Shifting Nature of Labour in the Context of Liberalization, Privatization and

However internal migration is often associated with the urbanization, modernization and industrialization debates in India.<sup>11</sup> In addition, migration is gendered and segmented depending on various caste/tribe, gender and regional identities.

According to the most recent Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS),<sup>12</sup> during the July 2020-21 period, the nationwide migration rate stood at 28.9 percent, with males migrating at a rate of 10.7 percent and females at 47.9 percent. The data indicated that nearly 50 percent of male migrants originated from rural areas, while 47 percent came from urban regions. Among females, 78.8 percent were from rural areas, with 21 percent hailing from urban centres. In total, 73.4 percent of all migrants originated in rural areas, while 25.9 percent came from urban centres. The issues faced by the migrants are beyond the scope of this paper<sup>13</sup> and hence the paper further deals with women migrant labourers in India.

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Globalization in *Forced Migration: Problems, Challenges and Theological Responses* edited by Sigamoney Shakespeare and Indukuri John Mohan Razu (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2023), 101.

<sup>11</sup> The trajectory of migration has taken an interesting turn in the present economy because urban growth is considered as development and the country is promoting smart cities.

<sup>12</sup> PLFS survey cited in *Forced Migration: Problems, Challenges and Theological Responses* edited by Sigamoney Shakespeare and Indukuri John Mohan Razu (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2023), xviii. The last census happened in 2011 and there have been tremendous changes taken place in the migration pattern after that and hence the data is included in the present study.

<sup>13</sup> To detail a few in general, the migrant laborers often endure low wages, long working hours, and hazardous conditions, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by employers as they often work in sectors such as construction, agriculture, and informal labour. Most of them face discrimination based on their migrant status, ethnicity, or gender, limiting their access to opportunities and services. Many migrants lack access to social safety nets, such as healthcare and insurance, making them susceptible to economic shocks and health crises. Inadequate housing and poor living conditions are common among migrant laborers, affecting their overall well-being. Migrant children often miss out on quality education due to frequent relocations, perpetuating cycles of poverty. Migrants may not have proper legal documentation, making them susceptible to legal issues and deportation. Extended periods of separation from families can lead to emotional and social challenges. Limited access to healthcare services leaves migrants at risk of health issues, and they often lack information about available resources. Migrant laborers may feel socially excluded and marginalized in their host communities, impacting their sense of belonging and well-being. R.B. Bhagat, Priyanka

## **4. Migration and Gender: Multilevel Oppressions Migrant Women Labourers Encounter**

There was a quantum leap in the growth of female migrants from 0.4 percent in 1991 to 7.5 percent in 2011.<sup>14</sup> The rate was twice that of male migration. According to the Census of India 2011 out of the total inter-state migrants in India, approximately 46% were women. The recent statistics that are cited in the paper reflects the rapid pace in which the trend changes in this respect.

### **4.1 Feminization of Migration**

The patriarchal power relations continue to be embedded in religious, caste, place, and gender-based identities, despite increased urbanization and mobility. Working women ought to take care of both household chores and workplace duties, have little control over their salary/wages, and are dependent on men folk for their movement.<sup>15</sup> Within this system of uneven power dynamics, young girls and women have limited agency, and their movements are often dictated by their dependence on the male-dominated order.<sup>16</sup>

### **4.2 Labour and Women Migrants**

Women are typically marginalized in the labour market, resulting in weak bargaining power, which makes them more susceptible to employer-imposed flexible work policies.<sup>17</sup> Women are compelled to engage in flexible work arrangements that often

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Dhillon, & Tan Sagar, *Migration and Health in India: Current Scenario and Issues* (New Delhi: Springer, 2014), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in S. Irudaya Rajan and Sumeetha M. "Migrant Odyesseys," in *Hand Book of Internal Migration in India* edited by Irudaya Rajan and Sumeetha M (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2020), 4.

<sup>15</sup> R.B. Bhagat, "Migration and Right to the City," in *Migrants, Mobility and Citizenship in India*, Ashwani Kumar and R.B. Bhagat, ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 37.

<sup>16</sup> Geertje Lycklama A Nijeholt, "Women in International Migration," in *A Commitment to the World's Women: Perspective on Development for Beijing and Beyond*, edited by Noleen Heyzer (UNIFEM: New York, 1995), 54-55.

<sup>17</sup> Maria Thorin, "The Gender Dimension of Globalization," in *Division of International Trade and Integration* (Santiago: December 2001), 24.

do not align with their domestic responsibilities and at times push them into unemployment too.

### 4.3 The Feminization of Poverty

Women experience poverty more severely than men, leading to a disproportionate representation of female-headed households among the impoverished.<sup>18</sup> Women and girls also face greater challenges accessing essential resources like food, education, and healthcare. Environmental degradation and infrastructure issues impact women's lives more significantly due to their responsibilities such as water fetching and food preparation, leading to declining health.<sup>19</sup> Gender-specific inequalities, such as unequal inheritance rights, limited job opportunities, and restricted access to assets and skills, contribute to women's economic insecurity and vulnerability during crises.

### 4.4 Women Migrant Labourers and Unsafe Environments

Studies also show that women migrant labourers are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation in the work place than their male and the non-migrant counter-parts.<sup>20</sup> Further, lack of bus services in non-peak hours, roads designed without considering women's safety needs, or lack of streetlights are some of the other examples.<sup>21</sup> The migrant labourers mostly live in temporary and unhygienic settlements without proper safety measures which make the women vulnerable to sexual exploitations. There is no proper sanitation for women and their children jeopardizing their safety and security.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Arensenla Jamir, "Feminization of Poverty in India: A Socio-Ethical Critique," *Bangalore Theological Forum* XLVII/1 (June 2015), 65.

<sup>19</sup> Arensenla Jamir, "Feminization of Poverty in India: A Socio-Ethical Critique," 66.

<sup>20</sup> Exclusions and deprivations are very much evident within the city as every fifth urban dweller is living in a slum, about 90 percent working in socially unprotected informal sector with very low level of wages and salary.

<sup>21</sup> One must not forget the catastrophe in the case of *Nirbhaya*, - a migrant woman who was waiting for public transport for hours in a bus stop in Delhi, was trapped in a private bus and was raped and killed.

<sup>22</sup> Reji Samuel, "Migration, Church, and Theology," *Bangalore Theological Forum* XLVII/1 (June 2015), 106.

## **4.5 Interplay of Sexuality and Identity; stigmatizing the Women Migrants**

Traditionally, patriarchy has always been concerned with women's unbridled sexuality. Coupled with her sexual identity is her ethnic and community identity as certain communities have historically been represented as promiscuous and sexually available. Female sexuality is complicated and additionally constituted by caste, class, ethnic, and community markers.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the hostility faced by migrant women in the city/workplace is deeply sexual, casteist, and racial in nature.<sup>24</sup>

## **4.6 Intersections of Caste and Gender**

The intersection of caste and gender plays a significant role in influencing migration patterns in India. Despite the weakening of the link between caste and occupation in contemporary India, the caste system continues to be characterized by inequality of opportunity and outcome. Many surveys highlight that there have been longstanding limitations on women's participation in labour migration, particularly among the dominant castes. These restrictions are both cultural, and material foundations, as noted by de Haan.<sup>25</sup> Dalit individuals were more likely to work on small plots of land or be landless. Conversely, dominant caste families, primarily landholders, typically had women staying behind to

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<sup>23</sup> The middle class, dominant caste Hindu female body is at the apex of this tension, while the tribal/ Dalit/ Christian female body is the 'promiscuous other' and the Muslim woman is the oppressed, 'baby-producing machine' residing at the fringes of the society

<sup>24</sup> Panchali Ray, "Nursing Labour, Employment Regimes," in *Migration, Gender, and Care Economy* ed; S. Irudaya Rajan and N. Neetha (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 58.

<sup>25</sup> A. de Haan, *Unsettled Settlers: Migrant Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Calcutta* (Hiversum: Verloren, 1994), 27. For instance, in the context of the Gounders, a dominant caste in Tamil Nadu, Heyer observed that women only tended to migrate when households had transitioned away from agriculture. J. Heyer, "Rural Gounders on the Move in Western Tamil Nadu: 1981-82 to 2008-09, in *The Changing Nilage in India: Insights from Longitudinal Research* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 328. In the Konkan region of western India, it is observed that historically, oppressed castes and artisans had higher rates of female out-migration compared to other castes.

manage the household and fields.<sup>26</sup> However, the broader relationship between caste and out-migration holds true for both genders.

## **5. Book of Ruth: Intersectional Exploration of the Struggles and Social Agencies and Liminalities in the Context of Migrant Labourers**

In the light of above discussions, the paper further singles out the book of Ruth as it conjoins issues of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, widowhood, class, and religion that allows the readers to read the stories of the women migrants in Indian context in the light of the multilayered narratives of Ruth. The narrative of Ruth depicts women struggling to survive in a male-dominated world, shedding light on the political agency of women and emphasizing the significance of gender, race, ethnicity and social status.

### **5.1 Ruth as a Migrant Labourer: Intersections of Gender, Ethnicity, Race, and Religion**

Within the book, Ruth is portrayed as a migrant labourer, where her identity as a foreigner, a Moabite, and a widow, as well as her gender roles, play a pivotal role in understanding her role as a migrant worker.<sup>27</sup> Hence an intersectional approach is required to bring out the nuances of the oppressions that a migrant labourer then underwent.

The term “foreigner” distances Ruth from the women around her because in the context of Israel, the term “foreigner” is exactly the term used to stigmatize married women who either engage in adultery or even in prostitution.<sup>28</sup> This issue of the foreigner takes

<sup>26</sup> I. Mazumdar, Neetha N. and Agnihotri I, “Migration and Gender in India,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 68 (10), 54-64.

<sup>27</sup> Gale A. Yee, “She Stood in Tears Amid the Alien Corn’: Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority,” in *They Were All Together in One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, ed., Randall C. Bailey, Tat-Siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segavio (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 119.

<sup>28</sup> Paderborn B. Lang, “Nokri,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. IX, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 428. To be called “a foreigner” is equivalent of a

centre stage, especially in the post-exilic setting of the book, where the presence of foreigners among the Israelites became a contentious topic during the fifth century.<sup>29</sup> By labelling her as a “foreigner” Ruth experiences a more significant amount of inequality among women.

Ruth’s status as a ‘widow’ pushes her into a vulnerable situation which is oppressing and marginalising. The Hebrew term that designates a widow *אַלְמָנָה* (*almanah*) describes a legal position without parallel in the modern languages.<sup>30</sup> It is possible that the popular belief was that she was somehow responsible for the death of the husband which would explain why widowhood was looked upon as something shameful.<sup>31</sup> The fate of a woman is determined by men, particularly their husbands, sons or even the elders of the town.<sup>32</sup> In the Israelite context, a married woman when becomes a widow undergoes a class change through the misfortune occurred.<sup>33</sup> The socially ascribed status of Ruth’s identity as “a widow” shows the lack of power, as she has to control the “social stratification” that is dictated by the law of her time.<sup>34</sup>

Ruth is prominently described as a Moabite, a member of a negatively perceived outgroup.<sup>35</sup> The negative portrayals of Moab

racial epithet meant to both guard men from interacting from the “polluted women,” and imposed on women to constraint their sexuality (1Kgs 11:1; Ezra 10:2; Nehemiah 13:26,27).

<sup>29</sup> Andre LaCocque, *Ruth; A Continental Commentary*, trans. K.C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>30</sup> The Hebrew term *almanah* refers to a) a widow; b) without a son, son-in-law, or brother-in-law. Andre LaCocque, *Ruth; A Continental Commentary*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Andre LaCocque, *Ruth; A Continental Commentary*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, “Ruth,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 84.

<sup>33</sup> Gerald D. Berreman, “Race, Caste, and Other Invidious Distinctions in Social Stratification,” *Race* 13, no.4 (April 1972): 387.

<sup>34</sup> Martha T. Roth, “Gender and Law: A Case Study from Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, eds. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 174.

<sup>35</sup> This label “functions like a stereotyping device that discriminates the centre and the periphery, the superior and the inferior.” Sin-lung Tong, “The Key to Successful Migration? Rereading Ruth’s Confession (1:16-17) Through the Lens of Bhabha’s

can be traced back to the biblical representations of Moabite origins.<sup>36</sup> Another aspect is the association of the seduction of Israelite men by Moabite women with their supposed sinful origin. The prophetic oracles, certain parts, such as ‘*ndd*’ (to flee) in Isaiah 16:2 and ‘*aroer*’ (juniper in the wilderness) in Jeremiah 48:6, are used to describe Moab as a land marked by scarcity of food and water, homelessness and destitution.<sup>37</sup> Musa Dube points out that these contrasting images paint Moab as synonymous with barrenness, famine and death.<sup>38</sup> According to tradition, Israelite families could receive land equivalent to what a yoke of oxen could plough in a day (I Sam 14:14) or the amount required for sowing a specific quantity of seed (Lev. 27:16). However, Ruth’s options in this context were distinct; as a foreigner, she did not fit the mould of an Israelite widow.<sup>39</sup> While the law did not overlook foreigners, it particularly excluded Moabites. Ruth’s birth status as “the Moabite” prevents her inclusion, and therefore, cannot assimilate in the Israelite society even though she remains faithful to Naomi or even goes to the extreme of belief in one deity for another.<sup>40</sup>

Ruth also serves as an example of the unpaid and ceaseless work patterns of migrant labourers. She tirelessly gleaned in the

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Mimicry,” in *Reading Ruth in Asia*, eds. Jione Havea and Peter H.W. Lau (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 41.

<sup>36</sup> Chin Ming Stephen Lim, “Ruth as Ezperanza? A Trans-textual Reading of Ruth with Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore” in *Faith Class and Labour: Intersectional Approaches in Global Context* edited by Jin Yoing Choi and Joerg Riger (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 132. Moabites are depicted as descendants of an illicit union born between their primordial father Lot and his daughters. (Genesis 19: 1-38).

<sup>37</sup> Chin Ming Stephen Lim, “Ruth as Ezperanza?,” 132.

<sup>38</sup> Musa W. Dube, “Divining Ruth for International Relations” in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, edited by Musa W. Dube (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 186.

<sup>39</sup> A widow could return to her fathers’ house (Gen.38:11), if she was allowed to return, for this was not an obligation except in the case of a daughter (Lev. 22:13). She could also evidently remarry, except in the case of a daughter from a priestly family (Ezek 44:22). Often, she lived on charity, as protected by the Law and the exhortations of the prophets (Duet. 10:18).

<sup>40</sup> Christian Fervel, “Introduction: The Discourse on Intermarriage in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Mixed Marriages: Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period*, ed. Christian Fervel (New York: T&T Clark International, 2011), 133.

fields until evening and processed her gleanings (2:17), underscoring the extensive labour women undertook for household sustenance.

Ruth reiterates the need for the intersectional approach in dealing with the migrant labourers struggles. The intersectional identity of Ruth as ‘a Moabite,’ ‘a foreigner,’ and ‘a widow’ embodies her as the ‘other’ in the Israelite society.

## 5.2 The Book of Ruth: An Antidote to Exclusivism

Scholars have explored the possibility of women’s authorship in the transmission of the Ruth narrative. Fokkelein van Dijk-Hemmes presents three arguments to support this: 1) an intent that deviates from the typical androcentric perspective, 2) a redefinition of reality from a woman’s viewpoint and 3) definable differences between the male and female viewpoints.<sup>41</sup> For Phyllis Trible the book of Ruth explicates women characters who represent women in culture, women against culture and women transforming culture.<sup>42</sup> Further one notices a deconstruction of the sexual roles. For Jon Berquist the book of Ruth is “subversive” in every sense as the women assume the roles and responsibilities of men.<sup>43</sup>

The main argument for dating the book post-exotically is its engagement with post-exilic issues concerning the inclusion of foreigners.<sup>44</sup> The earlier emphasis on challenging the limitations of traditional ethnic barriers might have been relevant during the eras of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Book of Ruth revisits the story, challenging the purity perspectives of the late pre-exilic Deuteronomistic History, with its warnings against relationships with local Canaanites.<sup>45</sup> Kwok Pui-lan notes that the explicit

<sup>41</sup> Fokkelein van Dijk-Hemmes, “Ruth: A Product of Women’s Culture?” *A Feminist Companion to Ruth*, edited by A. Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 134.

<sup>42</sup> Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 196.

<sup>43</sup> Jon I. Berquist, “Role Differentiation in the Book of Ruth,” *JSOT* 57 (1993), 24.

<sup>44</sup> Frederic W. Bush, “Ruth- Esther,” *WBC* (Dallas: Word Books, 1996), 30.

<sup>45</sup> Alice M. Sinnott, *Ruth: An Earth Bible Commentary* (London: T&T Clarke, 2022), 4.

concept of Yahweh's preference for Israel over other nations and people developed relatively late, particularly in the Deuteronomistic history toward the end of the seventh century BCE.<sup>46</sup> Recognizing the repeated need to challenge narrow exclusivism in the ancient community's life should remind readers that the story of Ruth addresses a perennial issue in human communities.

### 5.3 The Book of Ruth: Envisaging Intersectional Paradigms of Liminalities

Despite being uprooted from her own culture land, and derogatorily labelled as "the Moabite," "a widow," "a woman," and "a foreigner," Ruth upholding her social agency, critically negotiated with the circumstances and people and built a liminal identity to flourish in the new nation. Honig suggests that it could be a marker for two familiar moments in the immigration dynamics, "One, a furious and hyperbolic assimilationism" disowning all connections to the mother land and two, "a refusal of transition and a retreat into a separatist or nationalist enclave that leaves the migrant stranded in relation to the receiving country and in relation to the lost home land."<sup>47</sup> This could be a liminal space for a migrant like Ruth which initiates new searches for interaction.<sup>48</sup> Peter H.W. Lau cites Murray Gow's observation that Ruth's speech possesses a symmetrical structure, with "Your

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<sup>46</sup> Kwok Pui-Lan, "Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction*, edited by Elizabeth S. Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 107.

<sup>47</sup> Bonnie Honig, "Ruth, the Model Emigrée: Mourning and the Symbolic Politics of Immigration," in *Feminist Companion to the Bible*, Second Series, 3, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 61.

<sup>48</sup> Liminality refers to the state of being in between or at the threshold of a transformational experiences. It describes a phase of transition and ambiguity where individuals or groups find themselves betwixt and between two distinct states of being. In this paper it refers to the in between spaces where both the migrant labourer and the native interact and brings transformation. It is a creative space of engagement. Thus liminality as a 'potentially creative space' disrupts the structures of the binaric system itself. Kate Kirk, Ellen Bal and Sarah Renee Janssen, "Migrants in Liminal Time and Space: An Exploration of the Experiences of Highly Skilled Indian Bachelors in Amsterdam," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43, (2017), 16

people shall be my people and your God my God” occupying the central position.<sup>49</sup> Campbell argues that Ruth’s words focus on “human loyalty and self-renouncing fidelity.”<sup>50</sup> Ruth’s assimilation among Boaz’s ‘young women’ is her integration in Israel.<sup>51</sup> Ruth’s desire can be perceived as an act of desire to identify and assimilate as an Israelite, making it possible for her to assume a new identity.

On the other hand, the confrontation with the migrant invites Boaz and the Israelites to be in a liminal space. The label “Ruth the Moabitess” is consistently used by the townsfolk, including Boaz (1:22; 2:2; 4:5,10), but Naomi and Boaz also affectionately call her “my daughter.” While boundary markers remain within the story, the spirit of ethnic labelling has shifted.<sup>52</sup> Boaz extends special protection to Ruth as a foreigner, instructing his servants not to touch or rebuke her (2:9, 2:15-16). There were potential dangers for a woman, especially a foreigner and a Moabite, as noted by David Shepherd.<sup>53</sup> For readers in Israel, Boaz’s name may evoke the northern pillar in the first temple (1 Kgs 7:21), and his name could appropriately translate to “a pillar of strength.”<sup>54</sup> While an Israelite enjoyed the privilege of inheriting land from YHWH, it also involved providing for those who did not directly benefit from

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<sup>49</sup> Peter H.W. Lau, *Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth: A Social Identity Approach* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 94. Ruth realizes that YHWH is inseparable from the person of Naomi (1:16-17).

<sup>50</sup> Edward Campbell F. Jr, “Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1975), 82.

<sup>51</sup> Andre LaCocque, *Ruth; A Continental Commentary*, 67.

<sup>52</sup> The narrator, on two occasions, simply refers to her as ‘Ruth’ (2:8; 4:13; though 1:22; 2:2, 21 still use the label ‘foreigner’). In the narrator’s perspective, Ruth has shed her ethnic label as a ‘foreigner.’

<sup>53</sup> David Shepherd, “Violence in the Fields? Translating, Reading, and Revising in Ruth 2,” *CBQ* 63 (2001), 444-462. The verb *negaya* connotes major violence or illegitimate sexual relations.

<sup>54</sup> Contra D. N. Fewell and D. M. Gunn, “Boaz, Pillar of Society Measures of Worth in the Book of Ruth,” *JSOT* 45 (1989): 45-59. The portrait of Boaz is consistently one of patriarchal authority, yet, one without a tinge of abuse, oppression, or sexist bias against women. As a man of privilege (landowner) and authority, Boaz treats his workers with blessing and honour rather than disdain and superiority; the relationship is one of “trust and mutual respect.” There is no sign of elitist separation to ensure his authoritative status as Boaz partakes in mealtime rest with his workers (2:14).

the land's use, including widows, orphans, and aliens from marginalized social groups.<sup>55</sup> However, the infrequent mention of this special provision in the Law suggests it was often ignored by landowners.<sup>56</sup> Boaz not only allowed Ruth to glean in his fields but also provided her with extra protection and water (2:8-9). Jack Sasson highlights that Boaz exceeded the requirements of the gleaning law.<sup>57</sup> The provision of a meal for Ruth further underscored his generosity, as it was not expected for a foreigner gleaning in the field to eat with the male harvesters.”<sup>58</sup> His commitment to Naomi and Ruth at the gate during the land exchange (4:1-10) would have undoubtedly influenced attitudes of the public.

Thus, the book challenges the readers to envisage in-between spaces which facilitate critical interactions, which enables one to uphold the social agency and on the other hand expand one's horizons and extend solidarity to the migrant labourers.

## **6. Converging Paths: Reading the Intersectional Experiences of Ruth and Indian Women Migrants for Reimagining Vital Christian Response**

In the light of above discussions, the paper further propounds Christian response to the issues of the migrants particularly the women.

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<sup>55</sup> The protection of weak was a common concept in the AWA, found in the literature of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Israelite law provides welfare measures for the under privileged through the presentation of a triennial tithe composed of all produce harvested from the land (Deut 14:22-29, 26:12-15). Ronald E. Clements, “Poverty and the Kingdom of God – An Old Testament View,” in *The Kingdom of God and Human Society: Essays by Members of the Scripture, Theology and Society Group* ed., Robin Barbour (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 15-16.

<sup>56</sup> The repeated exhortation of the Prophets indicates this was an ongoing problem. For instance, Isa 1:21-23, 10:1-2, Amos 5: 11-15, Mic 3:1-3.

<sup>57</sup> Jack Sasson, “Ruth,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 249.

<sup>58</sup> Not only she is served the basic staple food, she is offered an accompaniment to enhance her dining experience.

## 6.1 Intersectional Experiences and Overcoming Attempts to ‘Homogenise’ Inequalities

The paper has elaborately discussed how various identities collude in victimizing the migrants in the Indian context and one cannot have a unitary approach in addressing their issues.<sup>59</sup> This could be seen in the case of Ruth, who carried the label the Moabite throughout the narrative. This is the case for many minoritized migrant labourers, but not always evident among migrants from dominant societies. Jione Havea makes such comparisons of the migration stories in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>60</sup> The multi axial oppression that a woman migrant like Ruth faced can never be equated to the migrant experience of the elite ‘returnees’ during the Ezra-Nehemiah era. Therefore, the popular approach in pastoral theology and church practice today which avoids the ‘othering’ of the migrant labourer and perceives migration as the normal case and as anthropological pre-condition, rather than as exceptions may not be a just approach. Therefore, a response to the plights of the migrant labourers particularly the women migrants seek sentiments of solidarity with refugees and migrants, tends to overlook the variety of forms of migration, the unequal distribution of power, caste, and gender differences and so on.

## 6.2 Conversation of Gaze: Migrants as Agents of Social and Religious Innovations

Pierre Bourdieu argued that people from different social backgrounds develop distinct ways of looking at and understanding the world, which he referred to as their “cultural gaze” and the conversations that they engage later he calls as “conversation of gaze.”<sup>61</sup> Taking clue from this, one needs to keep in mind that for

<sup>59</sup> It is common among migrants to feel that they are perpetual aliens. They do not quite fit in and largely due to their features, clothes, skin colour and accent, and they feel that they do not belong to the place.

<sup>60</sup> Jione Havea, “Migration in the Hebrew Bible: A Pastification, in Solidarity for West Papua” in *Religion and Migration: Negotiating Hospitality, Agency and Vulnerability* edited by Andrea Bieler et.al, (Leipzig: Evanelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019), 221.

<sup>61</sup> For example, someone from a privileged and educated background might have a different cultural gaze than someone from a less privileged and less educated

the natives such a conversation implies a willingness to reflect migration from the perspective of migrants and to recognize their experiences and abilities and potentials. Migration opens spaces of learning and conversation.<sup>62</sup> Migrants accelerate and thus force the confrontation with evils that would have to be addressed. The migrant labourer Ruth and the Book of Ruth serve as an antidote to the socio-religious exclusivism in the post-exilic Israel. She challenged the Israelite community to look beyond the prejudices and stigmas of the then times by engaging in this conversation of gaze. The Book of Ruth reiterates this concern, as Boaz and the community transcend the limitations of the episteme of Levitical laws meant for the foreigners since she is a Moabite. The universal conditions must have objectified a migrant woman and would have denied her due justice. An era which witnesses attempts to homogenise and monopolise the migrants turn out to be no more mere passive victims, but that their agency can take a variety of creative forms that even contribute to the development of social utopias and political sensitization. The female migrant labourers may describe that how migrants are empowered to formulate visions denouncing the lack of social recognition and violent representation policies, such a world in which migrants are no longer seen as merely discriminated and foreign. In the present Indian context, the migrant labourers call for a broad, multifarious, and polyphonic ideal of nationhood.

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background. This cultural gaze influences how individuals perceive art, literature, fashion, and various aspects of culture and society. Pierre Bourdieu cited in Regina Polak, "Migrants as Agents of Social and Religious Innovation" in *Religion and Migration: Negotiating Hospitality, Agency and Vulnerability* edited by Andrea Bieler et.al, (Leipzig: Evanelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019), 59.

<sup>62</sup> Migrant labourers open insights and perspectives on the world situation for indigenous populations, the cultural diversity, linguistic wealth, but also global crisis phenomena such as violence, famine, climate change and poverty.

## 7. Conclusion

Ruth's story, with its resonance in the Book of Ruth challenged prejudices and stigmas, beckoning the Israelite community to broaden its perspective. This narrative reiterates the necessity for intersectional readings of the lived experiences of the migrant labourers and challenges any attempt to homogenize and monopolize migrants. Rather, their agency takes diverse, creative forms that contribute to social utopias and political awareness. In the Indian context, female migrant labourers call for a broader, multifaceted vision of nationhood. In essence, the journeys of migrant labourers like Ruth, challenge us to reevaluate our perceptions, policies, and practices. They beckon us to engage in a richer, more inclusive conversation that goes beyond stereotypes and exclusions, ultimately forging a path toward a just and compassionate society where the agency of all, regardless of their migrant status, is acknowledged and celebrated.

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## **The Ancient Flame: The Enduring Legacy of the Syrian Orthodox Mission**

Praveen Kuriakose Kodyattil<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Theology of mission is always the fruit of the total being of the church and not a mere speciality for those who receive a particular missionary calling. But for the Syrian Orthodox Church there is a special need to reflect upon its basic missionary motivations, because its presumably non-missionary character has been too often explained by, and ascribed to, the very essence, the “holy of holies” of Orthodoxy: its sacramental, liturgical, mystical ethos. Even now, as the study of Syrian Orthodox missions seems to correct the traditional view, there remains the temptation to explain these missions as a marginal epiphenomenon in the history of Orthodoxy, as something that happened despite its general

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tendencies and trends. This is why a theological clarification is necessary.<sup>2</sup> Can a church whose life is centered almost exclusively on the liturgy and the sacraments, whose spirituality is primarily mystical and ascetical, be truly missionary? And if it is, where in its faith are the deepest motivations of the missionary zeal to be found? In somewhat simplified terms this is the question addressed, explicitly or implicitly, to the Syrian Orthodox Church by all those for whom “ecumenical” means necessarily and unescapably “missionary”.

### **1. Syrian Orthodox Doctrines and Experience of the Church**

The Church is a means of grace, the sacrament of the Kingdom. Its hierarchical, sacramental, and liturgical structure serves to enable the Church to fulfil itself as the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, actualizing its very nature as grace. According to Syrian Orthodox ecclesiology, the fullness of the Church cannot be manifested out as invisible Church and the visible Church the latter is the expression and actualization of the former, the sacramental sign of its reality.<sup>3</sup> This underscores the unique and central ecclesiological significance of the Eucharist, the all-embracing sacrament of the Church. In the Eucharist, “the Church becomes what it is,” fulfilling itself as the Body of Christ and the divine Parousia, the presence and communication of Christ and His Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Syrian Orthodox ecclesiology is indeed eucharistic ecclesiology. Through the Eucharist, the Church accomplishes the passage from this world into the eschaton, participates in the ascension of its Lord, and partakes in His messianic banquet, tasting the joy and peace of the Kingdom. The eucharistic prayer in the Liturgy of John Chrysostom reflects this: “And thou didst not cease to do all things until thou hadst brought

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel B. Clendenin, ed. *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A contemporary reader* (USA: Baker Academic 2003) 195.

<sup>3</sup> Archbishop Anastasios, *Mission in Christ's Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010) 75.

<sup>4</sup> Ignatius Aphrem I Barsoum, (*History of Syriac Literature and Sciences* (Pueblo: Passaggiata, 2000), 43.

us back to heaven, and hadst endowed us with thy Kingdom.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the whole life of the Church is rooted in the Eucharist, the fruition of this eucharistic fullness in the time of this world, whose ‘image passed by.’ This is indeed the mission of the Church.

The Syrian Orthodox Church is also humanity’s response to the divine gift, its acceptance and appropriation by humanity. If the Church's order is shaped and conditioned by the eschatological fullness of the gift and is its sacramental sign, the purpose of the Christian community is the acceptance of the gift and the growth into its fullness. The Church is fullness, and it is also increasing and growing in faith and love, knowledge and koinonia. This response has two inseparable aspects, each conditioning the other and together constituting the dynamics of Christian life and action in these ecclesiastical structures. There is no separation between the two aspects.

The first aspect of the Syrian Orthodox Church as response is God-centered: it involves the sanctification and growth in holiness of both the Christian individual and the community, aiming at the “acquisition of the Holy Spirit”, as defined by Seraphim of Sarov<sup>6</sup>, one of the greatest Orthodox saints.<sup>7</sup> This entails the slow transformation of the old Adam into the new one, the restoration of the pristine beauty lost in sin, and the illumination with the uncreated light of Mount Tabor. It is also the gradual victory over the demonic powers of the cosmos, bringing the joy and peace that make us partakers of the Kingdom and eternal life here and now.<sup>8</sup> The Syrian Orthodox spiritual tradition has always emphasized the mystical nature of Christian life, described as a life hidden with Christ in God. The great monastic movement, which began in the

<sup>5</sup> Ion Bria, *Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspective on Mission* (Geneva: WCC, 1986), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Seraphim of Sarov, born Prokhor Isidorovich Moshnin, was a Russian saint who lived from 1754 to 1833 and was known for his asceticism and spiritual guidance. He is venerated by the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Anglican Communion.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel B. Clendenin, ed. *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A contemporary reader...*, 103.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Bar-Sawme, *Entering the Holy Place in Syriac Orthodox Liturgy: A Ritual and Theological Analysis* (Sweden: Uppsala University, 2021) 69.

fourth century after the Church was officially recognized by the Roman Empire and given status in this world, was essentially a new expression of early Christian eschatologism.<sup>9</sup> This movement affirmed that Christianity ontologically belongs to the life of the world to come, rejecting any permanent home or identification in this world.

The second aspect of the Syrian Orthodox Church as a response is man or world centered. It understands the Church as being left in this world, within its time, space, and history, with a specific task or mission: “to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6). The Church is fullness, and its home is in heaven. However, this fullness is given to the world, sent into the world for its salvation and redemption. The eschatological nature of the Church does not negate the world; instead, it affirms and accepts the world as the object of divine love. In other words, the Church's otherworldliness is a sign and reality of God's love for the world, a condition for the Church's mission to the world.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the Church is not a self-centred community but a missionary community, focusing on the salvation of the world. In Orthodox experience and faith, it is the Church-sacrament that enables the Church-mission.

## **2. The Missionary Imperative in the Syrian Orthodox Church**

The Church Fathers serve as witnesses to the Syrian Orthodox mission. During the Patristic period, the focus on mission was not prominent, as Christological controversies demanded much attention and energy, detracting from the development of missionary theology. However, the Church Fathers understood God's plan for the world's salvation. According to David Bosch, the monastic movement was a significant saving element in the Patristic and later Orthodox missionary traditions.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, it

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A contemporary reader...*, 35.

<sup>10</sup> Stylianos Harkianakis, *Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology* (Sydney: ATF St Andrews Orthodox Press, 2008) 56.

<sup>11</sup> David J Bosch, *Transforming Missions: Paradigm Shift in Theology of Missions* (New York: Orbis, 1992) 205.

is the simple faith of thousands of ordinary believers that continues to express the inherently missionary dimension of Orthodoxy.

We can now more precisely articulate the various aspects of the missionary imperative as understood in the Orthodox experience of the Church. This imperative is the essential expression of the Church as a gift and fullness, projecting itself into the time and space of this world.<sup>12</sup> While nothing can be added to the Church, its fullness being that of Christ himself, the manifestation and communication of this fullness constitute the very life of the Church in this eon. On the day of Pentecost, when the fullness of the Church was realized once for all, the time of the Church began, marking the last and crucial segment of the history of salvation.<sup>13</sup> The only newness and soteriological content of this segment is mission: the proclamation and communication of the eschaton, which is already the Church's being and indeed it's only being. It is the Church's mission that gives real significance to this time and meaning to history. Mission validates the human response in the Church, making us true co-workers in the work of Christ<sup>14</sup>. Nothing better reveals the relationship between the Church as fullness and the Church as mission than the Eucharist, the central act of the Church's liturgies and the sacrament of the Church itself.

### **3. Eucharist as the foundation of Syrian Orthodox Mission**

In the time of worship, the congregation are able to have communion with God and, moreover, experience the presence of God through symbol and symbolic actions. In the Eucharistic celebration of the Syrian Orthodox Church a person gets involved with his/her five senses and that helps him/her to experience the message, i.e., hearing (language, music), seeing (pictures, sign), touching (kissing, stroking), tasting (bread and wine) and smelling (incense). All these give a life to worship. There are two complementary movements in the Eucharistic rite: the movement

<sup>12</sup>T G Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective. Vol. 1* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox, 1997), 13.

<sup>13</sup>Ion Bria, *Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspective on Mission...*, 55.

<sup>14</sup>Stylianios Harkianakis, *Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology...*, 98.

of ascension and the movement of return. The Eucharist begins with an ascension toward the throne of God and the kingdom, symbolized by the offertory hymn's call to "put aside all earthly care."<sup>15</sup> We prepare to ascend into heaven with Christ and to offer his Eucharist in him. This first movement, fulfilled in the consecration of the elements, the sign of God's acceptance of our Eucharist is already an act of mission. The Eucharist is offered "on behalf of all and for all," fulfilling the Church's priestly function: reconciling the whole creation with God, sacrificing the world to God, and interceding for it. All this is accomplished in Christ, the unique priest of the new creation, "the one who offers and the one who is offered."<sup>16</sup> This is achieved through the Church's total separation from the world ascending to heaven and entering the new eon.

When this state of fullness is consummated at the Lord's table in his kingdom, and "we have seen the true Light and partaken of the Holy Spirit," the second movement begins: the return to the world. "Let us depart in peace," says the celebrant as he leads the congregation out of the temple, and this is the final commandment. The Eucharist is always the end, the sacrament of the Parousia, yet it is also the beginning, the starting point of mission.<sup>17</sup> Having seen the true Light and enjoyed life eternal, we are now called to be Christ's witnesses in the world.<sup>18</sup> Without this ascension into the kingdom, we would have nothing to witness to; but having become his people and inheritance, we can fulfil Christ's command: "you are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:48). The Eucharist, transforming the Church into what it is, transforms it into mission.

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<sup>15</sup>Ion Bria, *Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publication, 1996), 45.

<sup>16</sup>T G Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective. Vol. 1* ..., 90.

<sup>17</sup>Archbishop Anastasios, *Facing the world: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concern* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003), 122.

<sup>18</sup>Stylianios Harkianakis, *Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology...*, 67.

#### 4. The Objects of Syrian Orthodox Mission

The main objects in Syrian Orthodox mission are man and the world. Not man alone in isolated religious terms, nor the world as an entity where man is just a part. Man is the essential object of mission, but the Orthodox idea of evangelism avoids individualistic and spiritualistic connotations. The Syrian Orthodox Church, the sacrament of Christ, is not merely a society of converts or an organization to satisfy religious needs. It is new life, redeeming the whole life and total being of man.<sup>19</sup> The whole life of man is precisely the world in which and by which he lives. Through man, the Church saves and redeems the world. Every time a person responds to the divine gift, accepts it, and lives by it, the world is saved and redeemed. This does not transform the world into the Kingdom or society into the Church. The ontological gap between the old and the new remains unchanged and cannot be bridged in this eon. The Kingdom is yet to come, and the Church is not of this world.<sup>20</sup> Yet, this coming Kingdom is already present, and the Church is fulfilled in this world. They exist not only as proclamations but in their reality, and through divine agape, their fruit, they continuously perform the sacramental transformation of the old into the new, enabling real action and real "doing" in this world.

This gives the Syrian Orthodox Church's mission both a cosmic and historical dimension, which are essential in the Syrian Orthodox tradition and experience. State, society, culture, and nature are real objects of mission, not merely neutral milieus where the Church's sole task is to preserve its inner freedom and maintain its religious life.<sup>21</sup> A comprehensive volume would be needed to recount the story of the Syrian Orthodox Church from this

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<sup>19</sup> Sebastian P Broke, *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 133.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Illinois: IVP Academic Press, 2013), 89.

<sup>21</sup> Archbishop Anastasios, *Mission in Christ's Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission...*, 33.

perspective: its concrete participation in societies and cultures, becoming their total expression; its identification with nations and peoples without betraying its otherworldliness and eschatological communion with the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> A detailed theological analysis would be required to adequately express the Syrian Orthodox idea of the sanctification of matter, or the cosmic aspect of its sacramental vision. Here, we can only state that all this is the object of Christian mission, because all this is assumed and offered to God in the sacrament. In the world of incarnation, nothing remains neutral; nothing can be taken away from the Son of Man.

### **5. The Importance of Trinitarian Theology in Syrian Orthodox Mission**

The mission of the Syrian Orthodox Church is based on Christ's mission, and understanding this mission necessitates an application of Trinitarian theology. Christ's sending of the apostles is rooted in the fact that Christ himself was sent by the Father in the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-23). While the significance of this scriptural assertion for the concept of mission is commonly acknowledged, the Trinitarian theology implied in it deserves more attention than it typically receives.<sup>23</sup> Trinitarian theology highlights that God, in God's own self, is a life of communion and that God's involvement in history aims to draw humanity and creation into this communion with God's very life. The implications for understanding mission are profound: mission is not primarily about propagating intellectual convictions, doctrines, or moral commands but about transmitting the life of communion that exists in God. The "sending" of a mission is essentially the sending of the Spirit (John 14:26), who manifests the life of God as communion (I Cor. 13:13). The salvation of the world should be viewed as a "program" of the Holy Trinity for the entirety of creation. The kingdom of God represents the inner movement and ultimate goal not only of every human endeavour but of the entire dynamic of

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<sup>22</sup>Ion Bria, *Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and witness from an Orthodox Perspective...*, 101

<sup>23</sup>Daniel B. Clendenin, ed. *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A contemporary reader...*, 215.

the universe.<sup>24</sup> True life is found in the Holy Trinity, in Christ by the Spirit, coming from and oriented towards the Father.

## 6. The Centrality of Christ in Syrian Orthodox Mission

According to Syrian Orthodox faith, Christ occupies the central place in confession, as he is the dynamic factor in Christian witness in the world. Following the biblical and kerygmatic tradition of the Church, we confess the incarnation of the Logos of God the Father, who, through the work of the Paraclete, mediates our regeneration and restoration.<sup>25</sup> Our communion with God is realized through the divine-human person of Christ. Thus, the Logos of God functions not only as our saviour but also as our creator. Christ occupies a central position in two respects: as the divine Logos, he is the source and model for our reason, and as the initiating partner of our dialogue with him. As the divine-human hypostasis, he is the central figure for all beings and things, serving as both the partner and the creative, generative source of dialogue with him and among humans.<sup>26</sup> He is the Logos of all things and the image of the Father. The world's ontological basis lies in God, as all things are connected to the Logos, illustrating the diverse expressions of the Logos' reason. Simultaneously, their connection and unity in a harmonious whole are rooted in the undifferentiated unity of the personal Logos.<sup>27</sup> Material, tangible, and intelligible things are images of the varied reasons and thoughts of the Logos, while humans are the image of the Logos himself as a rational being.

The Son of God has taken on the entirety of our humanity; in doing so, he affirms, heals, and restores humanity by integrating it

<sup>24</sup> Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch* (London: Routledge, 2003), 122.

<sup>25</sup> John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, (2002), 43.

<sup>26</sup> K.M George, *Silent Roots: Orthodox Perspective on Christian Spirituality* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 23.

<sup>27</sup> Archbishop Anastasios, *Mission in Christ's Way: An Orthodox Understanding of Mission...*, 95

within himself and, consequently, within the Holy Trinity. This profound mystery of perfect divine-human unity becomes the source and fountain of new life for the world.<sup>28</sup> When we emphasize Christ in our theological understanding, it is essential to hold together the Trinitarian and incarnational aspects of this new life, ensuring a focus on Christ that remains Christocentric but not Christo monistic manner.

## **7. Influence of Liturgy in Syrian Orthodox Mission**

In the Syrian Orthodox tradition, the liturgy is a communal act rather than an individualistic one. It serves as a means for believers to maintain their faith traditions amidst challenges and persecutions. The liturgy has enabled the Church to sustain its identity and existence, even in isolation from its cultural roots. There is a deep connection between the liturgy and the mission of the Church. The Eucharist, the supreme liturgy, represents the culmination of the Church's mission and highlights its missionary imperative. The act of gathering for worship itself is a proclamation (1 Cor. 11:26). "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the lord's death until he comes. Therefore, the extent of the mission of the church is confessed at every Eucharist service."<sup>29</sup> Throughout history, the worship of the church has been both the expression and the guardian of divine revelation. It not only represents the saving events of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, but also serves as a living anticipation of the kingdom to come for the church's members. In worship, the church, as the body of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit, unites the faithful as the adopted children of God, the Father. Liturgical worship, centered around the Eucharist, is a key action of the church. Although the Eucharist has always been a celebration reserved for church members and not outsiders, the broader

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<sup>28</sup> Ion Bria, *Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspective on Mission...*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> West F and Baumstark A, *On the Historical Development of Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011), 145.

liturgical worship serves as an obvious form of witness and mission.<sup>30</sup>

## 8. The Eucharistic Liturgy as a Missionary Event

An analysis of the historical development of mission strategies and models within the Syrian Orthodox Church reveals that the Eucharistic liturgy serves as the foundation for its mission. The missional themes embedded in the Eucharistic liturgy inspire the Church to create new, contextually relevant mission strategies and models. Although the Church continues to grapple with balancing evangelical pietism and Oriental liturgical moorings, it is clear that missional nature and identity of the church derive from its liturgy.<sup>31</sup> The Eucharistic liturgy remains a pivotal element in shaping its mission efforts. The Eucharistic liturgy involves the faithful in the salvation achieved through the incarnation of the divine Logos, extending through them to the entire cosmos. Through the mutual self-giving of Christ and his people, the sanctification of the bread and wine, and the transformation of communicants, the Eucharist becomes a place where we experience the fullness of salvation, the communion of the Holy Spirit, and heaven on earth. In the humble and self-emptying concealment of the divine word in the mystery of the bread, offered, broken, and shared, “we proclaim his death and confess his resurrection until he comes again.” The role of the Eucharistic liturgy is to initiate us into the kingdom, allowing us to “taste and see that the Lord is good” The liturgy transforms individuals into “living stones” of the church and the community into an authentic image of the kingdom.<sup>32</sup> The liturgy serves as our thanksgiving for the created world and the restoration of the fallen world in Christ. It is a symbol of the kingdom, representing the cosmos becoming ecclesia.

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<sup>30</sup>Daniel B. Clendenin, ed. *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A contemporary reader...*, 194.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Stringer, *Rethinking the Origin of the Eucharist* (London: SCM, 2011), 56.

<sup>32</sup>Ion Bria, *Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspective on Mission...*, 60.

## 9. The Traditional Approach to Mission

Throughout its history, the Syrian Orthodox Church was involved in missionary work, preaching the word of God among nations which had never heard it. There are two aspects characterizing the traditional Orthodox approach to mission that are relevant to our situation today. Syrian Orthodox missions have often succeeded when they were conducted not as an organized endeavour, planned and supported from abroad, but as a spontaneous and personal witness of Christian life, holiness and communion with divine life.<sup>33</sup> Whether systematically planned or spontaneously improvised, Syrian Orthodox missions were generally based on the attempt to make Scripture and liturgy immediately acceptable to the new Christians, by having them translated into their native tongue and by having a native clergy assume leadership in the “young churches.”<sup>34</sup> In the examples mentioned above, however, indigenization was never seen as an end in itself; concern was also given to cultural continuity between the mother church and the daughter churches. which preserved the sense of the universal unity of the church. Orthodoxy is proud of its foreign missionary tradition that has not been carried out in a spirit of colonialism. But rather with the intent of adapting the faith to the manners, language, traditions and lifestyles of the people to whom it brings the gospel.<sup>35</sup> Whenever Orthodoxy is now active in such mission it must retain and expand that method.

## 10. Challenges of External Mission

At this time in our history, Syrian Orthodox churches find it very difficult to speak of foreign missions. It certainly is not a live option for many of the national churches. Their duty remains primarily within the churches and the nations in which they find themselves. Yet, other churches are to be challenged for having both the opportunity and the resources, and not responding to the

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<sup>33</sup> John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches...*, 93.

<sup>34</sup> Sebastian P Broke, *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy...*, 112.

<sup>35</sup> Ion Bria, *Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and witness from an Orthodox Perspective...*, 65.

charge to "make disciples of all nations" (Mathew. 28:19). The mission and witness of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the modern world has also been hampered by a weakening of the sense of unity between the local autocephalous Orthodox churches.<sup>36</sup> There has been a tendency to lose the sense that unity and mission are inseparable, that the divine love and unity cannot be convincingly preached by those who do not adopt it as the standard for their own lives. Thus, especially in those countries where communities have a relatively recent history there are territorially overlapping jurisdictions and a tendency, by autocephalous churches, to be motivated in their policies and actions by nationalism, which belongs to the 'fallen' world.<sup>37</sup> The mission of the Syrian Orthodox Church and its witness to the world suffers greatly from these inconsistencies and conflicts. They must be urgently resolved by a common accord of all the Orthodox churches. Thus, the difficult and thorny question of the renewal of foreign mission by the church cannot be met or solved by any one of the Syrian Orthodox churches. We cannot deny the goal. Yet a unified and organized Orthodox approach is needed, lest we harm and do disservice to our fellow Orthodox.<sup>38</sup> It certainly is an important element in our understanding of our total mission in the world today, from a Syrian Orthodox perspective. Part of our mission is also to protect and preserve Orthodoxy where it is found today. An honest recognition of our limitations and existential restrictions is required as well.

## **11. Monastic Mission in the Syrian Orthodox Church**

Monastic life is one of the important carriers of the Syrian orthodox mission both men and women are part of this. Monastic life, like Christian life in general, remains a mystery; it is a way of existing in the communion of faith and the love of God. Within Jesus Christ, various ways of living and diverse charismata coexist in the life of the church itself (1 Corinthians. 12:4-31). The Syrian

<sup>36</sup> Ignatius Aphrem I Barsoum, (*History of Syriac Literature and Sciences...*, 78.

<sup>37</sup> John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches...*, 122.

<sup>38</sup> James Stamoolis, "Mission in Orthodox Theology", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 33, no.1 (Spring 1988) 63.

Orthodox Church has always encouraged such diversity. The presence of a monk in the world is inherently paradoxical. He is a pilgrim (1 Peter. 1:1; 2:11) who does not belong to this world yet finds himself within it (2 Corinthians. 5:6-7).<sup>39</sup> Any definition of the monastic vocation is likely to face criticism. Monastic life is often described as askesis, but it is not a mere mechanism for ensuring salvation. While monks and nuns practice asceticism, a natural dynamism of human nature, monastic life cannot be reduced solely to asceticism. The monastic vocation does not create a superior state within the church. On the contrary, monks are inclined to confess continually that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and I am the foremost of them” (1 Timothy 1:15). A monk is a person of the gospel, thirsting for salvation in the resurrected Christ. The roots of monastic life are in repentance and faith, in a perpetual metanoia, wherein the monk lives the reality of the fall of human nature, as well as the new reality of salvation in Christ, in which he participates as a living and active member.<sup>40</sup> In faith and humility, he experiences continuous metanoia as a renewal of the baptismal gift, a ‘growth in God’ (Colossians. 2:19), striving towards the goal of union with God in Christ.

The phenomenon of monasticism continues the legacy of the early martyrs within the church. Through the principles of non-attachment and availability for God and fellow humans, monks and nuns bear witness to the eschaton within the church, exercising mission by exemplifying the gospel’s way of the kingdom.<sup>41</sup> This radical faithfulness of the martyrs ensures that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church. However, the monastic community’s emphasis on renunciation of the world and the eschatological dimension of history risks becoming an escapist movement, potentially leading to avoidance of the significant

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<sup>39</sup> Gabriel Bar-Sawme, *Entering the Holy Place in Syriac Orthodox Liturgy: A Ritual...*, 88.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Stringer, *Rethinking the Origin of the Eucharist...*, 50.

<sup>41</sup> West F and Baumstark A, *On the Historical Development of Liturgy...*, 188.

issues that concern other church members living in society.<sup>42</sup> It is the monk's duty, as part of his role in spiritual direction, to assist the faithful in fulfilling their societal responsibilities with full liberty and discernment.

## **Reflection and Conclusion**

The Syrian Orthodox mission was formed mainly in Scripture, traditions, monasticism, patristics and the liturgy, emphasizing a Trinitarian model of mission in the revised liturgy. The Eucharistic celebration fosters a communion of believers with the Trinity, not only conforming individuals to Christ but also transforming them collectively into His body through the Holy Spirit's power. This mutual indwelling of Christ in the believer and the believer in Christ, expressed in the liturgy, leads to a profound assimilation to Christ and a full immersion into Trinitarian life. The liturgy, thus, provides a Trinitarian model of mission, affirming that the Church's mission is an extension of the Triune God's mission, revealed in Christ's life by the Holy Spirit's power. In the Syrian Orthodox liturgy, the Holy Eucharist celebrates the communion of love from the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit. The Church prays and sings to the Trinity "through Christ" in the Spirit's power, and active participation in the Eucharistic liturgy enables the faithful to partake in the Trinitarian mystery. The model of the Trinity as a community serves as a paradigm for forming and sustaining witnessing communities in the Church. The Eucharist is not only the source and nourishment for the Syrian Orthodox mission, but it also shapes its content and method. Consequently, the Church's ministry must be tailored to the specific needs and context of each region. The missiological elements present in the Eucharistic liturgy act as catalysts for the Church's mission.

The Syrian orthodox community is one of the ancient and largely spread communities all over the world. It is difficult to come up with one single mission statement due to various reasons.

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<sup>42</sup>Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch...*, 101.

In a nutshell the Syrian orthodox Mission does not believe in conversion rather than strengthening the roots of the believers. If the root is weak the tree can't face natural calamities and can't survive more but if the root is strong the tree is ready to face anything. In the Syrian orthodox church, the head of the church will become the missionary in a mission needed moment. For example, the late patriarch and head of the Syrian Orthodox Church, St. Ignatius Alias came to India as a Missionary to strengthen the faith in roots. He stayed with the people and showed great compassion, died and buried in Malankara, Similarly St. Basliouse Eldho also went through the similar mission movement. It is not about how many converts in the church but how strong the existing people in faith. The Syrian Orthodox Mission's imperative is a clarion call to embrace the timeless wisdom of ancient faith. As a beacon of hope and guidance, the mission's legacy offers a profound reminder of the transformative power of spirituality, the importance of community, and the boundless potential of the human spirit.

The Syrian Orthodox Mission's legacy is a testament to the power of faith and perseverance. Despite facing numerous challenges and setbacks, the mission's impact on Indian Christianity remains profound. From the arrival of Saint Thomas, the Apostle to the present day, the Syrian Orthodox Church has nurtured a rich spiritual heritage, shaping the lives of millions. Through its ancient liturgies, monastic traditions, and commitment to social justice, the mission has kindled a flame that continues to illuminate the path for generations. As a bridge between East and West, the Syrian Orthodox Mission has fostered cultural exchange and understanding, enriching the fabric of Indian society. Its enduring legacy is a reminder that even in the face of adversity, the light of faith can never be extinguished. May the ancient flame of the Syrian Orthodox Mission continue to inspire and guide us on our own journeys of faith and discovery.

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## **The Bible Gives Importance for Keeping Good Health: A Survey on Major Christological Controversies**

Paul Baby<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

According to JND Kelly, the foundation datum of all Christological development is the twofold attribute given to Jesus Christ by the New Testament writers; ‘according to the flesh’ and ‘according to the spirit’, that is as Man and as God respectively.<sup>2</sup> The Christological debates of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries were based on the theological viewpoints of Antiochene and Alexandrine schools.<sup>3</sup> Christological decrees produced by prominent church fathers brought them popularity and naturally bred imitations and thus disseminated across the church. This paper takes a quick

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<sup>2</sup> JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 138.

<sup>3</sup> MO John, *Yerusalemil Ninnu* (Kottayam: Divyabodhanam Publications, 2000), 175.

survey on different expositions of Christological thought that dominated the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Christian church.

## 1. Arianism

Arianism was a 4<sup>th</sup> century Christological controversy. It is associated with an Alexandrine presbyter from Lybia, Arius.<sup>4</sup> The crux of his exposition was that the Father is greater than the Son. The source of this teaching might be Lucian of Antioch, who had been the teacher of Arius for a period of time. This assumption is also because of the reason that most the disciples of Lucian backed the teaching of Arius.<sup>5</sup>

The teaching of Arius can be viewed in two parts. First, on the divinity of Jesus Christ, it goes thus; God the Father is absolutely unique and transcendental and God's essence (ousia) cannot be shared by not even the Son.<sup>6</sup> Arius believed that if the Father and the Son share the same essence, there would be two Gods. Out of his rigid and vigorous monotheistic view, he came to the conclusion that the Son is the first and unique creation of God, and He is not eternal with the Father. Thus, the Son is inferior to the Father. Second, his teaching on the humanity of Jesus Christ. It can be explained thus, he adapted and applied the Platonic tripartite division of human nature into the question of the Person of Christ.<sup>7</sup> Platonic tripartite division of human nature describes man is meld of body (soma), soul (psyche), and spirit (nous). He argued that the human nature of Christ lacked the rational soul (nous). Instead of this rational soul, Christ is supplied by the Logos. In the nutshell, Arius presented a Christ who is neither fully Divine nor fully human.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jacob Parappally MSFS, *The Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Bengaluru: Theological Publications in India, 2019), 80.

<sup>5</sup> VC Samuel, *Yeshu Kristhu Aaru?* (Thiruvalla: Dhaivasastra Sahithya Samithi (DSS), 2005), 60.

<sup>6</sup> Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, ed., *Begotten Not Made* (Kottayam: MOC Publications, 2017), 227.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 228.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria and later the Cappadocia fathers confronted Arianism vehemently. The universal council of Nicea anathematized Arius and his teaching.

## 2. Apollinarianism

Apollinarianism is associated with Apollinarius, bishop of Laodicea. He was a friend and co-adjutor of St. Athanasius. Even though he was a stout, antagonise of Arianism, it is contradictory that some scholars trace the ancestor of his teaching to Arianism.<sup>9</sup> He adopted the same analogy of Arius thus agreed with Arius that in Christ the Logos was united to a human body with an animal soul.<sup>10</sup>

According to VC Samuel, Apollinarius was creating a solution for the logical problem of the incarnation of the second person in the Trinity who is omniscient and without the boundaries of time and space into the limits of time, space and human fragility.<sup>11</sup> For this, he reinforced the teaching of the Alexandrine school that ‘the one incarnate nature of the divine Word’.<sup>12</sup>

The error that the Orthodox fathers found with the teaching of Apollinarius was with his presenting of ‘imperfect humanity’ in the person of Christ.<sup>13</sup> The anthropology of Apollinarius can be traced back to a psychological interpretation of man prominent in his time. According to this psychological interpretation, man is of three parts: body, animal soul, and rational soul.<sup>14</sup> He taught that in the event of the incarnation, Christ lacked the rational soul and its place was taken by the Divine immutable and infallible Logos.<sup>15</sup> According to the Cappadocean fathers the proneness to sin is

<sup>9</sup> JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 289.

<sup>10</sup> Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, ed., *Begotten Not Made* (Kottayam: MOC Publications, 2017), 229.

<sup>11</sup> VC Samuel, *Yeshu Kristhu Aaru?* (Thiruvalla: DSS, 2005), 67.

<sup>12</sup> JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 293.

<sup>13</sup> Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, ed., *Begotten Not Made* (Kottayam: M O C Publications, 2017), 229.

<sup>14</sup> VC Samuel, *Yeshu Kristhu Aaru?* (Thiruvalla: DSS, 2005), 69.

<sup>15</sup> Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, ed., *Begotten Not Made* (Kottayam: M O C Publications, 2017), 229.

situated in the rational mind.<sup>16</sup> Since Apollinarius wanted to protect the 'sinlessness' of Christ, he tended to replace the 'rational soul' with 'Logos'.<sup>17</sup> It was the main of the teaching of Apollinarius.

According to the Cappadocean fathers, Apollinarius compromised the soteriological aspect of the event of the incarnation. Human nature cannot be redeemed if only part of it was assumed by the Logos.<sup>18</sup> Even though Apollinarius reinforced the 'one incarnate nature' of Jesus Christ, he failed to manifest the fullness of his human nature.<sup>19</sup> Apollinarius was condemned in the council of Constantinople in 381.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Nestorianism

Nestorius, who born in Germanicca, educated and lived as an ascetic in Antioch, became the Patriarch of Constantinople in 428.<sup>21</sup> Since he was deeply influenced by the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, he was Antiochene in Christology.<sup>22</sup> It was a time of intense Christological debate between the Antiochene and Alexandrine schools. The incident which triggered the controversy was a sermon delivered by Anastasius, the chaplain of Nestorius, in which he criticised the use of the title 'Theotokos' applied to Virgin Mary. The Patriarch himself supported the priest.<sup>23</sup> According to JND Kelly, Nestorius argued that 'God cannot have a mother and no creature could have engendered the Godhead'.<sup>24</sup>

The real disagreement underlying the dispute was the difference in the Christological viewpoints of Nestorius and his

<sup>16</sup> VC Samuel, *Yeshu Kristhu Aaru?* (Thiruvalla: DSS, 2005), 69.

<sup>17</sup> Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, ed., *Begotten Not Made* (Kottayam: M O C Publications, 2017), 229.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.230.

<sup>19</sup> VC Samuel, *Yeshu Kristhu Aaru?* (Thiruvalla: DSS, 2005), 69.

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Parappally MSFS, *The Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Bengaluru: Theological Publications in India, 2019), 81.

<sup>21</sup> VC Samuel, *Yeshu Kristhu Aaru?* (Thiruvalla: DSS, 2005), 81.

<sup>22</sup> JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 310.

<sup>23</sup> VC Samuel, *The Council of Chalcedon Re-examined* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1977), 5-6.

<sup>24</sup> JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 311.

opponents;<sup>25</sup> in a broad sense between the Antiochene and Alexandrine schools. The dispute over the title of Virgin Mary was merely a surface level manifestation of this undercurrent. Nestorius was against all teachings which extinguish the separateness of the two natures in Jesus Christ. Behind the title of 'Theotokos', he suspected the tenets of Arianism and Apollinarianism that the Son was a creature and the manhood was incomplete respectively.<sup>26</sup> His preference was to call Virgin Mary as 'Christotokos' (Christ bearing) or even 'Theodoxos' (God- receiving).<sup>27</sup> Nestorius used the word 'conjunction' of two natures instead of 'union'.<sup>28</sup> He was of the view that it was only a human being that had been born to Mary and later, a Divine Being united with him.<sup>29</sup> He could not agree with the Alexandrine habit of speaking of God being born and dying. He wanted the impassibility of 'the God' preserved.

Cyril of Alexandria opposes the Christological standpoint of Nestorius and explains the Alexandrine position in the second letter of Cyril to Nestorius that the union of the natures of Godhead and manhood, which are different from one another, converged into the one Lord Jesus Christ into an indivisible unity. Since God the Son, who is eternal, united to himself hypostatically at the first moment of his conception in the womb of the Virgin, she brought forth God the Son incarnate.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the letter expels the thought of double sonship and separation.<sup>31</sup> The council of Ephesus (431) condemned Nestorius.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> MO John, *Yerusalemil Ninnu* (Kottayam: Divyabodhanam Publications, 2000), 188.

<sup>26</sup> JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 311.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 316.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 314.

<sup>29</sup> Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, ed., *Begotten Not Made* (Kottayam: MOC Publications, 2017), 232.

<sup>30</sup> VC Samuel, *The Council of Chalcedon Re-examined* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1977), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Zachariah, "Formulae of Faith of the Chalcedonians in the Light of the Statements in the West Syrian Anaphoras on God's Plan of Salvation, Incarnation and Sanctification of the Redeemed", *Doctoral Dissertation*, (Vienna: The University of Vienna, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Jacob Parappally MSFS, *The Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Bengaluru: Theological Publications in India, 2019), 83.

#### 4. Eutychanism

Eutyches was an old monk and archimandrite of Constantinople,<sup>33</sup> who exerted great influence in the court of Theodosius II. He was a muddler headed man who could not be relied on for any consistent theological discussion.<sup>34</sup> According to V C Samuel, nobody has a crystalline impression of the exact teaching of Eutyches. The substance that generally accepted as his teaching is only the commentaries given by others.<sup>35</sup>

The controversy started when Eusebius of Dorylaeum accused Eutyches of holding and disseminating ideas contrary to the faith of the fathers of Nicea and Ephesus at the synod of Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>36</sup> The first charge against him was that he refused to confess the consubstantiality of Christ with us.<sup>37</sup> But the history says that Eutyches neither accepted it nor even commented on it instead he held forth a paper which contained his confession of faith.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, the synod neither received it nor read it. But from the chronicle of the home synod of Constantinople, it is understandable that there was a reluctance in Eutyches to accept the consubstantiality of Christ's human nature with ours.<sup>39</sup> Eutyches consented to do so if the synod insisted.<sup>40</sup>

The second charge against Eutyches was that he denied the human nature of Christ. He was of the claim that it was absorbed in His divinity, so that there was only one nature in Christ, the divine.<sup>41</sup> In other words the two natures were there before the union

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<sup>33</sup> Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, ed., *Begotten Not Made* (Kottayam: M O C Publications, 2017), 232.

<sup>34</sup> VC Samuel, *The Council of Chalcedon Re-examined* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1977), 16.

<sup>35</sup> VC Samuel, *Yeshu Kristhu Aaru?* (Thiruvalla: DSS, 2005), 83.

<sup>36</sup> VC Samuel, *The Council of Chalcedon Re-examined* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1977), 16.

<sup>37</sup> VC Samuel, *Yeshu Kristhu Aaru?* (Thiruvalla: DSS, 2005), 82.

<sup>38</sup> VC Samuel, *The Council of Chalcedon Re-examined* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1977), 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21.

<sup>40</sup> JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 332.

<sup>41</sup> Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, ed., *Begotten Not Made* (Kottayam: M O C Publications, 2017), 232.

but after the union there is only One Nature.<sup>42</sup> Eutyches took this stand while answering a question of Florentius during the trial at the synod,<sup>43</sup> thus it marked the beginning of ‘Monophysitism’.<sup>44</sup> But it has to be considered that the old monk was a confused and unskilled thinker and all that he confessed were a part of his weak rush to defend the unity of Christ against all attempts to divide Him.<sup>45</sup> Over the charges mentioned above, the home council of Constantinople in 448 condemned his teaching and excommunicated him.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries of the church history had seen many vital steps towards forming a balanced and sound Christology. These incidents resulted in bringing a clarity to the question of the person of Christ.

The two theological schools played a prominent role in the phrasing of Christological dictums. The enmity between the two schools paved a way to further tensions. Magnification of Alexandrine Christology led to Apollinarianism and Eutychanism and Antiochene Christology led to Arianism and Nestorianism.<sup>47</sup> The misunderstanding of Greek terms used in the dictums were also a cause for the Controversies. The role of the imperial interferences should also be added to it.

<sup>42</sup> Jacob Parappally MSFS, *The Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Bengaluru: Theological Publications in India, 2019), 82.

<sup>43</sup> VC Samuel, *The Council of Chalcedon Re-examined* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1977), 21.

<sup>44</sup> Jacob Parappally MSFS, *The Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Bengaluru: Theological Publications in India, 2019), 82.

<sup>45</sup> JND Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 333.

<sup>46</sup> VC Samuel, *Yeshu Kristhu Aaru?* (Thiruvalla: DSS, 2005), 82.

<sup>47</sup> Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros, ed., *Begotten Not Made* (Kottayam: MOC Publications, 2017), 235.

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