

## **The Significance of Mar Ivanios for Liturgy, Church, Theology and Spirituality in East and West**

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This contribution asks whether and how contemporary Western European Christianity and its theology have anything to learn from a man who did not know the Roman Rite and who was unfamiliar – and did not seek familiarity – with any particular Western culture, yet who belonged to the Catholic Church utterly and completely. Mar Ivanios was the man who, in the twenties and thirties of the previous century, realized the reunification of many Indian Syro-Malankara Christians with the Roman Catholic Church. This article demonstrates that this Indian bishop, who may, in the future, be canonized as a saint in the Catholic Church, in fact has a lot to say to contemporary theology. I will particularly highlight his understanding of the Eucharist and his natural manner of connecting liturgy, life, Church and spirituality. The development of these two elements provides the opportunity to reflect anew, and from a liturgical theological perspective, on the universality of the Church, on the tension between sacredness and holiness, as well as on a few other widespread assumptions of the Liturgical Movement.

Mar Ivanios (1882-1953) was an Indian Christian, who greatly influenced the development of the so-called Syro-Malankara Church. He founded and animated the movement that, in the twenties and thirties of the last century, realized a reunification of many Syro-Malankara Christians in India with the Roman Catholic Church. It was not without reason that the well-known English author G. K. Chesterton called Mar Ivanios the ‘Newman of the East’. At this point, this fitting characterization ought to refer only to the stature of the man. Its precise meaning will become apparent only towards the end of this article.

At the moment, the Bethany Ashram or Order of the Imitation of Christ (OIC) that was founded by Mar Ivanios in collaboration with the

Syro-Malankara hierarchy, is preparing the canonization of its founder.<sup>1</sup> It is by no means improbable that this endeavor will succeed in the not-too-distant future. As far as I can tell, Mar Ivanios certainly fulfills most of the criteria applied today.<sup>2</sup> This essay, however, is rooted not in a journalistic interest in these developments but in the hypothesis that when theologians and liturgists ask about sanctity and the veneration of saints, they must appeal not only to the past but also to the future. For, the *communio sanctorum* which undoubtedly plays an important role in the liturgy is, by necessity, a community that is to be completed, for it has not yet reached its fullness.

Thus far only a few indicators have been given as to why a liturgical theologian might be interested in Mar Ivanios. In the course of this article I will provide further reasons. First, however, one should familiarize oneself with this man more closely. In the first part of this text, I thus briefly outline Mar Ivanios' life and works. In a second step, I deepen the theological reasons as to why an interest in Mar Ivanios might be meaningful to the contemporary Western European context of celebrating the liturgy and of reflecting on it theologically. Thirdly, I attempt an elaboration on the liturgy and the Eucharist. In doing so, my guiding questions are determined by the questions raised in the central part of the article. The key question of this contribution, then, is: what can we learn about the vital connection of liturgy, Church, spirituality and theology from a man, and eventually perhaps a saint, who belongs neither to European culture, nor to a Western (liturgical) tradition or to this time but who, without a doubt, belongs to the Catholic Church?

## **1.The Life and Works of Mar Ivanios**

To date, there exists no scientific biography of Mar Ivanios, although there are, of course, several descriptions of his life of a noticeably biographical ilk that illustrate the rich and wondrous personality and life story of Mar Ivanios by means of many anecdotes. These texts are mostly characterized by a certain culture of devotion. Some of them have been translated into English and, at least theoretically, help enable people also

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1 Cf. the websites <https://catholicate.net/curia/canonisation/7> and <http://www.bethanyashram.net/founder.php> (accessed May 2, 2022).

2 Cf. Veraja FABIJAN, *Heiligsprechung. Kommentar zur Gesetzgebung und Anleitung für die Praxis*, trans. and ed. by Andreas Resch, Innsbruck 1998; Marcus SIEGER, *Die Heiligsprechung. Geschichte und heutige Rechtslage*, Würzburg 1995.

outside of India to inform themselves about this extraordinary man.<sup>3</sup> For, in fact, the translations from Malayalam are normally distributed only throughout India itself.

### 1.1. Youth and Studies

Geevarghese, or Gevarghese (George), Paniker, or Panickaruveetil, was born on 21 September 1882 in Mavelikkara, Kerala, India. He was the son of a famous family – the Mallitti-Panikers –, who for generations had belonged to the Syrian Christians in South-West India. An older brother of his father was a priest and lived with them. The family lived very close to the church, of which they kept a key. The Christian faith in its local cultural-traditional form was also closely intertwined with the family history. The young Gevarghese was gifted, which he demonstrated both at the *Church Mission School* and at the state school where he was later educated. He changed schools because bishop Mar Joseph Pulikottil did not want him to be influenced too thoroughly by the protestant missionaries. For, secretly, this church leader had already determined him for the priestly office in his own church. In January 1898 – he was not yet 16 – Gevarghese Paniker entered the ‘Jacobite’ seminary of Kottayam. Then already, he began to concern himself with, and care for, the spiritual life of his fellow believers.

In 1900, Gevarghese Paniker was ordained a deacon and went on to obtain a Bachelor’s degree in economics and Indian history. In 1906 he obtained a masters from *Madras Christian College* with high marks. He was the first from the Malankara community to obtain a title in this way and his community was very proud of this. In the meantime, he continued his initiative for improving the religious and spiritual situation of his church community with much zeal. He attained the nickname “Koodasa Semmasan,” the sacrament-deacon. The Bible and the liturgy were the main sources of his efforts for renewal. On 15 September 1908, at the age of 26, he was ordained a priest by the successor of Mar Joseph Pulikottil, Mar Dionysius Vatassaril. Not long thereafter he was made director of the seminary in Kottayam.

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3 Peter C. ABRAHAM, *In his Master’s Footsteps. Life Story of Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, trans. Rebecca Thomas, Kottayam 2001; Margaret GIBBONS, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios, Apostle of Church Union*, Kottayam 2002 [1962]; George ONAKKOOR, *Mar Ivanios, the Prophet of Ascetic Wisdom*, trans. Babu Zachariah, Kottayam 2003.

When, in 1912, his bishop travelled to Kolkata in North India for an important ecumenical meeting, the young priest Gevarghese Paniker accompanied him as his personal secretary. The contacts made there contributed to his being appointed as a professor of Syrian, Church history and political economy at the University of Serampore in 1913. There he met a British nun, Mother Edith, who shared his interest in the Greek language and the Church Fathers. Together, they studied the writings of Saint Basil the Great on the religious life. Thus, the idea matured in Gevarghese, to develop a monastic community. So he quickly formed there around him a circle of enthusiastic disciples whose focus increasingly turned towards askesis and contemplation.

After six years as a professor, Gevarghese Paniker left Serampore with his group and returned to Kerala. There his first endeavor was to find a suitable place for the newly founded monastic order, Bethany Ashram. An acquaintance gave him a large piece of land in Perunad, where the first ashram, a center for prayer, recollection and contemplation, was soon built. Gevarghese Paniker often gave spiritual homilies, for which many people traveled to Perunad. A home for orphans was also built.

## **1.2. Achievements**

The most important achievements of Mar Ivanios undoubtedly consist in the foundation of religious orders and in the reunification of many Syro-Malankara Christians with the Roman Catholic Church.

During his time as a professor in the North of India the young priest was increasingly fascinated by the lifestyle of the *Sannyasi* (Hindu eremite or ascetic). At the same time – and as already mentioned – he studied the foundations of the Christian monastic life and of the religious life in Basil the Great, among others. It is thus that the specificity of the Bethany Ashram became apparent: culturally speaking fully Indian and at the same time deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. Since 1966 the order has been recognized by the papal authorities. Today, the *Order of the Imitation of Christ* (OIC) is a flourishing community that counts almost 300 members (of which more than 200 are priests) and that administrates and owns many schools and institutions. It has residences in two provinces and has its base (generalate) in Kottayam.<sup>4</sup> The seminary is located outside of Kerala, in Pune, Maharastra, where it maintains close relations with the Jnaanadeepa Institute of Philosophy and Theology.

4 More details can be found on the website <http://www.bethanyashram.net/ataglance.php> (accessed May 2, 2022).



As early as 1925, Gevarghese Paniker also founded a congregation for women, the Bethany Madham or *Sisters of the Imitation of Christ* (SIC). During his time in Serampore, the education and empowerment of girls and women was incredibly important to him. Today, this order counts more than 800 members in five provinces. The generalate is also located in Kottayam and the congregation already received papal recognition in 1956.<sup>5</sup>

Mar Ivanios was, finally, also involved with the foundation of a third religious congregation. When, in 1938, Joseph Kuzhinjalil founded the *Daughters of Mary*, he had the blessing of Mar Ivanios.<sup>6</sup> He had talked with him about this at length and both men shared the conviction that the spiritual renewal and mission of the young Syro-Malankara Church needed the support of religious institutes.

The three mentioned orders played a decisive role in the most significant achievement of Gevarghese Paniker: the reunification of many Syro-Malankara Christians with the Catholic Church.

The idea of the necessary unity of the Church had long imposed itself on his reflections, and the call for a realization of this unity became increasingly strong. Gevarghese also knew, however, that many of his sisters and brothers in the faith would see this as a betrayal. For the identity of the Syro-Malankara Church rested, among other things, on its resistance against the dominion of Western powers in Southern India. There had been the 1599 Synod of Diamper, in the wake of which the native liturgical and spiritual traditions were suppressed and a sweeping Latinization prevailed. Since then, the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara Christians were, to all intents and purposes, separated. In 1653, the Syro-Malankara Christians swore an oath (*Coonan Cross Oath*) which, among other things, contained continual resistance against the occupational power. They additionally went to Antiochia with a request for support of the Orthodox patriarch – which explains why, to this day, the Syro-Malankara churches do not belong to the East-Syrian but to the West-Syrian liturgical family.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless, however, Gevarghese Paniker was aware that he had to break this oath in order for reunification to be able to take place. In the

5 Cf. the website <https://catholicate.net/articles/SIC> (accessed May 2, 2022).

6 More information on this congregation can be found on the website <https://catholicate.net/articles/DM> (accessed May 2, 2022).

7 For a closer encounter with this liturgical family see Baby VARGHESE, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology*, Aldershot 2004.

symbolic order such an act is anything but self-evident. But he realized that the oath was not directed against Rome but against the colonizers, such that it was more of a historical-political than an ecclesial matter. In any case, barely any difficulties arose in the conversations that eventually took place between the representatives of the Syro-Malankara Church and those of the Roman Curia.

In 1926, a synod of the Syro-Malankara Orthodox Church took place. It was decided that Mar Ivanios, who, in the meantime, had been made a bishop (cf. *infra*), should work out the concrete modalities of a rapprochement. He took this task very seriously. And after having considered and talked about it at length, he, together with a few others, decided to move towards a complete reunification, though on the condition of preserving their own liturgical tradition and a (relatively) autonomous ecclesial structure.

The official and symbolic moment of reunification is generally identified as 20 September 1930, when Mar Ivanios and his fellow campaigners professed the creed in front of bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger, who was designated as the Pope's official representative for this matter. He was followed by the large majority of Bethany Ashram's members and by all the sisters of the Bethany Madham at the time. In the immediate future, they developed into the motor of the young Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. There was, by the way, no room for triumphalist feelings, for this entire period was a very difficult time for everyone involved. It took a long time for the official confirmation from Rome to materialize and many Syro-Malankara Christians put up a multi-layered resistance.

### 1.3. Writings

Regarding Mar Ivanios' writings, the most important edition is that of his collected works: *The Complete Works of Archbishop Mar Ivanios*. Six volumes of this edition appeared in 2006 under the direction of Antony Valiyavilayil.<sup>8</sup> The publication of the works of Mar Ivanios in English is,

8 The Complete Works of Mar Ivanios, Trivandrum 2006: No. 1: *Giripeedam (Mountain Lamp)*, trans. Sr. Rehmas, ed. Antony Valiyavilayil; No. 2: *A Guide to the Malankara Sanyasa*, trans. Samuel Thaikootathil, ed. Antony Valiyavilayil; No. 3: *The Liturgical Year. A Theological Reflection*, trans. Samuel Thaikootathil; No. 4: *Blossoms of Meditation. A Book of Meditation for the Malankara Faithful*, trans. Samuel Thaikootathil, ed. Antony Valiyavilayil; No. 5: *The Holy Qurbano. An Appraisal and Meditation*, trans. Antony Valiyavilayil; No. 6: *The Sacrament of Confession. A Meditative Study*, trans. Samuel Thaikootathil.

without a doubt, an important step towards making his ideas better known. It is no surprise that the office working towards his canonization (*The Cause of the Canonization of Mar Ivanios*) strongly advocated this publication.

Mar Ivanios' writings are not of a theological nature, at least not in the sense in which this is commonly understood by academic theologians in the West. In them, Mar Ivanios does not formulate complicated problems of understanding, nor does he engage in extensive discussions of method, unfold a hermeneutic of history, justify some version of a certain discourse or set up research hypotheses. He does not engage in source criticism, nor does he scientifically comment on a series of quotations, undertake fundamental research or exhaustively treat bodies of text and so on. The nature of his writings can rather be characterized as spiritual-catechetical, parenetical or edifying. Mar Ivanios' most important intention seems to consist in involving the faithful in the mysteries of faith ever more deeply.

With Marion, who, in *Dieu sans l'être* (*God without Being*), distinguishes between *Theologie* and *Theologie*,<sup>9</sup> I would nonetheless say that one can sense genuine theology, authentic speech of God, in these writings. With the help of an adequate hermeneutic and the right questions, the writings of Mar Ivanios can, today in the West, provide a meaningful contribution to disputed theological issues. Among these, the complex of liturgy, spirituality and theology appears to me to be the most central one: how can Christians in Western Europe (once again) orient spirituality more directly towards the rhythm of the liturgy, and how can theology benefit from this (yet to be realized) mutual enrichment?

It is evident that the writings of Mar Ivanios did not emerge as the result of the thought processes of an intellectual who experienced the urge or the pressure to put his ideas into writing. Instead, they originate in the variety of practical needs he became aware of in the course of his life. Mar Ivanios was also not a writer who took the time to endlessly refine his texts or whose priority lay in their style and literary quality. His language is profound in content, but at times grammatically simple and stylistically awkward.

#### 1.4. Later Life as a Bishop

As early as 1925, Gevarghese Paniker was consecrated a bishop in the Malankara Orthodox-Syrian Church, as bishop and director of the

9 Jean-Luc MARION, *Dieu sans l'être. Horts-texte*, Paris 1991 [1982], p. 216.

Bethany Ashram. Since then, he was called Gevarghese Mar Ivanios. After his entry into the Catholic Church, he preserved title and function. Later he also became the first Metropolitan or 'Katholikos' as head of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, which by then had five eparchies or dioceses. In 1932, Mar Ivanios travelled to Europe. During this journey, he received the opportunity to meet Pope Pius XI, who, in a solemn ceremony, presented him with the pallium. In the same year, he also participated in the 31<sup>st</sup> Eucharistic Congress, which then took place in Dublin, Ireland. Up until the end of his life, he organized, inspired and motivated the Syro-Malankara Church. After the Second World War, he embarked on another journey to the United States and Canada. In 1947, he was a much-regarded participant of the Marian Congress in Ottawa.

Mar Ivanios died on July 15, 1953. Soon afterwards he was considered one of the greatest Christian personalities from India in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2 The Interest in Mar Ivanios**

### **2.1. The Universal Church**

The universality of the Church is a first topic that I wish to discuss in the context of this contribution. How is it to be understood today? Many analyses, which need not again be further explicated here, have pointed out that in today's world the idea of a homogenous culture definitely belongs to the past. It is usually only conservative reactions that want to turn away from all that is 'other', in the belief that they must somehow shield themselves. At least in the West, homogenous cultures characterized by the steady cohesion of a people, a language, a history and a particular terrain within more or less clear geographical borders hardly exist anymore. Yet this evolution, which has often been described in terms of globalization and, perhaps better, also as 'glocalization', has not caused a disintegration but rather a mixing of cultures – plurality, diversity and de-traditionalization are, in any case, key terms in this context.<sup>10</sup> This process is still in its early stages and, in the near future, will probably prevail even further and more radically – even where one thought it possible or necessary to curb it.

The image of the universal Church was strongly determined by the image of a homogenous culture. This culture was Western European, was carried primarily by men and thought of itself as morally sophisticated.

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10 Cf. the thorough cultural theological analyses of Lieven BOEVE, *Interrupting Tradition. An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context*, Leuven 2003; *God Interrupts History. Theology in a Time of Upheaval*, New York 2007.

It was supported by the economic and technological domination of Europe and, later, of America, too. Today, the universal Church has a much different appearance. The truth is that the Church does not really coincide with any one culture. Of course, the message of Jesus Christ is always passed on through cultures, and the faith and its concrete forms of expression are always human, all too human, and therefore culturally determined. However, Christianity as such is no culture, not even a 'religious culture'. By nature, Christianity is *leiturgia*, service of God or, as they say so beautifully in German, *Gottesdienst*. How and in which culture this is carried out is less important than that it is practiced at all. The universal Church is therefore relatively independent of individual cultures. In its variegated forms of existence, it can never be detached from (old) cultures (and this would not be necessary), but at root, as a theological category, it transcends the boundaries of every culture.

Behind these thoughts lies the question of what role a man like Mar Ivanios can play for the universal Church. For it seems essential to me that the boundaries of Indian culture must be transcended if, as a potential saint, he truly has something to say and possesses real significance. The paradox consists in the fact that he is, on the one hand, the product of a particular, consciously non-Western culture – and is at least always presented as such by Indians –, and that precisely as a Christian believer in and from India he must, on the other hand, have embodied something of the universality of the Church and its faith. The contrast between the 'West' and the 'East' must, however, be surpassed such that Mar Ivanios acquires relevance also in Europe.<sup>11</sup> The exemplarity of a saint must necessarily contain a transcultural dimension and the veneration of saints itself must be fundamentally purged of all kinds of nationalism and ethnocentricity.

It will further need to be examined whether and how Mar Ivanios himself concretely realized the transcendence of culture in liturgy and spirituality.

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11 In the literature on Mar Ivanios, this contrast is nonetheless mentioned time and again. Mar Ivanios is seen as a hero of inculturation and many Syro-Malankara Indian Christians rather narrowly consider him 'one of us'. Cf. e.g., typically, ONAKKOOR, *Mar Ivanios, the Prophet of Ascetic Wisdom*, p. 19: "Western missionary societies [...] were out-doing one another in noble pomp and prosperity. The inspiration behind founding the Bethany Ashram was in no way theirs, but a backdrop entirely, and decidedly Eastern. It was purely from a *typical Indian atmosphere* that the vow, observances and modes of meditation were drawn" (my emphases).



## 2.2. Liturgy and Life

My liturgical theological interest in Mar Ivanios, secondly, concerns the relation between liturgy and life. For a few decades already, this has been an important topic of pastoral theological reflection that seems to, once again, have become more pronounced. The statement of the problem in a sense always emanates from the observation that the liturgical life of the Church is alienated from that of human beings in their everyday life. How can one build a bridge between an increasingly complicated everyday life and an institution that carries out unintelligible rites and that, in doing so, speaks a language that barely still says anything? Is the liturgy, which has emerged from a long history and which, according to Louis-Marie Chauvet, is ‘naturally conservative’, even still capable of conveying something meaningful? Or does the liturgy today express only the convictions of an increasingly diminishing group within a society that was once pervaded by Christianity?

Even for such a small group the question regarding the relation between liturgy and life is relevant and urgent. For how does one live the *‘ite missa est’*? How does that which is celebrated and said and how it is celebrated and said in the liturgy relate to lived life, not only in moral areas but also in all that Christians undertake and avoid? Are Christians really bearers, or heralds, of authentic evangelical joy, which, ultimately, is a deep joy about the real continuation of the resurrection of Christ?

I will examine how Mar Ivanios understands (reflexively) and shapes (actively) the inner relationship between liturgy and life. The middle term in this context seems to be a deeper liturgical and at the same time life-related spirituality.

## 2.3. Eucharistic Celebration and Piety

I am, thirdly, interested also in a classical problem in the theology of the Eucharist that has time and again been emphasized by representatives of the Liturgical Movement. It has often been said that the content of the Latin Mass was not understood by normal faithful that were present in the church building while a priest ‘offered the sacrifice’ or ‘said Mass’. It was not only the language that was problematic in this respect but also the entire ritual shape of the Eucharistic celebration. For the faithful were barely or not at all involved in the celebration. They only were present, prayed or concerned themselves with all sorts of devotional exercises. The ideal of *actuosa participatio* (active participation) in any case contrasted with

them. According to this ideal, the faithful should be involved in the course of the ritual actions so that the Eucharist can indeed develop into the climax and source of their religious life.

My question is not whether and how far this ideal is realized today, and whether and how far the many measures and regulations undertaken in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council contributed to this. (I of course think this to be the case.) My question is rather whether it is true that the faithful did not *understand* what the Mass was about. For the one cannot be logically concluded from the other. It is certainly possible not to be focused on the ritual performance, not to 'participate actively' in the sense of a consistent and systematic way of celebrating (*ars celebrandi*), and not to be used to praying during Mass, and this for years, and nonetheless to know and experience exactly what the Eucharist is actually about. From a maximalist pastoral perspective this is of course not ideal and encouraging but I think the facts are there and that they are clear.

With respect to Mar Ivanios, too, it is the case that during his life many Christians, primarily laypeople, were not involved in the celebration of the Eucharist in the sense of a maximalistically understood active participation and conscious involvement. Much was still said in Syrian, a language which they did not understand, and they were simply unable to see, and did not know, many of the fine rites at the altar. There even was (and still exists) a curtain between the sanctuary and the nave that plays an important role in the liturgy. In addition, the used texts are of such a complexity that they can hardly be understood unless one studies them in a detailed and profound way.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, one cannot claim that these Syro-Malankara Christians did not 'understand' their Mass, the holy Qurbano. Mar Ivanios neither changed the liturgy, nor was he a representative of some Liturgical Movement as it existed in the West, but he contributed much to the interior and intimate appropriation of the Mystery of the Eucharist on the part of the faithful towards whom he had a pastoral responsibility.

It will have to be examined, therefore, how exactly Mar Ivanios did this. He was obviously not helped by academic theology and mere instruction in the sense of an encyclopedic transmission of information. How did he view the mutual interplay of liturgy and devotions?

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12 Cf. *A Handbook of the Holy Mass According to the Malankara Rite, Dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, by His Grace the Most Reverend Doctor Mar Ivanios, Trivandrum 1947.

## 2.4. Sacredness and Holiness

Fourthly, I am interested in the dichotomy between sacredness and holiness. For the sacred in the sense attached to it in the history of religion or in the comparative study of religion cannot, or at least not automatically, be equivocated with the holy, or saint, of which the Christian tradition speaks. It may be true that being itself is something mysterious, that not everything can be explained (and understood and controlled), and that as a thinking animal the human being has always and everywhere been in some way conscious of this. With this, the deepest meaning of what Christians mean by holiness has not yet been sufficiently laid out. Sacredness is a feature that, for an interpreting subject open for this, somehow comes forward from the nature of things.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, holiness is not, in its origin, a quality of being as being but a quality that points back to the source and foundation of all holiness, God.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it is not natural but supernatural; its alliance with being rests not on features inherent to being but on the intercession of the Son, the promises of the Father and the dynamic of the Holy Spirit indwelling the Church. It is for this reason that canonizations are not to be interpreted as rewards but as gifts. They must be understood as formative of the Church and as eschatological – they are, ultimately, truly liturgical.

With regard to Mar Ivanios, we must ask how he interprets the Mystery of holiness, as well as how he deals with the sensibility for sacrality that spontaneously wells up in human beings.

## 3. Mar Ivanios on Liturgy and Eucharist

Mar Ivanios probably already wrote a series of meditations on the Holy Mass in 1923. These originally served the purpose of orienting the members of the Bethany Ashram more directly towards the Mystery that is celebrated in the Eucharist. This compilation of 31 texts in fact resembles the well-known *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* of St. Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori (1696-1787), both in form and in content.<sup>15</sup> This wondrous corpus

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13 For a more detailed engagement with the question of sacredness and holiness see: Joris GELDHOF, *Liturgy and Secularism: Beyond the Divide*, Collegeville 2018, ch. 3.

14 God is called *fons omnis sanctitatis* in the second Eucharistic prayer of the Roman Missal.

15 On this, see my essay "Eucharistic Adoration in East and West: An Essay on Mar Ivanios and St. Alphonse de Liguori," in Mathai KADAVIL, James PUTHUPARAMPIL & G.T. KALLUNKAL (eds.), *From Streams to Source. Essays*

of texts is included in *The Complete Works of Mar Ivanios* as the second part of the fifth volume; the first part is a catechetical instruction with questions and answers on the Eucharist. This entire fifth volume will provide me with the basis for four modest reflections on Mar Ivanios' liturgical theology.<sup>16</sup>

I discuss, first, the notion of sacrifice, second Mar Ivanios' marked liturgical theological and sacramental theological realism, third the dichotomy of God's holiness and human beings' sinfulness and, finally, the foundational miracle of God's love. These four subject areas are representative for Mar Ivanios' theology of the liturgy and the sacraments.

### 3.1. The Sacrificial Character of the Mass

The sacrificial character of the Mass is a difficult subject of sacramental theology in so far as one often hears that classical Catholic theologies of the Eucharist are too narrowly focused on this while the liturgy of the Eucharist itself does not emphasize it as strongly as theology does. This whole matter was taken up again by the American Jesuit Robert J. Daly. In his monograph *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* he particularly aligns himself with the analyses of another Jesuit, Edward J. Kilmartin. Understood in a Christian sense, Daly asserts, sacrifice can never consist in giving in order to receive, no matter how subtly spiritualized. The only sacrifice in the Christian sense must be understood in a Trinitarian, not an anthropological, manner. Daly says:

It begins, in a kind of first 'moment', not with us but with the self-offering of God the Father in the gift of the Son. It continues, in a second 'moment', in the self-offering 'response' of the Son, in his humanity and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the Father and for us. And it continues further in a third 'moment' – and only then does it begin to become Christian sacrifice – when we, in human actions that are empowered by the same Spirit that was in Jesus, begin to

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*on the Foundation of Malankara Theology*, Pune 2010, 361-389. See pp. 365-366 for a discussion of the difficulties encountered in analyzing and interpreting these texts.

16 On Mar Ivanios and the liturgy see: Philip CHEMPEKASSERY, "The Eucharist in the Teachings of Mar Ivanios," in Geevarghese CHEDIATH, Kurian VALUPARAMBIL & Philip CHEMPEKASSERY (eds.), *Archbishop Mar Ivanios in his Thoughts*, Trivandrum 2004, 38-51; Kuriakose KULAPARATH, "Liturgy as a Means of Union with God: Mar Ivanios' Vision on Liturgy," in Anthony VALIYAVILAYIL OIC (ed.), *The Theological Visions of Mar Ivanios*, Pune 2004, 102-138.

enter into that perfect, en-Spirited, mutually self-giving, mutually self-communicating personal relationship that is the life of the Blessed Trinity.<sup>17</sup>

Mar Ivanios' interpretation of the holy Qurbono as a sacrifice, in a way, comes very close to this definition. He distinguishes four inseparably intertwined dimensions of sacrifice:

The holy qurbono is a sacrifice (1) as it is a means for us to offer glory and praise to God [...], and (2) as the sacrifice of the crucified Son of God, that is, the sacrifice which the Son offers in heaven before God the Father, which the Church remembers and offers, in the form of a sacrifice, the heavenly sacrifice of the Son of God in the holy qurbono [...], and (3) as we offer ourselves to God as a living, holy sacrifice to God in the holy qurbono [...], and (4) as we offer our kith and kin and everything we have as a sacrifice for the glory of God the Father [...].<sup>18</sup>

This remarkable congruence between Daly and Mar Ivanios may indicate – firstly – that the understanding of sacrifice developed in the East was often no less strongly pronounced than in the West and – secondly – that it is precisely in this respect that Mar Ivanios might serve as a bridge-builder. As Daly also knows, the solution regarding sacrifice as a problem for theology and faith cannot consist in simply undoing the notion of sacrifice in liturgy and theology but only in a consistently executed redetermination of the term. In this context, one could also suggest that popular piety and the celebration of the Eucharist were not, perhaps, set apart as widely as has often been claimed.

### **3.2. Real Presence, Encounter and Communion**

Mar Ivanios was strongly conscious of the real presence: “Jesus the Messiah abides in the holy qurbono genuinely, truly, spiritually, perfectly and really.”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere he says:

We believe [...] that you are present in this holy sacrifice [...]. We believe that your body crucified on the cross is present here. We believe that the hands nailed on the cross, the blood that flowed like water, the heart pierced for the sake of love, the eternal Son of God

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17 Robert J. DALY, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice*, London – New York 2009, p. 5.

18 MAR IVANIOS, *The Holy Qurbono* (CW 5), p. 51.

19 MAR IVANIOS, *The Holy Qurbono* (CW 5), p. 62.



crucified, the holy high priest, Jesus condemned to death, is present here.<sup>20</sup>

In his thinking, the notion of the real presence is thus connected with the fact that the celebration of the Eucharist or Qurbono is a real event of encounter and commemoration. It is an event that, through the act of remembering (*anamnesis*: “memorial”), enables a real encounter with the origin of all holiness and of all salvation.

The sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah had been offered for the salvation of the whole world. It is being offered continuously. The holy qurbono is a means to recall this to mind and to experience the same. Hence it is offered before the holy Church as a memorial.<sup>21</sup>

This strong metaphysical consciousness is extended in practical theological terms with thorough existential interpretations of the Mystery of faith. For Mar Ivanios the Eucharist cannot really be something unworldly, for it refers as much to the innermost part of the human being as to God. The deepest fulfillment of human existence consists in *communio* with God (cf. the motif of *theosis* in many oriental theologies), and the Eucharist is situated at the crossroads of the divine-human encounter: “Make us come near your sacred thronos and be absorbed in your presence,”<sup>22</sup> he prays.

### 3.3. God’s Holiness and the Unworthiness of the Human Being

According to Mar Ivanios, there is of course a sharp contrast between God and the human being. It is striking how elevated his language is when he speaks of, or orientates himself towards, God. The contrast with human sinfulness is truly considerable. This is generally an important and prominent topic in the theology of Mar Ivanios.<sup>23</sup> Two striking points are to be highlighted here.

The emphasis on the sinfulness of the human being is, firstly, not merely the expression of an oppressive moralism similar to that with which pastors in the West still seem to be grappling – and which, indeed, may not yet have been fully overcome. There are, to be sure, moralizing traits in Mar Ivanios’ paraneses but the category of sin does not primarily serve

20 MAR IVANIOS, *The Holy Qurbono* (CW 5), p. 97.

21 MAR IVANIOS, *The Holy Qurbono* (CW 5), p. 47.

22 MAR IVANIOS, *The Holy Qurbono* (CW 5), p. 152.

23 Mar Ivanios dedicated an entire book to the sacrament of confession: *The Sacrament of Confession. A Meditative Study* (CW 6).

him to stress the culpability of the human being. Rhetorically speaking, the discourse on sin rather functions as a vehicle towards emphasizing the human being's need of grace.<sup>24</sup> Put simplistically, the human being will not 'make it' without God. Only through recognition of the Other will he or she liberate themselves (and others) from the messiness and misery of the world.

Mar Ivanios' determination of the relationship between God and the human being by way of the terminology of sinfulness, unworthiness and the need for grace, secondly, implies a genuinely soteriological dynamic. Through the liturgy – and especially the sacrament of the Eucharist – God, in total freedom, gives signs of grace that somehow meet humans' deepest desires. For Mar Ivanios, the liturgy is not only a special symbolic frame (among possible alternatives) that points us to the unusual or the mysterious dimensions of reality. It brings something about, it effects something, it is of the order of doing rather than of mere referencing. And what it does or achieves has to be seen in the line of salvific events which found their climax in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Human beings, in any case, need the liturgy so that they can perfect themselves: "It is the holy qurbono that sanctifies the saints who are grown up in sanctity and leads them to perfection. [...] In the holy qurbono is deposited all the graces that a faithful needs to grow up as a perfect human being."<sup>25</sup>

The contrast between God's holiness and human sinfulness serves not, therefore, to oppress human beings but to elevate them. And insofar as holiness has to do with the salvation that is to be given to human beings, it is only God who stands at its origin. As a consequence, it must not be confused with natural sacredness.

### **3.4. The Love of God and his Sacrament**

It can no longer be a surprise that for Mar Ivanios, the Eucharist is the foundational sacrament of the love of God, truly *sacramentum caritatis*. In the Eucharist, the perpetual realization of this love, which was crowned in the Christ event, is further affirmed. There are clear soteriological, ecclesiological and eschatological accents in Mar Ivanios' understanding of the Eucharist. The Church celebrates the Eucharist in order to praise God and in order to give Him thanks for the offer of love and salvation that was realized in and through His Son. The aim ultimately lies in the

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24 Cf. MAR IVANIOS, *The Holy Qurbono* (CW 5), p. 92.

25 MAR IVANIOS, *The Holy Qurbono* (CW 5), p. 37.

reconciliation of the entire human family and all of creation with Him, and in our 'active participation' in the inner-trinitarian love itself. The image of the heavenly banquet is thus close to Mar Ivanios' heart:

Lord! How good and invaluable is the banquet, you, the heavenly king has prepared for us, the earthly ones. You have prepared the table of banquet in this church and in all churches. [...] All are welcome to the banquet hall of the king of kings. No one has to stay out. How poor or costly be our clothes, how illiterate or how wise we are, whether we are born in a poor man's hut or in the palace of a king – you consider everyone equal. All have the same freedom and rights. All are invited to your banquet of love. Most beloved Jesus! Make us understand the height and depth of your love revealed in this.<sup>26</sup>

#### **4. Concluding Reflection**

To conclude, I want to respond positively to the question posed at the beginning of this essay, namely whether one can learn anything from the ideas, achievements and texts of a man, who has a good chance of being canonized in the future. I consider it important, even, to promote the reception of Mar Ivanios also outside of India, as a tangible sign of trust in the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I hope to have convincingly shown that there are meaningful signs in his life and thought that may contribute to the endeavor of, once again, forging a closer relationship between theology and church life on the one hand and liturgy and spirituality on the other. Such a conversation could be a concrete example for the frequently demanded but rarely practiced dialogue between 'the East' and 'the West'.

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26 MAR IVANIOS, *The Holy Qurbano* (CW 5), p. 103.