

East Syriac Theology

An Introduction



Edited by
Pauly Maniyattu

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East Syriac Theology

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Pauly Maniyattu



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East Syriac Theology:An Introduction

Edited by Pauly Maniyattu

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Foreword

Catholic Church has recognized the diversity of theology in the East and West. It is made clear in the Vatican II decree on ecumenism: “In the investigation of the revealed truth, East and West have used different methods and approaches in understanding and proclaiming divine things” (UR 17). Church has realized that such a diversity in methods and approaches is of great significance for the preservation and promotion of the common heritage of the Church. Therefore, Church tells all the faithful to “realize that it is of supreme importance to understand, venerate and foster the exceedingly rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches in order faithfully to preserve the fullness of Christian tradition and to bring about reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians” (UR 15). The liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary heritage of the Oriental Churches is viewed by the Church as the heritage of the whole Church of Christ (OE 5).

Preservation and promotion of the ecclesiastical heritage is a grave obligation on the part of the Eastern Churches. Vatican Council II insists on this obligation of the Eastern faithful. “All these, then, must be observed with greatest fidelity by the Orientals themselves. They are to aim always at a more perfect knowledge and a more exact use of them, and if they have fallen short because of contingencies of time and persons, they shall endeavour to return to their ancestral traditions” (OE 6). However, such a concern for the preservation and promotion of Eastern heritage cannot be the concern only of Eastern Churches. The faithful of the Western Church as well, should be aware of this obligation. Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter, *Orientalis Lumen* (1995) asked all Catholics to be familiar with the Eastern tradition, so as to be nourished by it and to encourage the process of unity in the best way possible for each” (OL 1).

It is in this context that the endeavours of St. Ephrem’s Theological College, Satna, to promote East Syriac theology, become much relevant. The present volume is the result of a serious attempt from the part of St. Ephrem’s Theological College for the promotion of Syriac theology. The articles in this book are based on the scholarly papers presented at the National Symposium of Syriac theology conducted by St. Ephrem’s Theological

College. The scholars who have contributed to this book are not presenting the East Syriac theology just from a historical perspective. The theology of the Churches of the East Syriac tradition is analysed, especially in view of the present generation of believers. The expositions of the Syriac theologians are presented in the context of today's Church, with a critical reflection on their theological conclusions.

This book on the East Syriac theology is edited by Fr. Pauly Maniyattu, former Dean of Studies of St. Ephrem's Theological College and the first editor of *Ephrem's Theological Journal*. He has done a good job in presenting the scholarly expositions of different people with a specific goal: the presentation of an integral and coherent theological vision of the East Syriac tradition, relevant to the ecclesial life today. The article on the important characteristics of the Syriac theology serves as a good introduction to the study of East Syriac theology. There are detailed studies on the views of great Syriac theologians like Aphrahat and Ephrem. Specific studies on the Christology, Soteriology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, Mariology, Sacramental Theology, Theology of Eucharist, and Moral Theology help us to delve deep into the riches of the East Syriac theology.

Today, when great Eastern theologians like St. Ephrem, are becoming more and more influential in the Church as a whole, it would be a remarkable service to introduce the important features of the Syriac theology to all those who are not yet familiar with the riches of the Syriac tradition. I hope and pray that this book may invite great number of Christian faithful to understand, appreciate and promote the venerable theological heritage of the East Syriac tradition.

Bishop Mar Mathew Vaniakizhakkal

Satna, May 5, 2007

Introduction

Theological patrimony is one of the important elements of the identity of a Church *sui iuris* (CCEO can.28). An individual Church is required to have its own theological heritage. However, there are individual Churches sharing one and the same liturgical and theological traditions. The Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Church and the Syro-Malabar Church share the same East Syriac liturgical and theological traditions, though with some considerable differences. Thus the East Syriac theology is the theology of these three Churches. The assertion of the identity of these Churches necessarily results in the recognition of the East Syriac theology.

East Syriac theology was developed by numerous great theologians, starting from the time of the Fathers. There is a vast amount of literature dealing with this theology. East Syriac theology was so beautifully exposed in the early centuries of Christian era that the theological writings of authors like St. Ephrem enjoyed a universal appeal. But when we talk about the glorious situation of the East Syriac theology in the past, the real question is about the relevance of such theological works today in the main-stream theologizing of the Catholic Church. It seems that only a little impact is made in our times by this theological tradition on the general theological views of the Church. While extolling the greatness of Syriac theology we face the following questions: Does this theological tradition play some role in the contemporary ecclesiology, sacramental theology, and moral theology? Is the Syriac theology just an appendix to the theology of the Church? Is the official teaching of the Church sufficiently inspired by the great theological tradition of the Church of the East?

Why was East Syriac theology not properly recognized in the recent centuries? The predominance of the Western Catholic theology or Latin theology accounted for the negligence of the theological traditions of the Eastern Churches. The insistence on a uniform liturgical and consequent uniform theological understanding in the West paved the way for the disappearance of various liturgical and theological traditions in the West. Thus a uniform liturgical tradition prepared the ground for a uniform theology in the West. Though the Churches in the East always appreciated the diverse liturgical and theological traditions, the steady development and dissemination of the theological views of

the West had an overwhelming effect on these Churches. This was all the more true in the case of the Oriental Churches in communion with Rome. The decline of many Eastern Churches due to political, social and ecclesiastical reasons may have caused the deterioration of their respective theological traditions. Thus East Syriac theology which had enjoyed a remarkable position in the theological milieu of the Christian Church, was practically ignored.

For those who were familiar with the Western style of theologizing the lack of a systematic approach in the Eastern theologies was a sign of imperfection. The Eastern theologies were considered weak and imperfect and therefore, were gradually discarded, and the theology of the Latin Church came to be recognized as the official theology of the Church. The overwhelming influence of the Western culture has almost brainwashed some of the theologians of the Eastern Churches, and consequently the Western theological thinking has become an imperative for them. They were so much influenced by the Western theological thinking that the very notion of theology came to be understood as theology of the Latin Church.

For the Eastern Churches the lack of proper awareness of their theological heritage was perhaps the most important reason for the switchover to Latin theology. The Eastern Churches miserably failed in presenting their theologies in a manner appealing to the scholarly world. As a result they were forced to impart to their members a theological formation in accordance with the Western understanding. The courses conducted at the theological institutes and seminaries were basically "Latin" in method and content.

However, the classical Western method of theologizing seems to have suffered many set backs while addressing the grave issues of modern man. Hence there are many theologians even in the Latin Church who look for a radically different approach in interpreting the Christian faith in today's world. Since East Syriac theology has a different approach, its theologizing method could be proposed as an alternative to the Western method. The central goal of this book is to highlight the potentiality of the East Syriac tradition to contribute to a paradigm shift in the theologizing of Church today. The promotion of East Syriac theology today has the definite purpose of proposing alternative means for the Church to address the problems of modern man. For example, the stress on the transformation of man in the East Syriac eucharistic theology is

more relevant to the Church today than the stress on the 'eucharistia' towards God in the Western eucharistic theology.

The present volume is the fruit of the national symposium on Syriac theology conducted by St. Ephrem's Theological College, Satna in 2004. Most of the papers presented at the symposium were re-worked and modified by the authors in the light of the discussions which followed the presentation of the papers. This book presenting together all papers of the symposium aims at giving a general picture of the various disciplines of the East Syriac theology. The articles of this volume serving as brief introductions to different branches of East Syriac theology would surely provide us with some clear idea about the characteristic features of the theology in the East Syriac tradition.

Though most of the articles of this volume deal with specific theological themes, we may not claim them to be exhaustive studies on such themes. The different articles are indeed attempts of introducing the various aspects of the East Syriac theology. In fact the theological expositions in this volume are much limited since they are based only on some of the important sources of East Syriac theology. The authors have made use of biblical, liturgical, patristic and canonical sources to a limited extent. However, a good number of texts of the liturgical prayers, commentaries and patristic texts could not be included, mainly because of the fact that they are not yet made available for theological research.

This volume consists of an introductory study on the relevance of Eastern theology by Bishop Isidore Fernandez. Citing from the pertinent teachings of the Church, the author discusses the importance of Eastern theology for the entire Church. Following the words of Pope John Paul II - the Church must learn to breathe again with its two lungs, its Eastern one and its Western one - Bishop Isidore Fernandez insists on the need of the whole Catholic Church getting familiar with the theological tradition of the Eastern Churches. The introductory study on Eastern theology is followed by Bishop Abraham Mattam's article on the historical setting of East Syriac theology. This article prepares the ground for understanding and appreciating the Syriac theological heritage. Recognizing the great role played by the theological School of Nisibis in the development of the East Syriac theology, Bishop Mattam discusses the origin and development of the School of

Nisibis and its shift to Edessa. Along with the history of the theological School, we are provided with good amount of information on the structure and organization of the School, the directors, and the specific theological position of the School. The detailed treatise on the theological School helps us to understand the academic foundation and quality of the East Syriac theology. The second part of the article is on the Semitic and Hellenic background of the East Syriac Theology. Bishop Mattam, citing the views of Sebastian Brock on the Semitic and Hellenic poles of the Syriac tradition, gives us some general idea about the influence of these two poles on the East Syriac tradition.

Archbishop Joseph Powathil's article on the basic features of early Syriac theology is a profound study on the important characteristics of the East Syriac theology. The author views the Semitic origin as something pertaining to the uniqueness of the East Syriac theology. This theology is thoroughly a biblical theology, encountered by the faithful as the tangible expression of the living faith. The extra-ordinary emphasis on the 'sense of mystery', something very much characteristic of the East Syriac liturgy, is seen in the theological tradition too. The author points out the pneumatological, incarnative, eschatological and ascetical dimensions of the East Syriac theology. The symbolic aspect of Syriac theology is discussed at length, showing also the example of Ephrem's theology in poetry. Theology in the Syriac Orient is almost the mysticism of Nature. Thus Syriac theology is by its very nature eco-theology. The following three articles may be viewed as continuation of Archbishop Powathil's article. They are specific studies giving examples for some important features of the East Syriac theology. Fr. Thomas Kuzhuppil's article discusses the patristic emphasis of the East Syriac theology. Fr. George Kaniarakath CMI provides us with a remarkable illustration of the biblical emphasis of the East Syriac theology, focusing the theological writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem. Fr. Thomas Anikuzhikattil's article is a detailed example for the East Syriac theology, as it is presented by St. Ephrem.

The article on the Patristic foundation of the East Syriac theology by Fr. Kuzhuppil concentrates on the Patristic contribution to the theological patrimony of the East Syriac tradition. The article begins with a short inquiry into the origin of

the double heritages of the Church of the East. Based on the writings of the Syriac Fathers the author discusses the theology of the imageries, the exegetical method of the Fathers, and the eucharistic theology of the Fathers. Ecclesial life is depicted by the Syriac Fathers as a Eucharist-centered life. The role of Holy Spirit in the eucharistic spirituality is properly emphasized.

Fr. Kaniarakath's article presents the biblical theology of Aphrahat and Ephrem. The author points out Aphrahat's emphasis on faith as the foundation. Aphrahat's biblical theology is centered on themes like typological parallels and lists of testimonies, the idea of divinization and the theology of history. Ephrem's biblical theology is presented citing numerous texts from Ephrem. The author explains Ephrem's view on the three sources of revelation - the creation (Nature), the written Words of Bible and the Son of God. Fr. Kaniarakath deals with Ephrem's understanding of the biblical theology of the economy of salvation. Ephrem's views on creation, the loss of Paradise, incarnation and re-entry into Paradise are discussed in detail.

The theologizing method of St. Ephrem is the central point of the article by Fr. Anikuzhikattil. He analyses the important writings of St. Ephrem and points out the basic features of the East Syriac theology employed in Ephrem's writings. The symbolic literary style, typical of Syriac theology, is seen as an important feature of Ephrem's theology. Ephrem's theological method is discussed explaining some basic concepts and themes in his writings. Thus there is discussion on Ephrem's themes like Creator and Creation, Hidden and the Revealed, Primacy of Faith, Two Times, One and the Many, Concept of Free Will, and Value of Human Body. This discussion is followed by a study on the use of imagery in Ephrem's writings. The presentation of the distinctive theological motifs in Ephrem may help us to have a clear picture of the theological world of Ephrem. As examples of the special themes treated by Ephrem, the author provides us with sample studies on Ephrem's ecclesiology, paschal theology and Mariology.

Fr. James Palackal's article is an attempt to trace out the ecclesiology in the East Syriac tradition. As the author himself says, it may not be justified if we are looking for an ecclesiology of modern understanding in the East Syriac writings. The author points out the limitations of the early Syriac 'Ecclesiology'. The

concept of covenant is presented as the key to understand the early Syriac Church. The ecclesiological understanding of the East Syriac tradition is explained through the themes like the Church of the Nations, the Body of Christ and corporate personality, Church as the bride of Christ, origin of Church from the side of Christ, Church as mother, Mary and the Church, Church as ship coming to harbour, and the house on the rock.

East Syriac Christology has been the subject of intense discussion in various theological circles, mainly because of the accusation that there could be traits of nestorianism in the East Syriac Christology. Fr. John Thoppil gives a precise and brief account of the Christological position of the Church of the East and compares it with the christological positions of the Antiochene and Alexandrian traditions. The christological views of the important authors like St. Ephrem, Narsai of Nisibis and Babai the Great are presented to verify the orthodoxy of the christological teaching of the East Syriac tradition. The author gives the doctrinal exposition of the East Syriac Christology, explaining the christological terminologies and christological themes in liturgy and the conciliar teaching of the Church of the East on Christology.

The article on the Syriac Portraits of Christian Salvation by Fr. Thomas Kollampampil, CMI is one complementing the article on Christology. The Syriac soteriological understanding is exposed here, analysing numerous texts of the Fathers. However, the Syriac portraits of salvation discussed here may not be considered in the strict sense as pertaining to the East Syriac tradition. This article contains theological expressions from both East Syriac and West Syriac traditions. They bring out a sort of general theology of the Syriac traditions with regard to the work of salvation accomplished by our Saviour. The theological writings of great Fathers like Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh are taken as the central source. In fact, the Syriac portraits concentrate on the mystery of the created humanity and the mystery of the history of salvation. The Adam-Christ complementarity is a central theme in the Syriac soteriology presented here.

Fr. Thomas Neendoor's article is a brief study on the East Syriac Pneumatology. The author examines the pneumatological understanding of the early Church and reaches certain conclusions regarding the understanding of the early Syriac Church on the Holy

Spirit, analysing the biblical, patristic and liturgical sources in the East Syriac tradition. After discussing the Tradition on the Holy Spirit, the author presents the various symbolisms of the Holy Spirit. From among the Syriac Fathers the views of Ephrem and Narsai are presented as typical sources of the East Syriac pneumatology. There is also the discussion of the work of the Spirit in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. Thus the author also presents a liturgical pneumatology.

The East Syriac Tradition has an entirely different concept about the sacraments of the Church. In fact, the term 'sacrament' is foreign to this tradition. 'Rāzē or mysteries is Syriac tradition's favourite term parallel to the Western term 'sacrament'. Fr. Jose Kochuparampil discusses the theology of 'Rāzē in the East Syriac Tradition. The article treats in the beginning the general theology of the 'Rāzē. After explaining the trinitarian and ecclesial dimensions of the mysteries the author proceeds to the discussion of the liturgical understanding of the mysteries of the Church. The mysteries of the Church - mystery of the priesthood, mystery of Church, mystery of baptism, mystery of Qurbānā, perfection of the monks, mystery of matrimony, mystery of the sign of the cross, penitence, anointing of the sick and the service for the dead - are discussed on the basis of the patristic, liturgical and canonical sources.

East Syriac tradition can be indeed proud of its liturgical tradition since it has one of the most ancient liturgies of the Church. The ancient anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari, the most precious possession of the East Syriac liturgical tradition, the "gemma orientale" as praised by the scholars in the West, contributes substantially to the eucharistic theology of this tradition. My article on the theology of Eucharist in the East Syriac tradition is a humble attempt to understand the significance of the eucharistic celebration in the ecclesial life of the East Syriac tradition. I have tried to present the theology of Eucharist analyzing the celebration of the Holy Qurbana (Eucharist) in its totality. Thus, the entire space-time of the Qurbana is significant in this theology of the Eucharist. The liturgical space is seen as the meeting of heaven and earth; the processions between the sanctuary and bema are understood as the movements between heaven and earth, namely the incarnation and the ascent to heaven. The central aim of the celebration of the Eucharist is the

sanctification of God and sanctification of man. Commemoration of the paschal mystery of Christ becomes the means of this twofold sanctification. The prayers, actions and the objects in the liturgy serve as authentic means for the sanctification of God and our sanctification. The transformation or sanctification of man resulting from the commemoration of the paschal mystery of Christ is the real event desired of the Eucharist. Thus the East Syriac theology of Eucharist stresses the transformation of man through the sanctification of God.

The Syriac tradition assigns to Blessed Virgin Mary a very special place in the Church. The liturgies and the writings of the Fathers praise her greatness as the mother of Christ and the mother of the Church. Fr. James Puthuparampil OIC discusses the sublime views of the Fathers, especially of St. Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh on Blessed Virgin Mary, in his article on the Syriac Mariology. As in the case of the Syriac soteriology, here we do not have a precise East Syriac Mariology since the present treatise is based on the writings of Ephrem, the East Syriac author and Jacob of Serugh, the West Syriac author. In fact, with regard to Mariology we may not find substantial difference between East Syriac and West Syriac traditions. Ephrem's writings on Mary are taken into the liturgical texts by both East Syriac and West Syriac traditions. The important Mariological themes like divine motherhood of Mary, the perpetual virginity of Mary, holiness of Mary, Mary's participation in the human redemption, assumption of Mary, and Mary's intercession are discussed on the basis of the patristic writings and liturgical texts.

In the article on moral theology Fr. Dominic Vechoor discusses the notion of Christian morality against the background of the moral theology of the Eastern Churches in general, and then particularly of the East Syriac tradition. The author provides us with the general outlines of the moral reflections in the East. The writings of the Fathers concerning moral life are seen as the foundation of the Eastern moral theology. The author points out the celebrative (liturgical) character of the moral life. Christian moral life is viewed by the Syriac tradition as the life in Christ. The moral vision of the East Syriac tradition is presented as a paradigm for an eastern approach to Catholic moral Theology. The important themes discussed in relation to the East Syriac moral theology are

the imageries of Christian baptismal life, purity of heart as the basic virtue, ascetic life style, sacramental character of the created world, and the healing imageries related to Christian life.

While concluding this introductory note, I would like to remember the generous help of many persons for this publication. I express my most sincere gratitude to them all for their whole-hearted support. I am especially grateful to Mar Mathew Vaniakizhakkal, the bishop of Satna, who has been rendering constant encouragement and support to all endeavours for promoting East Syriac theology. He has expressed his great concern towards this publication, writing the Foreword for it. I express my sincere gratitude to all scholars who contributed articles for this book. I feel privileged to mention the names of the great personalities like Archbishop Mar Joseph Powathil, Bishop Mar Abraham Mattam and Bishop Rt. Rev. Isidore Fernandez whose contribution to this work, I believe, is indeed a blessing. It is my great pleasure to place on record my sincere thanks to Bishop Mar Mathew Anikuzhikattil, Very Rev. Fr. Jose Koodapuzha, the Rector of St. Ephrem's Theological College (ETC), Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Maleparampil, the former Rector of ETC, the Staff and Students of ETC, Fr. Thomas Kochuthara and Fr. Joseph Ottapurackal, the officials of Ephrem's Publications, and St. Thomas Press, Palai for their timely support and co-operation. If our readers are inspired a little bit to turn to the East Syriac theological tradition for the betterment of today's ecclesial life, that is undoubtedly the reward for the sincere and concerted effort of so many people manifested in the publication of this book. It is my earnest wish that this book may become a humble sign attracting scholars as well as lay people to the wonderful world of East Syriac theology.

Pauly Maniyattu
Editor

1

Relevance of Eastern Theology Today¹

Bishop Isidore Fernandez

While commencing a serious study on the East Syriac theology, it is quite opportune to ponder over the words of Pope John Paul II on the relevance of the Eastern heritage for the entire Catholic Church: “The Church must learn to breathe again with its two lungs: its Eastern one and its Western one.”² One of the greatest achievements of Vatican II from an ecclesiological perspective was the re-discovery of the patristic understanding of the Church as a communion of the Churches. The Church deeply aware of this ecclesial reality appreciates and promotes the various elements of the ecclesial heritage of the Eastern Churches. Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic letter *Orientalis Lumen* says: “ Since in fact we believe that the venerable and ancient tradition of the Eastern Churches is an integral part of the heritage of Christ’s Church, the first need for Catholics is to be familiar with that tradition, so as to be nourished by it and to encourage the process of unity in the best way possible for each” (OL 1).

Familiarity with the Eastern Churches and with their heritage is important for appreciating the contribution of these Churches. Besides, this familiarity helps further co- operation, understanding and mutual respect especially among the various sui iuris Churches within the Catholic communion.

The Church, founded by Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, has its roots in the Syriac East. It is significant to observe that, the Church was born in the Syriac and Semitic context of Jerusalem. The thought forms, the imageries and the religious vocabulary used in the New Testament are all Semitic and the Syriac writings are steeped in Biblical Tradition and they preserve for us the authentic primitive spirituality of the apostolic times.³

Swami Vivekananda, who was very much impressed by the Eastern identity of Jesus of Nazareth and the Semitic, Eastern and Biblical background of Christianity, reacts to the attempts to portray Christ and Christianity as Western. He told the people of America in 1900 at Los Angeles:

“Many times you forget that the Nazarene himself was an oriental of Orientals, with all your attempts to paint him with blue eyes and yellow hair; the Nazarene was still an oriental. All the similes, the imageries in which the Bible is written, the scenes, the locations, the attitudes, the groups, the poetry and symbol- speak to you of the Orient; of the bright sky, of the heat, of the sun, of the desert, of thirsty men and animals; of men and women coming with pitchers on their heads to fill them at the wells, of the flocks of the ploughmen, of cultivation that is going around: of the water- mill and wheel, of the mill- pond, of the mill- stone.”⁴

The Eastern Churches have played such a vital role in the history of the Church that “the history of the early Church is basically the history of the Eastern Churches. The Apostles, their disciples and the later messengers of the Gospel were Orientals, and it is to them that we owe the doctrinal development, the organization of the Churches, last not least the victorious struggle against heresies which threatened the very existence of the Church, its faith and mission. Traditions and many ecclesiastical institutions, liturgical rites etc. equally took shape in the East, and the western Church which is an offspring of the evangelical work of the Orientals, has largely profited from what the Eastern Churches could offer.”⁵

In the Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen* the Pope John Paul II underlines the Eastern origin of the Christianity saying that the Eastern Christianity provided the natural setting for the Church to take root:

“In contemplating it, before my eyes appear elements of great significance for a fuller and more thorough understanding of the Christian experience. These elements are capable of giving a more complete Christian response to the expectations of the men and women of today. Indeed, in comparison to any other culture, the Christian East has a unique and privileged role as the original setting where the Church was born.”⁶

Unfortunately, in the past the Churches could not properly understand and appreciate the diversities especially in the theological, liturgical, and disciplinary matters. And this resulted in the divisions and misunderstandings between various Churches. These misunderstandings and divisions were also due to the

ignorance of the customs, practices and the heritage of the Churches.

The encyclical *Orientalium Dignitas* by Pope Leo XIII (1894), the Vatican II decree on the Oriental Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and the decree on ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* and the Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen* by Pope John Paul II (1995), the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* by Pope John Paul II (1995) contain the most important teachings on the Eastern Churches and their ecclesial heritage.

The Vatican II emphatically speaks of the richness of the Eastern heritage: “From their very origins the Churches of the East have had a treasury from which the Church of the West has drawn largely for its liturgy, spiritual tradition and jurisprudence. Nor must we underestimate the fact that the basic dogmas of the Christian faith concerning the Trinity and the Word of God made flesh from the Virgin Mary were defined in the Ecumenical Councils held in the East. To preserve this faith, these Churches have suffered and still suffer much” (UR 14).

Lack of information on various ecclesial traditions and ignorance of the facts related to the history, growth and contributions of various sui iuris Churches are at the root of all the inter-ecclesial tensions. Hence Pope John Paul II expresses his conviction “that inter-ritual collaboration will grow and bear excellent fruits when priests, religious and laity are educated and formed to understand the true nature of the Church and the significance of her diversity in unity.”⁸ It must be admitted that those who are ignorant of or unwilling to appreciate the heritage of Churches other than their own, indirectly agree that they have not realized in their own lives the importance of the Church and her traditions.

When Vatican II insists on fostering the oriental heritage the council means that the Churches of the Eastern traditions should contribute their venerable liturgical, theological and spiritual heritage to the Catholic Church as a whole. In the light of the teachings of the Church on the necessity of preserving and promoting the Eastern heritage, the attempt of St. Ephrem’s Theological College, Satna, to promote the East Syriac theology is indeed praiseworthy. The National Symposium on the East Syriac Theology organized by St. Ephrem’s Theological College, focuses

on some of the very important aspects of the theology of the Syriac Orient. The promotion of the East Syriac theology is indeed a great service to all the Churches in the Catholic communion. Other theological traditions can be really inspired by the rich theological heredity of the East Syriac Churches.

We are happy that in India the Church of St. Thomas Christians has been preserving the great riches of the East Syriac theological tradition. I am sure that the Syro-Malabar Church has played a vital role in bringing the East Syriac theology to the attention of the scholarly world. This symposium organized by St. Ephrem's Theological College will be a significant contribution to the theology of East Syriac tradition and to the theology of the Church in general. I wish to mention gladly the meritorious service rendered by St. Ephrem's theological College, through its international theological journal, *Ephrem's Theological Journal*. This journal has been already recognized by international scholars as a significant contribution to the Eastern theology.

Notes

¹ The present article is based on the inaugural address delivered by His Excellency Isidore Fernandez, the bishop of Allahabad, on the occasion of the National Symposium on Syriac Theology conducted by St. Ephrem's Theological College at Satna in 2004.

² To the members of the Roman Curia on the 28th of June 1985; cf. Also Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones* of Pope John Paul II promulgating the CCEO on 18th October, 1990.

³ Cf. Hausherr, "Les Grands Courants de la spiritualite orientale", OCP 1 (1935) 114-138.

⁴ Swami Vivekananda, "Christ, The Messenger", Speech delivered at Los Angeles in 1900. See text in: *The Complete Works of Vivekananda*, Vol IV, Calcutta 1966, 142.

⁵ J. Madey, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum More than Twenty Years After*, OIRSI 110, Kottayam 1987, 48.

⁶ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Orientale Lumen* (2 May 1995) 5.

⁸ Pope John Paul II to a group of Indian Bishops during their Ad limina Visit, *L'osservatore Romano*, 14 April, 1989. Cf. Also The Letter by Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of India, n.6, 28 May, 1987.

2

Historical Setting of the East Syriac Theology

Bishop Abraham D. Mattam

Historical background of the Church of the East played a vital role in the shaping of the East Syriac theology. The Judeo-Christian cultural context and the political and social isolation from the Greek and Roman world contributed to the development of a specific theological tradition in Mesopotamia. One of the most important factors that contributed to the development of the East Syriac theology is the presence of a very influential theological school in the East Syriac milieu. The Semitic cultural background, particular political and social situations, and the contributions of the scholars of the School of Nisibis paved the way for the origin and development of the great theological tradition of the Church of the East. If the theology of the East Syriac tradition has an unparalleled place in the Christendom, it is to a great extent due to the intense theologizing work accomplished by the Theological School of Nisibis, later known as the School of Edessa. Here we may analyse the historical setting of the East Syriac tradition especially in the context of its Theological School.

1. The School of Nisibis

The famous Theological School of Nisibis had great influence in giving shape to the East Syriac theology.¹ Nisibis is the modern Nusaybin, a city in Turkey on the Syrian border. Nisibis was formerly an important military and commercial centre. Among the Assyrians it was known by the name Nasibina. Because of its strategic importance it was a scene of several battles and was alternately under the Roman and Persian rule. In 115 A.D., Emperor Trajan captured the city, but was retaken by the Persians a few years later. Septimius Severus again brought it under Roman domain in 297 A. D. But in 363 A. D., Emperor Jovian was forced to cede the city to the Persians. Mar Mari a disciple of Addai is said to have preached the Gospel and established the Church in Nisibis. At the beginning of the 5th century Nisibis was a Metropolitan See with seven suffragans.

In the early history of the Church there are few institutions comparable to the School of Nisibis. It was a centre of learning, of literary creativity and spiritual dynamism, and to a great extent it was this School that moulded Christianity in the East. The achievements of the School in such an early period, from the 4th century, are amazing and almost incredible. The influence and fame of the institution was not confined to the East; it was a source of inspiration and emulation even for Christianity in Africa and Europe.

Nisibis was probably the first Theological University in the whole Christendom, with a definite curriculum, giving regular courses and having detailed Statutes and Regulations. Labourt says: "At any rate, the great Nestorian Metropolis saw within its walls the birth of the first Theological University, the first public courses in Theology."² The school won the admiration of the ruling circles in Rome and Pope Agapetus (535-536 A. D.) wanted to found a similar University in Rome.³ Regrettably knowledge about this unique institution is very much lacking both in the East and in the West.

1.1. The Origin of the School

Regarding the origin of the Theological School of Nisibis the information we possess is scanty. According to one tradition Bishop Mar Jacob of Nisibis founded the School after the Synod of Nicea in 325 A.D. With Constantine, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and consequently Christians in the neighbouring Persia were suspected of their loyalty in their own country, because of their religious allegiance and were subjected to persecutions. For this reason it was extremely difficult to open a school within the Persian territory to provide for the training of the clergy there. Mar Jacob found a solution to the problem by opening a school in Nisibis, which was under Rome but near the Persian boarder. The direction of the School was entrusted to Mar Ephrem, the future Saint and Doctor of the Church, who it is believed, was present though only a Deacon, at the Council of Nicea with Mar Jacob. The school flourished under the direction of Ephrem and earned a high reputation.⁴

A great calamity befell Nisibis and the school there, in 363 A.D. The city was ravaged by wars and captured by the Persians in

that year. St. Ephrem's hymns known as, *Carmina Nisibena*, Nisibene hymns, describe the devastations caused by the siege.⁵ The School could not function there any more because of the hostile attitude of the Persian rulers. Ephrem with some of his companions left Nisibis and came to Edessa which became the new site of the School. He continued to direct it until his death in 373 A.D.

Edessa was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Oshroene in Northern Mesopotamia. It is the modern Urfa in Turkey. The people were of Semitic origin and spoke Syriac language, a form of Aramaic. The territory was conquered by the Assyrians in the 8th century B.C., who called it Ruhu, in Syrian Urhai. The name was changed to Edessa under Seleucus I (312-280, B.C.). It had special importance as it was on the trade route between Syria and Armenia. Merchants from China and India passed through Edessa to the Western countries.

Mar Addai, a disciple of St. Thomas, is considered to be the Apostle of Edessa. King Abgar VIII of Oshroene and his family was converted to Christianity probably at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, and Oshroene had the unique distinction to be the first Christian country. Edessa soon became a centre of Christian culture and learning. In 216 A.D. the city was captured by the Romans. The holy relics of St. Thomas were transferred from Mylapur in South India to Edessa towards the end of the second century or in the first quarter of the third.

1.2. The School under Narsai

After the time of Ephrem another eminent personage who occupied the chair of the Director, *Rabban* of the School, was Narsai. He was a student of the School at Edessa and later joined the teaching staff. He became the head of the institution in 437 and under his directorship the School made great progress and its fame and influence spread widely.

Narsai followed the theological and exegetical tradition of Diodorus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, of the Antiochene School. This brought upon Narsai and the School of which he was the head, the wrath of imperial authorities. Emperor Zeno ordered the closing of the School. Consequently Narsai was forced to leave Edessa with his followers and take refuge outside the Empire, in

Nisibis about 457 A. D., where he founded a new School and was its Director till his death.⁶ Various sources do not agree upon the date of Narsai's departure from Edessa as well as his assumption of the directorship of the School.⁷

Narsai was the master of an elegant literary style and his writings find a place among the classics of Syriac literature. Most of his works were written in the form of poetry. He wrote more than 300 treatises in Syriac called *memre*, which were arranged in 12 volumes. His themes were usually based on Old and New Testaments. Meditation on the truths, events and personages contained in the Scriptures evoked in him religious sentiments and poetic imagination, which he put into writing. There is one cycle of *memre* that deals with the main feasts commemorated in the liturgy around which the different seasons of the liturgical year are structured, namely, the Nativity, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost etc. Some of his compositions are used even today in the East Syriac liturgy.⁸

Narsai's liturgical homilies deserve particular attention. Among them are "An Exposition of the Mysteries" giving a detailed commentary of the East Syriac Qurbana; "On the Mysteries of the Church and Baptism" and "On Baptism" devoted to a detailed explanation of the baptismal liturgy.⁹

1.3. The School under Abraham de beth Rabban

The School of Nisibis reached the zenith of its glorious existence during the Directorship of Abraham de beth Rabban. He was a relative, probably a nephew, of Narsai and his second successor as the head of the institution. His prolonged directorship lasted for about 60 years. The number of students rose to over one thousand. The influx of students was so much that the administration found it difficult to admit and accommodate all of them. In order to remedy this situation Abraham made plans for the expansion of the School and won the support of the King in his endeavours. He obtained a property close to the School and put up eighty dwellings upon the site for the boarding of the students. Besides, he bought a farm to support the teachers by the income there from, thus solving the financial problem on a permanent basis.¹⁰

Abraham's reputation was great for his learning as well as his piety and asceticism. He wrote commentaries on Joshua, Judges, Ezekiel, Daniel and some other books of the Old Testament. His commentary on Isaiah alone consisted of two volumes.

1.4. Directorship of Henana

Another outstanding name among the directors of the School is that of Henana. He became the Rabban some time after A. D. 571. He revised the old Statutes, and made a lasting imprint on the image of the School. Henana had as many as eight hundred students under his direction at a time

Henana gave a new orientation in the thinking and theological expositions of the School. He was much impressed by the writings of Origen, who in turn had borrowed from the Philosopher Philo. Following Origen he tried to interpret the Scriptures seeking a spiritual and allegorical meaning in the written words. Inevitably this departure from the theological traditions of the School based on Theodore of Mopsuestia led to serious conflicts and brought trouble and strong opposition to Henana. The School passed through a turbulent period. Henana died around 610 A.D.¹¹

Henana's exegetical works include commentaries on Genesis, Prophets, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and several other Old Testament books. He wrote also a commentary on the Gospel of Mark. In the field of liturgy he wrote on the Sacraments, the festivals of the Church etc. Only two of his works and some quotations found in other authors are extant.

During the period subsequent to the death of Henana there was no one of the stature of Narsai or Abraham de beth Rabban occupying the office of the Director. The School gradually lost its pre-eminent position. At the same time we find other Schools like those of Seleucia and Basos emerging.

1.5. Curriculum and General Characteristics of the School

The organisation of the School of Nisibis was somewhat like that of a modern Seminary. The students and the teachers were obliged to live in the community. They lived a semi-monastic life. Strict discipline was enforced.

Exegesis or the study of the Scriptures had the first place in the curriculum, commentaries on the Scriptural texts were part of theological studies. Canons of the Church law, liturgy, and philosophy were the other important subjects taught by competent teachers. The Statutes tell us that Medicine was one of the optional subjects. But it seems those who devoted to the study of this subject formed a separate group. Other subjects like Geography, History and Grammar too were included in the programme of studies.

The regular course lasted for three years. From some reports we can infer that there were students who continued their studies for several years, up to ten years or more.

The head of the School, the highest authority upon whom the responsibility for the instruction and administration rested was called 'the *Rabban*'. He used to be the *Mpašqana*, commentator of the Scriptures or exegete. The exegesis of the Scriptures was considered the highest discipline and the office of Rabban was entrusted to the head of this department.

There was the office of an Assistant called *Rabbaita*. He played a key role in the whole administration and it was his responsibility to supervise and enforce discipline among the student body. The members of the staff elected him for a period of one year.

Lecturers called *Maqreiane* formed part of the staff of teachers. A lower grade of teaching staff was known as *Mehageiana*. The *Malpane* or the Doctors were distinguished teachers in various disciplines, but this term was sometimes indiscriminately used for all teachers. A council of outstanding members of the staff assisted the Rabban in the administration in important matters including the punishment of serious violations of the rules.

The students had to take a test before their admission to the School. The responsible Council was to be satisfied about the fitness of the candidate for enrolment.¹²

1.6. Statutes of the School

The statutes of the School of Nisibis revised under the supervision of Mar Narsai in 496 A.D. have been preserved in Syriac and Arabic manuscripts. This revision was authorised by

Mar Hose Bishop of Nisibis who also ratified the Statutes. The preamble to the Statutes speaks of a set of canons that existed earlier, drawn up under the direction of Narsai during the time of Bishop Barsauma. But these canons are lost. The same is the fate of the Statutes followed by the School at Edessa. But since Nisibis was an off-shoot of the School of Edessa we can safely conclude that the Statutes were very much the same.

The Statutes were again revised under the directorship of Henana in 590 A.D. Twenty-one new canons were added. The increased number of students necessitated further regulation regarding admission, maintenance, study and religious obligations. Stricter enforcement of discipline and order were felt necessary. These additional canons were sanctioned by Mar Simeon who was the metropolitan of Nisibis at that time. The Statutes of Narsai as revised in 496 A. D, contain 22 canons. The first two canons pertain to the office of Rabbaita, an Administrator, his election and his duties in general. The last canon prescribes sanctions against the Rabbaita in case he fails in his duties and acts contrary to the regulations. The twentieth canon concerns the teachers that they may not neglect their work.

The other canons generally deal with the life and discipline among the student community - their admission, studies, and disciplinary actions against those who are found lacking in morals, quarrelling or stealing.

1.7. Nisibis and Greek Philosophy

A significant achievement of the Nisibene School was the application of Greek philosophy in the exegesis and study of theology. The works of Aristotle, Porphyrios and other Greek philosophers were translated into Syriac with commentaries. The translation work was started by the School at Edessa and was continued in Nisibis. As early as the second quarter of the fifth century Peripatetic philosophy was included among the courses imparted at the School. The names of Proba and Paulos, who later became the Bishop of Nisibis, stand out prominently among the pioneers in this field. The works of Proba include translation and commentary on Hermeneutics and Analyticon of Aristotle and Isagoge of Porphyrios. These were taught in the school and it had a profound effect on the theological reflection and teaching at this

centre of learning. This was seven centuries before St. Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274) employed Aristotelian philosophy to expound Christian teaching. About this new dimension in the history of theological investigations Arthur Vööbus makes the following observation: “The impact of the translation of the Greek philosophical works was commensurate to the significance of this event. It was strong enough to fluctuate studies in a new sphere of thought, making Aristotelian philosophy the lasting foundation of the theological thought of the Syrians.”¹³

Paulos, an extraordinary genius, made a great contribution. His lectures and notes given to the students as introduction to biblical studies were compiled and used as a textbook on hermeneutics. This work tells us a lot as to how the Aristotelian philosophy was applied in the process of biblical theological investigations. Therein each book of the Scriptures is proposed to be examined from a sevenfold angle, namely, ‘*intentio, utile, cujusnam auctoris sit liber, ordo, causa inscriptionis, divisio in capita, et ad quid refertur*’. This corresponds to the logical conceptions of Aristotle as it appears in a Syriac commentary on the Hermeneutics: purpose, usefulness, origin, order, cause, division and subject.¹⁴

Each text is further studied from the point of view of: *genus, species, differentia, proprium et accidens*. It meant the logical application of the “*quinque voces*” of Porphyrios. The treatment of the subject is further carried on under the aspects: *substantia, quantum, quale, relatum, ubi, quando, situm esse, habere facere, et pati*- all Aristotelian categories.

Vööbus observes: “Once again, we see how the logical categories of Aristotle have moulded the explication of biblical-theological materials in such a way that they gave lucidity and clarity to the exposition particularly important for a treatment designed as textbook for class-room situation. These qualities guaranteed for this work great future even far beyond the boundaries for many centuries.”¹⁵

1.8. School of Nisibis and Indian Christians

The Church in India was in constant contact with the Persian or Mesopotamian Church. We have sufficient indications to conclude that priests from India were among the students of the

reputed School of Nisibis. There is a document that throws some light on the close collaboration between the Church in India and the East Syriac Church in the fifth century. Išo'dad, in a colophon to his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans wrote: "Now to God who is of power to establish you we commented on above. Mar Koumi translated this Epistle from Greek to Syriac for Mari the Presbyter, with the help of Daniel, the Indian. The commentaries on Epistle to the Romans are finished."¹⁶

Koumi translated the Epistle during the first quarter of the fifth century. Išo'dad of Merv who composed the commentaries was a Bishop and he died around the year 850 A. D. Commenting on the testimony of Iso'dad, Mingana writes: "The fifth century opens with an Indian Christianity which was in such a state of development that she is able to send her priests to be educated in the best schools of the East Syrian Church, and to assist the doctors of that Church in their revision of the ancient Syriac translations of the Pauline Epistles... This important passage proves that the Church of India was about A. D. 425 in close relationship with the East Syrian Church, at the very beginning of the latter's scholastic life, which began at Edessa with the translation of the works of Aristotle. Komai is one of the first translators of Greek works into Syriac, and it is gratifying to see that his collaborators were Christian Indians well versed in the Greek sciences. The passage proves also that the ecclesiastical language of India was, at the beginning of the fifth century, Syriac and not any of the many Indian dialects."¹⁷

1.9. Influence of Nisibene School on the West

The fame and influence of the School of Nisibis spread far beyond the confines of the Persian Empire and East Syrian Christianity. A few instances will help us to ascertain the lasting influence the School exerted in the West.

Junilius of Constantinople, an officer of the imperial palace (*Quaestor*) has left on record his admiration for the achievements of Nisibis. He translated into Latin one of the works of Paulos, a teacher at the School under Abraham de beth Rabban, as mentioned above. The dedicatory Preface of the translation is

addressed to Primasius, Bishop of Hadrumentum in North Africa. Junilius writes that he knew Paulos the Persian, educated at Nisibis, where the divine things are regularly taught as it is customary among the Romans to teach secular subjects in their schools. *“Tu autem quam is quis esset qui inter graecos divinatorum librorum studio intellegentiaque flagraret. Ad haec ego respondi, vidisse me quemdam Paulum Nomine, Persam genere, qui in Syrorum schola in Nisibi urbe est edoctus, ubi divina lex per magistros publicos, sicut apud nos in mundanis studiis grammatica et rhetorica, ordine ac regulariter traditur.”*¹⁸

Cassiodorus was greatly inspired by the Nisibene School. With the co-operation of Pope Agapitus I (535-36) he endeavoured to found a similar centre of higher theological studies in Rome.¹⁹ Pope Agapitus took the first steps towards the realization of this scheme converting his own family house into a library which was to form part of the new University. But his untimely death put an end of his dream.²⁰

The Arabs who in turn were educated by the graduates of the school of Nisibis transmitted the heritage of Greek culture to the West. For this reason historians acknowledge the debt of European culture and the great Schools of Europe to the once illustrious centre of learning, Nisibis. To quote one author, Aziz Atiya writes: “Since the Nestorian graduates of Nisibis were the teachers of the Arabs, who transmitted the heritage of Greece to the West in the later middle Ages, it is not difficult to appraise the debt of the great schools of Europe to Nisibis.”²¹

2. Semitic and Hellenic Background of East Syriac Theology

The Syriac theology is noted for its early Jewish Christian characteristics. The East Syriac tradition was separated from the Hellenic Churches, because of political and theological reasons. This isolation helped the Churches of East Syriac tradition to preserve the ancient Semitic traits. However, it may not be true to say that the East Syriac theology is devoid of any Hellenic influence. Authors like Sebastian Brock find influence of both Semitic and Hellenic traditions on the Syriac theology. According to Sebastian Brock, a Semitic and a Hellenic pole can be identified within the Syriac Christianity. From the study of 1st to 7th century writings we can distinguish three periods.²²

First period (before AD 400): The writings of this period were untouched by the Greek ways of thinking and Greek modes of theological expressions. The writers of this period are the true heirs of the Semitic world. Odes of Solomon, Acts of Thomas, works of Aphrahat and St. Ephrem are examples of the writings of this period. Since the Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari most probably originated and acquired its basic shape in this period, there is little possibility of Greek influence on this Anaphora.

Second period (5th–early 6th centuries): It was a period of Hellenic influence. Greek became more and more prestigious to most of the Syriac writers. (e.g., Philoxenus of Mabbug). This is a period of creative fusion of Greek and native Syriac elements. However, some authors like Narsai of Nisibis and Jacob of Serugh, preserved the Semitic pole in their writings.

Third period (Later 6th–7th centuries): This period is noted by philohellenic trend. Many of the works of Greek writers were translated into Syriac. Hellenic pole can be very much identified in this period. It was a period of great interest in Greek philosophy. Many Greek philosophical texts were translated into Syriac.

In the 8th, 9th centuries Syriac scholars translated Greek texts into Arabic. These Arabic translations became the source for the Latin translation. This is how the Latin West became familiar with the classical Greek philosophy. Thus the translation work of the Syriac scholars eventually paved the way for the development of the Scholastic theology.

9th-13th centuries witnessed the production of the great theological compendia of the thirteenth century, notably those of Barhebraeus in the West Syriac tradition and of Abdišo in the East Syriac tradition. These compendia belong essentially to the Hellenic pole of Syriac tradition.

At different points in their history the Churches belonging to the Syriac tradition have often found a need to emphasise one pole more than the other. It has never been the case that one pole has been emphasised to the complete exclusion of the other, and during the very long period during which the Hellenic pole may be said to have been predominant in most theological writing, the Semitic pole has nevertheless continuously been represented in the liturgical tradition, above all in liturgical poetry.

The Semitic pole of the Syriac tradition preserves the most distinctive elements which belong to the specifically Asian context. "...by building upon the Semitic pole of their tradition the Syriac Churches can contribute to the enrichment of the other Christian Churches whose roots lie inserted in the Latin West or the Greek East, and not in the Syriac Orient, for this Semitic pole, while being unique to Syriac tradition, is clearly something very precious for all Christian traditions in view of all that it represents in common with the Semitic environment out of which Christianity sprang." ²³

Conclusion

The uniqueness of the East Syriac theology lies in its Semitic and biblical characteristics. In fact these two characteristics are intrinsically related. The early Christian communities insisted on the preservation of the Semitic or Jewish elements in the liturgical practices and theological interpretations, most probably due to the tendency of identifying the Semitic elements with the biblical elements. The insistence of the East Syriac tradition on the Semitic elements, in spite of the open apologetic attitude against the Jews, was due to the strong conviction that the biblical elements of the history of salvation, though many of them are typically Semitic, are to be maintained intact. The predominance of the biblical characteristics thus makes the East Syriac theology a biblical theology. The special care in preserving the Semitic traits, in fact, helped the East Syriac tradition to guard its theological heritage against becoming a hybrid of Greek and Semitic traditions. However, the insistence on the Semitic elements does not mean that the tradition as a whole remained closed to the Greek influences. We find a systematic growth in the appreciation of the Hellenic elements in the East Syriac liturgy and theology.

Though the Eastern Churches as a whole view liturgy as the *theologia prima* there have been nevertheless venues for organized theological reflection. The theological School of Nisibis is the classical example for the organized effort of theologizing in the East Syriac tradition. This theological School, resembling any standard university of modern times, was a theological formation center which preferred the *theologia prima* of liturgy to the academic theological reflection. Thus the theological works

produced by the School of Nisibis maintained the important characteristics of the Eastern theology, namely the Scriptural, ecclesial, liturgical, apophatic, and mystical characteristics.

Notes

¹ The two other important centres of theological learning of antiquity were the theological Schools of Alexandria and Antioch. Probably the first systems of theology and exegetical works were developed in Alexandria. We have the earliest reference to the Alexandrian School in connection with Pantenus, the head of the institution. Lucian the Presbyter, who died a martyr in 312 A.D., is considered to be the founder of the Theological School of Antioch. St. John Chrysostom, Diodorus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius etc. are famous names associated with this school. But neither of these centres developed into mighty institutions with numerous students as was the case with Nisibis and Edessa, imparting prolonged courses in various subjects and having proper statutes for its administration.

² Labourt, *Le Christianisme dans l'empire Perse*, Paris 1904, 301. "Quoi qu'il en soit, la grande métropole nestorienne vit naître dans ses murs la première Université théologique, les premiers cours publics de théologie. Ce phénomène qui excitait l'admiration et l'étonnement du quaestor sacri palatii de Justinian..."

³ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. I, McGraw-Hill, New York 1967, 195.

⁴ Cf. A. Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis*, CSCO 266/Sub. 26, Louvain 1965; Cf. also, A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, CSCO, Vol.197, Louvain 1960, 410ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 167-218.

⁶ According to Sebastian Brock, Narsai had to leave Edessa owing to conflict with the Bishop Cyrus. S. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, Moran Etho 9, SEERI, Kottayam 1997, 36.

⁷ Vööbus, *History of the School*, 33 ff; 62ff; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, London 1959, Vol. 7, 954.

⁸ I. Ibrahim, *La Doctrine Christologique de Narsai*, Essai d'interprétation, Doctoral Dissertation defended at Angelicum, Rome, 1975.

⁹ R.H.Connolly, *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, Cambridge, 1919. There are authors who would not attribute the authorship of Homily XVII to Narsai. According to Brock, Homily XVII is almost certainly not by Narsai himself, but must date from the sixth century. Brock, *Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, 36.

¹⁰ Vööbus, *History of the School*, 143 ff.

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- ¹¹ Cf. Geevarghese Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai the Great*, Kottayam 1982, 49-53; Vööbus, *op.cit.*, 242ff.
- ¹² Cf. Vööbus, *The Statutes of the School of Nisibis*, Stockholm 1961.
- ¹³ *Ibid.* 21.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* 185.
- ¹⁶ Gibson, *The Commentaries of Iso 'dad of Merv*, Cambridge 1916, Vol. V, Part II, 22.
- ¹⁷ Mingana, *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Manchester 1928, 27-28.
- ¹⁸ Labourt, *op. cit.*, 300.
- ¹⁹ Vööbus, *History of the School*, 194.
- ²⁰ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, 195; Vol. 3, 184.
- ²¹ Aziz S. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, London 1968, 206-207.
- ²² S. Brock, "The Two Poles of Syriac Tradition", in C. Payngott, ed., *Homage to Cariattil*, Kottayam 1992, 75.
- ²³ Brock, "The Two Poles of Syriac Tradition", 79.

3

Early Syriac Theology: Some Basic Features

Archbishop Joseph Powathil

Introduction

There are three basic ecclesial traditions in the universal Church: Latin West, Greek East and Syriac Orient. Many identify the Western ecclesial tradition with the Latin tradition and the Eastern tradition with Greek East. The Syriac Orient is often forgotten. Scholars have tried to point out the reasons for the neglect of the Syriac ecclesial tradition. The first reason proposed is connected to the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline letters. The Acts were written in Greek for hellenic Christians and it does not show much interest in the Aramaic or Syriac speaking Churches.¹ So too are the letters of Paul which, predominantly, are addressed to the gentile Christians and not to the Jewish Christians.² Later Christian authors too followed the same line. The second reason is the neglect of the Syriac ecclesial tradition in the universally acclaimed Church history of Eusebius.³ Eusebius' Ecclesiastical history is practically the history of the Church within the Roman empire and he passes over the history of the Church to the east of the Roman empire in almost total silence. This trend has also been followed by later Church historians, which has eventually led to a euro-centric history of Christianity. Another reason is the fact that the Church of the Persian Empire did not involve much in the christological controversies of the early Christian centuries.

The ecumenical councils were predominantly affairs of the Churches of the Roman Empire and the condemnation of the theology of the Church of the East further weakened its influence.⁴ It is gratifying, however, to see that from the beginning of the 20th century onwards scholars have tried to unearth the wealth of the Syriac ecclesial tradition, especially with the discoveries of the Qumran and Nag Hamadi documents. Only when all the three ecclesial traditions, with their uniqueness and identity, are protected and promoted can the Church fully express her catholicity.

Relevance of the Study of the East Syriac Ecclesial Tradition

Christianity is born in an Asian cultural context and in a Semitic milieu. To comprehend the uniqueness of the early Syriac theology, it is imperative to understand the history of Syriac literature and theology. Scholars point out two poles of Syriac theology and literature: the Semitic and Hellenic poles.⁵ The first four centuries of Syriac literature, till the end of 400 A.D., are usually considered the Semitic pole. During this period, the 'golden age' of Syriac literature, Syriac theology was least influenced by Greek philosophy and culture. The Semitic pole represents the period of early Syriac Christianity which is genuinely Asian, free from European cultural and intellectual trappings that have become attached to the main streams of Christianity.⁶ Ephrem and Aphrahat belong to this period when theological terms and thought categories were still primarily Syriac and yet little touched by the process of hellenization. They both represent a genuinely Semitic and Asian form of Christianity.

The hellenic pole of Syriac literature and theology represents the period from 5th century onwards. Such had become the prestige of the Greek world and of Greek ways of thinking and conducting theological discourses that from about 400 AD onwards no Syriac writer fails to come under the strong Greek influence of one sort or another.⁷ During this period Syriac Christianity progressively adopted Greek thought forms and became strongly hellenized, with the result that Syriac theology of the early middle ages was as much influenced by Aristotle as was Latin theology.

To understand some of the basic features and uniqueness of Syriac theology, therefore, we need to turn to the Semitic pole and will limit the scope of this study to the period of early Syriac Christianity. In Ephrem and Aphrahat we have a characteristically Semitic presentation of a Semitic religion. However, it is also important that we do not make a sharp divide between the Greek and Syriac presentations of Christianity. No Syriac writer of the 4th century is going to be purely Semitic in character or totally unhellenized. The difference between the two poles, 'Hellenic' and 'Semitic', is not merely linguistic rather it is basically a difference in theological approach. The Greek approach is philosophical and analytical while the Semitic approach is primarily symbolic and synthetic. These two approaches in theology are not based on

differences in the central truths of Christianity, but rather in the different modes of understanding and presenting these truths. They complement rather than contradict each other.⁸

Basic Features of Early Syriac Theology

1. Semitic Origin

The fundamental characteristic of Syriac theology, especially of early Syriac theology, is its Semitic origin. Scholars usually trace the beginnings of Syriac Christianity to the Judeo-Christian roots and point to the regions of Edessa and Adiabene as its cradle.⁹ In the first few decades after the death of Christ, the Jewish and Christian communities remained socially connected in a Zoroastrian pagan milieu. Though the Syriac Church was definitely separated from Judaism by the fourth century, it still remained spiritually very close to the synagogue in many respects. The Church adopted the Jewish Scripture, the *Peshitta* Old Testament, and probably adapted it slightly to suit her needs. For instance, it is very likely that the word ‘*edta* ܐܕܬܐ, which may have been a Christian development to designate the Church as distinct from the synagogue (*knušta* ܟܢܘܫܬܐ), was preferred in the *Peshitta* text.¹⁰

In the opinion of J. Daniélou, three worlds went to the making of the Christian Church, three cultures, three visions and expressions of truth - the Jewish, the hellenistic and the Latin; each of them produced its own distinctive theology.¹¹ Theology found in the New Testament is connected to Hellenistic and Jewish Christian¹² types of theology. Indeed, Jewish Christian theology is the first form of Christian theology expressed in Jewish-Semitic terms. However, the Jewish Christian theology, a doctrinal system that was Semitic in structure and expression was long forgotten. Its recognition as an entity was slow to come. This theology survived, to a great extent, in Syriac Christianity,¹³ which is startlingly marked both in its liturgical and theological remains by a strongly eschatological and apocalyptic character. It is true that among all ecclesial traditions, the East Syrian ecclesial tradition, to some degree, is the direct heir to this Semitic milieu.¹⁴ According to R. Murray: “the number of significant elements of Judaic character remaining in Syriac Christianity make it clear, beyond doubt, that

here must be found the principal surviving heirs of Jewish Christianity”.¹⁵

As Persian Christianity sprang from a Jewish core, its language, religious vocabulary, thought-categories and imageries were very much related to those of the Mesopotamian Jews.¹⁶ The early Syriac theologians like Aphrahat and Ephrem were much influenced by Jewish teachings.¹⁷ For instance, Ephrem and the Syriac Christianity in general, evidently inherited the image of the primordial ‘robe of glory’ from Jewish interpretations of Genesis 3:21.¹⁸ In fact, scholars are recognizing more and more the Jewish character of Syriac Christianity and the close contacts between the Church and the Synagogue. Early Syriac theology and literature were greatly influenced by a specific form of Jewish literature called the *haggada*.¹⁹ It is very significant to note that a theologian of the stature of Ephrem is also an heir to many Jewish traditions that are only to be found outside the Bible, in post-biblical Jewish literature, in the *Targumim*²⁰ and *Midrashim*. One such theme of Jewish origin, very often found in Ephrem, is the creative tension between God’s grace (*taybutha* ܬܝܒܘܬܐ) and Righteousness (*kenutha* ܟܢܘܬܐ).²¹

Deeper probings into the origin and structure of the Christian eucharistic prayers, especially the anaphora of Addai and Mari, have drawn the attention of many scholars to the heart of Jewish theology exemplified by the theme of covenant. Considering the Jewish influence on the anaphora of Addai and Mari, I. H. Dalmais calls this liturgy “the most archaic of all the forms of Christian liturgy, that is, the one that has to the greatest extent retained characteristics derived from its Semitic roots”.²² The remarkable presence of a large corpus of Jewish traditions in the Syriac Christianity of the first four centuries, especially in the areas of sacred Scripture, asceticism, liturgy, theology and exegesis, are today well attended by scholars.²³ It is a matter of pride for the Syriac Churches that they employ as their liturgical language Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, the language of Jesus and his disciples.

2. Theology as Biblical Theology

The importance of East Syriac ecclesial tradition and its theology lies in the fact that it alone is the authentic representative

of the Semitic world out of which Bible sprang.²⁴ This biblical milieu is very evident as the early Syriac theologians who in their whole theological process were trying to explain Scripture for the benefit of the faithful. One of the great qualities of Syriac theology is that its theological expressions were not made on the basis of conclusions derived from abstract philosophical speculations, as was the case in Greek and Latin ecclesial traditions, but faith was explained using concrete images and thought-patterns taken from Scripture. In other words, Scripture is the fundamental source of their theology.²⁵

The East Syriac ecclesial tradition, like other traditions, inherited the Jewish Bible, which became the Old Testament, the normative Scripture of the primitive Christians. On a cultural-linguistic basis as well as in prayer forms and symbolism it remained faithful to the Old Testament biblical tradition. The writings of both Ephrem and Aphrahat demonstrate an intimate familiarity with the Bible and their writings are packed with biblical citations, images and allusions especially from the Old Testament. These images and types find their fulfillment in the mysteries of Christ. In the words of Ephrem: "Fulfillment entered and actually put on the symbols which the Holy Spirit had woven for Him".²⁶

The early Syriac theologians approach Scripture as the book of faith and their interpretation of the biblical texts is both spiritual and practical. For instance, Ephrem regards Scripture as the incarnation of God in human language. What God has allowed to be said of Himself in the Bible is a primary source for any human knowledge of God. The 'names' of God and the various symbols in Scripture constitute the meeting points between God and humanity. And God in his divine condescension has lowered Himself to the level of human understanding. It is the incarnation proper which throws light on his understanding of Scripture which is incarnation of God in human language.²⁷

Historical exegesis of the Scripture, generally, is not the primary concern of the early Syriac fathers rather they emphasize the spiritual exegesis which proceeds from faith. The inner meaning of Scripture can only be perceived by the inner eye of faith. Aphrahat in his Demonstration XIV says that the main aim of learning and reading the sacred Scripture is to put them into

practice and to fulfill the commandment of self-renunciation and the love of God.²⁸ Scripture and Tradition play an important part in their interpretations. Both Aphrahat and Ephrem assert that sacred Scripture contains the wisdom and revelation of God and no human mind can exhaust the depth and breadth of it. Hence several interpretations are possible of the same biblical text.

The interpretation of the biblical texts had also an ecclesial dimension, i.e., their interpretations were always in accordance with the faith of the Church and precisely to foster it. For instance, in Demonstration XXII: 26 Aphrahat states: "Whatsoever is written in these chapters was not written according to the thought of one man, nor for the persuasion of one reader; but according to the thought of all the Church and for the persuasion of all faithful".²⁹

3. Theology as the Tangible Expression of Living Faith

Syriac theology approaches divine realities through faith, or as Ephrem puts it, through the "eye of the spirit",³⁰ which is the eye of faith, and not through intellectual scrutiny. In the opinion of Ephrem, intellectual scrutiny and theological definitions are not only potentially dangerous but also blasphemous; dangerous because they hinder the human experience of God and blasphemous because definitions are attempts to contain the uncontainable, to limit the limitless. Ephrem even develops a hostility towards speculative enquiry.³¹

The being of God is utterly hidden from creation, yet owing to his immense love for humanity he has created them in his own image and likeness. God in his inexplicable love for humanity has crossed over the ontological chasm between Creator and creation and made himself available to those who seek him in the right way, i.e., through love and faith. God can be known and spoken of in so far as He has decided to reveal himself and the proper response to this revelation is by way of faith. The early Syriac theologians like Ephrem did not try to approach the truths about God (theology) by establishing dogmas but they depended on revelation found in Scripture-Tradition, Nature and fully in the incarnation of the Son of God through the response of faith. Hence theology in this tradition is mystical and spiritual and it is difficult to separate theology from spirituality.

Here, faith is the ‘key’ by which the door to the Kingdom of God can be opened, and faith is the initial ‘offering’ to God that needs to be made before any progress in knowledge of God becomes possible. Hence Ephrem sings: “To you, Lord, do I offer my faith as an offering. I have offered it all naked, without any good deeds – it belongs to You, Lord, so let it be enriched by You – then I, for my part, who am so needy, will be enhanced”.³²

Faith is a *sine qua non*, a necessary condition, to understand divine revelation in Nature, Scripture and in the person of Christ. Without faith one sees only the exterior historical meaning of Scripture, which the Fathers call ‘letter’, but with the eye of faith one is able to penetrate inwards to discover the inner spiritual meaning of it. Without faith Nature is pure material world devoid of any types and symbols of the divine. So also without faith, Jesus of Nazareth remains merely a historical figure; only when one looks with the eye of faith that the divinity of Christ becomes apparent.

Ephrem has a sacramental view regarding both Scripture and Nature. He considers them as windows to truth. To see through these windows, the essential prerequisite is the eye of faith or the “luminous eye”.³³ A person whose inner eye is ‘darkened’ with sin will not see much in the Scripture, but one whose eye is ‘lucid and clear’ will behold a great deal. Hence in the understanding of the early Syriac Fathers theology is the ‘science’ of faith and a theologian is a man of faith. If theology is man’s search and experience of God who has revealed himself, then the approach of theology can be nothing other than the approach of love and faith. For the same reasons their theology is basically apophatic.³⁴

4. The sense of ‘Mystery’ (*Raza*) in Syriac Thought and Liturgy

The concept of mystery (*’raza* ܠܝܫܬܐ) is central to understand early Syriac thought and liturgy. The sense of the mystery permeates the symbolic and typological expressions used by the early Syriac authors to express divine realities. In fact, symbolic language is the language of mystery and helps the human spirit go deeper into unfathomable depths of God, providing an awareness of the immanence as well as the transcendence of God, than pedantic and straightforward assertions about God.³⁵

The Syriac theologians have always tried to maintain the sharp divide between the Creator and creation, that man is unable to grasp the 'divine hiddenness' through intellectual scrutiny. Nothing of God could be known by man if God had not taken the initiative to reveal Himself in various ways: "Had God not wished to disclose Himself to us – there would not have been anything in creation – able to elucidate anything at all about Him".³⁶ Ephrem understands the dynamics of revelation from the perspectives of the 'hidden' and the 'revealed'. In spite of God's revelation through types and symbols, he maintains, God is still both 'hidden' and 'revealed': "Lord, Your symbols are everywhere, yet You are hidden from everywhere".³⁷ The creative tension between the 'hidden' and the 'revealed', i.e., the transcendence and the immanence of God, as it were, produces the sense of mystery and wonder in man.

In the 4th century, the Arian heresy was waging very strongly against the Church. Ephrem understands the intricacies of this heresy and calls those who are misled by Arius as the sick members of the Church. Their sickness consists not only in their doctrinal heresy but in their presumptuousness in inquiring into the mysteries of the Godhead by speculation. Ephrem refuses to answer the Arians by developing a speculative theology, as the Cappadocians did, but rather sticks to his symbolism and demands that the mystery remain veiled.³⁸ That is to say, for the early Syriac Fathers theology is not strictly *fides quaerens intellectum* but *fides adorans mysterium*.

The term 'mystery' (*raza*) has an over-whelming liturgical connotation in the Eastern Churches. It is a common term used in all the early liturgies, especially in the Eastern liturgies.³⁹ This term is used for any religious symbol, and especially for sacramental rites and, in the plural, for the Eucharist.⁴⁰ For the Syriac theologians, *raza* meant the whole liturgy, the worship of the Church and all its related elements.⁴¹ The Syriac Churches always have been conservative in their approach to liturgical matters and the concept of *raza*, very dear to them, is very extensively used. In the East Syriac liturgical tradition the singular form *raza* generally denotes any sacrament and the plural form *raze* always denotes the Eucharist.

5. The Pneumatological Emphasis

Pneumatology is one of the strong holds of Eastern theology. That the Syriac Churches have a profound pneumatology is clearly seen in their theology and liturgy, especially in the celebration of the mysteries of initiation.⁴² The word for the ‘spirit’ or ‘wind’ is feminine in the Semitic languages and the early East Syriac sources before the 5th century consistently construe *ruha d-qudša* ܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ⁴³ as a feminine figure and in some cases regard the Spirit as mother.⁴⁴ In the early Syriac sources like the *Odes of Solomon*,⁴⁵ *Didascalia Apostolorum*⁴⁶ and *Acts of Thomas*⁴⁷ and in the writings of the theologians like Ephrem and Aphrahat three symbols of the Holy Spirit (*ruha d-qudša*) stand out: fire, dove and the oil; of these by far the most prominent is that of fire.⁴⁸ These works see the remission of sins, purification of the heart, imparting the life of the Trinity, the revelation of the mysteries of God, and renewal of life as the gift of the Spirit.

The rites of initiation begin with the ‘signing’ (*rušma* ܪܘܫܡܐ), an anointing of the whole body, symbolizing the unction of the Holy Spirit. It is followed by baptism and the Eucharist. Hence the early East Syriac liturgical tradition knows no post-baptismal anointing corresponding to the sacrament of confirmation.⁴⁹ Like the *rušma* in the rite of initiation and the ‘laying on of hands’ in the rite of ordination, the eucharistic sacrifice is also perfected by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. The term used to signify the action of the Holy Spirit in all the three rites is ‘hovering’ (*ruhha* ܪܘܫܡܐ),⁵⁰ an image frequently found in the *Odes*, the *Acts of Thomas* and in authors like Aphrahat and Ephrem.

6. An Incarnative Theology

In the thought of early Syriac Fathers, anthropology and soteriology are intrinsically related to each other. Incarnation is the high point of their soteriology which is built around the imagery of clothing, stripping off and putting on the ‘robe of glory’. Both in Aphrahat and in Ephrem the imagery of clothing has a prominent place. According to Aphrahat, the wedding garment (Mt 22.11-14), the robe of glory, put on by the soul at baptism, is a pledge of the resurrection and the re-entry into Paradise. This wedding garment

is a necessary condition for entering into the marriage feast and the bridal chamber.⁵¹

The imagery of clothing is further developed by Ephrem. The entire salvation history, from creation to fall, through the incarnation, to the sacraments and on to the final resurrection, is graphically and cohesively presented through the image of 'robe of glory'.⁵² He states: "All these changes did the Merciful One make, stripping off glory and putting on a body: - for He had devised a way to re-clothe Adam - in that glory which Adam had stripped off".⁵³ At the fall, Adam (humanity) was stripped off his original robe of glory; but this effect of the fall was reversed by the Divine Word by 'stripping off His own glory' and 'putting on a body'. In the Hymns on Epiphany, Ephrem states that Christ at his baptism in Jordan has placed this 'robe of glory' there that every Christian who is baptized can be clothed with it. In other words, according to Ephrem, Christ by putting on human nature raised humanity to its original state, re-clothing Adam in the 'robe of glory'.

In this soteriological scheme, the created world and the human body have great salvific significance. We do not find any tinge of dualistic tendencies, found in early Christianity, that seeks to denigrate the value of the material world or human body. For Ephrem both body and the soul are equally important having different roles. It is the body which serves as the bridal chamber where the bride, the soul, meets the heavenly bridegroom.⁵⁴ His positive attitude towards human body comes from the fact that it is created by God himself. From a meditation of New Testament passages like 1 Cor 6.19; 2 Cor 5; Jn 14.23, Ephrem comes to the conclusion that human body is a dwelling place and habitation of the Trinity. Further, the fact that God 'put on a body' (Hymns on Nativity 9:2) indicates that there is nothing unworthy about the body. The Eucharist also provides Ephrem with a similar evidence on the worth of the body. Ephrem asks the group of Christians who despised the body but accept the Eucharist: "...for how could Christ have despised the body yet clothed Himself in the Bread ... and if He was pleased with dumb bread how much more so with the body endowed with speech and reason?" (Against Heresies 47.2).⁵⁵

7. Theosis: the Purpose of Revelation (Incarnation)

The concept of theosis or divinization is often associated with the Greek tradition especially with the names of Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor. However, it may be a surprise that the basic concepts of this doctrine is already found in the early Syriac theological and spiritual tradition, especially in St. Ephrem. According to Ephrem, the very aim of incarnation is deification of man; God put on human form so that man may put on God's form. In his hymn on Paradise Ephrem states: "He clothed Himself in the likeness of man in order to bring man to the likeness of Himself".⁵⁶

In the soteriology of the Syriac Fathers, theosis is seen as the result of a downward movement, divine descent, and an upward movement, human ascent. According to Ephrem, it is precisely because of humanity's (Eve's) arrogance in grabbing divinity that humanity lost divinity. However, God's love for humanity is so great that God took the initiative, in revelation, to bring humanity back to paradise. The whole aim of revelation given through three channels: types and symbols in Nature and Scripture; divine names in the Scripture and the fullness of revelation in incarnation, is nothing other than the restoration of humanity to the paradisiacal state, a state that in fact will be even more glorious than that of Adam and Eve before the fall. In short, Ephrem understands theosis as a two-way movement based on a call-response dynamics: divine descent in revelation for man's ascent to God in faith. "Divinity flew down to draw humanity up".⁵⁷

The Syriac Fathers understand revelation, which is God's self-abasement, as an invitation addressed to the free will of man. Man can either accept or reject the call of God given in Nature, Scripture and in Christ. The purpose of the types and symbols available in Nature and in Scripture is to allure man from his fallen state to the glorious divine reality. In the Hymns on Faith, Ephrem states: "Lord, You bent down and put on humanity's types – So that humanity might grow through Your self-abasement".⁵⁸ If man accepts God's invitation in surrendering faith, the result is divinization or theosis. However, Ephrem affirms that humanity is divinized through grace and not by nature. The first Adam becomes god by grace but the second Adam is God by nature: "God in his mercy called mortals 'god through grace'".⁵⁹

8. Ascetical Dimension of Syriac Theology

The beginning of monasticism is often associated with Egyptian style of monasticism. However, there existed in the Syriac Church a native form of Mesopotamian monasticism, quite distinct from and independent of Egyptian monasticism, which scholars call, 'proto-monasticism'.⁶⁰ Later, however, it fused with the Egyptian monastic tradition. In the history of monasticism it was very often forgotten and neglected.

The ascetical thrust is one of the main characteristics of early Syriac theology, especially on the ways of Christian living, focused on the whole hearted discipleship of Jesus.⁶¹ Almost in all early Syriac literature asceticism is a dominant theme.⁶² Both Aphrahat and Ephrem are exponents and members⁶³ of this proto-monastic tradition and its ascetical ideal had great impact on their theology. This proto-monasticism could be exemplified by the movement called *bnay qyama* **ܩܕܝܡܐ ܡܨܚܐ**.⁶⁴ This term has been usually translated as 'the children of the covenant'.⁶⁵ It refers to a group of people who led some form of consecrated life, with a vow of chastity which was probably made at the time of (adult) baptism.⁶⁶

This group, living in towns and villages, seem to have formed the core of the local Church community.⁶⁷ Aphrahat has a full demonstration, demonstration VI, dedicated to this community⁶⁸ and at least the first ten demonstrations are for the members of the covenant, to strengthen their morale and sense of commitment.⁶⁹ The life style of this community could be presented by the term *Ihidaya* **ܐܝܗܝܕܝܐ** which refers to three basic concepts: singular, individual, unique; single-minded, not divided in heart; and single in the sense of unmarried, celibate.⁷⁰ Baptism is the source of this single-minded devotion and commitment to Christ: at baptism those who are embarking on a consecrated life put on Christ the *ihidaya* and so become *ihidaye*.⁷¹ The motivating force behind the ascetical ideal, based on baptism, in the early Syriac Christianity are mainly three: the model of Christ as the Bridegroom to whom individual Christians are betrothed at baptism; the model of baptism as a return to Paradise and the model of the baptismal life as the marriageless life of the angels.⁷²

A. Vööbus in his work, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*,⁷³ persuasively characterizes the Aramaic-speaking

Christianity as fundamentally ascetic in nature. He describes the ascetic character of early Syriac Christianity as follows: “We are first impressed with the covenant-consciousness in the primitive Syrian Christianity. The Christian faith is perceived as a new covenant, and this is the decisive factor determining all others in the understanding of the new religion, even to the shaping of its implications. The covenant... assumes the structural position of moulding all its theology, ethics, and organization. This *qyama*, which also means ‘oath’, ‘a solemn promise’, characterizes the believers even insofar as their name is concerned. These Christians are *bnay qyama* and *bnat qyama* translated ‘the sons of the covenant’ and ‘daughters of the covenant’, actually in the Semitic simply ‘covenanters’”.⁷⁴

Ascetical life itself had a special theological significance in the Syriac Church. Christian marriage is the sacred sign of the union of Christ and the Church (Eph 5.28-32). However, in the understanding of the Syriac Church, the consecrated virgins, both men and women, are in immediate contact with the holy reality of which marriage is the sign. An ascetic by becoming single-minded accepts circumcision of heart (Josh 5.2) and puts on Christ. Their covenantal relationship with Christ was for attaining the original state of the humanity of Adam and Eve before the fall.⁷⁵

9. Eschatological Dimension

Eschatology defines the very structure of Christian life and is fundamental to any Christian theology. It is the distinctive particularity of Christian faith and definitely not the last chapter in theology.⁷⁶ Eschatology can be understood as a process that focuses attention on the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation in Christ when creation is restored to its original state.⁷⁷

The eschatology of the early Syriac Fathers cannot be reduced to a mere belief in last events or to a map of future events such as death, judgment, heaven, hell, or to a belief in the ultimate victory of God in Christ. But it is, at the same time, the realization of the fact that as Christians we already possess that in which we believe. That is, their eschatology is to be understood more in terms of a realizing or realized eschatology. It is in this scheme that the relevance of baptism and Eucharist for the life of the Christian community and for the individual Christian is to be understood.

Baptism and Eucharist restores the condition of the first Paradise and anticipates our future state.⁷⁸ Through the mysteries of baptism and the Eucharist each believer becomes the member of the Church, the pilgrim community on its way to the father-land. In this journey baptism and the Eucharist become the pledge of salvation and the foretaste of the happiness to come.⁷⁹ Ephrem in his *Commentary on Diatessaron* explains: “We have eaten Christ’s body in place of the fruit of the Tree of Paradise, and his altar has taken the place of the Garden of Eden for us; the curse has been washed away by his innocent blood and in the hope of the resurrection we await the life that is to come, and indeed we already walk in this new life, in that we already have a pledge of it”.⁸⁰

The eschatological thrust of early Syriac Church is most evident in its liturgy, especially in its eucharistic liturgy. For instance, the epicletic prayer in the anaphora of Addai and Mari reads: “O My Lord, may your Holy Spirit come down... And dwell in this Qurbana of your servants and bless it and sanctify it that it may be to us, O My Lord, unto the pardon of debts, remission of sins and the great hope of resurrection from the dead and new life in the kingdom of heaven with all those who have found favour in your presence”.⁸¹

10. Symbolic Theology

One of the most attractive features of early Syriac theology is its symbolic character. The early Syriac Fathers, especially Ephrem⁸² uses a number of imageries and symbols to expound the truths of our salvation. For instance, he understands divinity as fire,⁸³ the metaphor of clothing to understand the mystery of incarnation,⁸⁴ the images of eye⁸⁵ and mirror⁸⁶ and imageries from agriculture, from archery, from sailing etc., are common in his writings. Types and symbols found in nature and Scripture serve as pointers to the existence and creative activity of God: “creation gives birth to Christ in symbols, as Mary did in the flesh.”⁸⁷ In their symbolic theology the East Syriac Fathers do not look for, what we seek today, ‘the logical sequence’. They do not jump directly into the heart of the matter through linear logical sequence rather their approach to reality is more circlic, circling round the matter through symbols and types, gradually advancing and going deeper.

From a subjective human point of view types or symbols can be understood as revelations of some aspects of divine hiddenness. But from the objective divine point of view the reverse is true: some aspect of divine reality lies hidden in the type or symbol. In fact, Ephrem employs the word 'raza' for symbol. He understands symbols as intimately linked with reality, or 'raza' is the hidden power or meaning of reality.⁸⁸

Symbolic theology is in fact a going back to the Christian sources as symbolism and symbolic expressions were dear to the Jewish Christians and the Jews alike. This approach to theology can be considered as a corrective of the 'definition-distinction' approach. The Syriac Fathers provide us with a refreshing counterbalance to an excessively cerebral tradition of conducting theological enquiry.⁸⁹ As Hugo Rahner states: "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. The world of imagery found in the symbols of the Church which the theology of the first ten centuries has preserved for us could bring about a renovation of our thinking about the Church, large areas of which have, from a dogmatic point of view, become sterile".⁹⁰ Symbolic language is not only an efficient tool of theology but also highly effective in spirituality. It is true that to account for the richness and power of the symbolism in early Syriac literature and liturgy one must clearly ascribe much to the biblical inheritance shared with Judaism.

11. Theology in Poetry

Theology in poem and theologian as poet may sound contradictions for the modern mind. In Ephrem poetry proves to be an excellent medium for creative theological thinking. He does not present profound theological insights in philosophical categories rather present them by means of images that are drawn from the Bible and ordinary human life. This lends his poetry a timeless character.⁹¹ Ephrem's approach to theology is by way of paradox and symbolism, and for this purpose poetry proves a far more suitable vehicle of sustaining the essential dynamism and fluidity than straightforward theological description. It is our experience

that language of poetry can express the spiritual reality more successfully.

Even though the demonstrations of Aphrahat are in prose, it has often poetic characteristics. He excels in following Semitic rhetorical tradition, i.e., the use of parallelism, rhythmic and syllabic patterns, paradigmatic catenae, chiasmus, thesis-antithesis etc.⁹² Scholars point out that early Syriac literature, especially the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, is rich in poetic titles of Jesus which often suggest a litany or responsorial form.⁹³

12. Eco-Theology and Mysticism of Nature

The ecological vision and nature mysticism of the early Syriac Fathers, especially that of Ephrem, would astonish us as eco-theology is gaining more grounds today. Humanity's relationship, attitude and use of nature are matters of profound significance for them. The natural world stands side by side with Scripture as a witness to God. Therefore, the Syriac Fathers have a sacramental vision of the world, as they are aware of the fact that the natural world can provide innumerable symbols that the inner eye of faith can use as vehicles for understanding divine realities. Their approach to the nature is one of wonder and reverence and not that of greed and exploitation. Ephrem clearly states that human sin, misuse of free will, can disturb the cosmic harmony and order.⁹⁴

13. Theology as (the Language of) Doxology

The theological approach used by Ephrem is not one of intellectual scrutiny but an approach of engagement, an engagement of love and wonder. If the scientific intellectual approach of the mind to its object is a one-way affair, the approach of engagement is a two-way affair involving mutual interaction and participation. Only in this approach of mutual love can theology and knowledge of God grow. An essential concomitant of this attitude of engagement and participation is a sense of wonder (*tehra ܠܝܡܗ*), a key word in the hymns of Ephrem.⁹⁵ This wonder is, above all, caused by the supreme manifestation of God's love for humanity in the incarnation of the Word. Wonder gives birth to love and praise and, indeed, to live without praise is to live as though dead: "I will give praise during my lifetime, and will not be

as a dead man among the living”.⁹⁶ According to Ephrem, for the growth of faith the nourishment needed is praise that comes out of wonder.

In Ephrem, we are able to decipher a deep spiritual approach to the created world as a means of divine revelation and the sense of wonder and awe enkindles in him the praise of God, doxology.⁹⁷ It is clear that for Ephrem theology is nothing other than God experience and it evokes in him sentiments of praise and adoration. Both Ephrem and Aphrahat would have heartily agreed to the 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’.

Conclusion

Early Syriac Christianity can genuinely claim to be an indigenous Asian representative of Christianity. As the sole representative of a Semitic Christianity which was for the most part still uneuropianized, early Syriac Christianity takes on a new relevance in the modern world where the Churches of Asia, Africa, and South America are rightly seeking to shake off the European cultural baggage. In the early Syriac tradition, we encounter a form of Christianity whose theological expression is as yet uninfluenced by the Greek philosophical tradition, but which employs thought forms that far more conducive to these Church’s own cultural backgrounds.

The early Syriac theological tradition, as a true representative of the Semitic and biblical milieu out of which Christianity is born, can take us to the very origins of Christian theology itself. While development of theology in other traditions owes much to heresies, controversies and to particular systems of thought, Syriac theology remains faithful to the biblical tradition. As such Early Syriac theologians were not controversialists. They do not use, if at all they confront heresies and heretics, the speculative weapons of their adversaries. The biblical thought forms and categories extensively used by the early Syriac theologians, far from being advocates of a particular philosophical school, in explaining the faith of the Church are to be regarded common treasure of all theological traditions and thus have a perennial value.

In early Syriac theology one does not find systematic or scientific treatise on any single subject. Here 'Faith' is the key word in the process of theologization and one cannot draw a sharp divide between theology, spirituality, mysticism and liturgical experience. Early Syriac theology, therefore, can act as a corrective of a pure cerebral approach to theology, divorced from the faith experience of the Church, which is not worth its name. This is what K. Rahner means when he says: "If his [the Priest's] theology were not a "theology on its knees" at least to the extent of being the theology of a man who prays, if it degenerated into an intellectual exercise concerned only with problems which are spitefully cast in the Church's teeth instead of seriously looking for a solution, then that theology would no longer be worthy of the name, it would be mere nineteenth century pomposity".⁹⁸

The incarnative approach of Syriac theology with its mysticism of nature and sacramental view of creation can bring harmony and wholeness to our world which is painfully divided and where exploitation, injustice and secularization have become the order of the day. This forgotten theological tradition with its sense of the sacred and mystery, with its deep mystical and ascetical spirit also can be an effective remedy against the erosion of spiritual and moral values.

Notes

¹ J. Danielou and H. Marrou, *The Christian Centuries: The First Six Hundred Years*, Vol. 1, London 1964, 3.

² G.C.Pademetrious, "Jewish Rite in the Christian Church: Ecumenical Possibility", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26 (1973) 467.

³ S. Brock, "The Church of the East in the Sassanian Empire up to the Sixth Century and Its Absence from the Councils in the Roman Empire", in *Syriac Dialogue 1* (First Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition), Pro Oriente, Austria, 1994, 69-84, 70; see also, S. Brock, "The Two Poles of Syriac Tradition", in C. Payngott (ed.), *Homage to Mar Cariattil*, Kottayam 1992, 74-79.

⁴ S. Brock, "The Church of the East in the Sassanian Empire", p. 70; see also, F. Dovornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Philosophy: Origins and Background*, Vol. 2, Washington 1996.

⁵ See S. Brock, "Two Poles of Syriac Tradition", 74-79; S. Brock, "An Introduction to Syriac Studies", in J. H. Eaton (ed.), *Horizons in Semitic Studies*, Birmingham 1980, 1-33.

⁶ S. Brock, CIIS, Rome, 1985, 3; S. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem Prayer and the Spiritual Life, Introduction*, Cistercian Publication, Kalamazoo 1987, x-xiv.

⁷ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 2; see also, S. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, London 1984.

⁸ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 119.

⁹ R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1975, 6; De Vries, "Edessa und judische Christentum", *Vigiliae Christianae* 24 (1970) 4-33; A. Fortescue, *The Lesser Eastern Churches*, London 1913.

¹⁰ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 18.

¹¹ J. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, Vol. 1, Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1964, 1.

¹² The term 'Jewish Christian Theology' certainly needs a qualification. It refers to the expression of Christianity in the thought-forms of later Judaism.

¹³ J. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 4.

¹⁴ S. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life, Introduction*, x.

¹⁵ R. Murray, "The Characteristics of Earliest Syriac Christianity", in N. G. Garsoïan, T. F. Mathews (eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, Dumbarton Oaks Papers, Washington D. C. 1982, 5.

¹⁶ A. Baumstark, *Die Messe im Morgenland*, München 1921, 48-52.

¹⁷ B. D. Spinks, *Addai and Mari – the Anaphora of the Apostles: A Text for Students*, Bramcote 1980, 3; see also his "The Jewish Sources for the Sanctus", *The Heythrop Journal* 21 (1980) 168-179.

¹⁸ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 66.

¹⁹ The word literally means 'narration'. It refers to one of the two classes into which the traditions of Jewish piety were divided in the Rabbinic period, denoting a particular literary style including legends, anecdotes, symbolism etc. Cf. J. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, see glossary; see also, S. Funk, *Die haggadischen Elemente in den Homilien des Aphraates des persischen Weisen*, Vienna 1891.

²⁰ Aramaic translations of the Bible.

²¹ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 8.

²² I. H. Dalmais, "The Eastern Liturgical Families", in A. G. Martimort (ed.), *The Church at Prayer*, vol. 1, Minnesota 1987, 29. For the Jewish

- influence on East Syrian liturgy, cf. R. Taft, "Some notes on the Bema in the East and West Syrian Traditions", OCP 34 (1968) 326-359.
- ²³ S. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources", *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 30 (1979) 212-232; see also T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Traditions*, Coniectanea Biblica (Old Testament series 11), Lund 1978; R. Taft, *Eastern Rite Catholicism: Its Heritage and Vocation*, New Jersey 1963.
- ²⁴ S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition (Moran 'Etho, 2)*, Kottayam 1989, 1.
- ²⁵ Y. Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, SCM Press, London 1982, 70 ff.
- ²⁶ Ephrem, *Hymns on Unleavened Bread*, 6. 22.
- ²⁷ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 32.
- ²⁸ Aphrahat, *Demonstration XIV*: 19 and 32.
- ²⁹ J. Gwynn, "Selections Translated into English from the Hymns and Homilies of Ephraim the Syrian, and from the Demonstrations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage", in P. Schaff & H. Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. XIII, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1989, 411.
- ³⁰ Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 53.12 (CSCO, 155, t. 74, p. 143). See also, P. Yousif, "Approach to the Divine Realities in the Thought of St. Ephrem of Nisibis", in J. Madey & G. Kaniarakath (eds.), *The Church I Love: A Tribute to Rev. Placid J. Podipara c.m.i.*, Kottayam 1977, 54-69; E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden über den Glauben*, Studia Anselmiana 33, Rome 1953.
- ³¹ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 10-11; see also, T. Jansma, "Narsai and Ephrem: Some Observations on Narsai's Homilies on Creation and Ephrem's Hymns on Faith", *Parole de l'Orient* 1 (1970) 49-68.
- ³² Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 16. 6 (CSCO, 155, t. 74, p. 50).
- ³³ Ephrem, *Hymns on the Church*, 11:4. For a discussion on the 'luminous eye' cf. S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 52-56.
- ³⁴ V. Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, J. Clarke & Co., Cambridge 1991, 25-27.
- ³⁵ S. Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of St. Ephrem*, London 1983, 5.
- ³⁶ Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 44:7 (CSCO, 155, t. 74, p. 119).
- ³⁷ Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 4:9 (CSCO, 155, t. 74, p. 11).
- ³⁸ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 89.
- ³⁹ For a study of the term and concept of 'mystery', cf. J. Poovannikunnel, *The Concept of "Mystery" (Raza) in the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, OIRSI, Kottayam 1989, 5-73.
- ⁴⁰ See E. Beck, "Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephräm", *Oriens Christianus* 42 (1958) 19-40.

⁴¹ C. Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of Liturgy*, (L.J. Doyle, trans.), Minnesota, 1976, 65; cf. also, Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, B. Neunheuser (ed.), London 1962.

⁴² See the excellent study of S. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, (The Syrian Churches Series, vol. 9, second edition), J. Vellian (ed.), Pune 1998; also cf. P. Yousif, "L'Eucharistie et le Saint Esprit d'après Saint Ephrem de Nisibe", in R. H. Fischer (ed.), *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus: Studies in Early Christian Literature and its Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East*, Chicago 1977, 235-246; A. Mikloshazy, *East Syrian Eucharistic Pneumatology* (excerpta ex dissertatione ad lauream, PUG), Rome 1968; J. Chalasserry, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Initiation in the East Syrian Tradition*, Rome 1995.

⁴³ In the Syriac tradition the term used for the Holy Spirit is *ruha d-quḏša*. It may be a surprise for many that the term *ruha d-quḏša* (the spirit of holiness) is a frequent term in some Jewish texts especially in the Palestinian tradition of the Aramaic translations of the OT or Targumim, Cf. S. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 4.

⁴⁴ Aphrahat presents the Spirit as mother in Demonstration XVIII, 10.

⁴⁵ J. H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1973.

⁴⁶ A. Vööbus (ed. & trans.), *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, CSCO, Vols. 401, 402, 407 & 408, SS 175, 176, 179 & 180, Louvain 1979.

⁴⁷ A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, (Introduction-Text-Commentary), Leiden 1962.

⁴⁸ For a fuller treatment of these themes cf. S. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 27-36.

⁴⁹ The Malabar Church, following the East Syrian liturgical tradition, till the 16th century knew no sacrament of confirmation which caused great uneasiness to the Portuguese missionaries.

⁵⁰ See E. Beck, "Die Eucharistie bei Ephräm", *Oriens Christianus* 38 (1954) 41-67; R. Murray, "A Hymn of St. Ephrem to Christ on the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit and the Sacraments", *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970) 142-150.

⁵¹ Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, VI: 1 and 6.

⁵² For a fuller treatment of this imagery by Ephrem, cf. S. Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition", in M. Schmidt (ed.), *Typus, Symbol, allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern un Ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, Eichstätter Beiträge IV, Regensburg 1982, 11-37.

⁵³ Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity*, 23.13 (CSCO, 187, t. 83, p.109).

- ⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion on 'the bridal Chamber of the Heart', see S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 106.
- ⁵⁵ Cited in S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 22-23.
- ⁵⁶ Ephrem, *Hymn on Paradise*, 11.6; cited in S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 33.
- ⁵⁷ Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 48.16.
- ⁵⁸ Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 32.9 (CSCO, 155, t. 74, p. 89).
- ⁵⁹ Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 29.1 (CSCO, 155, t. 74, p. 81).
- ⁶⁰ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 108-109.
- ⁶¹ See G. Kretschmar, "Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung fröchristlicher Askese", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 61 (1964) 24-27.
- ⁶² R. Murray, "The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity", 6.
- ⁶³ R. Murray, "The Characteristics of Earliest Syriac Christianity", 7; R. H. Connolly, "Aphraates and Monasticism", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 6 (1905) 522-539; S. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism", *Numen* 20 (1973) 1-19.
- ⁶⁴ M. Maude, "Who were the B'nai Q'yama?", *The Journal of Theological studies* 36 (1935) 13-21.
- ⁶⁵ The translation of this phrase is problematic and for discussions on it, cf. S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 109-112. For studies on bnay qyama, see E. Beck, "Asketentum und Mönchtum bei Ephraem", *OCA* 153 (1958) 273-298; E. Beck, "Techne und Technites bei dem Syrer Ephraem", *Oriens Christianus* 63 (1979) 1-19; A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, II, CSCO 197, sub. 17, 1960, 70-110; A. Adam, "Grundbegriffe des Mönchtums in sprachlicher sichtsicht", *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 65 (1953) 209-239; G. Nedungatt, "The Covenanters of the early Syriac-speaking Church", *OCP* 39 (1973) 191-215, 419-444.
- ⁶⁶ For further details on this see, R. Murray, "The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church", *New Testament Studies* 21 (1974-75) 59-80.
- ⁶⁷ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 111.
- ⁶⁸ For English translations of this demonstration, cf. J. Gwynn (ed.), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, II, 13 (1898), 362-37; K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat Demonstrations*, HIRS Publications, Changanaserry 1999, 102-136.
- ⁶⁹ R. Murray, "The Characteristics of Earliest Syriac Christianity", 7.
- ⁷⁰ In the Syriac New Testament it is a title used for Christ meaning the 'only begotten'. In the Jewish tradition *ihidaya* is used for Adam and also for God. So it is fitting that in the Christian texts the second Adam, who is also divine, should be *ihidaya*. S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 112.
- ⁷¹ Ephrem, *Hymns on Epiphany*, 8.16 (CSCO, 187, t. 83, p. 160).
- ⁷² S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 115.

- ⁷³ A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East. I. Early Monasticism in Persia*, Louvain 1958, 3-31; 138-172.
- ⁷⁴ A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, 12-13.
- ⁷⁵ K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat Demonstrations I*, 10.
- ⁷⁶ A. Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Tradition*, T. Fisch (ed.), St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York 1990, 94-95.
- ⁷⁷ S. J. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology: With special Reference to the Maronite Tradition*, University press of America, Lanham 1983, 133.
- ⁷⁸ I. Ortiz de Urbina, "Le Paradis eschatologique d'après saint Ephrem", *OCP* 21 (1955) 467.
- ⁷⁹ G. Saber, *La Théologie Baptismale de Saint Ephrem*, Kaslik 1974, 173-174.
- ⁸⁰ Cited in S. Brock, "Mary and the Eucharist", *Sobornost* 1/2 (1979) 54.
- ⁸¹ *The Order of Raza*, 50-51.
- ⁸² Cf. R. Murray, "The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology", *Parole de l'Orient* 6-7 (1975-76) 1-20.
- ⁸³ Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 4.2 (CSCO, 155, t. 74, pp. 9-10).
- ⁸⁴ Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity*, 23.13 (CSCO, 187, t. 83, p. 109).
- ⁸⁵ M. Schmidt, "Die Augensymbolik bei Ephrem und Parallelen in der Deutschen mystik", in M. Schdmit (ed.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und Ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, *Eichstätter Beiträge* 4, 1982, 278-301.
- ⁸⁶ E. Beck, "Das Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephrem", *OCP* (1954) 5-24.
- ⁸⁷ Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 6: 8; cited in S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 39. See the study of P. Yousif, "Le symbolism de la croix dans la nature chez saint Ephrem de Nisibe", *Symposium Syriacum* 1976, *OCA* 205, Rome 1978, 207-227.
- ⁸⁸ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 27.
- ⁸⁹ Cf. P. Yousif, "Foi et Raison, dans l'apologétique de Saint Ephrem de Nisibe", *Parole de l'Orient* 12 (1984-85) 133-151; P. Yousif, "St. Ephrem on Symbols in Nature: Faith, the Trinity and the Cross (Hymns on Faith, No. 18)", *Eastern Churches Review* 10 (1978) 52-60.
- ⁹⁰ H. Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche*, Salzburg 1964, 8; English version from, R. Murray, *Symbols*, 37.
- ⁹¹ Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 135.
- ⁹² M. M. Maude, "Rhythmic patterns in the Homilies of Aphrahat", *Anglican Theological Review* 17 (1935) 225-233; see also R. Murray, "Some Rhetorical patterns in the early Syriac Literature", in R. H. Fischer (ed.), *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus*, Chicago 1977, 109-131.
- ⁹³ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 27-28.

⁹⁴ Ephrem, *Hymns against Heresies*, 28.9; cited in S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 137.

⁹⁵ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 51.

⁹⁶ Ephrem, *Hymns on Nisibis*, 50.1; cited in S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 30.

⁹⁷ R. C. Bondi, "The Spirituality of Syriac Speaking Christians", in B. McGinn, J. Meyendorff & J. Leclercq (eds.), *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, New York 1988, 153-161.

⁹⁸ K. Rahner, *Servants of the Lord*, Burns & Oates 1968, 68-69.

4

The Patristic Foundation of the East Syriac Theology

Thomas Kuzhuppil

In this short study on the patristic theology of the East Syriac tradition we may point out the general characteristics of the patristic tradition of the Church of the East. It is through the doctrines of the Fathers that the Church of the East had its theological development. The present study does not claim to comprehend all the characteristic features of the patristic tradition of the Church of the East, but rather it deals with six major points: double heritages of the Church of the East, theology of the imageries, the method of exegesis, the eucharistic-centred life, the pneumatological eucharistic theology and the Logos-Anthropos Christology. By means of the analytical method, we try to perceive the theological nuances inherent in the teachings of those Fathers who lived in the formative period of this Church.

1. Double Heritages of the Church of the East

With regard to the patristic tradition of the Church of the East, there is a synthesis of both the early Syriac tradition represented by Ephrem (+373) and the Antiochene tradition represented by Theodore of Mopsuestia (+428).¹ One may have to analyze and understand, therefore, the theology of the Church of the East from the point of view of those double heritages. From the earliest times, the theology and the exegesis of Ephrem formed the main part of the curriculum of the school of Edessa, the first prominent theological school of the Church of the East.² By the first half of the fifth century, the school of Edessa emerged as the centre of Antiochene theology and became the heart of its propagation. In the course of its growth, Narsai (+503), one of the main teachers in the history of the School, contributed much in the amalgamation of hellenistic scholarship cultivated in the “Antiochene school” with the theological reflections evolved in the Syriac milieu.³ In this manner, the school of Edessa enriched itself by adapting the theological reflections of the Antiochene Fathers,

and thereby set a new beginning in the history of the Church of the East. Such a transition can be viewed as an organic growth in the theological tradition of the Church of the East. In the later half of the fifth century, with the help of Barsauma, Metropolitan of Nisibis, Narsai shifted the school (ca. 457) from the Roman territory of Edessa to the Persian territory of Nisibis due to the domination of Alexandrian theology in the far eastern part of the Roman empire and the intolerance of the Roman emperors towards Antiochene theology and its propagators.⁴ The school of Nisibis became soon a famous centre of learning in Persia and brought new life and a growing interest in learning.

2. Theology of the Imageries

One of the main characteristic features of the early Syriac writings is the ample use of imageries, and thereby they present the mystery of Christ in symbolic language. It shows that they continue the Judaeo-Christianity: the biblico-semitic tradition and its symbols.⁵ For Ephrem, symbols and types of Christ are to be found both in Nature and in the Scripture. Since all those symbols and types found its fulfillment in Christ, Ephrem calls Him, “The Lord of the Symbols”.⁶ The symbols and types latent in both Nature and the Scripture become perceptible, according to Ephrem, in the light of faith or with the luminous eye.⁷ In this manner, Ephrem continues to hold the primitive Christian theology of imageries.

Ephrem, for example, employs the natural and the biblical imagery of fire to demonstrate the divinity,⁸ the divine act of sanctification,⁹ the Holy Spirit,¹⁰ the divinity of Christ¹¹ and the mystery of Trinity.¹² As a reference to the eucharistic mystery, Ephrem uses the expression, ‘Medicine of life’ (*sâm hayyê* ܣܡ ܗܝܝܐ) to explain the life-giving presence of our Lord in the Eucharist.¹³ Imageries from agriculture, archery, sailing, commerce and travel, and from many other spheres of life are likewise to be found everywhere in Ephrem’s hymns.¹⁴

In continuity of the primitive Christian tradition, Aphrahat and Ephrem use a series of typological parallels, that is, they perceive a number of symbolic titles of Christ in the Old Testament. Ephrem’s commentaries on Genesis and on Exodus show a remarkable restraint in the use of typology; a longer

typological explanation is found for the biblical prescriptions concerning the paschal lamb (Ex 12.3-28).¹⁵ In his *Demonstrations*, Aphrahat expounds Christ as the one who shares with Old Testament figures such as Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Jephthah, David, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Josiah, Daniel, the Three children and Mordecai, and yet surpasses them.¹⁶ Likewise, Narsai employs the imagery of fire¹⁷ and 'medicine of life'¹⁸ to explain the mystery of Triune God and the Eucharist respectively. Moreover, the use of typological parallels of Christ, such as Enoch and Elijah, the sacrifice of Isaac, the tabernacle, the story of Jonah, Micah, Malachi, and Daniel,¹⁹ show that Narsai was influenced by the early Syriac typological tradition. In fact, the natural symbols and typological parallels found in the East Syriac liturgical texts manifest that the Church of the East continues the early Syriac heritage of the theology of the imageries.

3. The Method of Exegesis

The hermeneutical works of the early Syriac Fathers are particularly rich from the point of view of historical or literal approach. Ephrem and Aphrahat show a keen interest in reconstructing the historical events related in the Bible.²⁰ Although, the early Syriac exegetes interpret the Old Testament in its plain, literal sense, there is no evidence of any dependence of them on the literal approach of the Antiochene school.²¹ However, by applying the term *theôria*, the Antiochene Fathers explored the non-literal meanings of the Scripture; it is in fact the Antiochene way of expressing the spiritual sense of the Bible.²² The distinctive character of the Antiochene exegesis is that under no circumstances can it do away with the historical or the literal sense of the Bible, that is, it develops a higher spiritual sense (*theôria*) without abrogating the underlying literal sense of the text.²³ In contrast to the allegorical²⁴ interpretation, we note that both the early Syriac and the Antiochene exegetes do not repudiate the literal sense of the Bible; in other words, both of them give due emphasis on the historical dimension of the divine revelation.

Like allegorical interpretation, literal interpretation of the Antiochene school is indebted to a certain extent to the culture of the contemporary world. They expound the text literally as the literalists of the pagan rhetoric schools, with historical, linguistic,

and grammatical observations.²⁵ Such a literal approach influenced by the pagan rhetoric schools is alien to the early Syriac Fathers. Although, on the one hand, the early Syriac Fathers reconstruct on the historical events, they explore, on the other hand, the spiritual richness of the Scripture through their experience of wonder, love, faith and discernment.²⁶ With reference to their exegesis, they are closely related to or inspired by the rabbinic 'Midrash'. Midrash explains the Bible from the Bible, that is, any of the verses of the Bible can be related to any other.²⁷ It may be noted that a similar style of interpretation was employed by the primitive Christians by considering the Scripture as containing the types of the New age. It is in fact the historical reality of the biblical events which serves as a means for them to find out parallels in the Bible.²⁸ In spite of all the differences, we perceive in the early Syriac Fathers, a foundation of the literal or the historical approach of the Antiochene interpreters. Such a common heritage is continued thereafter by the Church of the East.²⁹

4. The Eucharistic-centred Life

For Ephrem it is Christ who really abides in the baptismal water and in the eucharistic bread. In the Eucharist, according to him, one partakes in the entire historical and eternal reality of Christ, namely the Eucharist is nothing less than the entire eschatological mystery of Christ taking place here now in history.³⁰ The reception of this sacrament grants salvation and the justification;³¹ therefore, Ephrem calls it 'the cup of the salvation'.³² He finds links between the Eucharist and the incarnation: "See, Fire and Spirit in the womb that bore you! See, Fire and Spirit in the river where you baptized! Fire and Spirit in our baptism; In the bread and cup, Fire and the Holy Spirit!"³³ It shows that the Eucharist is a type of incarnation, that is, the fruits of incarnation are now extended to us through the Eucharist.³⁴ Ephrem presents the Christian life as centred on the eucharistic Mystery.

Similarly, the Antiochene Fathers present the Christian life as centred on the liturgical celebration. For Theodore of Mopsuestia, we are enabled to maintain our existence through the eucharistic food. The earthly liturgy is the mediation of salvation here and now, where one foretastes the eschatological experience,

and through which one is nourished in the present mortal and mutable state.³⁵ A. Grillmeier describes the eucharistic mystery expounded by Theodore: “The whole *oikonomia* of God is present in the eucharistic fest. It already gives a share in the world of heavenly realities. The life of the future must already be lived in the community of the Church, the pattern of the *civitas caelestis* to come”.³⁶ The glorified Christ, who is perpetually alive in heaven, imparts to us the redemption brought by Him through the sacraments (baptism and Eucharist).³⁷ Sacraments, according to Theodore, draw their salvific power through the divine graces that the Spirit dispenses through the glorified Christ, as the spiritual blessings that Christ’s human nature now enjoys through the *parsopic* union with the Word. Through the sacraments, we also participate in the spiritual blessings that Christ’s human nature now enjoys.³⁸ Theodore explains the sacramental presence from the point of view of the glorified humanity of Christ. The Antiochene Fathers in such a way with their comprehensive understanding of the reality of the humanness of Jesus provide us with a rich eucharistic theology.³⁹ From this point of view, we have to understand Theodore’s perception of the earthly liturgy as the “type” of the liturgy that takes place in heaven.⁴⁰ It shows that the Church of the East has inherited a rich eucharistic theology from its early period. All the later commentators of the liturgy of the Church of the East followed the same tradition, particularly the eucharistic mystery expounded by Theodore. The eucharistic centred life promulgated in the tradition of the Church of the East is evident also in the words of Narsai when he describes the Eucharist as “a pledge of life for mortals”.⁴¹

5. The Pneumatological Eucharistic Theology

Ephrem expounds further the eucharistic mystery by referring to the role of the Spirit in the liturgical celebration. He finds links between the Eucharist and the incarnation by means of the consecratory role of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit who acted at the moment of the incarnation (Lk 1.35) continues his act in the Eucharist.⁴² By employing the imagery of fire, Ephrem explains the consecratory role of the Spirit in the Eucharist: “The fire of compassion descended; and took residence in the bread”.⁴³ Elsewhere he refers to the consecratory role of the Spirit by using

the same imagery: "In Your Bread, there is hidden the Spirit who is not consumed, in Your Wine there dwells the Fire that is not drunk: the Spirit is in Your Bread, the Fire in Your Wine, a manifest wonder, that our lips have received".⁴⁴ Through the eucharistic food, the same Spirit is communicated to us: "He called the bread His living Body and He filled it with Himself and the Spirit...Take it, eat with faith, nothing doubting that it is My Body, and that he who eats it with faith, eats in it Fire and Spirit...Take and eat this, all of you, and eat with it the Holy Spirit. For it is truly my body and whoever eats it will have eternal life".⁴⁵ For Ephrem, the Spirit who is present in the baptismal water continues to work in the eucharistic bread and wine.⁴⁶ To quote him: "Fire and Spirit are in our baptismal font, in the Bread and Cup are Fire and the Holy Spirit".⁴⁷ He continues: "In Fire is the symbol of the Spirit, it is a type of the Holy Spirit, who is mixed in the baptismal water; So that it may be for absolution, and in the bread that it may be an offering".⁴⁸ In the biblical and the primitive Christian tradition, baptism is perceived as the anointing of the Spirit; in other words, the Spirit is given at baptism.⁴⁹ Tertullian in his treatise on baptism states that it is the Spirit who descends on the baptismal water, bestowing upon it the sanctifying power.⁵⁰ For Ephrem, it is in and by the Holy Spirit, that Christ is present in the Eucharist. In this manner, he manifests that the pneumatological understanding of baptism of the primitive Christianity has an implication for the Eucharist as well. Accordingly, Ephrem employed the imagery of the 'Coal of fire' of Is 6.6 to explain the pneumatological significance of the eucharistic mystery.⁵¹ Since the divine fire purifies and sanctifies,⁵² it is indeed the most prominent symbol of the Holy Spirit in the early Christian writings.⁵³ Therefore, Ephrem's interpretation of the 'Coal of fire' by referring to the role of the Spirit in the Eucharist corresponds to the early Christian understanding of fire as the imagery of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, according to G. Dix, in some sense, was recognized as playing some part in the consecration in the Syriac writings of the third century.⁵⁴ There is certain allusion to the Spirit epiclesis in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a fourth century West Syriac document.⁵⁵ There is an invocation for the descent of the Spirit, though not for the transformation of the gifts, in the liturgy of the eighth book of the Apostolic Constitutions.⁵⁶ It is the

earliest Antiochene document of the Spirit epiclesis. We notice a similar form of epiclesis also in the liturgy of St. James.⁵⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem witnesses to an epiclesis with an invocation for the transformation of the gifts.⁵⁸ Likewise, there is an epiclesis in the catechetical lectures of Theodore with a clear invocation of the Holy Spirit to transform the eucharistic elements.⁵⁹ For him, the Spirit who raised up Jesus from the dead (Rom 8.11) activates in the same manner in the Eucharist, and thus, by the descent of the Spirit, the bread and wine which is the “type” of His sacrificial body is transformed into the “type” of the new corporality of the risen Lord.⁶⁰ Accordingly, he distinguishes between the “cold and dark Coal” and “the luminous and hot Coal” by interpreting Is 6.6; the “cold and dark Coal”, is an imagery of His sacrificial body, whereas the “luminous and hot Coal” symbolizes the risen body of Christ revived through the epiclesis.⁶¹ From the above discussion, it is clear that the theology of the Spirit epiclesis evolved in the Syro-Antiochene milieu. In this manner, the Syriac Fathers formulated a pneumatological eucharistic theology, and which in turn continued in the Syro-Byzantine liturgical tradition.

6. The Logos-Anthropos Christology

The Christology of the Church of the East was a question of dispute throughout the history. They upheld in fact a unique position in the exposition of the mystery of incarnation, which in turn continued by them throughout the centuries. In defining the relation of the divine and the human in Christ, they explained the unity by preserving the properties of each nature without any mixture and confusion. The New Testament authors attributes to Him a twofold order of being, namely Godhead and Manhood.⁶² Likewise, Ephrem the Syrian, without using any metaphysical notions, explained His order of being: “For it is God by his entry and man by his outburst. Surprise and embarrassment to hear: The fire entered in the womb put on a body and came forth”.⁶³ The same idea is repeated elsewhere, when he says: “He gave us divinity, we gave Him humanity”.⁶⁴ We notice an archaic form of Christology in the writings of Ephrem: “Who will not give thanks to the Hidden One, most hidden of all, who came to open revelation, most open of all, for He put on a body, and other bodies felt Him-though minds never grasped Him”.⁶⁵ He continues: “He

clothed Himself in the likeness of humanity in order to bring humanity to the likeness of Himself".⁶⁶ The terms such as "put on a body" and "clothed" designate that Ephrem presents the mystery of incarnation in biblical terms.

For Theodore of Mopsuestia, the glorified humanity of Christ is the guarantee of our salvation. If the Second Person of the Trinity had not assumed full manhood, human salvation would have remained incomplete.⁶⁷ Christ by reason of his divinely evoked human obedience to God, transferred the whole of humankind from mortal life, which is the heritage of Adam, to immortal life.⁶⁸ The observation of R.V Sellers is pertinent in this context, when he says: "We find that one of their (Antiochene) fundamental ideas is that if man is to be redeemed, there must come into the world a man who is in perfect obedience to the will of God, He will be the Man, the Second Adam, the first fruits of a renewed humanity".⁶⁹ It shows that the *Logos-Anthropos* Christology of the Antiochene Fathers is necessarily rooted in their anthropological and soteriological doctrines. Theodore upholds, on the one hand, the transcendental and the incomprehensible nature of God, and on the other hand, the full humanity assumed by the divine Logos and its capacity to operate autonomously.⁷⁰ Besides this, he exhibits a clear unity of *prosopon*, that is, there is only one *prosopon* of Filiation, not two-sons.⁷¹ However, Theodore presents the union of the two natures without mixture and without confusion. From the Antiochene perspective, an attempt to explain the unity just as connecting two physical or material realities is inadequate.

Narsai exhibits Christ as one Person in two natures, and both the natures, according to him, are complete. Accordingly, Christ has two *kyânê* ܩܝܢܐ and one *pârsôpâ* ܦܪܫܘܦܐ (*prosopon*) of Filiation.⁷² The full-fledged Christological doctrine of the Church of the East is seen in Babai the Great (+628), who formulated it by emphasizing both the Oneness of Christ and the duality of natures. There are two natures (*qnômê* ܩܢܘܡܐ) and one *pârsôpâ* in Christ; the properties of each *qnômâ* is preserved without any kind of mixture and confusion. For Babai, there is only one *pârsôpâ* of Filiation, namely one subject in Christ. The Word (Divine *qnômâ*) assumed to its *pârsôpâ* of Filiation, the human *qnômâ*. *Kyânâ* (nature), according to Babai, does not have an existence in itself; it

exists only as *qnômâ*. The term two *qnômê*, therefore, signify that two natures (*kyânê*) really exist in Christ.⁷³

In their attempt to expound the mystery of Incarnation, the Antiochene Fathers succeeded in preserving the properties of each nature, and at the same time, explained how the assumed Manhood is an instrument for His salvific act. In this context, it is pertinent to quote the Christology of Chalcedon: "We unanimously teach to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man composed of rational soul and body... We confess that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (*prosopon*) and one *hypostasis*".⁷⁴

Conclusion

The patristic heritage of the Church of the East is an amalgamation of double sources. Such a synthesis was in fact an organic growth, and thereby the Church of the East took shape. Even though there are differences, there is a common factor in their exegesis that they interpreted the Bible literally respecting the historical dimension of the divine revelation. In their Christological exposition, they upheld double natures, and explained the unity without any kind of mixture and confusion. The eucharistic theology of the Church of the East has its foundation in their Christological doctrine. Moreover, they propagated a eucharistic centred life. The Spirit-centred eucharistic theology in general, and the theology of the Spirit-epiclesis in particular, is formulated in Syro-Antiochene milieu. Such a rich eucharistic understanding was continued thereafter by other Eastern Churches.

Notes

¹ A. Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis*, CSCO 266, Subs 26, Louvain, 1965, 88; I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, 2nd ed., Roma 1965, 115-122.

² A. Vööbus, *History of the School*, 14. Ephrem (ca. 306-373) was born in Nisibis. He served as a deacon in the bishopric of Nisibis. After the fall of Nisibis in 363, Ephrem came to Edessa (ca. 365) and taught there until his death.

³ P. Gignoux, "Narsai", *DSp* vol. 11, Paris, 1982, cols 39-40; A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, Bonn 1922, 100; A. Vööbus, *History of the School*, 88. The "Antiochene school" is different from the other theological schools of the early Church. Antioch had no long history of an organized scholastic system as the others, rather the term "Antiochene School" signifies the theological reflections evolved there through their representative theologians beginning with Diodore and Theodore.

⁴ S. Gero, *Barsauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century*, CSCO 426, Subs 63, Louvain 1981, 63; A. Scher (ed. & tr.), *Mar Barhadbešabba 'Arbaya, Évêque de Halwan: Cause de la fondation des écoles*, PO 4, Paris 1908, 381-387; S.P. Brock, "The «Nestorian» Church: A Lamentable Misnomer", *BJRL* 78 (1996) 33; S.H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 1, New York 1998, 194.

⁵ R. Murray, "The Theology of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology", *PdO* 6/7 (1975/76) 1-20.

⁶ HdF 9,11; CDiat 1,1; Virg 6,7. E.G. Mathews & J.P. Amar (trs), *St. Ephrem the Syrian; Selected Prose Works: Commentary on Genesis, Commentary of Exodus, Homily on our Lord, Letter to Publius*, Washington D.C. 1994, 53.

⁷ The Syriac word *šhâphyâ* is used by Ephrem to communicate the idea contained in the term "luminous eye". S.P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem*, Rome 1985; Revised edition, Kalamazoo 1992, 73-80.

⁸ Com. Exodus 3,2; Epi 4,14.

⁹ Epi 3,10; Para 12, 11.

¹⁰ HdF 74, 19-20; 10, 17; 40, 10.

¹¹ Virg 25,14; 32,9; HdF 4,2; Hom. Nat 10-17; CDiat 1,25.

¹² HdF 40,2-3; 75, 13-16; 73,1-8. The imagery of the sun/fire implies that the sun/fire is the principle and the source of light and warmth; therefore, according to Ephrem, it symbolizes the oneness of the divine Mystery. Besides this, the clear distinction of the light and the warmth from the sun/fire shows the distinction of the three divine Persons. E. Beck,

Ephräms Trinitätslehre im Bild von Sonne/Feuer, Licht und Wärme, CSCO 425, Subs 62, Louvain 1981, 32-40

¹³ Virg 31,3; CNis 46,8. G. Widengren, *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism*, Uppsala/Leipzig 1946, 129-138.

¹⁴ S.P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 40.

¹⁵ P. Yousif, "Symbolisme christologique dans chez saint Éphrem", *PdO* 14 (1987) 224-231; J. Naduvilezham, *The Theology of the Paschal Lamb in Ephrem of Nisibis*, Kottayam 2000, 194-204; E. Beck, "Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephräm", *OC* 42 (1958) 26-40; T. Bou Mansour, "Étude de la terminologie symbolique la Bible et dans la nature chez S. Ephrem de Nisibe", *PdO* 8&9 (1977-1980) 20-23.

¹⁶ R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, Cambridge 1975, 23; L. Van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation", in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, Göttingen 1996, 620-621; E. Beck, "Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephräm", 19-26.

¹⁷ *Creat* 2, 129-130; 3, 57-58; P. Gignoux (ed. & tr.) *Les homélies de Narsai sur la création*, PO 34, 3-4, Turnhout, 1968, 565, 587.

¹⁸ Hom. 17; A. Mingana (ed.), *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina*, vol. 1, Mosul, 1905, 295; Hom. 21; A. Mingana, *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae*, 355-356.

¹⁹ J. Frishman, "Narsai's Homily for the Palm Festival-Against Jews?", in H.J.W. Drijvers & R. Lavenant (eds), *IV Symposium Syriacum*, OCA 229, Rome 1987, 221-223; "Themes on Genesis 1-5 in Early East Syrian Exegesis", in J. Frishman & L. Van Rompay (eds), *Traditio Exegetica Graeca: The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation*, Louvain 1997, 176-186. In comparison with early Syriac tradition, Theodore of Mopsuestia employs a limited number of natural symbols and types; he preserves only the traditional typological parallels used in the Bible. T. Kuzhuppil, *The Vision of the Prophet Isaiah: A Theological Study of Narsai's Interpretation of Isaiah 6*, (Doctoral Dissertation, Augustinianum, Rome) 2004, 22.

²⁰ L. Van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation", 616.

²¹ P. Yousif, "Exegetical Principles of St. Ephraem of Nisibis", in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *StPatr* vol. 18, 1990, 298.

²² S. Hidal, "Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Antiochene School with its Prevalent Literal and Historical Method", in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, Göttingen 1996, 547; D.Z. Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of his Old Testament Exegesis*, New York 1989, 105. The Greek word *theôria* means the act of seeing. Antiochians have employed

it for the prophetic vision of the Bible and adapted it as a principle of their hermeneutics. For them what the prophet has actually seen is the future mysteries of the Messiah. P.A. Vaccari, "La *theôria* nella scuola esegetica di Antiochia", *Biblica* 1 (1920) 7, 26; P. Ternant, "La *theôria* d'Antioche dans le cadre des sens de l'Écriture", *Biblica* 34 (1953) 374-375.

²³ S. Hidal, "Exegesis of the Old Testament", 548-549; M. Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: A Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, Edinburgh 1994, 67; "Note sull'esegesi veterotestamentaria di Teodoro di Mopsuestia", *VetChr* 14 (1977) 72-74.

²⁴ *Allegory* = another; to speak so as to imply something other than what is said.

²⁵ M. Simonetti, *Lettera e/o allegoria: Un contributo alla storia dell'esegesi patristica*, Roma 1985, 163-172, 181-182.

²⁶ A. Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, Oxford, 1989, 97-98; K. Valavanolickal, *The Use of the Gospel Parables in the Writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem*, Frankfurt 1996, 323.

²⁷ R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 281; M. Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation*, 3; G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, Edinburgh 1991, 237. The most characteristic feature of the Qumaran sect was the 'Midrash pešer' (from the Aramaic *pšr*, to interpret). They interpreted the Old Testament by relating to the immediate situation of the sect and its struggles. C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, Cambridge 1952, 126-130; E.E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, London 1957, 45.

²⁸ P. Grech, *Ermeneutica e teologia biblica*, Roma 1986, 5-34; C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, Cambridge 1936, 36-56; G.W.H. Lampe, "Typological Exegesis", *Theology* 56 (1953) 204-205; A. Perriman, "Typology in Paul", *Theology* 90 (1987) 200.

²⁹ A. Scher (ed. & tr.), *Mar Barhad bešabba 'Arbaya, Évêque de Halwan: Cause de la fondation des écoles*, PO 4, Paris 1908, 382-383.

³⁰ E. Beck, "Die Eucharistie bei Ephräm", *OC* 38 (1954) 54; J.P. Amar, "Perspectives on the Eucharist in Ephrem the Syrian", *Worship* 61 (1987) 444; P. Yousif, *L'eucharistie chez saint Éphrem de Nisibe*, OCA 224, Roma 1984, 320-322.

³¹ HdF 10, 9.

³² Nat 4, 25.

³³ HdF 10, 17; S.P. Brock (tr.), "A Hymn of St. Ephrem on the Eucharist", *The Harp* 1 (1987) 67.

³⁴ P. Yousif, *L'eucharistie chez saint Éphrem*, 127; S.P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 108.

³⁵ F. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, London, 1983, 212; G. Hellemo, *Adventus Domini: Eschatological Thought in Fourth Century Apses and Catecheses*, Leiden 1989, 231-232

³⁶ A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, London 1975, 422-423.

³⁷ E. Mazza, *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*, New York 1989, 62; R.A. Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Exegete and Theologian*, Westminster 1961, 77-84.

³⁸ F.G. McLeod, "The Christological Ramifications of Theodore of Mopsuestia's Understanding of Baptism and the Eucharist", *J ECS* 10 (2002) 68-69.

³⁹ K.B. Osborne, *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation*, New York 1987, 182-184.

⁴⁰ R. Tonneau & R. Devreesse (ed. & tr.), *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste*, Studi e Testi 145, Città del Vaticano 1949, 485. The biblical term "type" is employed by Theodore to explain the theology of the sacraments.

⁴¹ Pass 169; F.G. McLeod (ed. & tr.), *Narsai's Metrical Homilies on the Nativity, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension*, PO 40, Paris 1979, 113.

⁴² S.P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 108-111; "Invocations to/for the Holy Spirit in Syriac Liturgical Texts: Some Comparative Approaches", in R.F. Taft & G. Winkler (eds), *Comparative Liturgy: Fifty Years after Anton Baumstark (1872-1948)*, OCA 265, Rome 2001, 391-395.

⁴³ HdF 10, 12; S.P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 112.

⁴⁴ HdF 10, 8; S.P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 104.

⁴⁵ *Sermones in Hebdomadam Sanctam* 4; CSCO 412, Scri. Syri. 181, 29-30.

⁴⁶ E. Beck, "La baptême chez saint Ephrem", *OS* 1 (1956) 115; E.P. Siman, *L'expérience de l'esprit par l'église: d'après la tradition Syrienne d'antioche*, Paris 1971, 104-110; F. Graffin, "L'eucharistie chez saint Éphrem", *PdO* 4 (1973) 100-109.

⁴⁷ HdF 10, 17; S.P. Brock, "A Hymn of St. Ephrem on the Eucharist", 67.

⁴⁸ HdF 40, 10; S.P. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, in J. Vellian (ed.), *Syrian Churches Series* 9, Kottayam 1979, 11.

⁴⁹ Acts 1, 5; 2, 37-41; 4, 4; 8, 12-17, 36-38; 9, 17-19; K. McDonnell & G.T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 2nd ed., Collegeville 1994, 86-90.

⁵⁰ *De Bapt.* 6; CCL 1, 282.

⁵¹ "And that coal is my body. You are all Isaiah. And that altar is this table. That temple is this room. The Lord of that temple is I. Behold, the prophecy has been fulfilled. Isaiah received my Spirit then, he received

of it and spoke about me". *Sermones in Hebdomadam* 4; CSCO 412, Scri. Syri 181, 30.

⁵² R. De Menezes, "Water and Fire in the Old Testament", in F.X. D'Sa, I. Padinjarekuttu, J. Parappally (eds), *The World as Sacrament*, Pune 1998, 56-59;

⁵³ G. Di Nola (ed.), *Lo Spirito Santo nei Padri*, Roma 1999, 54; J. Chalassery, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Initiation in the East Syrian Tradition*, Rome 1995, 65.

⁵⁴ G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, London 1945, 183.

⁵⁵ R.H. Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, Oxford 1929, 244. It is originally an ecclesiastical document of the third century written in Greek. Today, we come to know it only through other versions.

⁵⁶ F.X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, vol. 1, Paderborn 1905, 510.

⁵⁷ H. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper: A Study in the History of the Liturgy*, Leiden 1979, 110; J.H. McKenna & M. McCrimmon, *Eucharist and Holy Spirit: The Eucharistic Epiclesis in 20th Century Theology*, Great Wakering 1975, 108.

⁵⁸ MC 5, 7; E. Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem*, London & New York 2000, 183; E. Cutrone, "Cyril's Mystagogical Catecheses and the Evolution of the Jerusalem Anaphora", *OCP* 44 (1978) 52-64.

⁵⁹ A. Mingana (ed. & tr.), *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer, and on Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, WS 6, Cambridge, 1933, 118-119; R. Tonneau & R. Devreesse, *Les homélies catéchétiques*, 591-593

⁶⁰ H. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 430-431; F.J. Reine, *The Eucharistic Doctrine and Liturgy of the Mystagogical Catecheses of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, Washington, D.C. 1942, 21, 42, 142.

⁶¹ A. Mingana, *Theodore on the Sacraments*, 260.

⁶² J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed., London 1968, 138.

⁶³ HdF 4, 2; T. Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique de saint Ephrem le Syrien*, Kaslik 1988, 234.

⁶⁴ HdF 5, 17; S.P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 154.

⁶⁵ HdF 19, 7; S.P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 28.

⁶⁶ Para 11, 6; S.P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 48. The Trinitarian and the Christological reflections of Ephrem are based on two concepts: *qnômâ* and *kyânâ*. The term *qnômâ* affirms the idea of 'reality'. Thus the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit distinguish themselves in their own *qnômê* (*hypostases*). The divine *qnômâ* (divine nature) is not the human *qnômâ* (human nature), and therefore, both are in the incarnate Word. *Kyânâ* is a name common to God. It refers to the divine mystery; above all, to the divine nature that is Trinitarian. The term *qnômâ* not reduces simply to

the existence of a thing; it maintains an essential connection with *kyânâ*, from which it is never separated. When the aspect of nature (divine nature) is given more emphasis, it is synonymous to *kyânâ*. T. Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique de saint Ephrem le Syrien*, 160-180.

⁶⁷ W. De Vries, "Das eschatologische Heil bei Theodor von Mopsuestia", *OCP* 24 (1958) 333-338; "Der «Nestorianismus» Theodors von Mopsuestia in seiner Sakramentenlehre", *OCP* 7 (1941) 95, 102.

⁶⁸ R.A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ: A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, Oxford, 1963, 196; S. Gerber, *Theodor von Mopsuestia und das Nicänum: Studien zu den katechetischen Homilien*, Leiden 2000, 205-213.

⁶⁹ R.V. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies*, London 1940, 117.

⁷⁰ A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 219-248, 329-360; B. Soro, "The Person and Teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia and the Relationship between him, his Teaching and the Church of the East with a Special Reference to the Three Chapters Controversy", in *Syriac Dialogue, Pro-Oriente*, Vienna 1998, 28-38.

⁷¹ G. Kalantzis, "Duo-Filii and The Homo-Assumptus in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia: The Greek Fragments of the Commentary on John", *ETL* 78 (2002) 57-78

⁷² I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, 2nd ed., Roma 1965, 118; I. Ibrahim, *La doctrine christologique de Narsai*, (Doctoral Dissertation, Angelicum), Rome 1975, 320-330; G. Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai the Great*, Rome 1982, 86. Narsai rarely uses the term *kyânâ* to explain the Trinitarian mystery, and instead of it, he opts for the term *Itûtâ* (*ousia*) to designate the divine Unity. In his Christological exposition, Narsai uses *kyânâ* as an equivalent to *physis* (nature).

⁷³ G. Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai*, 119-154. For Narsai, the term *qnômâ* is equivalent to *hypostasis*, rather he uses the term *kyânâ* to designate the two natures in Christ; whereas, Babai employs "*qnômâ*" also in his exposition of the mystery of Incarnation. Accordingly, Christ has two *qnômê* parallel to two *kyânê*, and one *pârsôpâ* of Filiation.

⁷⁴ J. Neuner & J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, 4th ed., Bangalore 1987, 154-155.

Biblical Theology of Aphrahat and Ephrem

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Introduction

In this short study we may introduce the chief characteristics of the Biblical theology of the Syriac Fathers concentrating on the writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem which have a simple Judeo-Christian approach to the Scriptures untainted by any philosophical or speculative abstraction. Being the true representatives of the early Syriac Christianity, Aphrahat and Ephrem shed light on Church's understanding of the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments. From their writings it becomes clear how important the Sacred Scripture was in the life of the Church. Their interpretations tell us in unambiguous words about their approach to the Word of God.

1. Aphrahat "the Persian Sage"

The earliest author we know among Syriac Christian writers is Aphrahat, the author of the twenty three *Demonstrations* (*Tahwayata* ܛܘܘܝܬܐ), who wrote to a putative enquirer. Each Demonstration begins with a consecutive letter of the Syriac alphabet.¹ Aphrahat lived in the fourth century (ca.280-345), about whom we know precisely little. He was an ascetic and probably a bishop.

Aphrahat seems to quote often from the Jewish canon of the Old Testament though some Deutero-canonical books are also referred to. He follows the *Pešitta* than the *Septuagint*. He also seems to have made use of the *Diatessaron* of Tatian. "But in all his writings his mastery of the Scriptures, of the Old Testament especially, is conspicuous; and in many of them, especially in those of a hortatory character, there is much force of earnestness, rising at times into eloquence."²

1. 1. Aphrahat as a Biblical Theologian

Aphrahat gives us some hints about the methodology he uses in understanding and explaining the Scriptures in his

Demonstrations. In his twenty third *Demonstration* he writes: “Everyone who reads the sacred scriptures, both former and latter, in both covenants, and reads with persuasion, will learn and teach” (*Dem* 23.26). Here by ‘persuasion’ he seems to mean faith and conviction; to be sure, the Bible is a book of faith for the believers and it cannot be seen otherwise. Aphrahat in his practical wisdom says that if one fails to understand the meaning of Scripture, he should consult more people and take what is the most convincing to him, but should not scorn the sages, “for the Word of God is like a pearl, that has a beautiful appearance on whatever side you turn it. And remember, O disciple what David said, ‘From all my teachers have I learned’ alluding to Ps 119.99. Here, of course, Aphrahat has an adapted rendering of the Psalm. What he seems to say is that scripture can have different meanings as a pearl can have different appearances depending on the angle from which one looks at it; and the perception of the sages may differ. He reminds us that “the words of God are infinite, and cannot be concluded... no man has reached or will reach its end” (*Dem* 5.24). Again Aphrahat makes a bold yet correct statement: “For if the days of a man should be many as all the days of the world from Adam to the end of the ages, and he should sit and meditate upon the Holy Scriptures, he would will not comprehend all the force of depth of the words” (*Dem* 22.26).

1.1. Faith as the Foundation

Aphrahat wrote in prose though often he used rhythmic patterns with thematic or typological parallelisms and testimonies in his presentation of theological themes. He gives an interesting description of faith: “Now thus faith; when a man believes in God the Lord of all, Who made the heavens and the earth and seas and all that is in them; and He made Adam in His image; and He gave the Law to Moses; He sent His Spirit upon the prophets; He sent moreover His Christ into the world. Furthermore also believes in the sacrament of baptism. This is the faith of the Church of God.” Here we have what we may call a little *credo* that is perfectly biblical.

Faith (*Dem* 1) is said to be compounded of many things as it is like a building whose true stone/foundation-stone is Christ himself. Jesus is the foundation of all faith, on his person it is built

up. He who believes, loves and hopes is justified and perfected as well as consummated. The person becomes a dwelling place of Christ. Here Aphrahat quotes Jer 7.4-5, "... the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are you, if you amend your ways and your works", as referring to the believer. Again he quotes from Lev 26.12: "I dwell in them and walk in them", finding its confirmation in Paul: "You are the temple of God and the Spirit of Christ dwells in You" (1 Cor 3.16). Here the citation from *Leviticus* is introduced as the word of a prophet and it does not literally agree with the original text. Also Paul has written about the "Spirit of God" (*naos Theou*), while Aphrahat has 'the Spirit of Christ'. He also refers to the Johannine idea of mutual indwelling (Jn 14.20). Here we are to think that he adjusted the scriptural words to the context without neglecting or ignoring its spirit. What is said in the text of *Leviticus* is seen by Aphrahat as the active presence of God in all. Prophet Jeremiah, indeed, wanted to say that the human temple was more important than the physical structure of the temple in Jerusalem; he demanded harmony between worship and everyday life. That God dwells in a human person can be equally well expressed by saying that Jesus dwells in a person.

After speaking about faith Aphrahat adds that it has to be nurtured by prayer, love, almsgiving, and meekness. One may even choose virginity (it was very much valued in Syriac Christian life). These are seen as ingredients of or expressions of faith. For the Hebrews circumcision was an expression of faith in God (*Dem* 11): "He (Yahweh) commanded him to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin as a deed and a sign of the covenant so that when his seed became many, it should be distinct from all the nations among which they lived in order not to get involved in their impure works". What matters is the circumcision of the heart. Circumcision was a type that was fulfilled in baptism: "For our God is faithful and his covenants are exceedingly trust worthy, and every covenant in its time was sure and found true (*ܘܝܝܫܘܥ ܫܪܝܪ*) and those who are circumcised in their hearts have life and are circumcised a second time by the true Jordan (*ܕܝܘܪܕܢܐ ܕܫܪܪܐ* *Yôrdnan da-šrarâ*), the baptism of remission of sins" (*Dem* 11). Here Aphrahat the biblical theologian is following Paul in giving a correct understanding of Christian baptism.

1.2. Typological Parallels and Lists of Testimonies

Typological parallels and lists of testimonies are important in Aphrahat. As types of faith he mentions Hananiah, Azariah and Micah; (as also Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, and others). And he remarks that Jesus healed those who believed (*Dem* 1.17). He also writes about the great effects of faith on humans: “For faith raised up to the heavens (Enoch), and conquered the Deluge. It caused the barren to bring forth. It delivered from the sword. It raised up from the pit. It enriched the poor. It released the captives. It delivered the persecuted. It brought down fire. It divided the sea. It cleft the rock, and gave to the thirsty water to drink. It satisfied the hungry. It raised the dead, and brought them up from Sheol. It stilled the billows. It healed the sick. It conquered hosts. It overthrew walls. It stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the flame of fire. It humiliated the proud, and brought the humble to honour. All these mighty works were wrought by faith” (*Dem* 1.18).

While writing about persecution (*Dem* 21) also Aphrahat parades a number of witnesses as Jacob persecuted by Esau, Joseph by his brothers, Moses by the Egyptians; Joshua was persecuted like Jesus as also, David, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Daniel, Hananiah and his brethren, and Mordecai. And finally he gives the reason for his *catena* of *testimonii*: “These memorials that I have written unto thee, my beloved, concerning Jesus and the righteous who was persecuted, are in order that those who today are persecuted for the sake of the persecuted Jesus, may be comforted, for he wrote for us and comforted us himself; for he said: “If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you. And because of this they will persecute you, that you are not of the world, even as I was not” (*Jn* 15.20). In these *testimonia* the author goes round and round a theme with scriptural examples to convince the reader (*On Death* in *Dem* 22.3-14).

1.3. The Idea of Divinisation

It is a theological theme that has been developed by the Greek Fathers who were helped by Greek thinkers. In his *Demonstration* on the Monks, Aphrahat gives some elementary ideas which are based on the Bible. After quoting 1 Cor 15.49, he writes: “For Adam who was from the earth was he that sinned, and

the Adam who is from heaven is our Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ. They then that receive the Spirit of Christ, come into the likeness of the heavenly Adam, who is our saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Dem* 6.18). Again, after citing 1 Cor 15.52 he writes: "And they who shall be changed shall put on the form of that heavenly Adam and shall become spiritual"³. Here the idea is that humans are to be conformed to Christ who is the perfect icon of God.

1.4. Theology of History

Aphrahat's understanding of history is presented in his meditation on history and war on the basis of the book of Daniel (*Dem* 5). Everything is to come to fulfilment when the Son of Man receives the Kingdom from the Ancient of Days. All other kingdoms will come to an end and the Kingdom of Christ will be eternal. Aphrahat interprets Daniel's vision of the four beasts: "He saw first the children of Ham, the seed of Nirmod, which the Babylonians are; and secondly, the Persians and the Medes, who are the children of Japet; and thirdly, the Greeks, the children of the Medes; and fourthly, the children of Shem, which the children of Esau are... . But when the time of the consummation of the dominion of the children of Shem shall have come, the Ruler who came forth from the children of Judah, shall receive the kingdom, when he shall come in his second Advent" (*Dem* 5.10). The author has also another description of the four kingdoms. The final one is that of the King Messiah who was to destroy the image in the vision of Daniel (2.31-33) whose head was Nebuchadnezzar, whose breast and arms were the king of Media and Persia; its belly and thighs the king of Greece; its legs and feet the kingdom of the children of Esau and the stone that smote the image is the Kingdom of the Messiah. Because the Jews rejected the Kingdom, the nations are taking its place in the plan of God. Strangely, Aphrahat does not say anything about the eschatological aspect of the Kingdom as St Paul does (2 Cor 15.27-28).

2. St. Ephrem "the Harp of the Holy Spirit"

St. Ephrem (ca 306-373) was probably born of Christian parents at Nisibis, an outpost of the eastern Roman empire which was geographically in north-eastern Mesopotamia and was conquered by the Persians in 363. Ephrem and the Christian

community there was compelled to move to Edessa, hundred miles West which was called Urhaya/Urhay and where he had his last ten years continuing in fruitful intellectual labour. The earliest external witness we have about Ephrem and his writings is from St. Jerome who wrote in 392, nineteen years after his death. He wrote: "Ephrem, a deacon of the Church of Edessa, wrote a great deal in the Syriac language. He attained such distinction that his writings are read in some churches after the Scriptural lections. I have read a work of his on the Holy Spirit, which someone had translated from Syriac into Greek, and even in translation I could recognize the acumen of a lofty intellect."⁴ Jerome seems to be saying that the writings of Ephrem were highly spiritual and intellectual. About him the modern Orthodox theologian J. Meyendorff writes: "His name entered the lists of venerated saints in the East and in the West, and his writings influenced liturgical hymnography. Whether or not one is able to read him in the original Syriac, one has to acknowledge that he is the greatest Christian poet of his age. One can only regret that there seems to be no way of restoring his musical melodies, which he doubtlessly composed also, and which were an integral part of his meditation on the mysteries of faith. ...Ephrem is always able to transcend frozen formulas and to maintain that extraordinary biblical freshness that gives the early Syriac Christian tradition a favour of true universality. This is particularly true of Ephrem's theology of the incarnation, his sacramental typology and his understanding of ethical issues."⁵ Here lies Ephrem's originality and his special appeal to us today⁶.

2.1. The Three Sources of Revelation

According to Ephrem, the basic modes of divine revelation are the visible signs in nature, the types and symbols in the Scriptures as well as in the person of the Son of God who became man. Ephrem speaks about three sources of revelation: the universe, the Scripture and the Incarnation of the eternal Word of God. The Bible which is the Book (*kitab* کتاب), and nature (*kyana* كيانا) constitute two powerful witnesses according to the Jewish law (Deut 19.15; Jn 8.17). Then, of course, the Son of God become man is the supreme manifestation of God (Heb 1.1-2). McVey has well articulated how Ephrem sees Christ harmoniously blending the music of the three harps which are signs, symbols and

prototypes here. Here nature and Scripture are mentioned as modes of divine revelation:

But who has seen our Lord and admired His playing on three harps?

He bends their counterpoint wisely
lest their hearers be alienated:

signs, symbols and prototypes,
so that nature and scripture may convince.

With the one creation He bound together Two Testaments
to put the doubters to same (*On Virginity* 30.1).

In his book Moses,
described the creation of the natural world
so that both Nature and Scripture
might bear witness to the Creator:

Blessed are you, O Church, whose congregation
sings with three glorious harps.

Your finger plucks the harp of Moses,
and [the harp] of our Saviour and [the harp] of nature
(*On Virginity* 27.4).

Ephrem is, however, fully aware of the chasm that separates the creature from the creator. An object can be contained or comprehended only by a greater one and therefore none can 'investigate' ('*aqqeb* **חקק**) or 'pry into' (*bas*) divine nature.

Ephrem writes:

Whoever is capable of investigating
becomes the container of what he investigates;

knowledge which is capable of containing the Omniscient
is greater than Him (*On Faith* 9.16).

Such as I search You I shall not reach You;

My mind has reached nothing of your hidden being.

It is clear and plain face that I have seen in Your mystery
because you are beyond investigation ('*uqaba*).

Concerning the 'perfect' names of God which concern his person, Ephrem writes:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be reached only by their
names;

do not go further, to their Persons (*qnome*),

just meditate on their names.

If you investigate the person of God, you will perish,
but if you believe in the name, you will live.

Let the name of the Father be boundary to you,
do not cross it and investigate His nature;
let the name of the Son be a wall to you,
do not cross it and investigate His birth from the Father;
let the name of the Spirit be a fence for you,
do not enter inside for the purpose of prying into Him
(*On Faith* 4.129-40).

2.1.1. From Creation to the Creator

God created the world through his Word, and though not an emanation from him and only far remotely and in a symbolic way, it really proclaims (*ngd*) something of his glory and has a theophanic role (Ps 19.1). The psalmist wonders: “O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Ps 8.1,3; 104). Paul wrote to the Romans: “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made” (Rom 1.20).

Nature, through man’s use of it,
Scripture, through his reading of it,
these are the witnesses,
which reach everywhere,
they are to be found at all times,
present at every hour,
confuting the unbeliever who defames the Creator
(*On Paradise* 5.2).

2.1.2. The Bible as Divine Self-revelation in Written Words

The Bible is Israel’s witnessing about God’s self-revelation in words and deeds. It speaks about God and his plan for human salvation. In Scripture is a divine condescension in the sense that God has adopted human language to speak to us. Hence the ‘names’ and metaphors in the Bible are not to be taken literally.⁷ The Bible is like a mirror in which with the eye of faith one sees an image of Truth (*On Faith* 67.8). With a word of caution Ephrem writes about the revelatory nature of Scriptures:

If someone concentrates his attention solely on the metaphors used of God's majesty, he abuses and misrepresents that majesty and thus errs by means of those metaphors with which God clothed Himself for his benefit, and he is ungrateful to that Grace which stooped low to the level of his childishness; although it has nothing in common with him, yet Grace clothed itself in his likeness in order to bring him to the likeness of itself (*On Paradise* 11.6).

Ephrem describes the Bible as the "book which, above its companions, has in its narrative made the Creator perceptible and transmitted His actions" (*On Paradise* 6. 2).

2.1.3. The Son as Revealer par excellence

Full revelation is got in the incarnate Son of God in whom all the three sources of revelation reach their culmination. In him the ontological chasm that separated God from creation is removed. At the centre of the history of salvation is Christ who is simultaneously the metaphysical mediator between the Creator and the creation. Ephrem sees the three combined and clarified in Jesus in a wonderful way:

The Word of the most High came down and put on a weak body with hands, and He took two harps [Old and New Testaments] in His right and left hands.

The third [nature] He set before Himself to be a witness to the [other] two, for the middle harp taught that their Lord is playing them He played, and that third harp was harmonious and completed the [other] two (*On Virginity* 29.1).

Who will not give thanks to the Hidden One, most hidden of all,

who came to open revelation, most open of all, for He put on a body, and other bodies felt Him though minds never grasped Him (*On Faith* 19.7).

.....

Who, Lord, can gaze on Your hiddenness
which has come to revelation?

Yes, Your obscurity has come to manifestation and
notification;

Your concealed Being has come out into the open, without
limitation (*On Faith* 51.2).

2.1.4. Aspect of Veiling in the Revelations

In all the three revelations there is also an aspect of veiling which can be unveiled only with the help of faith (*On Faith* 72.2). Only in faith we are able to see the creator behind creation; only in faith we hear God in the Scripture and only in faith we are able to recognise God in the person of Jesus. The unbeliever denies the creator (*On Paradise* 5.2).

In his biblical and Semitic approach to divine realities, including revelation, Ephrem sees a necessary limitation in our perception. Here there is no question of ‘defining’ or setting limits or boundaries (*hori*, Greek) to divine realities, which, indeed, is a risky undertaking that has led to undesirable consequences in the early Church. An overdose of Greek philosophy with the words *prosopon*, *physis*, and *ousia* with the corresponding Syriac terms, caused much confusion and even divisions in the Church. A simple biblical faith that accepted Jesus as the incarnate Son of God should not have caused all these troubles. Besides, these terminologies have really added nothing to our faith or knowledge.

2.2. Ephrem’s Approach to the Bible

Ephrem is more concerned about the spiritual or inner meaning of Scripture than the historical or what he calls ‘the exterior’. According to him in Scripture God put on names, and in Incarnation he put on flesh. The inner meaning is got through what again he calls *raze*, types and symbols that are present in the text. Here one needs discernment (*puršana* ܦܘܪܫܢܐ) and the inner eye of faith. We have to remember that Ephrem lived at a time when Scripture was taken literally and historical criticism was unknown. But that does not mean that he was not using his intelligence to discern the true meaning of the Bible. He considered the outer historical meaning of scripture as important as the humanity of Christ.⁸ With the help of the types and symbols he was trying to

decode its inner salvific meaning. For Ephrem the human language of scripture was important but he cautioned that one is not to be misled by the human language alone (*On Paradise* 11.6).

Ephrem speaks about a multiplicity of inner meanings possible in the Bible. This is in keeping with the modern idea of the multi-voiced character of biblical texts and the consequent "multivalence." All texts, especially poetic and narrative texts are evocative of multiple readings.⁹ Ephrem writes:

Many are the perspectives of his word, just as many are the perspectives of those who study it. [God] has fashioned his word with many beautiful forms, so that each one who studies it may consider what he likes.

He has hidden in his word all kinds of treasures so that each one of us, wherever we meditate, may be enriched by it. His utterance is a tree of life, which offers you blessed fruit from every side. It is like that rock which burst forth in the desert, becoming spiritual drink to everyone from all places. Therefore, whoever encounters of its riches must not think that that alone which he has found is all that is in it, but [rather] that it is this alone that he is capable of finding from the many things in it. Enriched by it, let him not think that he has impoverished it. But rather let him give thanks for its greatness, he that is unequal to it. Rejoice that you have been satiated, and do not be upset that it is richer than you. The thirsty one rejoices because he can drink, but is not upset because he is unable to render the source dry. The well can conquer your thirst, but your thirst cannot conquer the fountain (*Com. Diatessaron* 1.18-19).

God reveals himself through types and symbols which are not to be taken as coercive, rather as persuasive. Human intelligence is limited, yet it is open to the Infinite. Type is a person, thing or event which foreshadows a person, thing or event. The Paschal Lamb is a type of Christ in Christian understanding. Here something (the *typos* or model) typifies something else. Again symbol is something that represents or recalls another thing. The tricolour is a symbol of the nation for Indians and the cross stands for Christ for the Christians. All our deep experiences, the religious as well, are expressed in symbolic language, which is free and limitless. It is the language of poets, prophets and visionaries.¹⁰

“As a sacramental word scripture is more like poetry than a textbook. It has the capacity to move us, inspire us, and claim us. It points beyond itself to ultimate meaning. Scripture, like poetry, is not primarily information about the past, but a lens for looking at the present.” Ephrem makes use of a number of Old Testament types. In his *Commentary on Exodus* (12.1-2)¹¹ Ephrem has a typological commentary on the Passover though he calls it a ‘paraphrase’ (*tûrgâmâ*):

Ephrem sees symbolism as a way to God:

O Laborer Whose symbols were gathered,
 Who is a reservoir of all symbols!
 In every place, if you look, His
 symbol is there,
 and when you read, you will find His types.
 For by Him were created all creatures,
 and he engraved His symbols upon His possessions.
 When He created the world,
 He gazed at it and adorned it with His images.
 Streams of His symbols opened, flowed and poured forth
 His symbols on His members (*On Virginity* 20.11-12).

Now the lamb is a symbol of Our Lord, who was conceived on the tenth of Nisan. For Zachariah was told on the tenth day of the seventh month that John was going to be born, and six months later, when the message was brought to Mary by the angel, was the tenth day of the first month. Because of this the angel said to her, “This is the sixth month with her who was called barren.” (*Lk* 1.36). So on the tenth when the lamb was confined, our Lord was conceived in the womb, and on the fourteenth when he was slain, the One it symbolised was crucified. As for the unleavened bread, with bitter herb that Scripture mentions, there is a sign of his renewal in the unleavened bread, and the bitter herb is because those who bear him suffer. “Roasted” (12. 8,9) is a symbol that he was baked with fire, “*with your loins girded and shoes on your feet*” symbolises the new discipleship that is ready to go out and preach the gospel. “*With your staffs in your hands*” (12.11) are the crosses on their shoulders; “*standing on their feet*” because no one partakes of the Living Body sitting down. “No foreigner may eat of it” (12.43) because no one who is not baptised eats of the Body. “*They shall not break any of its bones*” (12.46),

since even though our Lord's hands and feet were pierced and his side wounded, none of his bones was broken."

In his *Hymns on Unleavened Bread* (5.18-23) also we have the use of typology. The symbolic lamb was suspended when the true lamb came. The Lamb of God brought the types to nought. There were the symbols woven for him by the Holy Spirit. Here Ephrem uses the word *razâ* for what is translated as type and symbol, perhaps pointing to its character of revealing and veiling.

2.2.1. Poetic Interpretation of Scripture

Ephrem had a poetic approach to Scripture and he wrote verse homilies in 7 + 7 couplets or hymns constructed on single syllabic pattern chosen from many. Of course, his background aroused the poet in him,¹² but more, his search for the spiritual meaning of Scripture gave him a poetic perception of the written divine revelation. Ephrem's interpretation of Scripture sprang from faith and was directed to nourishing faith, and poetry was the best medium for this as it enabled one remember easily and sing with relish, conviction, and feeling. Any number of passages could be cited to underline the evocative power of his poems:

Blessed be the child Who today delights Bethlehem.

Blessed be the Newborn Who today made humanity young again.

Blessed be the Fruit Who bowed Himself down for our hunger.

Blessed be the Gracious One Who suddenly enriched all our poverty and filled our need.

Blessed be He Whose mercy inclined Him to heal our sickness Thanks to the Fountainhead sent for our salvation.

Thanks to the One Who violated the Sabbath in its fulfilment.

Thanks to the One Who rebuked leprosy and it remained not.

Fever also saw Him and departed.

Thanks to the Compassionate One Who bore our pain.

Glory to Your coming that restored humankind to life

(*On Nativity* 1.1-2).

In the above highly evocative lines, the great poet and teacher of the Church gives us the meaning and significance of the birth of Jesus on our everyday life. Through his Incarnation Jesus has caused joy and blessing to the whole world; he has made us young and healthy, he has given himself as food for us, and in his

poverty he has enriched us and has healed us who are sick. He is the fountainhead of our salvation, he was master of the Sabbath, and he cleansed people of leprosy and healed the fever-stricken. He, the compassionate one, bore our sufferings. His coming restored us to life. A long theological treatise is given here in a spicy memorable capsule.

In Ephrem's use of symbolism, paradox and parallelism we find a rhythmic balance of personalities, institutions and situations.¹³ Paradox is an important ingredient of Ephremian poetry that helps us to have a peep into the mystery that is being contemplated. In the Hymns on the Virginity 4.119ff we have a number of paradoxes:

By power from Him Mary's womb became able
to bear the One who bears all.
From the great treasury of all creation
Mary gave to Him everything that she gave.
She gave Him milk from what He made exist.
She gave Him food from what He had created.
He gave milk to Mary as God.
In turn, He was given suck by her as human.
Her arms carried Him, for He lightened His weight,
and her bosom embraced Him, for He made Himself small.
Who would be able to measure His grandeur?
He diminished His measurements corresponding to the
garment (182-88).

Again Ephrem sings about Jesus' mother in very touching paradoxes:

Our Lord, no one knows
how to address Your mother
[If] one calls her "virgin,
her child stands up, and "married" -
no one knew her [sexually].
But if Your mother is incomprehensible,
who is capable of [comprehending] You?
For she is Your mother - she alone -
and your sister with all.
She was to You mother;
she was to You sister.

Moreover, she is Your betrothed with
the chaste women.
In everything, You adorned her,
beauty of Your mother (*On Nativity* 11.2).

2.2.2. Contextual Interpretation

The biblical word is to be a challenge to our concrete life. That the eternal Word became flesh also means that the written word of God should enlighten the historical situation of the community that reads and interprets it. In the Nisibian Hymns Ephrem reflects on the Ark in the deluge to understand the sieges of the Persian king Shapur on the city of Nisibis, especially the third attack in which the king tried to undermine the fortifications of the city by diverting the river Mygdonius to engulf it. Ephrem compares the event to Noah's Ark floating on the waters of the great flood. Here the city speaks about her pathetic situation and appeals to the Lord:

All kinds of storms trouble me
and I count the Ark fortunate:
Only waves surrounded it,
but ramps and arrows as well waves surround me.
The Ark acted as a store for treasure for You,
but I have become a deposit of sins.
The Ark subdued the waves through Your love,
whereas I have been blinded amidst the arrows
through Your anger.
The Flood bore the Ark,
while me the river threatens.
O helmsman of the Ark,
be my pilot on dry land;
You rested the Ark on the haven of a mountain,
give rest to me too in the haven of my walls
(*On Nisibis* 1.3).

The spiritual lesson that Ephrem draws out of the event is remarkable:

He saved us without a wall and taught us that He is our wall.
He saved us without a king and made known that he is our
king.
He saved us in all from all and showed He is all.

He saved us by His grace and again revealed
that He is freely gracious and life-giving.
From each who boasts He takes away the boast
and gives to him His grace (*On Nisibis* 2.2).

Ephrem's interpretation and application of the parables of Jesus is a compelling example of his contextualisation.¹⁴ For him the parables are like paradigms and are applicable in different theological situations. He provides us with a reading of the text in the context of life.

3. Some Important Features of the Biblical Theology of the Syriac Fathers

So far we have been deliberating on the method of approach discernible in the writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem. Now we try to have a look at their specific contributions in the understanding of mankind, sin, the Incarnation of the Son of God and his death and Resurrection which are important and decisive moments in the history of human salvation. Our understanding of humanity and sin is based on what we have in the book of Genesis which is the first among what the Hebrews called *Torah* (instruction or guidance) and was translated as *nómos* (law) in the Greek *Septuagint*. Here, according to S. Brock,¹⁵ Ephrem has the Jewish Aramaic *urāytā* to the torah than *nāmōsā*, related to *nomos* which means that he understood the Pentateuch as a guidance given by God as the Hebrews correctly did, and not as a book of law. Though there are laws in it, it is much more than a collection of laws.

3.1. Creation of Humans

Here we remember that the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis are primeval history in metaphorical language not to be taken literally, though they shed true light on humanity giving inspired insights on God and humanity. Aphrahat writes about God who made man in his image (*Dem* 1.19). According to him Adam was conceived and dwelt in the thought of God before the other creations were made. "He fashioned him, and breathed into him of His Spirit, and gave him the knowledge of discernment, that he might discern good from evil, and might know that God made him" (*Dem* 7.7).¹⁶ Here the idea of Adam being the 'image' of God

found in the Priestly tradition is expressed in the divine action of 'breathing into him His Spirit'. Ephrem gives importance to both the Jahwist and Priestly traditions. In his Commentary on Genesis 1.29 he comments on the J tradition: "So on the sixth day "the Lord fashioned dust from the ground into Adam, and He breathed the breath of life (*nšamta d-hayyê* ܢܫܡܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܐ) into his nostrils, and Adam became a living being (*npeš hayya* ܢܦܫܐ ܗܝܝܐ)". Here God created humans but with grater dignity than all other creatures as our author has written (*Hymn on Christ* 47.11):¹⁷

He made him last; but He made him the first too.

For he was young in creation, but elderly in honour.

And the first things that were before him

were last in their being;

the late in their names.

Ephrem notes two special characteristics in the creation of Adam as different from that of animals. Animals come into existence at the life-giving word of God; about Adam it is said that God "fashioned him with his hands and He breathed a soul into him"; he gave him authority over all and "wrapped him in glory and gave him reason, thought and an awareness of the Majesty" (*Com. on Genesis* 2.4). Adam (*adam* ܐܕܡ) was from the earth (*ademta* ܐܕܡܬܐ) Hymn on (*On Faith* 60.11). Ephrem even qualifies the earth as 'mother earth' (*On Paradise* 9.1). Here is a word-play on 'earth' exactly as in the Hebrew original. Man is from the earth and earthy.

In P tradition man is made an image of God, which is expressed, according to Ephrem, in human freedom (*On Virginity* 3.8), speech (*On Nisbis* 46.5), and above all, in his dominion over other creatures (*Com. on Genesis* 1.29). This image character is shared by Adam and Eve in both the traditions as the word *adam* and its corresponding *Naša* can simply mean 'human' in general, which is the sense accepted by modern biblical theologians. Here Ephrem has a wonderful interpretation: After speaking about God forming woman from a rib of Adam who was sleeping, he writes' "Adam who was both one and two; he was two because he was created male and female" (*Com. On Gen* 2.12). Here one may find a kind of androgynism which was found among the Greeks and old Jewish tradition. R. Murray finds here the idea of a 'corporate personalty'¹⁸ which is accepted by the Bible scholars today.

3.2. Paradise Lost

Ephrem is aware of the metaphorical character of the story of Paradise as articulated in the *Hymn on Paradise* 2.1.3:

Joyfully did I embark on the tale of Paradise -
a tale that is short to read but rich to explore.

My tongue read the story's outward narrative,
while my intellect took wing and soared upward.

According to our author the first parents were created in an intermediary state, neither mortal nor immortal. They were to receive the gift of immortality by obeying God in full freedom (*heruta* *ሕሮተ*). And with the dominion over the other creatures, man was like a king. He writes:

A garden full of glory, a chaste bridal chamber,
did he give to that king fashioned from the dust,
sanctifying and separating the abode of wild animals;
for glorious was Adam in all things (*On Paradise* 12.3).

Two trees did God place in Paradise,
the Tree of Life and that of Wisdom,
a pair of blessed fountains, source of every good;
by means of this glorious pair
the human person can become the likeness of God,
endowed with immortal life
and wisdom that does not err (*On Paradise* 12.15).

The book of Genesis does not speak about God's creation of Satan or an adversary. But Ephrem writes about his creation and condemnation by God for sin. He became envious of Adam and Eve and that caused his fall (*Hymn on Church* 48.11). He cheated Eve in the form of a serpent (*Com. on Genesis* 32); in fact the evil one had put on the serpent's garment (*On Paradise* 15.14). But Ephrem also finds fault with Adam who wanted to 'steal secretly' the glory that was awaiting him (*Nativity* 21.15).

By not eating the fruit of the Tree of knowledge, they were to become worthy of the Tree of life.¹⁹ About the Tree of Life Ephrem writes:

God created the Tree of Life and hid it from Adam that he may not be tempted by its beauty and also that he may not see that gift that was awaiting him. "Even though God had given them everything else out of Grace, He wished to confer

on them, out of Justice, the immortal life which is granted through eating of the Tree of Life... He only withheld from them a single tree, just so that they might be subject to a commandment” (*Comm. on Genesis* 3.11. 17).

In his paradoxical way Ephrem writes what happened to Adam who disobeyed God:

He lost what he had desired, and found what he dreaded;
it was disgrace, instead of glory,
that God caused the audacious man to know (*Paradise* 12.5).

And God gave man enough time to repent and he came to question him only some time after the disobedience. In God’s question to Adam, Ephrem hears something more:

Would you consider as evil Him who fashioned you out of nothing and made you a second god over creation, instead holding to be good one who had merely with words promised you some advantage? ...You have held your God to be false and your deceiver to be true; you have broken faith with your Benefactor who put you in authority over everything, and you have believed that deceiver who has cunningly managed to take way your authority completely (*Com. Paradise* 26).” Ephrem remarks that God questioned Adam and Eve as they were capable of repentance, but did not do the same with the serpent, as it was unable to do it (*Ibid*, 29). About the remark of God, “Adam has become like one of us, knowing good and evil”, he notes that it is an ironical statement (*Com. Genesis* 34) as accepted by modern exegetes. Mankind is now driven out of the Paradise and we are told that God “caused a cherub and a sharp revolving sword to go round, to the east of the Garden, to protect the way to the Tree of Life” (*Com. on Genesis* 36).

3.3. The Incarnation or the Son of God as putting on Human body

Adam and Eve were stripped off the glory with which God had clothed them (*On Paradise* 15.8). The mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God is often expressed as ‘putting on of body’ or ‘clothing in body’ in Syriac tradition. Ephrem follows it

and rarely has the phrase 'put on flesh' (*Hymn on Faith* 7.3). He put on our weak body, and infirm nature (*on Virginity* 14. 13).

In the hymns on Nativity (8.2) Ephrem writes that in the person of Jesus, divinity and humanity were allied and joined, one from the height and the other from the depth. He mingled the two natures like pigments and an image came into being; the God-man. The consequence of Incarnation on humanity is well articulated: "Today the Deity imprinted its self on humanity so that humanity might also be cut into the seal of Deity' (*On Nativity* 1.99). It reminds us of the words of Athanasius of Antioch who spoke about the Son of God becoming Man to make sons of humans, sons of God.²⁰ A similar idea is found expressed again:

Divinity flew down,
to draw humanity up,
For the Son had made beautiful the deformities of the
servant

and so he has become a god, just as he wanted
(*On Nisibis* 48.17-18).

He gave us divinity,
we gave Him humanity (*On Faith* 5.17).

Again Ephrem sings:

Glory to that Hidden One whose Child was revealed.
Glory to that Living One Whose Son became a mortal.
Glory to the Great One Whose Son descended and became
small.

Gory to that One Power Who fashioned Him,
the Image of His greatness and Form of His hiddenness.
With the eye and the mind - with both we saw him
(*On Nativity* 3.4).

He put on the fashion of humankind and gathered us into His likeness " (*Hymns on Nisibis* 3.2-3). In his homilies on Our Lord, Ephrem writes again: "This is He Who was begotten from the Godhead according to His nature, and from manhood not after His nature... that we might be begotten from manhood according to our nature, and from Godhead not after our nature".²¹ Grace clothed itself in human likeness in order to bring him to the likeness of itself (*On Paradise* 11.6). *Odes of Solomon* also has similar expressions:

His kindness has humbled His greatness.
 He became like me, in order that I might receive Him:
 He was reckoned like myself
 in order that I might put on Him

 Like my nature He became (*Odes 7*).²²

3.4. Re-entry into Paradise

In Syriac tradition salvation is re-entry into the lost paradise; of course it was to be new and superior as restored by Christ. It is a 'homecoming and a return to the Father's house' (*On Paradise* 14.7). Just as a wood of Paradise became cause of death, the wood of the cross became cause of life:

And as one wood (*qaysa* ܩܝܣܐ) was the cause of death,
 so another wood became the cause for life.

For, through one the death won and through the other
 life flourishes (*On the Church* 49.8).²³

Jesus clothed himself in the body of mortal Adam, and made it a fountain of life for all mortals.²⁴ He received from us that he might give us abundantly from what is his.²⁵ It is Jesus the High Priest who (Heb 9.11) leads mankind back home. "The High Priest, the Exalted One, beheld him cast out from himself: He stooped down and came to him, He cleansed him with hyssop, and led him back to Paradise" (*On Paradise* 4.4). Adam who was in *Sheol* and was brought out of it to sing in the midst of Hosannas, "Blessed is He who has brought Adam from *Sheol* and returned him to Paradise in the company of many" (*On Paradise* 8.11).

Genesis 3.21 is understood in Syriac tradition against the background of the Jewish Targum and the *Midrash Rabba on Genesis* which present a 'clothing of glory' than 'the garments of skin' and is seen as having happened before the fall.²⁶ According to Ephrem, though naked, the first parents did not feel any shame (*Gen* 3.25) as they were wrapped by glory and the purpose of Incarnation was to re-clothe mankind (*On Virginit*y 16.9; 1.43). In this context we remember that in Syriac tradition the pierced side of Jesus (*Jn* 19.34) is more important than the crucifixion.²⁷ Eve was taken out of the side of Adam (*Com. On Gen* 2.22) and from the side of Jesus on the cross came the Church and the Eucharist (*Com. Diatessaron*) and in his Hymn on Crucifixion 9.2 we read:

For with the sword which smote Him

the Son slew Death, when He Himself was struck by it.
The sword that pierced Christ removed the sword guarding
Paradise:

His forgiveness tore up our document of debt.

He came and took Himself a body which was wounded

so that, by the opening of His side

He might open up the way to Paradise.

Commenting on Jn19.34 Ephrem writes:

“I have run towards all your members, I have received all [possible] gifts from them, and, through the side pierced by a lance (Gen 2.24), I have entered into Paradise, since it was through the rib that was extracted [from Adam] that we are robbed of the promise (Gen 2.21-22). Because of the fire that burned in Adam, it burned in him - the second Adam was pierced, and there issued forth from it a stream of water to extinguish the fire of the First Adam.”²⁸

Ephrem adds that the blood that came forth liberated us from slavery and purified us from evil. From the water and blood came forth the Church. “From Adam’s rib there was death, but from our Lord’s rib, life.”²⁹

The self-giving death of Christ is expressed here in his opening or breaking of the heart from which flowed salvation to all humans:

Blessed be the Compassionate One Who saw, next to
Paradise,

the lance³⁰ that barred the way to the Tree of life

He came to take up the body that would be struck so that
by the opening in His side

He might break through the way into Paradise

(*On Nativity* 8.4).

“By his blood He saved the peoples as the lamb [saved] the people’ (*On Nativity* 10.4). According to Ephrem the typology of the Paschal Lamb is important in understanding the salvific death of Jesus.³¹ Jesus’ blood saved the nations as the blood of the lamb saved the Israelites.³² The cross of Christ fulfils all the symbols and types (*On Virginity* 9.15).

Descent of Christ into *Sheol* is a special theme in Syriac thinking. Jesus’ cry at his death shakes the foundations of *Sheol*

(*On Nisibis* 36) and his resurrection ruins it (*On Nisibis* 41) and the dead ones are liberated (*On Nisibis* 36.11).

According to the Odes of Solomon 42.1, those in Limbo raise their voice to the Risen Lord stretching out the hands in the form of a cross and approach the Lord. For the stretching of the hands is His sign.

And the Lord responded to them:
 And I spoke with them by living lips:
 Because my word shall not be void;
 And those who had died ran towards me:
 And they cried out and said,
 Son of God, have pity on us
 And do with us according to thy kindness
 And bring us out from the bonds of darkness
 ...Let us also be redeemed with thee:
 For thou art our Redeemer.

3.5. Salvation open to all who seek God sincerely

As a part of Ephrem's hymns on Virginity we have a few hymns about Jonah (42-50) which are unique and modern as they give us a better understanding of divine plan for human salvation. Modern scholars see the book as having a short but relevant prophetic message. The author of the book, through a caricatured picture of Jonah the Hebrew was inviting them to have deeper and different understanding of God. God is not partisan and his salvation is without frontiers. Hymn 42 is full of satirical paradoxes on Jonah; in Hymn 43 we have a series of paradoxes of another kind. Hymn 44 is a contrast between the Israelites and the Ninevites, the circumcised and the uncircumcised. Ephrem concludes Hymn 44 as follows:

By a circumcised heart the uncircumcised becomes holy.
 In the bridal chamber of his heart dwells the Creator.
 It was not his name [that] made Abel fair.
 Because he desired innocence, his name was desirable.
 Eve chose the name of Cain,
 but since he hated his brother, his name was hated by all,
 The Assyrians! Inflammatory names!
 They gave fruits of desirable tastes!

With striking paradox Ephrem notes:

I chose the circumcised, but they have rejected themselves.
I rejected the uncircumcised, but they have dedicated themselves.

Election, therefore, is not [a matter] of names.

The furnace of testing the name is the deed.

It is tested whether it is the true name.

For there is fruit that is very splendid
but its taste is the opposite of beauty.

Even the despicability of the bee,
the most despised of all, is a spring of sweetness.

Splendid names - the house of the Hebrews-
are sweet names that make bitter things flow.

The mention of their name is sweet to the ear.

The taste of their fruit ravages your mouth

(*On Virginity* 44.7-14).

“Instead of their bodies they [Ninevites] circumcised their hearts” (*On Virginity* 49.6b).

About Jonah Ephrem finally wrote:

Jonah lifted his axe to uproot
the fig tree that suddenly had acquired health.

Since he wanted to cut down the beloved of the King,
the worm cut down his beloved young plant.

Since he did not rejoice in peace as a son of peace,
he was poured into the sea as a contentious man

(*On Virginity* 50.25-27).

In his commentary on the Diatessaron also Ephrem has given some reflections on Jonah. Commenting on Mt 12.39-40/Lk 11.29 Ephrem writes:

He (Jesus) left aside his witnesses, the kings, and prophets, and turned to the Ninevites. These did not recognize any kind of sign from Jonah, but, at the end, they will judge those who, after having seen many signs denied the author of these signs: he cast fear upon them and showed a stupor among them, and they presented him with a sheaf of contrition of spirit and the fruits of repentance. {Thus} were the gentiles chosen and the uncircumcised drew near [to God]. Pagans received life and sinners repented, to the confusion of the circumcised.³³ Again commenting on the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10.25-27) he writes that “it was clear,

therefore, that [the Lord] did not say that one's neighbour was [only] a son of one's race... but the wounded one he considered one as your neighbour, and care for him with diligence.³⁴

Conclusion

The early Syriac Fathers lived in times we call pre-critical, but they were no less critical as we have seen; they were critical enough in their own ways. They had a sense of the different types of literature in the Bible. They tried to see the internal logic of Scripture and drew out conclusions from the types and symbols available. Their poetic approach helped them to go beyond the literal and see and appropriate the internal and the life-transforming message. In contemporary terminology, their method was synchronic and rhetorical and quite persuasive.

For the early Syriac Fathers like Aphrahat and Ephrem the central event of salvation history was the Incarnation of the Son of God who put on our human body and thus took our nature enabling us to share in his divine nature. This Son of God became son of man and opened us the gates of the Paradise that had been closed, by allowing his side to be pierced and opened through a lance letting out the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist as well as the church. Incarnation was a self-emptying of the Son of God which also brought him glory (*Phil* 2. 6-11). On the cross Jesus offered his life to the Father as an expression of perfect obedience and self-surrender; simultaneously he opened his heart/self to humanity in the form of the Church which is the sacrament of healing and salvation (symbolised by baptism and Eucharist). Here salvation is, according to Ephrem, more than anything else, the self-giving of the Son of God to humanity through the opening of his heart. Here is something original and relevant to be learned from the Syriac Fathers. The salvation that is available in Christ is open to anyone who lives in good faith according to his conscience irrespective of his race or religion.

Notes

¹ J.Gwynn, *Hymns and Homilies of Ephrem the Syrian, and from the Demonstrations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage; edited with an*

Introductory Dissertation, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol XIII, 115-412, Oxford/New York 1898, Grand Rapids, reprint, 1979.

² *Ibid*, 162.

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ Quoted by S. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns on Paradise*, New York 1990, 12.

⁵ J.Meyendorff, "Preface" to K.McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns*, translated with introduction, New York 1989, 1-2.

⁶ The main works of Ephrem are the following:

(1) Prose works

Commentary on Genesis and Exodus: CSCO 152-3; SS 71-2 (Latin)

Commentary on Diatessaron: CSCO 137; SS 145 (Latin)

Commentary on the Acts, and Pauline Letters (Latin, Armenian)

(2) Hymns or Madraše

Hymns on Faith (87 hymns): CSCO 154-5; SS 73-4

Hymns on Nisibis (77 hymns): CSCO 218-9; SS 92-3

Hymns on Virginity (28 hymns): CSCO 223-4; SS 82-3

Hymns on Nativity (28): CSCO 186-7; SS 82-3

Hymns on Paradise (15); CSCO 174-5; SS 78-9

Hymns on the Church (52): CSCO 198-9; SS 84-5

Hymns against Heresies (56): CSCO 169-70

Hymns on the Unleavened Bread (21): CSCO 121

Hymns on Fast (10): CSCO 246-7; SS 106-7

(3) Verse or Memre

Six Homilies on Faith: CSCO 212-3; SS 78-9

(4) Artistic Prose

Homily on Our Lord Jesus Christ: CSCO 270-1; SS 116-7.

Letter to Publius (English).

For a complete list of the genuine works of Ephrem see S. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, Moran Etho 9, SEERI, Kottayam 1997, 23-28.

The English translations of St. Ephrem in this article are from:

S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye. The Spiritual Vision of St Ephrem*, Rome 1985.

S. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns on Paradise*, New York 1990.

K.McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns*, New York 1989.

C. McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, Oxford University Press 1993.

⁷ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 28.

⁸ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 33.

⁹ D.Carr, "Untamable Text of an Untamable God. Genesis and Rethinking the Character of Scripture," *Interpretation* 54 (2000) 349.

- ¹⁰ J.P. Burgess, "Scripture as Sacramental Word," *Interpretation* 52 (1998) 381-382.
- ¹¹ A. Salvesen, *The Exodus Commentary of St. Ephrem*, Kottayam, 39-41.
- ¹² The first Syriac author we know is Bardaisan of the 2nd century who wrote 150 hymns using parallelism, rhyme, alliteration and a variety of paronomasia. Ephrem became its unrivalled master. McVey, 26.
- ¹³ C. McCarthy, *Com. Diatessaron*, 17.
- ¹⁴ K.Valavanolickal, "The Use of the Gospel Parables in Ephrem," ETJ 1 (1997) 16-24.
- ¹⁵ S. Brock, "Notes to the Hymns on Paradise," in *St.Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns on Paradise*, 189.
- ¹⁶ Translation by J.Gwynn, 389.
- ¹⁷ M. Paikatt, *Life Glory and Salvation in the Writings of Mar Aprem of Nisibis*, Kottayam 2001, 33.
- ¹⁸ R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom. A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, Cambridge University Press 1975, 82.
- ¹⁹ S.Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 18.
- ²⁰ St. Athnasiaus, *De Incarnatione*, 54
- ²¹ *Hom. on Our Lord 2 in Nicene Fathers*, 305.
- ²² J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol 1, Westminster, Maryland, 1986, "Odes of Solomon, 160-174.
- ²³ ET, M.Paikatt, *Life, Glory*, 146.
- ²⁴ *Homily on Jesus 7, Nicene Fathers*, 308.
- ²⁵ *Homily on Jesus 7, Nicene Fathers*, 309.
- ²⁶ S.Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 65ff.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, 61.
- ²⁸ *Com. Diatessaron* 21.10
- ²⁹ *Ibid*, 21.11.
- ³⁰ For Ephrem the sword of the angel at Gen 1:24 is a type of the lance that pierced the side of Jesus (Jn 19:34); cfr. *On Paradise* 2:1; *Com. Diatessaron* II. 1,10; *On Nisibis* 39.7; R.Murray, *Symbols*, 1225-27.
- ³¹ J. Naduvilezham, *Paschal Lamb. The Theology of the Paschal Lamb in Ephrem of Nisibis*, Kottayam 2000.
- ³² *On Virginity* 10.4.
- ³³ C. MaCarthy, *Comm. On Diatessaron*, 175.
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, 257.

6

Theology of St. Ephrem: The Classic of Syriac Faith Expressions

Thomas Anikuzhikattil

Introduction

St. Ephrem (306-373), the great Christian Aramaic poet theologian,¹ has rightly earned eulogies such as prophet of the Syrians, Lion of Syria, Harp of the Holy Spirit, Pillar of the Church, the Orator of the Syrians, the Beacon of Learning, Doctor of the Universal Church, the Marian Doctor etc. His writings represent the least hellenized form of Semitic, Judaeo-Christian theology. Being a prolific writer, Ephrem wrote commentaries on Scripture, homilies, hymns and sermons in prose as well as in poetry.

By the time of Ephrem, the separation between the Christians and the Jews was complete. The Jews rejected the Gospel and drove the Church out of Synagogue. The Jewish antagonism made Christianity conscious of its identity. Church was in a dilemma to renounce the Jewish practices and to affirm her continuity with God's alliance in the OT. She was poised between this Jewish past and non-Jewish present. Ephrem's writings reflect bitter hostility towards Judaism. At the same time Syriac Christianity of Ephrem's time kept up its Semitic mentality. For Ephrem the OT converges on the NT and forms one integral whole. Ephrem had to fight the heterodox adversaries² as Manichaens, Marcionites, the followers of Bardaisan, and above all the Arians. By 350 there emerged neo-Arianism and semi-Arianism which accommodated Arians to orthodox faith. The Neo-Arians wanted to uproot Christianity with their intellectual stipulations. Ephrem fought against the Neo-Arians who were 'investigators' and 'scrutinizers' according to him. Ephrem's ecclesiastical background had a decisive role to play in his theological approach. The Church's awareness of her Semitic heritage and at the same time her strong conviction about the radical break from the Jewish religion and her constant fight against the various heresies contributed to the shaping of the specific theological approach of Ephrem.

1. Ephrem's Theological Approach

According to Ephrem, we come to theological thinking and analysis by way of symbols, paradoxes, metaphors and images. The transcendental dimension is always within our theological thought process. Blunt rationalization of theological realm leads to secularization of the sacred. A secularized theology is no theology worth its name. Theologizing based on intellectual scrutiny may fail to grasp the real depth and breadth of authentic Christianity. Ephrem's contemporary Arians took a rationalistic approach. They tried to scrutinize, pry into divine realities. Ephrem had nothing against a legitimate, well-balanced intellectual search and theologizing. He was not an anti-intellectual. But he could not tolerate arrogant rationalism and the presumption that human intellect is able to pry into the Godhead. Prying into the divine realities is impossible because of the ontological Chasm and the fundamental difference between the Creator and created. So, Ephrem was against theological definitions, which sought to put God within the limits of the created intellect. God the Creator is beyond the grasp of any creature. God cannot be brought down to the level of created things.

Ephrem's thinking is not shaped by any kind of systematic or classical education. So there is a particular way in which he introduces his thought into his descriptive poetic language. He may use ordinary words with an unusual twist of meaning, adding wordplay or some other nuance. All the tireless repetitions, originality of thought, natural passion in arguments, inborn sense of humour, child-like wonder at everything in nature, interest in and observation of the natural and animal and vegetative world, and extraordinary insight into human psychology make Ephrem a different kind of theologian in the entire patristic period.³

Bible is the primary source for any human knowledge of God. The names of God and the various types and symbols⁴ constitute meeting points between God and humanity. Scripture may be said to possess both an exterior and an interior meaning. The exterior belongs to the sphere of what we call historical reality, the interior to that of spiritual reality, both co-exist, just as the unity and diversity do in the incarnate Christ.

1.1. The Symbolic Literary Style of St. Ephrem

Ephrem used a symbolic method instead of philosophical methods. For him, philosophical categories are dead while the symbols are alive. He used paradoxes in expressing truths. The theme of the creative tension between God's grace (Taybutha ܐܝܒܘܬܗ) and righteousness (Kenutha ܟܢܘܬܗ) is presented by Ephrem: "The scales of your balance are grace and righteousness; how and when they are balanced, you alone know."⁵ Among Ephrem's favourite paradoxes, when he is talking of the incarnation, are "the great One who became small", "the rich One who became poor", and "the hidden One" who revealed himself. Here, for example, let us see how he tries to convey something of the mystery of the birth of the divine Word from Mary: "Your mother is a cause for wonder, the Lord entered her and became a servant. He who is the Word entered and became silent within her, thunder entered her and made no sound; there entered the shepherd of all, and in her He became the lamb, bleating as came forth."⁶

Nature and scripture serve as two pure fountains of revelation. According to Ephrem, they are two modes of divine self-revelation. The divine self-revelation takes place through types and symbols that are present in both Nature and the Scripture. Types and symbols serve as pointers to divine truths. Some aspect of divine reality lies hidden in the type or symbol. Scripture and Nature constitute God's two witnesses.⁷ In the Scriptures God reveals some thing of himself and clothes himself in human language. He puts on names, and comes down to meet humanity on its own terms. Our ordinary terms and language undergo a sacramentalization and thus we get a theological language. The self-revealing God becomes manifest and hidden at the same time. The world of Galyata (ܓܠܝܬܐ revealed things) is always trying to overcome the world of kasyata (ܟܝܫܝܬܐ hidden things).

Finally we have the fullest self revelation of God at the incarnation, when God the Word put on a human body: "So He sent His Beloved One who, instead of the borrowed similitude with which God's majesty had previously clothed itself, clothed Himself with real limbs as the first born and was mingled with humanity."⁸ He put on our names that we might put on his names. The divine descent is for human ascent.

2. Some Basic Concepts and Themes of Ephrem's Theology

In Ephrem's writings one encounters a few basic concepts and recurring themes, some of which we need to be aware of at the outset; they constitute the grammar of his theological language.

2.1. Creator and Creation

Ephrem is constantly aware of the sharp division between Creator and creation. In his Hymns on Faith 69.11 he speaks of this ontological gap as a chasm, reflecting the term used in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16. 26). There is a great gulf between the rich man and the poor Lazarus. "For the chasm (pehta **ܦܫܬܐ**) is a great, limitless one: between you and the Son as regards investigation."⁹ "As regards Godhead what created being can trace out? For, there is a chasm between him and the Creator."¹⁰ "Towards God no one can come near, from among the investigators; for He is indeed close to those having discernment."¹¹ God is far away and very near in and through the types, symbols and metaphors in Nature and Scripture, the two fountains of revelation.¹² Everything in the created world, and the creation as a whole is a symbol, an accessible object corresponding to the reality which it represents. The created world is not God nor an evidence of the existence of God, but a pointer towards the hidden power (hyla kasya **ܫܝܠܐ ܕܟܝܫܐ**) of God.¹³ This concept of the world raises and directs the finite human intellect from the realm of understanding to that of experience, the experience of the whole truth. This enjoyment of the presence of the living God in the created world in and through the Spirit helps the believer to feel wonder and praise, and finally a sense of adoration filled with gratitude and joy. This is a mystical experience. The created world is not simply a material reality. It is living and growing unto the eschatological transformation. The presence of God makes the creation ever new and is used as one of the ways of revelation.

The world is a process of revelation. The Spirit reveals the love and beauty of the Creator in the created world and makes it anew. He re-clothes the believer in baptism and gives the reborn a new relationship with the creation. For him the material world is not a source of curse and danger, but the symbol of the love of God. It is no more an object of sin but an object sanctified by the

Lord.¹⁴ The world becomes an urge and incentive to act in gratitude¹⁵ and to produce the fruit of joy.

The proper area for intellectual inquiry lies in the places where God has revealed Himself in creation, the “Galyata” i.e. the revealed things. Ephrem states: “There is intellectual enquiry in the Church, investigating what is revealed; the intellect is not intended to pry into hidden things.”¹⁶

2.2. The Hidden and the Revealed

God is hidden, except in so far as He allows Himself to be revealed. The human experience of God’s hiddenness is only possible through various instances of God’s self-revelation. This revelation is always partial. Each individual will approach God’s hiddenness by way of a different ‘galyata’ or points of revelation.

Needless to say that God is most fully revealed to humanity in the incarnation of His Son (Heb1.1). Even there the divinity retains His hiddenness. “Who will not give thanks to the hidden One, most hidden of all / Who came to open revelation, most open of all / For, He puts on a body, and other bodies felt Him / Though minds never grasp Him.”¹⁷ The tension between the two poles, hidden and revealed, is more than that of the transcendence and the immanence of God. The ineffable God can be and should be depicted through images and illustrations. Image and likeness – serve as an inexhaustible fountain. The images we draw in our heart serve as an adorable icon of God. Here image means much the same as what we mean by sacrament.¹⁸ Dmuta ܕܡܘܬܐ and Yuqna ܝܘܩܢܐ – image and likeness come to our help and thus theologizing involves a sacramentalisation of our ordinary language.

2.3. The Primacy of Faith

According to Ephrem, humanity can gain any knowledge of God’s hiddenness through faith. Through faith God reveals Himself to us. Faith is a pre-requisite for understanding God. Ephrem anticipates Anselm who stated, “I believe that I may understand”.

2.4. The Two Times

To understand Ephrem's poetry we must constantly be aware of the distinction between ordinary, historical time and the sacred time. Ordinary time is linear and each point in time knows a "before" and an "after". Sacred time on the other hand knows no before and after, but only the 'eternal now'. What is important for sacred time is its content.

2.5. The One and the Many

Adam, according to Ephrem, may refer to the individual of the Genesis narrative or the human race in general, or indeed to both simultaneously; Adam is every man. The Pauline reference to Christ as 'the last Adam'¹⁹ has particular significance for Ephrem. He specifies that it is the body of mortal Adam that the Word puts on at the incarnation; it is the body of Adam that proves victorious in Christ.²⁰ It is the 'Church' who is betrothed to Christ at Christ's own baptism in Jordan, whereas in each Christian baptismal ceremony it is the individual soul that is betrothed to Christ.

2.6. The Concept of Free Will

Human free will plays an extremely important role in Ephrem's thought. It was through Adam's misuse of the free will that he was expelled out of the Paradise; and it was because of the correct use of this gift that the saints are rewarded. "Blessed is he who wove the commandments / so that through them free will might be crowned; / blessed is he, who has multiplied the righteous, / the witnesses who shout out concerning free will."²¹ God could have forced us to please Him without any trouble to Himself, but instead He toiled by every means so that we might act pleasingly to Him of our own free will.²²

2.7. Value of Human Body

Ephrem has a very positive attitude towards human body. In him, there is no Platonising dualism. For Ephrem, body is a part of God's creation and it is not evil. Body is a dwelling place and habitation of Holy Trinity. Human body is God's new Temple (1 Cor 6.19). God has put on a body; and it means that there is nothing unclean and unworthy in body. The body and soul are equally important in Ephrem's eyes; they simply have different

roles to play. Body provides the bridal chamber where the bride, the soul meets the heavenly bridegroom. Eucharist provides Ephrem with similar evidence of the worth of the body. "God would not have mingled His mysteries in the body if the body had originated from the Evil one."²³

3. Imagery in St. Ephrem

3.1. The Divinity as Fire

Ephrem's poetry has a wonderful wealth of imagery. Ephrem very frequently describes the divinity as fire; thus at the incarnation 'fire entered Mary's womb, put on a body and came forth.'²⁴ Fire is the symbol of the Spirit²⁵, and at the Eucharist 'the Spirit is in the Bread, the fire in the wine.'²⁶ In the case of Old Testament sacrifices, the descent of fire from heaven was an indication of divine acceptance²⁷, while at the Eucharist 'the fire of mercies has become a living sacrifice for us', from which we actually consume.²⁸

3.2. Imagery of Clothing

Perhaps the most frequent of Ephrem's images is that of putting on and taking off clothing.²⁹ Gen 3.21 is the basis of the clothing imagery in the Syriac tradition. Adam and Eve were clothed with the 'robe of glory' when created. In fact, the whole garden of Paradise was covered with glory and beauty.³⁰ The robe of glory is the radiation of divinity that spread over man and Paradise. The intimacy and the presence of God served for this glory, and the moment this intimacy collapsed, the robe of glory was stripped off from humanity.³¹ Adam and Eve lost the 'Robe of Glory'³² and became leprous and ugly.³³ They prepared for themselves a stained garment. By means of this imagery Ephrem presents to his readers a very clear picture of salvation history. For him, incarnation is a putting on of a body by the Word of God.

3.3. Conception and Giving-birth

In Ephrem's hymns we frequently meet with this feminine imagery. It is an indication of Ephrem's respect and understanding of women. It also fits in with the general emphasis on baptism as a rebirth, rather than as a death and resurrection.

3.4. The Imageries of Eye, Light and Mirror

Ephrem was thoroughly fascinated by mirrors, the metal ones that had to be kept polished in order to reflect the light and the

image of the beholder. Use of these images allows Ephrem to explore the optics of spiritual perception.

3.5. Medical Imagery

This imagery is already common in the Bible. In Ephrem's hands it undergoes considerable developments. Christ is the good and wise doctor, and the bearer of the medicine of life.

3.6. Other Images

Ephrem uses imageries from agriculture, archery, sailing, commerce, travel and many other spheres. These images drawn from everyday life give freshness to the modern readers.

4. Distinctive Theological Motifs in St. Ephrem

It is difficult to discover a continuous stream of thought or a comprehensive and systematic theology in Ephrem because of the very fact that he is a poet theologian. His theology is hidden behind his poetical language. He never exposes truths didactically in dogmatic form but treats them all in faith. Scripture being the basis of his theology, his treatises are practical exegesis of the Bible. He used apocrypha, myths and even legends without any prejudice. He utilizes amply metaphors, antitheses, riddles and play of words. Through the natural and scriptural symbols his theology becomes comprehensive to the believers. A few of his theological traits may be analysed.

4.1. The Holy Trinity

Being a poet, Ephrem does not use exact and coherent terminology as of a systematic theologian. According to him God's existence is made known to us because of his goodness. His Trinitarian theology is completely scriptural. Man is created in the image of God. Hence the creator is very close to the creatures. All the creatures contain and carry His vestiges. "Whatever you look, you will find His symbols and nature."³⁴ God himself became man and put on a real human body. A vital relation to the Word who became man is our salvation. He is our illumination through his abiding presence among us. He founded the Church and salvation. He provided us with interpretation of the revelation and participation in the divine life. All these are found in the Church. The same Holy Spirit inspires the prophets, the Fathers and the authors of the NT and also abides in the Church. Hence there is the

unity of both the Testaments. The how of God is the same as His wisdom.³⁵ The word *kyana* is used to signify the individual nature as well as nature in general. The nature of God cannot be known. The person – *Qnoma* ܩܢܘܡܐ - may be examined in a sense. It means the concrete existing of the reality. We come to know of things according to their names. Ephrem gives great importance to names.³⁶ The word -*šma* ܫܡܐ - name can include the nature of the thing made or it can mean pure name.³⁷ Father is the creator of all things. The begetting of the Son is timeless. The Holy Spirit is also given the same rank together with the Father and the Son. Ephrem keeps the order- Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. He defends the one God against the Gnostic teachings.³⁸

In his poetical method Ephrem uses many metaphors. The comparison of sun with light and warmth expresses the inseparability of the three persons Father, Son and the Spirit. “Fire and the sun are individual entities / they consist each of three things / mingled in threefold fashion / fire itself, then heat and the third, light. / One resides in the other in a balanced way ungrudgingly / mixed together, but under constraint / at the same time free, but not divergent.”³⁹ The sun corresponds to the Father, the light to the Son, and the heat to the Spirit.⁴⁰ Penetration into the nature of Trinity beyond revelation is not possible or permitted. “Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be reached only by their names; / do not look further, to their persons (*Qnome*), / just meditate on their names. / If you investigate the person of God, you will perish, / but if you believe in the name, you will live.”⁴¹ In order to express the mediation of the Son he uses the comparison of the tree and the fruit. They are of the same nature and of the same name.⁴² Jesus Christ is true God. The gospel speaks of the Word of God becoming man. In his commentary on Diatessaron Ephrem establishes the divinity of Christ.⁴³ Putting on (*lebish* ܠܒܝܫ) a human body means for Ephrem means to become man. Christ became son of man –*barnaša* ܒܢܐܫܐ -by his birth.

Ephrem devotes the entire Hymns on Faith 73 and 74 to the praise of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the warmth of the Holy Trinity that spreads life and inspiration. It purifies the hearts and the minds of the faithful and urges them to do good works. The activity of the Spirit is always in the Church especially in the working of the three sacraments, baptism, Eucharist and the

anointing. In connection with the formula of baptism that mentions the divinity of the Spirit Ephrem confesses his faith in the Holy Spirit. The Apostles who received it from Christ taught this Trinitarian formula.⁴⁴ The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are equal and united in the coming down at baptism when a believer is initiated into the communion of the Trinity.⁴⁵ The baptized one experiences the gift of the Spirit when the water touches his body, because the Lord had mixed water and the Spirit at the time of the baptism in Jordan.⁴⁶ Baptism is the new birth by which man is born of the Spirit and internally spiritualised and rendered worthy of the rank of the angels.

The Eucharist further nourishes this spiritualization because Eucharist contains Christ with the Holy Spirit. The sacrament of chrismation –Muron- also communicates the Spirit at the moment of function.⁴⁷ Ephrem compares the Holy Spirit mainly with the warmth of the sun contrasting it with the cold of winter. Its warmth is let down on every creature. It warms the “naked ones” (e.g. Adam who was denuded). Everything is made ripe through the warmth, as the Spirit sanctifies everything.⁴⁸ Warmth purifies things and expands them, whereas cold makes things stiff, gloomy and silent. Ephrem observes how the disciples spoke after the descent of the Holy Spirit. Using all these metaphors Ephrem wants to describe the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit warms, gives life, makes dynamic, gives courage, opens one’s mouth and so on. “The Spirit is beyond all scrutiny like the Father and the Son.”⁴⁹ The Spirit is the symbol of salvation just as the dove of the Arch of Noah was the symbol of salvation.⁵⁰ Ephrem takes the image of the harvest and uses it in his interpretation. The Spirit blows and cleanses everything. He separates the grain and the chaff and gathers the wheat into the barn of life without weeds.⁵¹

The humanity of Christ was fully related to the Holy Spirit. This relation began in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The fire entered the womb of the mother and put on a body and came out.⁵² It was present in river Jordan and was with Him still His ascension. God has given us His Son and His Spirit to show his eternal love for us.⁵³ The presence of the Spirit in the incarnation and his continued work in the Church through the Holy sacraments is of great importance for Ephrem. This is clear in the tenth hymn on Faith: “Behold, fire and Spirit in the womb of your mother: / Fire

and spirit in the river in which you were baptized: / Fire and Spirit in our baptism. / In bread and chalice, fire and Spirit.”⁵⁴ The Holy Church is full of the Spirit and the activity of the Holy Spirit spreads itself through the Church.⁵⁵

4.2.Theology of Redemption

Ephrem presents the Pattern of Salvation in his own style. Adam and Eve (humanity) had been created in an intermediary state, neither mortal nor immortal. It was the exercise of their free will, which would decide their future. If they kept the command, God would have rewarded them the fruit of the tree of knowledge and the fruit of the tree of life, and they would have become immortal. They failed to obey, and they were expelled from Paradise and became subject to death. The entire aim of God, henceforth, has been to effect the means for humanity to return to Paradise. Salvation history can be described as a process of healing, which extends backwards to reach the primordial time and down to the depths of the fallen human state. At the incarnation, God the Word clothes Himself not only with Adam’s body, but also with our body i.e. our humanity.

Salvation history has four Stages: (A) Before the Fall: Paradise is a mountain where Adam and Eve lived. They were clothed in robes of glory or robes of light. They were not ashamed. Gen 3.21 speaks of the garment of skin. There is a manuscript variation for it, as garment of glory. (B) After the fall: With the sin Adam and Eve were stripped off their robe of glory. They were pushed out of the Garden of Eden. (C) Divinity Himself puts on Adam: To remedy the naked stage of Adam Divinity puts on Adam. The whole intention of incarnation is to re-clothe Adam. The three central stages of the incarnation - the Nativity, the Baptism, and the descent to Sheol - are separate events in profane time, but intimately related in sacred time. These three stages have the images of a succession of wombs- the womb of Mary, the womb of Jordan, and the womb of Sheol. It is during his descent into Jordan that Christ deposits the robe of glory in the water making it available as the new white garment to each individual. (D) Christian Baptism: The baptism of Christ is the fountainhead and the source of Christian baptism. In baptism the robe of glory is given in potential. The baptized grows through the Eucharist, and it

is complete only in the eschatological experience. There is a Christian waiting. Kingdom of God is identical with the Church, but it is more than the Church.

The eschatological Paradise is not a going back to the Paradise that was lost. In the eschatological Paradise we will get what we lost and even more. Salvation history is going forward. The final glory will be more than that which humanity had in its beginning. The garment of glory lost is given back; but also the garment of the angels will be given and the clothing of the just will also be given. It is furthermore a royal and priestly robe and at the same time the wedding garment for the eschatological banquet.

4.3. Faith, Love and Prayer

According to Ephrem, faith is of primary importance. His hymn on Faith and the Sermons on Faith are of great dogmatic value. By contemplating God in faith we participate in the divine life. Faith is a second soul for us, and a new life coming from God. Professing one's faith is also important. Many people keep silence about their faith in God, although they have it in their heart. It is like voice to the trumpet.⁵⁶ Faith is exposed to the public. The one who hides his faith is like him who hides his face to the public. Ephrem identifies faith with the external profession of faith, the proclamation of it and the testimony to it through martyrdom. It is something to be taught, proclaimed, sung and confessed.⁵⁷ Abraham had the knowledge even before his call but not the conviction of it. God who reveals Himself takes up human images and symbols so that we may come and establish the relation between the creatures and the creator. Between God and man there is faith and prayer, to believe in his truth and to pray to his divinity.⁵⁸ In the silent adoration of the three kings (Magi) Ephrem sees the shining of pure faith.⁵⁹

Faith and charity in their Christian sense are interchangeable as faith is a vital relationship to Christ; it has its roots in Christ. The nearness is made felt through the relation of love and the roots of Christ's love are to be found in His mercy.⁶⁰ Without love our faith in the truth is like a bird that has only one wing.⁶¹ The truth has its life in our heart, its love in our spirit and its hope in our soul.⁶²

Besides faith and love, prayer also leads us to God. The Creator himself has given this way of prayer to the creatures so that they may come with the offerings of prayer at the door of salvation.⁶³ It is through the incarnation that this way is fully opened to us. This is the day on which the heavenly portal was opened to our prayers.⁶⁴ Christ is our only mediator through whom our prayers are heard. Happy is the one who offers his prayers through Christ.⁶⁵ The removal of egoism and practice of the love of neighbour are important preparations for efficacious prayer.⁶⁶ In vocal prayer the collaboration of our soul and body are needed.⁶⁷ Mental prayer should be interior and made in silence. We are in need of recollection and tranquility to pray properly.⁶⁸ Mental prayer is supposed to purify our mind and souls and put into order that which is troubled.⁶⁹ This purification of the internal faculties thorough prayer is completed when Christ himself will be reflected in our internal faculty.⁷⁰ Ephrem prayed continually for the Christian community and has composed hymns and prayers for the use of the liturgical assembly. Ephrem's hymns have found place in the canonical prayers of the Syriac Churches.

4.4. Death and Judgement

Pain, toil and death are punishments given to Adam (Gen 3. 17-10). Because of him the earth is first cursed. Adam has a share in the curse of the earth: sweat and pain in the struggle for food; encounter with thorns and thistles; herbs of the fields as food.⁷¹ "Adam was exalted and humbled./ His beginning was of heavenly rank;/ and his end, earthly humiliation./ His beginning was in Paradise / and his end in the tomb."⁷² Sin kills the soul and brings pain, tears and weeping. The death of all beings is immanently present in the corporeal death of Adam.⁷³ Death is dissolution of body into dust from which it is formed.⁷⁴

By the sin Adam was separated from God⁷⁵ and since he lost his original purity, he had to leave the pure garden.⁷⁶ "The Just One was furious and expelled him/ --to the dwelling of beasts./ He and these lived in the wilderness."⁷⁷ Because of the transgression of the commandment, death was decreed to Adam and Eve (Gen 3.19), the sentence of death did not take place immediately as it was pronounced (Gen 2.17). But the divine life in human life that covered humanity with a robe of glory was stripped off at the

moment when human life endangered its privileged intimacy with God. Death set its net over the first parents.

Ephrem is aware both of God's mercy and justice. They are the two plates of the same balance. The justice of God will be mild in the appearance of God's goodness. As St. Paul says sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Ephrem calls shame upon the sinners who hide their faults in darkness. They are troubled at the sight of Paradise.⁷⁸ He blames men of their love for this world. Men are sorry at the death of their relations, but they do not weep over the real death of sin, says Ephrem.⁷⁹ Though they mourn the death of others they are least thoughtful of their own death.⁸⁰ The real death is the death of sin. Although God is merciful in his judgement, penance is expected of us.

4.5. Sin, Repentance and Penance

Sin is something that upsets the order of the whole creation. The disorder began with Adam's sin. The cause of sin is man's free will. Ephrem is aware of the frailty of the human will in front of the divine will.⁸¹ Ephrem gives a clear picture of sin. Before the fall Adam could call every animal by its name and all animals were clean. After the sin, some of them became unclean (cf. Gen 3.14). The creator hated them because of man's sins. He declared some of them to be unclean, in order to teach him through them and to bring him to purity.⁸² After the fall the animals became like a mirror to man through which he could see his own meanness. In fact his spirit could see itself without the aid of a mirror. But as the result of sin his spirit became like a body and lost its power of self-seeing.⁸³ Human race is in intermediary state with regard to life and glory. Christ has prepared for mankind a new Paradise, new fruit of the tree of life, new life and glory. But it is up to everyone to attain this marvelous treasure through one's own free acts of love.

Our dolorous situation in the present life leads to repentance and tears. Penitence, penance and all other ascetical works emerge from this repentance.⁸⁴ God who gave Adam the opportunity to repent gives us also the same chance for the forgiveness of sins. "God, who had pity on Adam...and gave him opportunity to repent, opened the door to our penitence. Blessed is

he who forgives our debts. Blessed is He who multiplies our treasures.”⁸⁵ Our mortal and sinful life urges us to turn to God with sorrowful heart. Those who rely on the mercy of God will attain eternal life. Ephrem urges us to meditate on human life in this world. That will lead us to rely on divine mercy, not on human power. Ephrem expresses his hope on the mercy of God: “I hope for your mercy; / under your wings I take shelter. / I feel ashamed at my follies/ let my debts be blot out through your all-purifying hysoop.”⁸⁶ Repentance is like a baptism that washes away our guilt.⁸⁷ It is the medicine, which gives life to those who are dead to sin. We learn the lesson of penance from the Scriptures. The penance and the salvation of the Ninevites is a lesson for us.⁸⁸ “Nineveh repented, Jonah was sad; / the physician was perturbed because his medicine triumphed.”⁸⁹ “The Ninevites did penitence and penance observing fast and putting on sack clothes. Their repentance saved them from the wrath of God. Their act of penitence became a sign of life: “Nineveh bore fasting as bunches of grapes / and every almsgiving as clusters of grapes.”⁹⁰

Penance should be an attitude of the Christians. Tears of repentance or penitence are an external sign of an internal remorse and pain. A true penitent is a mourner.⁹¹ Tears have the power to open the doors of God’s mercy.⁹² Any one cannot bring the mercy of God, but God gives his mercy in exchange of tears.⁹³ Prayer, fasting and vigilance are outward expressions of the penitential way of life. Penance heals our wounds through its continual performance.⁹⁴ It is the grace and light of Christ that urges us to do penance.⁹⁵ The Israelites escaped from the captivity of Egypt and reached the land of promise making a tedious journey. So too we shall be saved from the captivity of sin in this world by means of penance.⁹⁶

Penance is a very good weapon to fight Satan who is also a cause of sin.⁹⁷ It is a true remedy for the sickness of sin.⁹⁸ On the one side penance is a gift of the merciful God and on the other it exacts great efforts from the part of man.⁹⁹ God’s mercy is showered abundantly upon the penitents. Those who approach with remorse of the soul will not be rejected. Penitence is the city of refuge of the New Testament.¹⁰⁰ A special reward is reserved to those who abstain from eating meat and drinking wine.¹⁰¹ Fasting heals our wounds.¹⁰² It makes us powerful against Satan.¹⁰³ It is the

nourishment for our spirit. It cleanses our soul. It is not enough to abstain from food and drink but also from all our sins; and this is real fasting. "Let us, my brothers, love fasting which brings forth in abundance pure fruits. Because the soul will be illumined through it and the thoughts will be pure." The good inspirations can come up in our heart through it.

Ephrem in his commentary on the commission given to the Apostles to forgive sins (Jn 20.23), speaks of the power of the Church to forgive sins and the sacramental character of the ministry of forgiveness.¹⁰⁴ He says that the reconciliation with the Church through the ministry of the priest is the sure pledge of the reconciliation with God himself.¹⁰⁵ The Apostles do not grant divine pardon; only God can grant it, but their action is a sign and infallible pledge of the divine forgiveness.

4.6. Virginity and Monastic Life

For Ephrem there are two ways of reaching the Kingdom of heaven, one is the way of the ordinary faithful and the other is the way of those who take upon themselves the cross denying the joy of this world for the sake of heavenly happiness.¹⁰⁶ They have the example of Christ who himself has led a life of mortification. For Ephrem a monk –Ihidaya ܐܝܚܝܕܝܐ - is some one who leads a chaste life and who is not married. Ephrem kept up great admiration for hermits.¹⁰⁷ A hermit is one who is doing penance and one who weeps over his sins. Jesus has shown his appreciation of the life of hermits by retiring to the desert.¹⁰⁸ According to Ephrem, life of virginity is the first form of mortification, which is proper to a monk.¹⁰⁹ For him, monasticism is a penitential institution. Life in the wilderness, among animals and eating grass and roots enable us to find the way to repentance. It is on mountains and deserts that one may recover his lost life.¹¹⁰ The angels have received the state of virginity as a present of God without striving for it, but men are called to receive it as the result of a fight.¹¹¹

Virginity is primary in Christ-centered life. Early Syriac Christians held virginity in high esteem as the ideal state of life. It is not because of hatred towards marriage or body, but because of its perfection.¹¹² In the Syriac Christianity, there existed a peculiar phenomenon: virgins, both male and female who took the vow of

virginity at Baptism. Such baptized virgins were called sons /daughters of qyama *ܩܝܡܐ* (covenant).¹¹³ The sons and daughters of qyama were the ordinary baptized laity or a group of virgins within the Church: some living at home, others in small communities, but not isolated from the laity. They were not proper monks or nuns,¹¹⁴ but they represent the early Syriac practice of virginity.

Ephrem's ascetical thoughts on virginal life include its relation to Christ, heavenly life, and the threats to virginal life. Virginity is the perfect union with Christ.¹¹⁵ Among the three permissible states of life viz family life, continence and virginity, virginal life is the perfection. "For, in three ways / that the law is conveyed to us / since it gives family, continence and virginity – possession, privation and perfection."¹¹⁶ Virginity leads to the ideal wholehearted discipleship of Jesus.¹¹⁷ 'Single-mindedness' has much significance in virginity. It means to be master of oneself, of body and mind; to be solitary internally and externally. It means to strive after full conformity with Jesus through the right use of mind and will, through self-discipline.¹¹⁸ It denotes a life consecrated to Christ, the Only-begotten, the *Ihidaya*. Such a person is also called *Ihidaya*¹¹⁹ i.e. the consecrated ascetics put on Jesus Christ in a special way. This is especially applicable to the pastors and properly to the bishop.¹²⁰ A bishop is like Abraham who was the father of many in faith and he had a wife called Sara. But for the bishop there is but one wife, who is his community, the Church. Ephrem says that women also are invited to this state of life.¹²¹ The idea that virgins are betrothed to Christ, the only Spouse, in their all-pure hearts (2 Cor 11.2) leads the eschatological significance of virginity. Virgins keep themselves pure and holy for the second coming of Christ as the wise maidens of Mt 25. Virginity, even though found in this world, has a celestial bridegroom and a heavenly nuptial chamber. The virgins will be brought to the eternal nuptial chamber with luminous garments and the body, which is made elegant and holy, persists so without stain. "Moses' face did not shine so bright/ as does her mind / She is promised eternal bliss / and a crown that lasts forever; / a table where she is at home / and a bride-chamber lasting forever."¹²² Threats to virginity are evil desires that enter and take away peace and joy.¹²³ Fasting, prayer and vigilance are the ways of protecting the life of chastity.¹²⁴ The three bishops of Nisibis were examples

of the life of chastity and poverty to the Church of Nisibis. They had no possessions except their Church. Constant prayer should accompany the life of a man of God. Prayer is a shield; it can ask anything just as the divinity is able to give anything.¹²⁵ Our prayers should be consisting full of hope.¹²⁶

Ephrem sees also the importance of good works. It is better to do a good work than to hear thousand words.¹²⁷ The study of the Scripture is especially recommended to the man of God. It contains all the treasures of heaven and earth. The result of the life of virginity, poverty and good actions together with the Scriptures in the Church is proper charity. The love of God and the love of the neighbour are like the two wings with the help of which we are flying to God.¹²⁸ Thus charity is an interior attitude formed through prayer and study of the Scripture.

5. Ecclesiology of St. Ephrem

Church is a mystery in the history of salvation and has her origin from Christ.¹²⁹ Ephrem locates the Church in the history of salvation. "The type was in Egypt /the reality in the Church / and the sealing of the reward in the Kingdom"¹³⁰, i.e. Israel > Church > Heavenly Kingdom. The type of the Old Testament reaches up to the ecclesial era. And the ecclesial era reaches up to the kingdom of heaven. The ecclesial era stands between the Old Testament times and the Kingdom. In the Church we see the reality of the Old Testament types and here we experience the foretaste of the Kingdom.

5.1. Birth of the Church.

The piercing of the side of Christ symbolizes the opening of the Paradise. It was to open the way to Paradise that was blocked by the sword of the cherubim and to quench the fire that came out of Adam's side. Ephrem gives symbolic meaning to the piercing of Christ's side by the lance of a soldier (Jn 19.34). "Blessed is the merciful one who saw the lance at Paradise which blocked the way to the tree of life. But Christ came and took for himself a body that was wounded by the lance so that by opening his side he might open the way into Paradise."¹³¹ The fact of the coming out of the blood and water from the pierced side of Christ leads Ephrem to find the emergence of the sacraments of baptism

and Eucharist from there as the means of purification for the admission into the new Paradise. The Church emanates from the pierced side of Christ because she is His blood. Ephrem presents this typologically: as Eve, bride of Adam, has her origin from the side of Adam, so the Church, bride of Christ¹³², from the side of Christ. At the same time the side of Christ becomes the fountain of the purifying water (baptism) and the life-giving blood (Eucharist). "There came forth blood and water, which is His Church, and it is built on Him; like Adam, for his wife was taken from his side. The rib of Adam was his wife, and the blood of our Lord, His Church."¹³³

The rib of the first Adam and the side of the second Adam are contrasted. The rib of Adam signifies Eve. She was the cause of the kindling of fire in Adam. Fire here symbolizes wickedness and destruction, burning of the sinful inclinations of Eve. In the writings of the prophets wickedness is compared to fire. In the case of the proto-parents fire symbolizes their sin. The water that came out from the side of second Adam is a symbolic stream that quenches the fire kindled in the first Adam by his rib. Through the evil mediator fire blazed up against them. But through the good mediator gushed forth the quenching water. Now there came out the blood with which he redeemed us from the slavery; but water also came out so that everyone who would approach His redeeming blood might be washed and purified from that bad slavery which had enslaved him. There came out blood and water, that is the Church. And it is built upon him as the wife of Adam was taken from his side. The rib of Adam was his wife; the blood of our Lord is his Church. From the rib of Adam came out death, from the rib of our Lord came out life. The blood flowing from the side of Christ is a symbol of liberation from slavery. Here we may find allusion to the blood of the lamb that liberated the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt. The water from the side of Christ is also symbolic. It has the function of washing clean from the slavery those who have access to the salvific blood.

Ephrem sees the type of baptismal water in the water that flowed from the pierced side of Christ and blood symbolizes Eucharist. Baptism and Eucharist are the greatest sacraments through which we are entering into the Church.¹³⁴ It is through these sacraments that the Church gives the real life. The role of the

Church in communicating life is presented in a sound theological way.

5.2. Church as Pilgrim, Way and Voyage

The call and challenge of the Church is to prepare her children to enter the kingdom. The true Church is the true image of the kingdom of Heaven, the harbour of peace. All should therefore live in harmony in the Church in her pilgrimage with the goal of reaching heaven. "This present Church of Truth / is the likeness of that Kingdom / Just as there is harmony in the Kingdom/ so is holy Church; there ought to be agreement."¹³⁵ Ephrem prays for the unity in the Church that is divided in Arian heresy.

The kingdom is the final goal of the Church. She is the way to the Kingdom, the way from Paradise to Paradise.¹³⁶ This way is divided into many stages: Tree, Cross, Eden, Zion, Church and Kingdom. "For the sake of the fruit he laid the Way / which runs from the Tree right to the Cross; / it extended from Eden to Zion, / from Zion to Holy Church / and from the Church to the Kingdom."¹³⁷ Ephrem means by this way the salvific plan of God. "Smooth is the way to the simple / that way which is faith / which has laid down inns and milestones/ from Paradise to Paradise. The milestones were the prophets and the inns were the Apostles."¹³⁸ Through Adam was the setting out and through the good thief the return. The Church is the way of life, of faith and commandment. It is the royal path. After the fall of Adam this way was necessary. The messengers of peace have made it. Truth and love have made milestones and inns on this way.

Ephrem compares the life of the Church to a voyage. This is a common allegoric figure used by the Fathers. In this figure the Church is the ship, heaven is the port, Christ is the Captain, Cross is the mat, and the Spirit is the wind. The faithful travel in this ship and reach the port. "We are enclosed as though in a ship / and we mourn for such as have escaped / from the storm into the haven of peace."¹³⁹ Church herself is the haven, the refuge for the weak and the sinners; she is the place of refuge for all who are persecuted. This house of refuge has a universal character. It comprises both heavenly and earthly choirs.¹⁴⁰

5.3. The Church and the Paradise

There is a profound comparison between the Church and the Paradise in Ephrem. The tree in the garden is compared to the commandment. God placed injection in the Paradise, but nobody heeded to listen to it. In the Church he planted the Word. “He planted the garden most fair / He built the Church most fair. / On the tree of knowledge/ He set the commandment / He gave joy, but they did not respond / He warned but they did not respond / He warned but they did not fear / In the Church He established the Word / which causes joy by its promises / and fear by its threats/ whoever despises it, perishes / whoever respects it finds life.”¹⁴¹

5.4. Church is the Flock of Christ, the Assembly of Saints

Both in Old Testament and in New Testament God is presented as the shepherd and the people as His flock. The Apostles and bishops are shepherds. Ephrem describes beautifully the scene of Christ entrusting Peter with the mission of feeding His sheep. “The Lord of the flock/ as he ate with his shepherds/ took and delivered his flock/ to Simon who obeyed him/ He spoke once, twice and again / to stress his concern / Three pledges he took from him as shepherd / that with love he should shepherd his lambs/ and he should visit his sheep with mercy / and should guard his ewes with fear.”¹⁴² Christ’s sheep is branded with the name Mšihaye and it is upon every member of His sheepfold and this serves as an identification mark. It is an indelible mark and seal put by the Good Shepherd.

Church is the assembly of saints. The members of the Church pick up the fruits of life everyday and press the grapes for the medicine of life. “The assembly of saints / is like the Paradise / There everyday is picked / the fruit of Him who gives life to all / There, O my brothers, are pressed, / the grapes for the medicine of life. / It refers to Eucharist. The serpent is crippled and bound by the curse / Eve’s mouth was sealed / by salutary silence / but now again her mouth / is a harp for her creator.”¹⁴³ The saints are no more naked for they have put on the robe of glory. They listen no more to the speech of the serpent. “Not one among them is naked, / for they have put on glory / nor does any one stand in disgrace/ arrayed only in leaves / for through our Lord they have found / the robe of Adam’s family./ Just as the Church cleanses her ears / from

the speech of the serpent / to which the newborn and the white-clad listened / to the ruin and loss of their garments.”¹⁴⁴

5.5. The Church as the True Vineyard

Israel is the rejected vineyard of Yahweh. The vineyard that has the blessing of the owner did not produce fruits. He therefore grafted that vine to the fruit-offering vine. Because Israel acted unfaithfully God rejected her. He founded His Church among the Gentiles and joined the Jews to them so that they might bear fruit. “As the idle vineyard did not receive/ the Lord of the vineyard, the bearer of blessings, / who will not be amazed, that the Lord of the vineyard / has given fruit to the accursed vineyard? / Not only did it fail to give fruits to the heir; with the fruits it did bring, it angered Him. / He uprooted it; to graft it among the Gentiles / into the sweet plant of the Gentile one.”¹⁴⁵

5.6. Church, the Body of Christ

Ephrem makes use of the Pauline imagery of the human body¹⁴⁶ a little more freely. Through the incarnation of the Son of God our natural human solidarity and unity have been strengthened. God the Son joined this natural unity when he assembled a human body for himself and then by His redemptive sacrifice. By the gift of the Holy Spirit he raised out human solidarity to become our spiritual unity in Himself.¹⁴⁷ Church is a unity represented by the seamless tunic of Christ.¹⁴⁸ In Hymns on Nisibis 26 Ephrem speaks of the person of the suffering mother Church of Edessa and of his own grief for it. A divided Church is a wounded body. It is only Christ the Physician can repair and heal those who are cut off from the body, which is the Church.¹⁴⁹ Church is a weeping mother because of her divided children. He prays to Christ the physician to heal his Church of her ailments.¹⁵⁰

5.7. Church, Bride and Mother

The prophets present Israel as bride of Yahweh. Having been liberated from Egypt her betrothal took place in the valley of Sinai, says Ephrem. But she proved herself unfaithful.¹⁵¹ She forsook the synagogue after the captivity. The son of the King took away all her ornaments. Her malice being proved, He betrothed

himself with the Church of the gentiles.¹⁵² Now she is well decorated and elegantly dressed.¹⁵³

The Church is the mother of the faithful. Here, Ephrem makes a comparison between Mary and Eve. Mary and the Church are the anti-types of Eve. In the place of the bread of weariness that Eve gave, Mary and the Church gave the living and the life-giving bread. "The Church gave us the living bread / for that unleavened bread which Egypt gave / Mary gave the bread of refreshment / for the bread of weariness which Eve gave."¹⁵⁴ Ephrem prays that the children of the Church may live as the children of one mother. "That from all Churches there may be / a single Church of Truth / and let her children be gathered, / righteous on her bosom, / that we may confess thy goodness, / praise to thy reconciliation."¹⁵⁵ Ephrem prays that the children of the Church may live as the children of one mother.

6. Paschal Theology of St. Ephrem

Ephrem sees the Paschal mystery of Christ in the Old Testament Passover context. The Passover lamb- Emar Pasha **ܐܡܪ ܦܫܐ** - of the OT was the type par excellence of Christ the True Lamb- Emar Qušta **ܐܡܪ ܩܘܫܬܐ**. The first lamb was symbolic and transitory and the second is true and real. Ephrem conceives a triple phase in the realization of the paschal mystery. The following verse illustrates this vision of Ephrem: "The Symbol (raza) was in Egypt / The Reality (šrara) in the Church / the sealing of the reward (hutam pur'ana **ܠܗܘܬܡ ܦܘܪܥܢܐ**) will be in the Kingdom."¹⁵⁶ This small verse reflects Ephrem's vision of the salvific plan, which is begun in the OT, continued in the Church and is consummated in the kingdom. The Christian life is to end up in its full realization in the Kingdom. Making use of typology he penetrates into the three spheres namely OT, NT (Church), and the Kingdom.

6.1. The Last Supper

In the second phase i.e. Church, Ephrem sees three important stages: Last Supper, Calvary and the Eucharist. The Cenacle is the first Church: Ephrem sees the Cenacle as the first Church in which Jesus became the true altar, priest and the victim. The Cenacle is the first sanctuary in which the first sacrifice of the new covenant was offered. "In you was broken for the first time /

that bread, for you became his Church / and the first sanctuary through His sacrifice / in you He appeared for the first time.”¹⁵⁷ It is the Eucharistic sacrifice that makes a Church. Without Eucharist there is no Church. It is in the Cenacle that the great covenant was sealed. Ephrem finds parallelism between mount Sinai and the Cenacle. The upper room is a mirror through which the whole world can be seen.¹⁵⁸

The two lambs: Ephrem sees two lambs present in the Cenacle—the paschal lamb and the true lamb, i.e. the symbol and the truth. The symbol ceases and the truth commences there. The two lambs meet in the Cenacle. The symbol gave way to reality. The meeting and the parting of the two testaments take place in the Cenacle.

The two Paschs: The old Passover was celebrated for the last time and the new Pascha was celebrated for the first time in the cenacle. “Blessed are you, O last evening / for the evening of the Egypt was fulfilled in you. / Our Lord ate the small Passover at your time. / And became the great Passover / Passover was mixed with Passover / Feast was blended with feast / The Passover that passed away / and the other that never passes away / the symbol and fulfillment.”¹⁵⁹ Ephrem contrasts the two Paschs and affirms their distinction and disparity and shows the superiority and uniqueness of the second Pascha. Paschal Lamb is the key for him to discover the true nature of redemption brought by Christ.

Christ the true Unleavened Bread: Ephrem takes up the second important element of the Passover namely the unleavened bread (patira) of Exodus 12 and presents Christ as the true unleavened bread -patira qušta ܩܘܫܬܐ ܩܝܡܐ - of the new Pascha and thereby points to the meal aspect and the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist. Christ breaks his own body, which became the true unleavened bread for the disciples. “The true lamb got up and broke His body. / for the disciples who had eaten the paschal lamb. / Praise be to Christ through whose body / the unleavened became void together with the people.”¹⁶⁰

6.2. Paschal Mystery, Realization of Calvary

Ephrem sees the culmination of the realization of the paschal mystery in Calvary. At Calvary He is the true Lamb and the Priest. He is the lamb and the shepherd. In Him victimhood and priesthood, victim and priest are identified.

Jesus is the Lamb: In the light of the fulfilment of the cross Ephrem finds the types of the Lamb in the Old Testament. Abel is the first type of the true Lamb: "Abel yearned for him / that he came during his time / so that he might see the Lamb of God / instead of the lamb that he offered"¹⁶¹. Jesus the true lamb was symbolised in the lamb cooped up for the Exodus night.¹⁶² As the symbol gave liberation to Israelites, Jesus the true Lamb is the new liberator. Ephrem contemplates the scene of the visit of "the shepherds to the newborn Saviour in Bethlehem. A lamb was offered to the true lamb.

Jesus is Priest and Lamb: The priests of the OT were unworthy to offer the true lamb. Jesus himself therefore becomes the priest. In OT the victims were inferior to the priests. Here the Victim is superior to the priests. "The true lamb knew that the priests were impure, / and the Levites unworthy and they were not sufficient for Him / He himself became for His body priest and High Priest. / The priests of that people killed the High Priest / for our priest became a sacrifice through his offering. / He put an end to the sacrifices. / To all sides He extended His help."¹⁶³ Jesus' sacrifice is most pleasing and sanctifying.¹⁶⁴

Jesus is Lamb and Shepherd: Ephrem attributes to Jesus the true Lamb a double messianic function of Lamb and of the shepherd. He was probably inspired by the parable of the Good Shepherd.¹⁶⁵ Ephrem wants to bring out the voluntary vicarious death of the Saviour who gives up his life of his own accord: "Blessed is the Shepherd, who became / The Lamb for our atonement."¹⁶⁶

The Lamb's Saving Blood: The blood of the Passover lamb saved the Israelites. The blood of the spotless Lamb appeased the height and depth, says Ephrem: "For the priests with their blemish were not worthy / to offer the spotless lamb. / He became a peace offering and pacified. / The height and depth with His appeasing blood."¹⁶⁷ The shedding of the true Lamb's blood inaugurates the new economy of salvation. It brought salvation to all nations.

6.3. The Eucharist

Ephrem sees Eucharist in the paschal context. Eucharist is the continuation of "the Last Supper and the sacrifice of Calvary. The eucharistic sacrifice abolished all the OT sacrifices. The type was in the OT and the truth is in the Church. The types of the

Eucharist in the OT (manna, quail) found their fulfilment in the bread of life.¹⁶⁸ For Ephrem, there is an essential continuity between the OT types and the Church's realities. "The Church has given us living bread / In place of the unleavened bread which Egypt gave."¹⁶⁹ The tabernacle of the OT appears as a type of the Eucharist in the Church. "Moses built a tabernacle in the desert for the God-head; / Because he dwelt not in their hearts, he shall dwell in the holy of holies / For the gentiles the Church was built, as a gathering for prayers / And by his power, which has to dwell in the bread, he enters and rests in us."¹⁷⁰

In the fulfilment of salvific plan Christ abolished the Old Testament priesthood and sacrifices.¹⁷¹ Ephrem sees the cessation of the OT priesthood¹⁷² symbolised in the tearing of the mantle of Caiphas (Mk 14. 63); and in the tearing of the Temple veil (Mt 27.51). Through the Eucharist the OT sacrifices and the elements of the Pesha meal are abrogated: "He abolished the sacrifices through his sacrifice, / the liberations through his incense, / the lambs through his slaughter, the unleavened bread through his bread / and the bitter herbs through his passion."¹⁷³

The True Paschal Bread: The true unleavened bread is given to us in the eucharistic sacrifice. This belongs to an entirely new sphere and its effects are far reaching. Ephrem describes the course of human life as a way through which man is on the move: "For the sake of the fruit he laid the way / which (runs) from the True right to the Cross, / it extended from the wood to the wood / and from Eden to Zion / from Zion to Holy Church/ and from the Church to the Kingdom."¹⁷⁴ We are now in the third stage i.e. from the Church to the Kingdom.

Ephrem links Eucharist with the eschatological vocation of the Church.¹⁷⁵ He sees an essential connection between Church, Eucharist and the eschatological wedding feast: "See you are reclining at the wedding feast / which is the holy Church, / and you are eating the holy Body / and drinking His pure blood."¹⁷⁶ Man is destined to re-enter the Paradise. The Eucharist is the spiritual bread that enables him to reach Paradise.¹⁷⁷ It transforms him and he flies over the clouds and reaches Paradise Here Ephrem points to the eschatological transformation of the human body. The eucharistic bread is the medicine of life (Sam hayye ܣܡ ܗܝܝܥ). By Lord's blessing the bread became the medicine of life during the

Last Supper.¹⁷⁸ It is because of His hidden presence in the eucharistic body that the Eucharist becomes the Medicine of life. And therefore, Eucharist also becomes a treasury of healings as His physical body.¹⁷⁹ The invisible power (Fire and Spirit) that dwells in His physical and eucharistic body is the source of this healing. Ephrem sees the Holy Spirit hidden in the Eucharist.¹⁸⁰ “In your Bread is hidden Spirit not to be eaten / in your Wine dwells a Fire not to be drunk. / Spirit in your Bread, Fire in your Wine / a wonder set apart, (yet) received by our lips.”¹⁸¹ As Medicine of life the Eucharist liberates us from the chains of sin, purifies and remits our debts, which are the consequences of sins. Naturally, this leads to sanctification and new life. “Blessed be He who gave us deliverance through His Bread / and blotted out, through His Chalice, the document of our debts.”¹⁸² Christ waited till His passion and death to distribute His body and blood to His disciples, for He gave them as a symbol of His death. And thus he entered the stomach of the disciples as He entered the womb of the earth. So the Eucharist also becomes a symbol of the victory over death just as He was victorious over death in the resurrection.¹⁸³ Jesus’ offering on Cross, wiped out evil and killed death itself. The Living Bread is victorious over death. It enables to transcend the space-time and attain the immortal and imperishable existence, by hope. “Whoever eats of the bread of the Heavenly One will become heavenly without doubt.”¹⁸⁴ Through the life-giving presence of Christ, Eucharistic offering too cleanses the participants from all stains of sin and gives life to the mortals.¹⁸⁵

7. Mariology of St. Ephrem

In the Hymns on Nativity we perceive the devotion of Ephrem to Mary. The dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption are not found as such in Ephrem’s works. He however symbolically expresses them. So too the idea of Theotokos - Mother of God- is clear in his hymns.

7.1. Mother of God

“Your Mother, O’ Lord, nobody knows, how we should call her! Virgin? But everyone knows about her child! Married? But no body has the knowledge of her. And if your mother it remains so incomprehensible.”¹⁸⁶ Again we find expressions in

Ephrem like “Your mother is a miracle¹⁸⁷; the womb of your mother has changed the orders. O’ You who create everything.”¹⁸⁸

The term ‘womb of Mary’ conveys that Christ is born from a woman, and thus shares our perfect humanity.¹⁸⁹ He gives the idea of the Mother of God in reference to the Son: “Which mother may speak to her child in her lap like Mary who could dare to call her son, the son of the Creator?”¹⁹⁰ Mary does not know how to call him. He is her son and her Lord.¹⁹¹ She is aware of her dignity as Mother of God in spite of her being a creature; “more than all who found salvation he has delighted me because I conceived him. More than all whom he has elevated he has elevated me because I gave birth to him.”¹⁹² Mary is described as a ship that bears the “great steersman of creation” who brought peace to heaven and earth.”¹⁹³

7.2. Immaculate Conception

Ephrem’s meditation on Immaculate Conception is on the basis of the holiness of the human nature of Christ, which is given to Him by Mary and in its turn of the sinlessness of Mary. No human being is comparable to Jesus and His Mother, says Ephrem: “You only and your Mother are beautiful above every thing. Because O’ Lord, there is no stain in you and no disfigurement in Your Mother. Among these two beautiful ones, whom do my sons resemble?”¹⁹⁴ Ephrem speaks of two births with regard to Jesus and Mary. For Jesus the first birth is the eternal birth from the Father and the other from Mary; and with regard to Mary, first from her parents and the other at the moment of conception of Christ. “Son of the Most High who came and dwelt in me/ [in} another birth He bore me also/ [in] a second birth, I put on the glory of Him/ Who put on the body, the garment of His mother.”¹⁹⁵

7.3. Devotion to Mary

The fundamental reason for Ephrem’s great devotion to Virgin Mary lies in the fact that she has given us the new cloth of our salvation.¹⁹⁶ Mary has brought the cloth of the Paradise, but it is Christ Himself who takes this cloth and saves us. “Your Christ’s shining purity is that garment of glory. He is just, the one who clothed with it.”¹⁹⁷ Mary is the one who brings life to the sons of Eve who was only the cause of death.¹⁹⁸ Death entered through the

ears of Eve (Gen 3.1) and the whole humanity was affected by it. Life entered through the ears of Mary (Lk 1.28) for all the chosen people.¹⁹⁹ Ephrem identifies the body of Christ that came from Mary and the eucharistic bread. The life giving bread is a present of Mary. Mary gives us the living bread in the place of that bread of toil that Eve gave us. "And He took and broke bread, a different one, unique symbol of that unique body from Mary."²⁰⁰ "The same body, which Christ took from Mary is perceivable in faith in the eucharistic bread, which is hidden to heretics who have no faith. The believers see Him in the Eucharist internally."²⁰¹

Conclusion

Coming from an undivided Church Ephrem belongs to the heritage of all Christian traditions. His poetry is deeply rooted in the Scripture and it participates in something of the perennial freshness of the biblical text itself, upon which it so often directly meditates. Ephrem's poems are vehicles of an immense wealth of spiritual insight, the variety of whose treasures never ceases to give rise to astonishment in the reader who approaches them with appreciation. Ephrem is the greatest poet of the patristic age, and perhaps the only poet theologian. His language full of images and symbols is alive and is capable of conveying divine truths. Ephrem is not worried about repetition; he uses ordinary words with twist of meanings. His child-like wonder in everything in the universe, his sense of humour, his interest in natural, animal and vegetable world and the extra ordinary insight into human psychology make him a religious philosopher in his own right.

Notes

¹ S. Brock, "Poet as Theologian", in *Sobornost* / ECR 7.4 (1977) 243-250.

² For details see J.B. Segal, *Edessa 'The Blessed City'*, Oxford 1970, 44 f.

³ Cf. Koonammakkal Thoma Kathanar, "Changing Views on Ephrem", *Christian Orient*, XIV, No.3, (1993) 113-130.

⁴ Cf. P. Yousif, "St. Ephrem on Symbols in Nature, Faith, the Trinity and the Cross", ECR 10 (1978) 52-60.

⁵ *HFid* 12.4 = *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Hymnen de Fide*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 154/155; syri 73/74, Louvain 1955.

⁶ *HNat* 11.61 = "Hymnen de Nativitate", in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 186/187; syri 82/83, Louvain 1959, 1-143; 1-130; ET, K. McVey, trans., *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, Classics of Western Spirituality, New York 1989.

⁷ Cf. S. Brock, "Humanity and the Natural World in the Syriac Tradition", *Christian Orient*, XIV No.3, (1993) 150.

⁸ *CHaer* 32.9 = *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Hymnen Contra Haereses*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 169/170; syri 76/77, Lovain 1957.

⁹ *HFid* 15.5.

¹⁰ *HFid* 69.11.

¹¹ *HFid* 69.11.

¹² *HFid* 35.1.

¹³ *HVirg* 6.8 = *Des Heiligen Ephraem des syrerers Hymnen de Virginitate*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 223/224; syri 94/95, Louvain 1962; ET, McVey, *Hymns*.

¹⁴ *HParad* 3.2 = *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Hymnen de Paradiso und contra Julianum*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 174/175; syri 78/79, Louvain 1957; ET, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, S. Brock, tr., New York 1990.

¹⁵ *HEccl* 4.11 = *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Hymnen de Ecclesia*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 198/199; syri 84/85, Louvain 1960.

¹⁶ *HFid* 8.9.

¹⁷ *HFid* 17.7.

¹⁸ Cf. Koonammakkal Thoma Kathanar, "Changing Views on Ephrem," *Christian Orient*, XIV, No.3, (1993) 124.

¹⁹ Cf. 1Cor 15. 45.

²⁰ *HCruc* 5.1 = "Hymnen de Crucifixione", in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers paschahymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 248/249; syri 108/109, Louvain 1964.

²¹ *CHaer* 11.4.

²² *HFid* 31.5.

²³ *CHaer* 43.3.

²⁴ *HFid* 4.2.

²⁵ Cf. *HFid* 4.10.

²⁶ *HFid* 10.8.

²⁷ Cf. I Kings 18.38.

²⁸ *HFid* 10.13.

- ²⁹ The clothing metaphors in Ephrem is dealt in detail by S. Brock. See, S. Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a means of theological Expression in Syriac Tradition", in M. Schmidt- C.F. Geyer ed., *Typus, Symbol*, Regensburg 1981, 11-38.
- ³⁰ *HParad* 1.5.
- ³¹ M. Paickatt, "Life and Glory Lost", *Christian Orient*, XX.No.3, (1999) 164.
- ³² *HParad* 15.8; *HEccl* 11.10; *HEpi* 6.9 = "Hymnen de Epiphania" in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 186/187; syri 82/83, Louvain 1959.
- ³³ *HParad* 3.14; 4.4; 15.10.
- ³⁴ *HFid* 20.12.
- ³⁵ *HFid* 87-89
- ³⁶ *HFid* 4.42-57.
- ³⁷ *HFid* 2.479-480.
- ³⁸ *HFid* 1.44.
- ³⁹ *HFid* 40
- ⁴⁰ *HFid* 73.1. For details see S. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, The Syrian Churches Series, Jacob Vellian, ed., 1998, 27 f.
- ⁴¹ *Memra on Faith* 4. 129-130. Cf. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 46.
- ⁴² *HFid* 2.13; 592.621.
- ⁴³ *CDiat* 21.11 = ST. Ephrem, *Commentaire de l'Evangile Concordant ou Diatessaron*, Syr. text and LT., L. Leloir, (Chester Beatty Monographs 8), Dublin 1963. FT of Syr. and Armenian, L. Leloir, SC 121, Paris 1966. Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, Cambridge 1975, 125.
- ⁴⁴ *HFid* 13.25.
- ⁴⁵ *HFid* 77.20.
- ⁴⁶ *HFid* 74.15; Mt 3.16.
- ⁴⁷ *HFid* 6.4.
- ⁴⁸ *HFid* 74.
- ⁴⁹ *HFid* 37.7.
- ⁵⁰ Cf. Gen 8.11; Mt 3.16.
- ⁵¹ *HFid* 38.12.
- ⁵² *HFid* 4.2.
- ⁵³ *HFid* 41.6.
- ⁵⁴ *HFid* 10.17.
- ⁵⁵ *HFid* 74.15; 4.2; 7.3.
- ⁵⁶ *HFid* 13.8.
- ⁵⁷ *HFid* 3.75; 2.244; 3.416; 41.39.
- ⁵⁸ *HFid* 4. 92-93.
- ⁵⁹ *HFid* 7.6.

- ⁶⁰ *CNis* 50.6 = *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, I CSCO 218/219; syri 92/93, Louvain 1961; II CSCO 240/241; syri 102/103, Louvain 1963.
- ⁶¹ *HFid* 20.12.
- ⁶² *HVirg* 39.11.
- ⁶³ *HFid* 11.11-13.
- ⁶⁴ *HNat* 1.96.
- ⁶⁵ *HVirg* 31.2.
- ⁶⁶ *HEccl* 4.3-11.
- ⁶⁷ *CNis* 47.4.
- ⁶⁸ *HFid* 16.20.
- ⁶⁹ *HFid* 20.17.
- ⁷⁰ *HEccl* 29.9-10.
- ⁷¹ Cf. *HEccl* 48.11; *HVirg* 31.14.
- ⁷² *HEccl* 45.1.
- ⁷³ *HNat* 1.62.
- ⁷⁴ *CNis* 41.14; 21.8.
- ⁷⁵ *HArm* 29.32 *Hymnes de S. Ephrem Conservées en version Arménienne*, Armenian version and LT, L. Maries & C. Mercier, PO 30, Paris 1961.
- ⁷⁶ *HParad* 4.4; 14.15; *HVirg* 38.17.
- ⁷⁷ *HParad* 13.6.
- ⁷⁸ *HParad* 11.15.
- ⁷⁹ Cf. *CNis* 64.
- ⁸⁰ Cf. *CNis* 66.74.
- ⁸¹ *HFid* 12.3.
- ⁸² *HFid* 34.1.
- ⁸³ *HFid* 34.4.
- ⁸⁴ M. Paikkatt, "Repentance and Penitence in Mar Aprem of Nisibis," *Christian Orient*, XII, No.3 (1991) 138.
- ⁸⁵ *HEccl* 45.33.
- ⁸⁶ *HVirg* 41.2.
- ⁸⁷ *CNis* 1.5.
- ⁸⁸ Cf. *Jona* 3.1 f.
- ⁸⁹ *HVirg* 49.14.
- ⁹⁰ *HVirg* 45.5.
- ⁹¹ Cf. Paikkatt, "Repentance and Penitence in Mar Aprem of Nisibis," No.3 (1991) 142.
- ⁹² *HArm* 1.25-26.
- ⁹³ *CNis* 1.17; Cf. *Lk* 7. 36-50.
- ⁹⁴ *HVirg* 3.9-10.
- ⁹⁵ *HFid* 12.12.
- ⁹⁶ Cf. *HEccl* 34.15; *HVirg* 17.9; 45.6; 47.1; 10.1-8.

- ⁹⁷ *HVirg* 13.1.
- ⁹⁸ *HVirg* 49.14-17.
- ⁹⁹ *HEccl* 34.6.
- ¹⁰⁰ *HEccl* 34.1-2.
- ¹⁰¹ *HParad* 7.16-18.
- ¹⁰² *Sermon on Fasting* 4.13.
- ¹⁰³ *Sermon on Fasting* 5.4.
- ¹⁰⁴ M. Anikuzhikattil, *Ecclesial Response to the Negativity in Human Life*, OIRSI, Kottayam 1996, 275-276.
- ¹⁰⁵ Cf. T.J. Lamy, *Sancti Ephremi Syri, Hymni et Sermones*, vol. I, Mechlinae 1882, 55f. quoted in M. Anikuzhikattil, *Ecclesial Response*, 276.
- ¹⁰⁶ Cf. *CDiat* 15.3-15.
- ¹⁰⁷ Cf. *CNis* 15; *HVirg* 21.
- ¹⁰⁸ *HVirg* 21.2; *CNis* 11.54.
- ¹⁰⁹ *CNis* 19.3.
- ¹¹⁰ A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, CSCO 184, 197, Louvain 1958, 92-93.
- ¹¹¹ *HVirg* 15.4.
- ¹¹² Cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 11-16; 154-157.
- ¹¹³ *HEccl* 17.8; 26.4; *CNis* 21.5; 21.28.
- ¹¹⁴ Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 111.
- ¹¹⁵ *HVirg* 1-3.
- ¹¹⁶ *CHaer* 45.10.
- ¹¹⁷ Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 115-116.
- ¹¹⁸ *HEccl* 28.8-9.
- ¹¹⁹ Cf. *HFid* 82.5; *CNis* 36.4; *HVirg* 2.11; *HEpi* 8.16-17.
- ¹²⁰ *CNis* 19.1.
- ¹²¹ *HVirg* 24.2.8.10.
- ¹²² *HArm* 46.25-30.
- ¹²³ *HVirg* 1.7-8.
- ¹²⁴ *CNis* 17.4; 18.2; 21.3; 29.8.
- ¹²⁵ *CNis* 17.4.
- ¹²⁶ *CDiat* 7.12-13; Mt 9.21-22.
- ¹²⁷ *CNis* 17
- ¹²⁸ *CDiat* 4.8.
- ¹²⁹ Cf. J. Naduvilezham, "Ecclesiological Perspectives of St. Ephrem of Nisibis," *Christian Orient*, XXII, No.1. (2001) 3-9.
- ¹³⁰ *HAzy* 5,23 = "Hymnen de Azymis", in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers paschahymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 248/249; syri 108/109, Louvain 1964, Cf. CSCO 248 Syr 108, 12.

- ¹³¹ *HNat* 8.4.
- ¹³² Cf. *HVirg* 33.1;16.2; 21.9; *HResur* 3.1-7 = "Hymnen de Resurrectione", in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Paschahymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 248/249; syri 108/109, Louvain 1964.
- ¹³³ *CDiat* 21.11.
- ¹³⁴ Cf. S. Brock, "One of the Soldiers Pierced...", *Christian Orient*, IX, No.2-3, (1988) 51-59.
- ¹³⁵ *HFid* 6. 315-330.
- ¹³⁶ Koonammakkal Thoma Kathanar, "The Church in the Churches....", *Christian Orient*, XIV, No.1. (1993) 34-46.
- ¹³⁷ *CHaer* 26.4.
- ¹³⁸ *HFid* 65.1.
- ¹³⁹ Cf. CSCO 169, Syr.76, p.106.
- ¹⁴⁰ Cf. Sophy Rose, "Church as Haven and Refuge.." *Christian Orient*, XIX, No.1. (1998) 3-12.
- ¹⁴¹ *HParad* 6.7; cf. CSCO 174, Syr. 7 8, p.24.
- ¹⁴² *HVirg* 36.6, CSCO 223, Syr. 94, p.131.
- ¹⁴³ *HParad* 6.8.
- ¹⁴⁴ *HParad* 6.9.
- ¹⁴⁵ Cf. CSCO 169, Syr.76, p.72.
- ¹⁴⁶ Cf. 1Cor 12.12-27.
- ¹⁴⁷ Cf. Koonammakkal Thoma Kathanar, "Christ and Christians...", *Christian Orient*, XV, No.4 (1994) 163-169.
- ¹⁴⁸ *HCruc* 6.6.
- ¹⁴⁹ *CNis* 26.3.
- ¹⁵⁰ *CNis* 34.13.
- ¹⁵¹ *HFid* 14.6.
- ¹⁵² *HVirg* 6.2. For details see T. Neendoor, *Communion*, Kottayam 1998, 157-158.
- ¹⁵³ Cf. Is 61.10.
- ¹⁵⁴ *HAzy* 6-7.
- ¹⁵⁵ *HFid* 52.15.
- ¹⁵⁶ *HAzy* 23.
- ¹⁵⁷ *HCruc* 2.12.
- ¹⁵⁸ *HCruc* 3.5.
- ¹⁵⁹ *HCruc* 3.2.
- ¹⁶⁰ *HAzy* 19.1-2.
- ¹⁶¹ *HNat* 1.42.
- ¹⁶² Cf. Ex 12.3-6.
- ¹⁶³ *HAzy* 2.2-3.
- ¹⁶⁴ *HVirg* 31.5.

- ¹⁶⁵ Cf. Jn 10. 1-18.
- ¹⁶⁶ *HNat* 3.15.
- ¹⁶⁷ *HAzy* 2.6.
- ¹⁶⁸ Cf. *HArm* 50.1-6.
- ¹⁶⁹ *HAzy* 6.6.
- ¹⁷⁰ *HArm* 48.13-24.
- ¹⁷¹ *HAzy* 2.6.
- ¹⁷² *HCruc* 4.12.
- ¹⁷³ *HArm* 51.1-6.
- ¹⁷⁴ *HEccl* 28.4.
- ¹⁷⁵ Cf. S. Kanjiramukalil, "Church and Eucharist in St. Ephrem", *Christian Orient*, VIII, No.3 (1987) 110-117.
- ¹⁷⁶ Memra 'On the Coming of Christ', III, 4. in CSCO 320.
- ¹⁷⁷ *HAzy* 17.8-9.
- ¹⁷⁸ *HAzy* 14.16.
- ¹⁷⁹ Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 77-91.
- ¹⁸⁰ *HFid* 10.17.
- ¹⁸¹ *HFid* 10. 8.
- ¹⁸² *HEccl* 32.2.
- ¹⁸³ Cf. Paikatt, *Life Glory and Salvation*, 209.
- ¹⁸⁴ *HNat* 4.103; cf. also 3.16; 5.21. For details see P. Maniyattu, *Heaven on Earth*, Rome 1995, 262-263.
- ¹⁸⁵ Cf. *HEccl* 13.18.
- ¹⁸⁶ *HNat* 11.7.
- ¹⁸⁷ *HNat* 11.6.
- ¹⁸⁸ *HNat* 11.7.
- ¹⁸⁹ P.S. Russell, "A First Look at the Christology of St. Ephrem the Syrian", quoted in G. Thumpanirappel, *Christ in the East Syriac Tradition*, Satna 2003, 76-77.
- ¹⁹⁰ *HNat* 8.17.
- ¹⁹¹ *HNat* 6.1.
- ¹⁹² *HNat* 2.7.
- ¹⁹³ *Hymns on Mary*, no.7. See Sophy Rose, *Church as Mystery and Communion*, Kottayam 1998, 329.
- ¹⁹⁴ *CNis* 27.8.
- ¹⁹⁵ *HNat* 16.11.
- ¹⁹⁶ *HParad* 4.5; *HEccl* 26.4.
- ¹⁹⁷ *HEccl* 26.4.
- ¹⁹⁸ *HNat* 13.2.
- ¹⁹⁹ *HEccl* 29.7.
- ²⁰⁰ *HCruc* 3.9.
- ²⁰¹ *HNat* 16.4-6.

7

Ecclesiology in the East Syriac Tradition

James Palackal

The quest for ecclesiological themes in the early Syriac Fathers may not be a search for a systematic treatise on the Church in clear propositions, since the forms in which the doctrines about the Church were expressed had been inherited from the primitive Judaeo-Christian Church with its midrashic traditions than those which prevailed in the Church of the Greco-Roman Empire.¹ This is all the more true of the 'ecclesiology', if one could say so, of the early Syriac Fathers like Aphrahat and Ephrem. Their reflection on the Church is unsystematic. History and eschatology are the limits within which their occasional thoughts on the Church swing. They do not approach the mystery of the Church by means of intellectual scrutiny but locating the Church within the *Heilsgeschichte*, they approach it through the eye of faith. Hence they use symbolic and figurative expressions by way of typologies,² catenae of *testimonia* and symbolic titles to explain the nature and mystery of the Church. Most of the references to the Church in their works are implicit rather than explicit.

In attempting to study the symbolic and typological expressions of the early Syriac Fathers on the Church, one should be careful not to impose Greek philosophical categories and thought patterns on the Semitic authors. No Syriac author up to the 5th century, probably with the exception of *Liber Graduum*,³ ever seemed to have asked the question, 'what exactly is the nature of the Church'?

This short study seeks to unearth the understanding of the Church in the early Syriac tradition up to the 5th century, which is commonly designated as the Semitic pole of Syriac Christianity.⁴ This period is comparatively free from Greek philosophical thought patterns and categories and it is here that one touches the uniqueness of Syriac theology which is both Semitic and biblical. Views of Aphrahat and Ephrem on the Church, expressed almost entirely through imagery and typology, are highlighted here, as they are the authentic representatives of the Semitic pole of Syriac

theology and, wherever necessary, liturgical texts are also called in to service.

1. The Primary Source of Early Syriac 'Ecclesiology'

Scripture is the primary source of the ecclesiological meditations of the early Syriac Fathers, often couched in typological and symbolical language.⁵ Typology refers to an early Christian, especially Jewish Christian, practice of reading the Old Testament and finding in it not merely an intervention of God in the history of Israel but a mystery (ܠܝܝܪܐ *raza*) hidden which is revealed only to an eye of faith.⁶ The mystery hidden in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the Christ event or in the mystery of the Church. The theological presupposition of the Fathers, especially Aphrahat and Ephrem, in reading the Old Testament to find in it pointers to Christ and to his Church can be summed up as follows: It is the same God (a) who guided the original events in the Old Testament with a view to subsequent revelation to us, (b) who inspired the former writers to write of the events for our future instruction, (c) who guided the events of Christ's life and the founding of the Church which 'fulfill' the types and prophecies, and (d) who inspired the New Testament writers to bring out the unity of God's dispensation.⁷ This presupposition is beautifully expressed by Aphrahat in his demonstration IV, when he speaks about Patriarch Jacob's prayer: "in anticipation thereby was shown the 'mystery' [raza] of the calling of the Gentiles."⁸

However, the task of tracing and interpreting the biblical types and symbols which the early Syriac writers apply to the Church is indeed a complex one. Both Aphrahat and Ephrem have many things in common in describing the Church and they point to a common source. They reveal inherited traditions of midrashic exegesis and symbolism, expressed above all in formal titles applied to Christ and often to the Apostles and to the Church. These biblical titles in fact give us a glimpse of the early Syriac Church's consciousness of her nature till the beginning of the 5th century. This can hardly be called 'ecclesiology' in the modern sense of the term, even though speculative theology was well under development in the Greco-Latin Church a century before the time of Aphrahat and Ephrem.⁹

2. Limitations of Early Syriac ‘Ecclesiology’

Early Syriac thought still awaiting an immanent parousia did not concern much with the structural set up of the Church. So also the serious heresies of the fourth century, which affected the East Syriac Church to the minimum, paved the way in some measure to think about the unity and set up of the church. Even in an author like Ephrem, we find limitations in his understanding of the mystery of the Church probably due to the fact that he did not know all the books of the NT, especially that of I Peter. It is also true that the Syriac Church received the book of Revelation at a comparatively late date. The Syriac paradisiacal imagery runs very close to the Apocalypse, yet there is never a reference, and the great theme of the heavenly Jerusalem occurs only by allusion to Gal 4.26. R. Murray believes that this is a loss for Syriac thought on the church.¹⁰

The limited New Testament canon of the early Syriac Fathers and the features of the Diatesseron text have certainly influenced early Syriac theology. The lack of knowledge of some New Testament books probably accounts for the fact that the theological developments in the rest of the Church with regard to some themes on the Church are not paralleled in Syriac milieu. Further, the strong ascetical spirit of the early Syriac Church with its corresponding eschatological expectation could have diminished the role of the Church in the thought of the early Syriac writers.¹¹

3. Covenant: the Key to Understand Early Syriac Church

Scholars point out that the informal beginnings of monastic life has its roots in Syriac Christianity, often called as “proto monasticism”.¹² The Syriac term **ܐܝܗܝܕܝܘܬܐ** *ihidaya* can mean both ‘the only begotten’ (*monogenes*) and the ‘single one’ (*monakos*). It is suggested that there are three elements involved in the doctrine of *ihidayuta* (**ܐܝܗܝܕܝܘܬܐ**): singleness by leaving family and not marrying; becoming single-minded by accepting the ‘circumcision of heart’ and, thirdly, putting on the only begotten (*ihidaya*), referring to a special covenantal relationship to Christ. Those who adopt this way of life form a kind of ‘Church within the Church’ called the *Qyama* (**ܩܝܡܐ**).¹³

The term *Qyama* is often rendered as ‘covenant’ and the concept of ‘covenant’ is central to understand early Syriac

Christianity. The term *bnay qyama* (ܩܝܡܐ ܒܢܝ) refers to the ‘sons of the covenant’ and *bnat qyama* (ܩܝܡܐ ܒܢܝܬ) to the ‘daughters of the covenant’. By the fourth century they are a recognizable body within the Church, some living at home, others in small communities, but not yet isolated from the laity.¹⁴ In fact, they were trying to live their baptismal commitment in its fullness,¹⁵ very closely associated to the community of the faithful.

In Aphrahat, especially in his Demonstration V, 232.6-8, the term ‘qyama’ has a clear ecclesiological meaning: ‘For see, the whole *qyama* of God is exempt from the burden of kings and princes’. In Demonstration VII, the priests are said to convoke the whole *qyama* at baptism.¹⁶ In Ephrem too, the term *qyama* has, at least, implicit ecclesiological connotations. In *Carmina Nisibena*. 21,5,¹⁷ he uses the term *qyama* and ‘church’ in parallelism and E. Beck suggests that the term *qyama* here reflects the idea that the *bnay qyama* are the ‘elite church’ or the ‘church within the Church’.¹⁸ At any rate, the very terms *ihidya* and *qyama* point to the centrality of the covenant and to the monastic spirit that was prevalent in the early Syriac Church.¹⁹

Aphrahat understands Christian freedom as the supreme gift received by the one who joins himself to the Church. In Demonstration V, he sees the dignity of the new ‘holy nation’ in its freedom; “He had freed for himself a holy Nation. For see, the whole Covenant of God is free from the burden of kings and rulers [Hos 8. 10]. Even if a man has been a slave of pagans, the moment he comes near to the Covenant of God, he becomes free”.²⁰ This is one of the rare places in Aphrahat where ‘Covenant’ still seems clearly to mean the whole church community, which is probably the most primitive Syriac usage.²¹

4. Major Ecclesiological Themes

In the early Syriac sources, while discussing the divine dispensation, profoundly-held beliefs about the Church emerge either explicitly or implicitly. The most common themes about the Church in our authors are: that the Church of the Gentiles has replaced Israel as the New People of God; that the Church is vitally united with Christ who ‘put on the body’ and gave us his own body to be the ‘Medicine of Life’; that she is one with him as Mystic Vineyard, Vine and Grape, and that she receives the oil of

initiation, consecration and healing from him as Mystic Olive, that the Church is the Tree of Life in the midst of the New Paradise. In baptism the Christians become the children of the Church, the virgin Bride of Christ, the Mother of the faithful and the daughter of light. Within the Church the apostolic functions are handed down by a succession of laying-on of hands which came to Christ from the Jewish priesthood through John the Baptist, and which Christ passed on to the Apostles. They, and the bishops following them, have their proper titles as Christ has; some shared with him (as Shepherd, Physician, Steward); some correlative - as Betrother of the Bride for Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom.²²

The eschatological vocation of the Church is also pointed out by Aphrahat, Ephrem, and by the author of *Liber Graduum* as they see the Church as a stage in the history of salvation, symbolized by the Old Dispensation and itself looking for fulfillment in the kingdom or Paradise. The eschatological dimension of the Church is underscored implicitly or explicitly by the use of various metaphors such as ship, haven, house of refuge, the type of Sinai and the Heavenly Tabernacle, the eschatological banquet, bridal chamber etc. Both Aphrahat and Ephrem lay heavy emphasis on the fact that the Church is the New People of God in contrast to the Jews. Aphrahat demonstrates this fact than any other Church Father using several biblical *testimonia*. However, the Pauline metaphor of the body of Christ for the Church does not seem to receive the due importance both in Aphrahat and Ephrem.²³

A special place belongs to Simon, whom Christ the *Kepha* (ܟܦܟܐ Rock) called *Kepha* and set in his own place as the principal foundation of the Church; but no doctrine of a lasting primacy is connected with this. Jurisdiction is evidently a familiar concept, expressed by possession of the keys and the status of steward. Aphrahat takes for granted the existence of a true spiritual authority in the Church, but our author gives us little insight into Church order in the full sense.²⁴ Below we shall attempt to study a few of them.

4.1. The Church of the Nations

The Euphrates-Tigris valley was peopled by a multitude of ethnic groups. Christians were acutely conscious that they

constituted such a new ethnic group, “the people which is of the peoples”, and Aphrahat repeatedly explained the new social entity formed by the disciples of the Messiah. Since a peculiar religion was part of the self-definition of each ethnic group, it was important to underline the fact that the Christians likewise constituted not merely a cult, but a true “people”.²⁵

Among the early Syriac authors we find two conceptual models regarding the origin of the Church: one is a ‘continuation’ model and the other is a ‘rejection’ model. The first model understands the Church as being constituted out of two elements, the Jewish Nation or ‘People’ and the Gentile Nations or ‘Peoples’. Aphrahat writes: “David married two king’s daughters, and Jesus also married two king’s daughters – the assembly of the People and the assembly of the Peoples”.²⁶ The second conceptual model understands the Church as being gathered solely from the Peoples, or Gentiles.²⁷ According to this model, God has rejected the chosen people of the OT and instead has elected the “the church of the nations”, “a nation from nations” or the “church of the gentiles”. The Church is the great Christian community instituted by Christ in place of the synagogue. It is the second model that is predominant in the ancient Syriac tradition.²⁸

In developing the theme of the election of the Gentiles in place of the former Israel, our authors use two traditional literary forms: typological parallels and lists of *testimonia* or a chain of proof texts. Aphrahat, in particular is engrossed with the theme that the gentiles have taken the place of the Jews. He develops it by means of four testimony-lists in Demonstrations XI, XII, XVI and XIX. Demonstration XVI is precisely “On the Nations which have taken the place of the Nation”.²⁹ Ephrem in a complex meditation in the ‘hymns on the Church’, sees the replacement of the tables of the Law, which Moses broke in anger, as a type of replacement at three levels – in the Redemption of fallen man, in the fulfillment of types, and in the Church succeeding the Synagogue.³⁰

However, our authors do not reject the value of Israel who is elected by God to be the chosen people. They also understand the Church as being constituted out of two elements, the Jewish Nation or People, and the Gentile Nations or Peoples. Both Aphrahat and Ephrem advocate that God chose one Nation in order thereby to bring His grace to all. In the opinion of Aphrahat,

through the call of Abraham God has extended salvation to all nations. In demonstration XI, Aphrahat advocates the primacy of faith over against circumcision which is a temporary sign of the covenant. It is through faith that one shares in the blessings promised to Abarham: "Therefore it is clear that circumcision is of no avail without faith; but whoever has circumcised the foreskin of his heart, has faith and lives, and becomes a son of Abraham".³¹

As an instrument of his plan of salvation, God chose one people for his own, but all its privileges destined to be extended to all nations, and all its rites were types seeking fulfillment in the Church. Both Ephrem and Aphrahat find in the Church the fulfillment of the types spoken in the Old Testament. Ephrem in his commentary on the Diatesseron says: "As long as the Church was in concealment, types told of her, while she herself remained silent; but when the Church herself was made manifest, she began to interpret the types, her [former] interpreters, which through this revelation of her became silent".³² That is to say, God's choice of Israel, is not complete in itself but is a movement in history, pointing to fulfillment; and this is true of all its institutions – circumcision, covenant, Passover, priesthood and its sacrifices, kingship and the assembly or the synagogue.³³

4.2. The Theme of Body of Christ and Corporate Personality

The idea of corporate personality is very prominent in Jewish thought. The freedom with which, in Semitic thought, the individual can merge into the collective, and the collective into the individual is clearly seen in the Old Testament. This way of thinking is also seen in the Syriac authors of the 4th century especially in Ephrem. For instance, 'Adam' in Ephrem can refer to the individual of the Genesis narrative or to the human race in general, or indeed to both simultaneously.³⁴ The very creative tension between the individual and the collective is seen in Ephrem's ecclesiological vision of the relationship between the individual Christian and the Church. It is the Church who is betrothed to Christ at Christ's own baptism in Jordan, whereas at each Christian baptism it is the individual soul that is betrothed.³⁵

It is, however, important to consider the extent to which the Syriac Fathers hold or develop a conception of the Church as the body of Christ or the concept of 'corporate personality' in

relation to the Incarnate Christ. Our authors are, in fact, content with a few simple forms of expression, which are only implicitly ecclesiological in nature. The image frequently used by the Syriac Fathers to signify the mystery of incarnation is “Christ put on a body”.³⁶ They emphasize the fact that Christ put on a human body to redeem us and he gave us this body (resurrected) in the mystery of the Eucharist. Ephrem, while speaking of the mystery of Incarnation, without explicitly expressing any doctrine on the church, provides us with material to find an implicit ecclesiological argument. He sets up an implicit ecclesiological argument when he teaches that the same body of Christ that healed us and rose again, has been given to us in sacramental form to heal us and to incorporate us in him in the Church, and gives us a pledge of resurrection. Even though Aphrahat uses the expression ‘put on body’ he never develops the idea of the solidarity of Christ’s body with our bodily nature in such a way as to make the doctrine implicitly sacramental and ecclesiological.

R. Murray, after examining the biblical ‘corporate personality’ notions of Son of Man, Second Adam and Mystical Body in the 4th century Syriac literature, states that the effort is much less rewarding than might have been expected of a Semitic Christian culture.³⁷ Neither Aphrahat nor Ephrem seem to start from St. Paul, and never develops these Pauline themes ecclesologically. More over, they have very little to speak about the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church who is the bond of communion.

4.3. Church as the Bride of Christ

Syriac tradition understands the Church in sacramental terms. The Church is not only the source of the mysteries, it is also a sacrament of the union of Christ with his people.³⁸ The Syriac Fathers, especially Aphrahat, in Demonstration XIV, calls Christ the ‘bridegroom’, Apostles the ‘betrothers’, the Church or the community of the faithful as ‘bride’: “He [Christ] is the bridegroom and the apostles are the betrothers and we are the bride; let us prepare our dowry”.³⁹ The nuptial language, to show the intimate relationship between Christ and his Church, is also common place in the East Syriac liturgical tradition.⁴⁰ The various titles⁴¹ used for the Church in the liturgy such as: ‘adorned bride’⁴²

‘glorious bride’⁴³ ‘bride of the King’⁴⁴, ‘Bride of Jesus the high priest, the heavenly bridegroom’⁴⁵ etc. highlight this fact.

The presentation of the Church as the bride of Christ is part of the New Testament heritage, especially found in the Pauline letters. Christ spoke of himself as the bridegroom, taking up the prophetic symbolism of God’s ‘marriage’ with Israel through the covenant. The Old Testament provides clear instances where Israel is depicted as betrothed to God, the betrothal having taken place at the time of the Covenant at Mount Sinai. God has laid the foundation of the Church on Mount Sinai.

East Syriac tradition many a time presents the Church as the “Bride of the Father”. God set up His presence on Mount Sinai and spoke of it as the type of His Church and finally accepted her as His Bride. “Blessed are you (church) because you have become the bride of the Father”.⁴⁶ “Blessed are you, O faithful Church the bride of the Father, the King of kings”.⁴⁷

According to the East Syriac Fathers, especially Ephrem, the betrothal that has taken place at Sinai through Moses is rejected by God due to the adultery of the bride, worshiping the golden calf, at the foot of Sinai.⁴⁸ God has selected a new bride for his Son, the Church of the New Testament, instead of the synagogue. The baptism of Christ in the Jordan is the key event, and Church is betrothed to Christ at his baptism: “Blessed be Christ who has betrothed you to himself from the water of baptism”.⁴⁹ This betrothal is foreshadowed in the Old Testament with the chain events that took place at the well. In his *Commentary on the Diatesseron*, Ephrem makes allusions to the various betrothals that took place at the well: that of Eleazer (for Isaac) with Rebeca, Jacob with Rachel, and Moses with Zipporah: “All these were types of Our Lord who espoused his Church at his baptism in the Jordan”.⁵⁰ The Church as the bride stood in need of purification as she is soiled by sin. Christ has purified her, washed her clean, at his baptism in the waters of Jordan.⁵¹ This purification owes its redemptive force to the death of Christ on the cross.⁵²

In the application of the bridal imagery, the East Syriac Fathers, especially Ephrem, move freely from the collective to the individual, from the Church to the individual Christian and then back from the individual to the collective. For instance, the Syriac authors connect the theme of bride and bridegroom with Christian

baptism.⁵³ They point out that at Christian baptism each individual soul is betrothed to Christ. Ephrem considers the Eucharist as the wedding feast of Christ, where the bride is both church and the individual soul.⁵⁴

As stated above, the image of the Church as the bride of Christ is a theme dear to the East Syriac liturgical tradition. In the liturgical prayers of the season of Epiphany, it is stated that the betrothal between Christ and his Church was witnessed by John the Baptist.⁵⁵ Christ at his baptism in the Jordan washed and purified his bride that she, according to Paul, might be without spot or wrinkle.⁵⁶ “Blessed are you O holy and glorious Church, bride of Christ who was gladdened in his love to give you his body and saved you by his blood and to cleanse your impurities by his bath (baptism) and joined you in his grace...”.⁵⁷ However, it is the Holy Spirit that purifies as the Spirit imparts the power of purification and re-birth to the water at baptism. This idea is clearly seen in the rite of baptism in *The Acts of Thomas*.⁵⁸

The baptism in the Jordan reaches its climax with Christ’s salvific death on the cross. The Church is betrothed to Christ at Jordan but truly becomes the bride of Christ on the cross. According to the East Syriac liturgical tradition, the Church is wedded to Christ on the cross and in his life-giving blood he has written the marriage document.⁵⁹ The blood of the cross also stands for the dowry which Christ has paid for his bride: “Exult and rejoice O faithful Church in the bridegroom... who has given you his body and costly blood as dowry”.⁶⁰

4.4. The Origin of the Church from the Side of Christ

The birth of the Church from the side of Christ on the cross is eloquently developed by the East Syriac Fathers. Christ’s espousal of the Church at his baptism, the anticipatory symbol of his death, was fulfilled on Calvary, when the Church was born from his side, the second Eve from the second Adam. In his *Commentary on the Diatesseron*, when he reaches Jn 19.14, Ephrem breaks out into lyrical prose and exclaims: “...Let us enter in through that side which was pierced, since we were stripped naked by the counsel of the rib that was extracted. The fire that burnt in Adam, burnt him in that rib of his. For this reason the side of the second Adam has been pierced, and from it comes a flow of

water to quench the fire of the first Adam".⁶¹ And a little further on he continues, "There came forth blood and water, that is, his Church, which is built on his 'side': just as in the case of Adam, his wife was taken from his side, Adam's wife being his 'rib', so our Lord's blood is his Church. From Adam's rib issued death, from our Lord's rib life".⁶²

The water and blood issued from the side of Christ refer to the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist which are constitutive of the Church.⁶³ One enters the community of the faithful through Baptism and the Christian is nourished in the Eucharist; both symbolized by the pierced side of Christ on the cross. The baptism of Christ and his death on the cross, though distant and separated events in linear time, intersect and become one in sacred time or liturgical time. Baptism, thus, becomes an anticipatory symbol of the death on the cross.

4.5. The Church as Mother

The image of the Church as Mother of all the faithful, inheriting the personification of Israel as Bride of Yahweh and developed already in the New Testament by St Paul (Gal 4.21-31) and in the Johannine Apocalypse, is classical in the Church Fathers from the second century. This theme, however, does not get much attention among the Syriac Fathers. The reason for the neglect of the theme by the Fathers is probably the fact that in the Early Syriac Christianity, the place of Mother is occupied by the Holy Spirit. However, it is true that one neither finds a developed understanding of the activity of the mother Spirit in the Church among the early Syriac Fathers.

The motherhood of the Church is exercised through the Word and Sacrament.⁶⁴ It is through baptism that the Church becomes the mother of the faithful. In his *Hymns on Epiphany* Ephrem says: "Baptism is a mother who engenders each day spiritual infants and gives to God new and holy sons".⁶⁵ He considers the baptismal font as a womb in *Hymns on Virginity*.⁶⁶ He speaks of Christ as being baptized in the womb of the river Jordan, and that womb, as it has been sanctified by Christ's presence within it, becomes the 'womb' that gives rebirth to Christians at baptism: "At your baptism, O saviour, the fountains of water were sanctified, and they became a spiritual womb for

humanity”.⁶⁷ Just as in the first birth we are born from a natural womb in the second birth, i.e., baptism, we are born anew in the womb of water.

The motherhood of the Church in baptism is further developed in *Liber Graduum*, where the Church on earth is repeatedly pictured as a mother rearing children for the Church in heaven: “this blessed nurse, which every day bears and brings up fair wards and sends them to that great Church on high”.⁶⁸ A little further on it is stated: “Now this Church, with its altar and baptism, bears mankind like children; they suck [her] milk, till they are weaned”.⁶⁹ After being born in baptism the Mother Church nourishes them by means of the breast feed of the Word of God, as Augustine confirms: “The Church is a nursing mother whose breasts are the Old and New Testaments”,⁷⁰ and through the nourishing food of the Eucharist.

The East Syriac liturgical tradition also celebrates the motherhood of the Church, especially in its Liturgy of the Hours: “Confirm O Lord, her [Church] life in your mercy and guard her children in your grace”.⁷¹ “Look with compassion and have mercy, O our Saviour, and raise up your Church and guard her children through the prayer of all your saints”.⁷² It is further stated that the Church not only begets children but, like a mother, she teaches them heavenly truths; the truths about the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit which she herself has studied from the apostles.⁷³

4.6. Mary and the Church

If the application of the term ‘mother’ to both Church and Holy Spirit failed to inspire the Syriac Fathers to any richer understanding of the Church, the more traditional sharing of titles between the Church and Mary is found several times in the Syriac Fathers, especially in Ephrem. The mutual relationship between Mary and the Church, founded on the early patristic doctrine of the Second Eve, may be summed up as follows: a) The birth of Eve from Adam’s side, while sleeping, is the type of the birth of the Church from the side of the Second Adam as he slept on the cross. b) Eve’s temptation and consent to the fallen angel is paralleled in reverse by Mary’s consent to God’s angel; they are respectively the cause of our ruin and of our restoration. c) Eve as ‘Mother of all the living’ is the type of the Church, begetting all to eternal life.

Here Mary has a twofold relationship to the Church. She is in the Church, the first of the redeemed; but also, since the Church is Christ's body, Mary, the mother of Christ's personal body, is mystically mother of all Christ's members in the mystical Body. Thus Mary and the Church are interwoven as types.⁷⁴

The Syriac Fathers also develop a parallelism between Mary, the mother of Christ and Baptism, the mother of Christians. Jacob of Serugh exclaims thus: "Mary gave a body for the Word to become incarnate while Baptism gives the Spirit for men to be renewed... Through Mary the Divine becomes human through Baptism the human becomes divine".⁷⁵ Both Mary and Baptism fill the role of the New Eve: Mary gives birth to Christ, Baptism to Christians. The sanctification that Mary receives through the presence of Christ in her womb is analogous to the presence of the 'fire' of the Holy Spirit in both the baptismal water and in the Eucharistic elements. This is clearly seen in Ephrem: "See, Fire and Spirit are in the womb of her who bore you, Fire and Spirit are in the river in which you were baptized; Fire and Spirit are in our baptism, and in the Bread and Cup are Fire and Holy Spirit".⁷⁶

4.7. The Eschatological Vocation of the Church

The expression 'pilgrim Church', adopted so strikingly by the second Vatican Council, is inspired by St. Augustine, but it is no less appropriate to the conviction of early Syriac Christianity that 'here we have no abiding city'.⁷⁷ A systematic treatise on the eschatological vocation of the Church, in the sense of a realized eschatology, may not be the attraction of the early Syriac Fathers; they were more concerned about the 'Last Things' (eschata) than about the Church in this world.

However, themes related to eschatological vocation of the Church are not absent in early Syriac sources. For instance, *Liber Graduum*,⁷⁸ introduces the concept of three Churches: the heavenly Church, the visible Church on earth and the interior Church of the heart. All the three are intimately related and the heavenly Church is the perfect one, the very goal of Christian life, to which is directed the other two. The visible Church is modeled on the heavenly Church and the Church of the heart on the visible Church. Christian growth consists in becoming aware of the existence of

the heavenly Church alongside the visible Church and then uniting with these the internal Church of the Heart.

Ephrem, in his *Hymns against Heresies*, understands the life of the whole human race as a pilgrimage involving three stages: from Eden to Moses, from Moses to Christ and the age of Church which is moving towards the future kingdom.⁷⁹ Ephrem, in his works, very often alludes to the eschatological Paradise as the consummation of the history of salvation.⁸⁰ To depict the journey of the Church through time towards *eschata*, the various Christian traditions, as do the Syriac tradition, present images related both to navigation such as ship, haven etc. and to 'Heavenly Tabernacle' and 'Wedding Feast'.⁸¹

4.7.1. The Church as Ship (ܐܠܦܐ Elpa)

Early Christianity, especially in its catechesis,⁸² presents the Church as a ship which journeys through a troubled and stormy world, considered as an ocean, towards the harbour of peace. This is elaborated in works like the Pseudo-Clementine *Epistle to James*, *Apostolic Constitutions* and Hippolytus' *Treatise on Antichrist*, where the Church is depicted as the ship, God the owner of the ship, Christ the pilot, bishop the lookout man, the presbyters the crew, the deacons oarsmen and the catechists the stewards.⁸³

The imagery of the ship is found in the early Syriac sources often with different shades of meaning and not always with strict ecclesiological connotations. In *The Odes of Solomon*, 16,1, the Odist compares his work of praise to that of a helmsman steering a ship.⁸⁴ Aphrahat in demonstration XIV, exhorts the clergy, the helmsman, to take care of his ship that it may not sink and lose the merchandise.⁸⁵ In demonstration XXIII, he compares the Church to a ship navigating through troubled waters which is directed by the righteous who are the helmsmen.⁸⁶ Ephrem also uses the imagery of the ship and Christ is presented as the mariner who has conquered the sea with the wood of the cross.⁸⁷ However, here, the reference is not so much to the Church as to the ascetic's struggle for perfection. The Syriac Fathers, especially Ephrem,⁸⁸ also compare the Church to the ark of Noah which is guided by Christ the 'steersman'. So also Mary, the type and true model of the Church, is compared to a ship in the East Syriac liturgical tradition.⁸⁹

4.7.2 Coming to Harbour

The imagery of haven or coming to harbour,⁹⁰ closely related to the imagery of the ship, is a recurrent symbolism in East Syriac liturgical prayers. This metaphor has allusions in the Bible, in Greek classical tradition and in the Judaeo-Christian tradition but not without Hellenistic influence.⁹¹ This metaphor is variously applied; it is applied to Christ,⁹² to Virgin Mary,⁹³ to the Church⁹⁴ etc. In Ephrem, the metaphor of haven is understood from theological, eschatological, moral ascetical, ecclesial and monastic perspectives.⁹⁵

In the liturgical prayers, the Church is presented as a haven or harbour of peace: "A harbour of peace, O Christ, you have established on earth for your praisers on the type of your celestial settlement and while sitting at the right of your heavenly Father, you have permeated your Church, O king of glory, with the quality and beauty of your cross... we beseech you a mighty wall to her and keep for her enduring peace".⁹⁶ "Our Lord made a harbour of peace and a haven of expiation for those who are tormented".⁹⁷ Here, the Church is seen as the harbour of peace. Peace is the eschatological gift of the risen Lord to his Church, achieved through his atoning death and resurrection. Christ has established the Church here on earth as a haven of peace and it is modeled on his heavenly habitation.⁹⁸ In other words, though the Church is established on earth, its foundation, fashion and final destination etc. are heavenly.⁹⁹

4.8 The Rock and the House on the Rock

The early Syriac Fathers understand the Church as being established on the rock of faith like a building.¹⁰⁰ Of the titles used for Christ and the Apostles by them, the use of the title 'rock' (*kepha*), in allusion to Mt 16.18, is a special one as it is the functional title (*kepha* = Peter) given by Christ to Simon. Christ the Chief Shepherd made Simon the chief shepherd in his place, so Christ the *Kepha*, foretold by prophecy and type, made Simon the *kepha* in his place, and said that on that *kepha* he would build his Church, and the 'bars of sheol' would not prevail over it.¹⁰¹

Aphrahat in his Demonstration I¹⁰² regards Christ as the firm rock (*Kepha šarrirta* ܟܦܗܐ ܫܪܪܝܪܬܐ), the foundation upon which is raised the house of faith, and then, he calls Simon *kepha*

both as the foundation and the building of the Church.¹⁰³ Even though Aphrahat's use of the figure *kepha* is complex, citing a number of biblical texts as *testimonia*, it is not devoid of ecclesiological overtones. For instance, the building on the rock is a natural as well as an explicitly scriptural symbol for the Church and Aphrahat relates the figure more to the structure of faith. But he occasionally uses it in reference to the Church.¹⁰⁴

Ephrem's development of the theme is similar to that of Aphrahat. Christ is the rock or stone, prefigured by a number of types. The theme of Christ the rock making Simon the rock is often implicit and rarely explicit as in Aphrahat. Simon's name 'kepha' is once again seen as a functional title shared with Christ.¹⁰⁵ Ephrem refers implicitly to the house on the rock and contrasts the Church with the Tower of Babel.

Conclusion

The ecclesiology of the early Syriac authors is couched in typological and symbolic language than in direct logical presentations. They do not provide a systematic and coherent presentation of the nature of the Church when compared with their contemporaries belonging to other traditions. This weakness could very well be their strength too as for the early Syriac Fathers Church is basically a mystery of faith. To speak about God's saving actions in human history and to speak about hidden realities symbolic language is much more a powerful medium than direct expressions. In this they stand faithful to biblical categories and Jewish midrashic traditions. They understand the Old Testament as related to the New Testament as type to fulfillment wherein the true meaning of the Old is revealed.

The early Syriac tradition understands the Church within the history of salvation and the Syriac Fathers have a sacramental and soteriological understanding of the mystery of the Church. The focal point of the divine dispensation (ܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܗ *mdabbranutha*) is the Christ event. Christ through his baptism, death and resurrection achieved salvation and established the Church as the *locus* par excellence of its experience. The Church, as the type of the future kingdom, is the vehicle of this salvation and prepares her children to receive the fullness of salvation in the *eschata* through the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Nevertheless, it is also

true that the early Syriac authors do not give the required importance for the life of the Church in this world. The strong ascetical and eschatological bend of mind of our authors must have contributed to a weaker sense of the Church as an entity in this world.

The early Syriac Fathers with their ascetical spirit understand the Church from a covenantal point of view. For them, at the heart of the reality of the Church stands the covenantal relationship with the only begotten Son. This approach of the Syriac Fathers could be a corrective to a mere juridical and hierarchic approach to the reality of the Church.

The typology and the symbolisms that the Syriac Fathers use to describe the Church are all authentically Semitic, a true native growth, without the limitations of any foreign element. It is the task of every Church, and has been the glory of Eastern Christianity, to make Christ's message truly 'incarnate' in every nation and culture being faithful to the heritage and genius of their particular ecclesial tradition. In this endeavour early Syriac theology can be a true guide and model for the Syro-Malabar Church.

The weakness of early Syriac thinking about the Church centers, perhaps, on the little-developed doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Syriac Fathers, loving to contemplate on the maternal action of the Spirit, seemed to have remained content with a mainly personal and sacramental view of the Holy Spirit's activity. Our authors are very much aware of the divine indwelling in each Christian as in a temple, but of it in the whole Church as in a temple they seem much less aware.¹⁰⁶ Hence their understanding of the Church is christocentric than being christo-pneumatocentric.

The Syriac ecclesial tradition has a great ecumenical value. The Semitic wing of Christianity, the Syriac tradition, in its early unadulterated form belongs to the undivided heritage of the universal Church. As such it is to be regarded as the common patrimony of all ecclesial traditions and has a strong ecumenical import in the present scenario of the divided Churches. In fact, the unity of the Church is a recurring theme in the East Syriac liturgical tradition. St. Ephrem compares the unity of the Church to the "seamless, undivided tunic" of Christ, the tunic being the

symbol of the true and undivided faith handed over by the apostles.¹⁰⁷

Notes

¹ R. Murray, "The Rock and the House on the Rock: A Chapter in the Ecclesiological Symbolism of Aphraates and Ephrem", *OCP* 30 (1964) 315.

² For details, cf. E. Beck, "Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphrahat und Ephräm", *Oriens Christianus* 42 (1958) 19-40; P. Yousif, "Exégèse et typologie biblique chez S. Ephrem de Nisibe et chez S. Thomas d'Aquin", *Parole de l'Orient* 13 (1986) 31-50; P. Yousif, "St. Ephrem on Symbols in Nature: Faith, the Trinity and the Cross" (Hymn on Faith, No. 18), *Eastern Churches Review* 10 (1978) 52-60.

³ *Liber Graduum* is a collection of thirty discourses or homilies on the spiritual life, dated later fourth century or early fifth century.

⁴ See, S. Brock, "The Church of the East in the Sassanian Empire up to the Sixth Century and Its Absence from the Councils in the Roman Empire", in *Syriac Dialogue I* (First Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition), Pro Oriente, Austria 1994, 70; S. Brock, "The Two Poles of Syriac Tradition", in C. Payngott (ed.), *Homage to Mar Cariattil*, Kottayam 1992, 74-79.

⁵ See the study of T. Jansma, "Investigations into the Early Syrian Fathers on Genesis: an Approach to the Exegesis of the Nestorian Church and to the Comparison of Nestorian and Jewish Exegesis", *Oud-testamentische Studien* 12, Leiden 1958, 69-181.

⁶ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 290.

⁷ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 290-291.

⁸ Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, IV, 145. 24-25.

⁹ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 341.

¹⁰ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 20-21.

¹¹ S. I. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology with Special Reference to the Maronite Tradition*, University Press of America, New York 1983, 79.

¹² S. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo 1987, introduction, xxi-xxv; S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, SEERI, Kottayam 1989, 50; S. Brock, *Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem*, CIIS, Rome 1985, 107-117; E. Beck, "Asketentum und Mönchtum bei Epraem, in *Il Monachesimo Orientale*, OCA 153, Roma 1958, 341-364.

¹³ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 16. The sixth *Demonstration* by Aphrahat is entitled 'On the *bnay qyama*'; for details, cf. R. Murray, "The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the ancient Syrian

Church", *New Testament Studies* 21 (1974-75) 59-80; G. Nedungatt, "The Covenanters of the Early Syriac Speaking Church", *OCP* 39 (1973) 191-215; M. Maude, "Who were the B'nai Qyama?", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 36 (1935) 13-21; P. Vazheparampil, "Covenant into Quddasa: The Anaphora of Addai and Mari, a re-reading", *Christian Orient* 17/2 (1996) 93-114.

¹⁴ R. Murray, *Symbols*, pp. 13-14; R. Murray, "The Characteristics of earliest Syriac Christianity", 8.

¹⁵ See, A. Vööbus, *Celibacy: a Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church*, Stockholm, 1951; A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, Vols. 1-2, CSCO, 184 & 197 Sub 14 & 17, Louvain 1958, 1960.

¹⁶ Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, VII, 19-20; see also, R. H. Connolly, "Aphraates and Monasticism", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 6 (1905) 522-539.

¹⁷ Ephrem, *Carmina Nisibena*, CSCO 218, Syr. 92, pp. 55-56.

¹⁸ Beck, "Asketentum und Möchtum bei Ephräm", *OCA* 153 (1958) 341-362, 354-355.

¹⁹ For details, see E. Beck, "Ascétisme et Monachisme chez St. Ephrem", *L'Orient Syrien* 3 (1958) 273-298; S. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism", *Numen* 20 (1973) 1-19; R. H. Connolly, "Aphraates and Monasticism", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 6 (1905) 522-539.

²⁰ Aphrahat, *Demonstration* V, 232. 6-10.

²¹ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 61.

²² R. Murray, *Symbols*, 342-343.

²³ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 343-344.

²⁴ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 344.

²⁵ J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-jewish Argument in fourth-century Iran*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1971, 1.

²⁶ Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, XXI, 13, cited in S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 94.

²⁷ For details see, R. A. Darling, "The 'Church from the Nations' in the Exegesis of Ephrem", *Fourth Symposium Syriacum 1984*, OCA 229, Rome 1987, 111-121.

²⁸ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 94.

²⁹ Cf. J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, 159-183, 201-213.

³⁰ Ephrem, *Hymns on the Church*, 44. 21-26; CSCO 198, Syr. 84, p. 113.

³¹ Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, XI, 497. 11-16.

³² Ephrem, *Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant, Version arménienne*, L. Leloir (ed.), CSCO, 137, Arm. I, 2.

³³ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 50.

³⁴ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 17.

³⁵ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 92-106.

³⁶ See the study of S. Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition", in M. Schmidt & C. F. Geyer (eds.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren parallelen im Mittelalter*, Eichstätter Beiträge, band 4, Regensburg 1981, 11-38.

³⁷ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 69-94.

³⁸ S. J. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, 81; cf. also, F. Graffin, "Recherches sur le thème de l'Eglise-Epouse dans les liturgies et la littérature de la langue syriaque", *L'Orient Syriene* 3 (1968) 317-334; J. Vellian, "The Church as Bride in the East Syrian Liturgy", *Studia Liturgica* 11-12 (1976-77) 59-64.

³⁹ Aphrahat, *Demosntration*, XIV.680:10-11, cited in R. Murray, *Symbols*, 131.

⁴⁰ L. Edakalathur, *The Theology of Marriage in the East Syrain Tradition*, Rome 1994; J. Theckanath, *The Church: Bride of Christ*, (UDD, PUL), Rome 1987.

⁴¹ S. Rose, *Church as Mystery and Communion*, OIRSI, Kottayam 1998, 260.

⁴² P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 391.

⁴³ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 394.

⁴⁴ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 394.

⁴⁵ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 394.

⁴⁶ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 410.

⁴⁷ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 410.

⁴⁸ Ephrem, Hymn on Resurrection, 3: 1-7; cited in S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 93-96.

⁴⁹ Ephrem, Hymn on Resurrection, 3: 1-7; cf. also, P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 397.

⁵⁰ Ephrem, *Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant*, 3, 17 (CSCO 137, Arm. 1, p. 450), cited in R. Murray, *Symbols*, 135.

⁵¹ O. Casel, "Die Taufe als Brautbad der Kirche", *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 5 (1925) 144-147.

⁵² S. J. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, 82.

⁵³ H. Engberding, "Die Kirche als Braut in der ostsyrichen Liturgie", *OCP* 3 (1937) 7-8; B. Botte, "Le baptême dans l'Eglise Syrienne", *L'Orient Syrien* 1/2 (1956) 137-155.

⁵⁴ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 99-100; cf. also, S. Brock, "An Epiphany Hymn on the Church as the Bride of Christ", *Harp* 2 (1989) 131-140.

⁵⁵ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 403.

⁵⁶ For details see, O. Casel, "Die Taufe als Brautbad der Kirche", *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 5 (1925) 144-147; J. Danielou, *The*

Bible and the Liturgy, Michigan 1956, 192ff; S. Rose, *Mystery and Communion*, 280-290.

⁵⁷ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 411.

⁵⁸ A. F. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction-Text-Commentary*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1962, 92; S. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, J. Vellian (ed.), *The Syrian Churches Series*, vol. 9, (Enlarged second edition), Pune 1998, 100-104.

⁵⁹ Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 410-411.

⁶⁰ Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 403.

⁶¹ Ephrem, *Commentary on Diatesseron*, XXI, 10, cited in S. Brock, "Mysteries Hidden in the Side of Christ", in J. Vellian (ed.), *The Syrian Church Series*, XIII, Pune 1988, 62-72, 62.

⁶² Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatesseron*, cited in S. Brock, "Mysteries Hidden", 62.

⁶³ S. Brock, "Mary and the Eucharist: An Oriental Perspective", *Eastern Churches Review* 1 (1979) 56-57; J. Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 208-221.

⁶⁴ H. De Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, 59; see also 75-84.

⁶⁵ Ephrem, Hymns on Epiphany, 13: 1, CSCO, 187, t. 83, 175; cf. also, G. Saber, *La théologie baptismale de saint Ephrem*, Kaslik 1974.

⁶⁶ Ephrem, Hymns on Virginity, 7, 7, (CSCO 223, t. 94, p. 26), cited in J. Chalaserry, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Initiation*, 56.

⁶⁷ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. I, 421; see also, S. Brock, *Spirituality in Syriac Tradition*, 62.

⁶⁸ *Liber Graduum*, XII, 285-304, cited in R. Murray, *Symbols*, 142.

⁶⁹ *Liber Graduum*, XII, 285-304, cited from, R. Murray, *Symbols*, 265.

⁷⁰ Tract. in Joan. Epist., 3, cap. 2; *PL* 35, 1998.

⁷¹ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 391.

⁷² P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 421.

⁷³ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 57.

⁷⁴ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 144. See also, R. Murray, "Mary, the Second Eve in the Early Syriac Fathers", *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970) 372-384. For a consideration of patristic texts on this theme, cf. T. Halton (ed.), *The Church: Message of the Fathers of the Church*, vol. 4, Michael Glazier, Wilmington 1985, 223-226; H. De Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, Ignatius, San Francisco 1982; G. A. Maloney, *Mary the Womb of God*, New Jersey 1979, 140-155; R. Cantalamessa, *Mary, Mirror of the Church*, Minnesota 1992. S. Rose, *Mystery and Communion*, 307-319.

⁷⁵ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. I, 204; see also S. Brock, "The Holy Spirit and Mary", in *The Syrian Church Series*, IX, SEERI, 1979, 131.

⁷⁶ Ephrem, Hymns on Faith, 10.17; cited in S. Brock, "Holy Spirit and Mary", 132.

⁷⁷ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 239.

⁷⁸ See the relevant text in R. Murray, *Symbols*, 262-269.

⁷⁹ Ephrem, *Hymns against Heresies*, 26, 4, cited in R. Murray, *Symbols*, 247.

⁸⁰ Otiz de Urbina, "Le Paradis eschatologique d'après saint Ephrem", *OCP* 21 (1955) 467-472; P. Yousif, "La croix de Jésus et le Paradis d'Eden dans la typologie biblique de saint Ephrem", *Parole de l'Orient* 6-7 (1975-76) 29-48.

⁸¹ For a detailed consideration of these images, cf. R. Murray, *Symbols*, 239-276; S. Rose, *Mystery and Communion*, 323-367.

⁸² J. Danielou, *Primitive Christian Symbols*, Maryland 1964, 58.

⁸³ J. Danielou, *Primitive Christian Symbols*, 59-60.

⁸⁴ J. H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1973, 69-70

⁸⁵ Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, XIV, 612, 2-4, cited in R. Murray, *Symbols*, 251.

⁸⁶ Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, XXIII.28, 21-29.6, cited in R. Murray, *Symbols*, 251.

⁸⁷ Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 31, 15, cited in R. Murray, *Symbols*, 251.

⁸⁸ Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 49, 3-6, *CSCO*, 155, t. 74, p. 132.

⁸⁹ For details cf. S. Rose, *Mystery and Communion*, 328-329.

⁹⁰ For details, cf. E. R. Hambye, "The Symbol of the Coming to Harbour", *OCA* 197, Rome 1974, 410-411.

⁹¹ E. R. Hambye, "Coming to Harbour", 410.

⁹² P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. II, 151.

⁹³ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. II, 93.

⁹⁴ *Onita d'Qanke*, first Sunday of the Dedication of the Church, *Supplementum Mysteriorum*, 155.

⁹⁵ E. R. Hambye, "Coming to Harbour", 407.

⁹⁶ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 395.

⁹⁷ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 403.

⁹⁸ P. Bedjan, *Breviarium*, vol. III, 395.

⁹⁹ S. Rose, *Mystery and Communion*, 335-336.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. R. Murray, "The Rock and the House on the Rock: a Chapter in the Ecclesiological Symbolism of Aphraates and Ephrem", *OCP* 30 (1964) 315-362.

¹⁰¹ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 205-206.

¹⁰² Aphrahat, *Demonstration* I, 5.16-8.18.

¹⁰³ R. Murray, "The Rock and the House on the Rock", 317-321.

¹⁰⁴ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 237.

¹⁰⁵ R. Murray, "The Rock and the House on the Rock", 325-350; cf. also, S J. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, 85.

¹⁰⁶ R. Murray, *Symbols*, 344.

¹⁰⁷ Ephrem, Hymns on Crucifixion 6, 6, cited in P. Vazheparampil, "Ecclesial Unity: An East Syrian Perspective", X. Kooduapuzha & J. Panicker (eds.), *Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*, Papers and Joint Statements, Kottayam 2001, 626-645, 629.

Christology in the East Syriac Tradition

John Thoppil

Introduction

The history of the Church witnesses to a rich plurality with regard to the understanding of the mystery of Christ. Different ecclesial traditions had their own Christologies. Sometimes these different Christologies were not appreciated by the various Churches because of the notable differences in the philosophical and theological concepts and approaches. Such a lack of appreciation accounted for the christological controversies in the history of the Church. It is, perhaps, the Churches of the East Syriac tradition, who suffered most on account of the 'misunderstanding' of their Christology. Today there is a great openness from the part of the Church towards the different expressions of the Christological languages. Thus the Christology of the East Syriac tradition is being appreciated by other ecclesial traditions as well. In this short study we may make a general survey of the historical background of East Syriac Christology followed by a brief analysis of its doctrinal expositions.

I. Historical Background of East Syriac Christology

1. Ancient Eastern Centers of Christological Thought

There were two great centers of intense theological activity in the ancient Church: the Alexandrian School and the Antiochene School. They produced great leaders who contributed a great deal to the development of Christology and theology of the Church. Each School considered the theological expressions of the other School contradictory rather than complementary. It paved the way for a number of rivalries, confrontations and condemnations of each other.

1.1. The Alexandrian School

The Christology of the Alexandrian School¹ is known as the 'Christology from above'. Here the Christology was centred on

the Word of God (Logos). For those who followed the theological tradition of the Alexandrian School “The Word became flesh” (Jn 1.14) was the model of presentation of the Incarnation. Logos was for them the subject of all the attributes. They insisted on the oneness of the Subject or Person, i.e., the Logos, the Second Person of the Trinity. Proceeding on the line of St. John, ‘the Word became flesh’, they would say, “the Word suffered and the Word died.” They taught a kind of *theopaschism*. From the Word of God, they came down to the historical Jesus Christ. So their Christology is known as descending Christology. Since they insist on the oneness of the Person, it is also known as unitive Christology. Since they start with John 1.14, it is called *Word-flesh (Logos-Sarx) Christology*. Their catchword was “*natural and hypostatic union*.” It became the Christology of the Council of Ephesus (431), and that of Constantinople II (553). Generally the Alexandrians did not sufficiently stress the human dimension of Christ. Any thought of duality would imply that the Word had not become fully human. From this point of view, the title *theotokos* for Mary is fully explicable and appropriate. Some heresies such as Arianism, Apollinarism and Subordinationism originated in the Alexandrian ambient.² St. Cyril is the best representative of the Alexandrian theological thinking. Clement, Origen, Athanasius, Theophilus were other prominent teachers of this School.

1.2. Antiochene School

The Christology of the Antiochene School³ is known as the Christology from below or an ascending Christology. Those who followed the theological position of the Antiochene School started with the historical Jesus of Nazareth and ascended to affirm the divinity of the Lord. It is known as *Word-man (Logos-Anthropos) Christology*. It clarified the duality and distinction between the divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ. The authentic Antiochene Christology did not divide Jesus Christ into two persons. On the contrary, it gave sufficient emphasis on the humanity also. Unity of Christ was a matter taken for granted. They found the unity on the level of *Person (prosopon)*. It became the Christology of the Council of Chalcedon. The so-called heresy of Nestorianism is a deviated outgrowth of the Antiochene Christology. This heresy professed two persons in Jesus Christ, one divine and the other

human. But in its authentic form, Antiochene Christology is no heretical. When the Antiochenes speak of Logos, they are primarily referring to the divinity of the Lord. They would not predicate all the attributes (like suffering) to the Word as such, but to the *Prosopon of Union*, namely Son, Lord, Jesus Christ and our Savior. For them, Word refers to the divinity, while Son refers to the Person of the Word. They never speak of the man or humanity as independent of the Word. When they speak of the *Word-man*, they mean that the humanity is full, endowed with a rational soul and free will and the divinity is perfect. If this distinction is not kept, then the incarnation cannot be seen effective in bringing about the salvation of humanity. This is precisely the reason why this tradition prefers the title *Christotokos* to *Theotokos* for Mary. They predicate all the glorious things to the divinity, and the humble ones to the humanity, but ultimately to the one Son who is the unique subject of all the predications. There is duality in Jesus Christ, but this duality is not of persons, but of natures. Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, St. John Chrysostom, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Nestorius of Constantinople were the important proponents of the Antiochene School.

The Christologies originating from these Schools could be considered complementary, and not contradictory. When the Alexandrians emphasized the unity and oneness of the Person, the Antiochenes insisted on the duality of the natures. When one Christology was considered the yardstick of orthodoxy, then the other was considered a heresy. It resulted in endless quarrels and controversies. Today's ecumenically oriented leaders of the various Churches are prepared to understand the Schools of thought in their own backgrounds and recognize their unique contribution to an integral Christology.

The East Syriac tradition owes its allegiance to the Antiochene tradition. The Churches of the East Syriac tradition, namely the Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Church and the Syro-Malabar Church, follow a common Christology. Hence it is important for us to focus on the historical development of the christological doctrines in these traditions.

1.2.1. Prominent Christologies of the Antiochene School

1.2.1.1. Christology of Diodore of Tarsus (+391)

Diodore of Tarsus is considered the founder of the exegetical School of Antioch.⁴ Against the monophysitic teaching of Apollinarians, Diodore defended the full divinity and humanity of Christ. His Christology is built upon a Word-Man framework. For him the union of two natures is very profound and inexplicable. The humanity is described as the temple. Word of God indwelt his temple. The union does not in any way change the natures. The humanity is equally honoured with the Word of God. Diodore also did not hold the theory of 'two sons' in Christ. In the one person of Jesus Christ he made a distinction between God the Word and the man born of Mary. But it was misunderstood by the opponents as two separate persons in the Lord. Hence he was posthumously considered as the originator of the heresy of Nestorianism.⁵

1.2.1.2. Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia (+428)

Theodore is a disciple of Diodore and is considered the interpreter *par excellence* and the 'Pillar of Orthodoxy.' He developed systematically the doctrine of 'two natures' in Christ. He emphasized the full humanity in Jesus Christ. According to Theodore, the Son of God and the man were united in one incarnate Person. This concept of the union of two natures in one person brings Theodore close to Chalcedon.

His emphasis on the true humanity led him to expressions, which suggest the independence of Christ's humanity. There is no substantial identity between God and man. By the perfect *conjunction* or unity (*synapheia*), He is one and the same in the person, but not the one and the same in the natures. God the Word, *the form of God* condescended to come down and to put on the *form of servant* for our salvation (Phil 2.6-7). It is through the medium of the humanity that the Word of God revealed himself. For him, Mary was mother of God as well as mother of man, one by the nature of the fact and the other by relation. For Theodore, *ousia*, *physis*, *hypostasis* were almost equivalents; the first two refer to nature in a general sense and the last refers to a concrete expression of a given nature. *Prosopon* expresses the being.

Theodore does not speak of two *prosopa* in Christ,⁶ he reserves the term *prosopon* for the union of two natures. Theodore speaks only of one *prosopon* in two natures.

Like Diodore, Theodore's overemphasis on the humanity of Jesus led to his condemnation posthumously in the Second Council of Constantinople (553). But the modern scholars are of the opinion that in spite of certain dubious expressions in his works, the general trend of his Christology is free from any error. It is difficult to justify the *anathema* pronounced against Theodore at the Council of 553.⁷ Hence the Church of the East did not acknowledge the Fifth Ecumenical Council.⁸

1.2.1.3. Christology of Nestorius (+451)

Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, strongly defended the Christian faith against the attack of monophysitism and tried to explain the unity of two natures in Christ. According to him, it is more accurate and biblical to call Mary *Christotokos*, mother of Christ, who is at once God and man. In this way he tried to avoid the misunderstanding caused by the use of the title *Theotokos*, but it led to enormous problems. Actually Nestorius never held the view of 'two sons' in Christ which is implied by the formula of two *kyane*, two *qnome*, one *Parsôpa*.

The Christology of the Antiochene School appeared in its developed and exaggerated form in Nestorianism. Nestorius was considered to be holding the position that in Christ there are "two physical persons" and "one person of union." The distinction between the human and divine natures was insisted upon. He applied the term 'Christ' to the person of union in the man Jesus who was the special indwelling of God. Consequently Mary was 'Christotokos.' The term 'Theotokos' would be a blasphemy because that would mean that Mary gave birth to the Divinity.⁹ But Nestorius' position can best be explained in his own words:

When I came here, I found a dispute among the members of the Church, some of whom were calling the Blessed Virgin *Mother of God*, while others calling her *Mother of man*. Gathering both parties together, I suggested that she should be called *Mother of Christ*, a term which represented both God and man, as it is used in the gospels.¹⁰

The Church of the East counts him among her saints and venerates him as an orthodox teacher described in her history books as unjustly excommunicated. The Antiochene interpretation of the Council of Chalcedon can consider him as orthodox whereas a Cyrillian interpretation cannot do it. It was unfortunate that Nestorius had already been condemned when the council, whose Creed he could have accepted, was held. Great injustice was done to him.¹¹

Nestorianism has been explained as a school of thought that denies the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ, allowing for only “a moral union” of a human person and a divine person. They were mechanically joined together, one being Son by nature and the other Son by association. Hence there are two persons in Jesus Christ. This position of “Nestorianism” is held neither by Nestorius nor by the Church of the East.¹² Hence care should be taken to understand first the real meaning of the heresy of Nestorianism before accusing Nestorius of this heresy. In fact, Nestorius did not hold the position commonly attributed to him, namely, in Jesus Christ there are two persons, the person of the Logos and the person of man. Today there are scholars who would say that Nestorius was never a Nestorian.¹³ In short, it is improper and unjust on our part to attribute the extreme heretical teachings called Nestorianism to Nestorius because he always stood for due emphasis on the genuine and perfect humanity of Christ against any suggestion that it is incomplete. This, in fact, is required for an integral Christology.

1.2.2. Christological Views of the Important Authors from the East Syriac Tradition

1.2.2.1. St. Ephrem (+373)

St. Ephrem is one of the greatest Fathers of the Syriac Church who belonged to the theological School of Nisibis. He was a great exegete, theologian and poet. He defended Orthodox Christianity against heresies such as Arianism and Manichaeism.¹⁴ Many of his hymns are incorporated into the liturgy of both East and West Syriac traditions. He asserts that Christ is fully divine and fully human. Christ's divinity is not adopted; he is a divine person even in the womb of Mary and from the moment of

conception. The term, 'womb of Mary' conveys that Christ is born from a woman, and thus shares our perfect humanity.¹⁵

Ephrem considered the incarnation as self-emptying of God out of His immense love for humanity. The Form of God assumed the form of servant. How can the Ruler of the world be contained in a single human womb? How can the power that governs everything, dwell in a small womb? Instead of the married womb, He made the virgin womb fruitful. "The Word of the Most High came down and put on a weak body" (*Hymns on Virginit*y 29,1). This condescension to mankind in the incarnation has brought about a permanent change in the relationship between human beings and their Creator. "The deity imprinted itself on humanity so that the humanity might enter into the field of deity." In Ephrem the language of *images* abound. He expresses the intimate union of the two natures with the language of painting. Like a painter, mixing the pigments for painting, God is uniting the divinity and the humanity (*Hymns on Nativity*, 8.2). The perfect image is *Išo mšiha*, *the only Begotten* and the Supreme Saviour of mankind who is one Person in two natures.

Christ has more than one birth; first in eternity, He was born from the Father without a mother. In time He took a body from the Virgin and was born from her without a Father. He was born from the river after his baptism. On the third day after his death he was born from the tomb. He has to be reborn in the mind and heart of each and every believer. For Ephrem, the name 'Jesus' is not the name of his nature but of his deeds, deeds of saving his people from sins (saviour) as announced at the time of Annunciation.¹⁶ Thus Christ is designated as the mediator of redemption.

1.2.2.2. Narsai of Nisibis (+502)

Narsai followed the theological and exegetical tradition of Diodorus and Theodore of Mopsuestia of the Antiochene School. He was the master of an elegant literary style and his poetic writings find a place among the classics of Syriac literature. He spoke of two distinctive natures, and was careful to avoid the notions of 'two Sons' or 'two persons' in Christ. He writes: "Let not the reader think, in reading 'Man' that I mean two sons, for the Son is one indeed."¹⁷

1.2.2.3 Babai the Great (+-c. 628)

According to Babai's interpretation Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the one *Parsopa* having the two natures in their proper *Qnome*.¹⁸ In this way he affirms the real existence of two substances in Jesus Christ. Both natures have their properties without mixture, separation and independence. They are united in the one ontological *Parsopa* of the *Filiation* of the Word, the second *Qnoma* of the trinity. The union and distinction last forever. Jesus as a man does not have a distinct independent ontological person other than that of the Word of God. So there is unity and there is duality.

Babai's picture of Christ is biblical and is in accordance with the Tradition.¹⁹ Repeatedly, Babai teaches that Christ is one and he rejects the accusation of his opponents that the Persians teach the error of two Sons. In his divinity Christ is Son by nature; in his humanity, he is Son by union and assumption. The principle of union in Christ is the *Parsopa* of Filiation. God the Word, the Second *Qnoma* of the Trinity, having the *Parsopa* of Filiation, assumed our humanity to His *Parsopa* and gave His glorious *Parsopa* to the man or humanity formed in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The union did not take away the distinction of natures-divinity and humanity- but remaining what he is, God the Word, united the man to His *Parsopa* of Filiation. At the same time, the Word assumed the lowly state of the manhood and it became His own, not by nature, but by union.²⁰ At the very moment of its formation, the human nature received the *Parsopa* of Filiation and thus he became the Son of the Most High, because of the *Parsopa* of the Word. But the human nature was perfect, endowed with a rational soul and body. The Word did not take the place of the soul. He in fact was united to both soul and body.

Babai was the first in the Persian Church to write a major christological work. His christological teaching is contained primarily in his work, *Book of Union*. For the Church of the East, Babai's Christology is the Christology of the Church. He refuted the accusation launched against the 'Nestorian' christological tradition. His Christology is based on a sound exegesis and an anthropology and it is less dualistic than that of Nestorius. Babai's Christology can be considered the best interpretation of the Antiochene position insisting on the perfection of the human nature

of Christ and the assumption of the form of servant by the Word of God.²¹

II. Doctrinal Exposition of the East Syriac Christology

1. Christological Terminologies

1.1. *Kyânâ*, *Qnoma*, *Parsopa*

The Christology of the Church of the East can be defined on the basis of the terminologies like one *Parsopa*, two *Qnome* and two *Kyâne*. These words are liable to be easily misunderstood and misinterpreted. Very often the Western theologians translate the Syriac theological terms as if they are synonymous with the Greek and the Latin terms which often lead to errors.

***Kyânâ* – Nature:** The term *Kyânâ* corresponds to the Greek *physis* and to the Latin *natura*. The syriac *Kyânâ* has a wider application as it refers to the common elements of a species. It is nature in general and abstract in contrast to a particular and concrete nature.

***Qnoma* – hypostasis:** The term *Qnoma* is the most difficult and complicated of the Syriac terms. It corresponds to the Greek *hypostasis* and to the Latin *substantia*. While the Greek *hypostasis* refers to person, *Qnoma*, for the East Syrians, refers to a substance and a concrete reality in contrast to a general thing. It is the principle which particularizes the general nature – *Kyânâ* - common to all species. It is an individual (concrete) “*Kyânâ*” that exists by itself, e.g., the particular nature of Jesus of Nazareth, in contrast to an abstract nature, e.g., human nature or the divine nature of the Logos in contrast to the general divine nature of the triune God. Hence God the Word united himself to the concrete nature of Jesus Christ from the womb of the virgin and not to the universal human nature. Hence if we state simply that two natures are united in Christ, it would mean that the whole trinity is united with the whole humanity. It is a folly. Therefore individual natures, *Qnome* – divine and human are united in Christ. The universal nature when it divides itself, we have singular nature, *Qnoma*. *Qnoma* is the manifestation of the *Kyânâ*.²² The Son is the *individual* divine nature. Christ was a human *individual* and not a human person. According to Babai the Great, *Qnoma* is the particular nature, numerically one which is not yet a person (*Parsopa*). It is sharing the general nature (*Kyânâ*) with all the similar *Qnome*. It is distinctive among its fellow *Qnome* by reason

of any unique individual properties, for instance, form, or temperament, or fatherhood, or sonship (as in trinity), or masculinity, or femininity, which it possesses in its 'Parsopa.'²³ East Syrians refused to accept the formula of one only *hypostasis* (=one *Qnoma*) in Christ because Christ had two *Qnome*, i.e., two individualized natures, of God the Word and of the man Jesus, not the whole divine nature nor the whole human nature. *Qnoma* is not to be translated as a synonym of *Parsopa* because this would lead to a misunderstanding of the Syriac terminology.

Parsopa – Person: *Parsopa* in syriac is equivalent to Greek *Prosopon* and the Latin *persona*. It is different from *Qnoma*. It is the sum total of the accidents and collective properties of a *Qnoma* which distinguish it from others of the same species. It is giving it its individuality. *Parsopa* originally meant appearance, face and has obtained the meaning of a person (2 Cor 2.10). The Easterners like Narsai always express their understanding of the intimate union of the two natures in Christ by the term *Parsopa*. With this notion of person are also linked different titles of Christ such as Jesus, Christ, only begotten, Son and Lord.

The terms are to be understood in their own context and according to the manner they are understood and used by the author in order to avoid misunderstandings. In short, “*Kyânâ*” can be defined as a nature in the abstract sense and “*Qnoma*” as a concretized nature and “*Parsopa*” as person.

1.2. Quaternity

Cyril argued that if one denies the natural and hypostatic union in Christ, one would naturally end up with the teaching of two Sons: God the Word and the Son born of Mary. Nestorius strongly opposed this conclusion and asserted that he never wanted to speak of two Sons.²⁴ Proclus, a contemporary of Nestorius, argued that if there was a difference between the Word and Christ it would result in a *quaternity* instead of a trinity in God. It was supposed that Nestorius held the Word to be a Person distinct from the Son of Man, and that he avoided the term *hypostasis* which expressed the real union of both and preferred to speak of a “conjunction” (Greek *synapheia*) between them. Hence he was accused of teaching “two Sons,” and as a result, he was considered to have introduced a fourth person into the Godhead and that

transformed the Trinity into a *Quaternity*. It was on this basis that he was condemned and it is this teaching attributed to Nestorius which is known in history as “Nestorianism.”

Nestorius denied such allegations and asserted that he never taught it: “Not indeed that the Son is one and God the Word is another”.²⁵ He distinguished between the nature and the person while his opponents continued to identify them. Babai used every occasion to assert strongly the oneness of the Son. G. Chediath makes a pointed observation regarding the controversy: In their zeal for orthodoxy, both parties forgot that the opponent was only affirming the very same truth for which they were fighting, and condemned the others as heretics. They failed to accept the varying viewpoints as complementary.²⁶

1.3. The Hypostatic Union

The Creed of Nicaea understood *hypostasis* as the divine “being” (substance, *ousia*) of the Father, by whom the Son was begotten. Half a century later, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were referred to as three *hypostases* which means three persons. In the first sense one might speak of two *hypostases* in Jesus, the divine and the human (*homoousios* with the Father and *homoousios* with us) and in the second sense Jesus is a unique person or *hypostasis*.

For Cyril, the ‘natural and hypostatic union’ meant the union in one Person (*hypostasis*) of the divine and the human natures without mixture or confusion. He had the deeper and valuable theological insight of the need to stress unity, but he lacked the clarity of expression.²⁷ According to Cyril, when one rejects this hypostatic union, one falls into the error of making two sons. His opponents failed to understand this particular ‘hypostatic union’.²⁸ Nestorius understood it as forming a new composite nature and hence causing suffering also to the divinity. Hence Cyril was accused of advocating a kind of *Theopaschitism*. Cyril was not consistent with the use of the expressions ‘*physis*’ and ‘*hypostasis*’ to signify ‘nature’ and ‘person’. The Incarnate Word was, for Cyril, one *physis*, one *hypostasis* and one *prosopon*. He spoke of two natures before the union of the Word and flesh and *one nature after the union*. Apollinarius identified nature with person and taught that there was only one nature in Christ.

In the *Bazaar of Heracleides*, Nestorius always maintained that there were two *Qnome* (*hypostases*) in the Person of our Lord. The Chalcedonian definition, on the other hand, uses the expression “one *hypostasis*,” and this expression ultimately became prominent, therefore to say “two *hypostases*” became impossible. Nestorius rejects the analogy of body and soul for the union of Word and man and accuses Cyril of Arianism. As the soul suffers with the sufferings of the body in a natural union, so the divinity suffers with the suffering of the body.²⁹

Nestorius is always consistent in his use of the term *hypostasis*. For him *hypostasis* has the sense of “substance,” and he maintains that the two substances, Godhead and manhood, though united in the one Person, continued to retain their respective and different characteristics, which he calls *Qnome* (individualized natures). It became part of the Chalcedonian definition later.

1.4. Theotokos and Christotokos

The title *Theotokos* (= bearer of God) had been the touchstone of orthodoxy since 431 but the East Syriac tradition gave its own interpretation to this title and preferred the title *Christotokos* for the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Theodore of Mopsuestia preferred the term *Christotokos*. According to him, Mary is *Theotokos* and *Anthropotokos*, the one by nature and the other by relation. She is really *Theotokos*, because God is in the man whom she brought forth; and she is truly *Anthropotokos* because the human nature is taken from her; the Word, however, did not originate from her. Nestorius and Babai preferred the expression ‘Mother of Christ’ (*Yaldad Mšīhā*). When Cyril advocated the adoption of the non-biblical phrase ‘Theotokos’, Nestorius had hesitation in the unqualified use of it due to its ambiguity and insisted on the use of biblical expression ‘Christotokos’ as the appropriate phrase since she was the Mother of Christ.³⁰ According to Nestorius, *Christotokos* removes the blasphemy of Paul of Samosata and the malice of Arius and Apollinarius. However, the opponents failed to understand Nestorius properly and hence he came to be considered a heretic.

As conclusion, we may say that if we take *Theotokos* in the sense that Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ who is God, it is right to call her ‘Mother of God’ as held by Cyril. The same was meant

by Nestorius when he used the title 'Mother of Christ' because he did not deny divinity to Christ nor did he propose 'two sons' or 'two persons' in Christ. In this sense, there is only a terminological difference in the views held by the Bishop of Alexandria and the Bishop of Constantinople. In order to avoid the confusion of believing that Mary was the Mother of God, the Father or God, the Holy Spirit, Nestorius was reluctant to call her *Theotokos*.

2. East Syriac Liturgical Christology

Liturgical Christology refers to the Christology based on the analysis of liturgical texts. Basically when the liturgical texts are analyzed, the trinitarian and christological dimensions of human salvation could be found in them.

When the theology or the Christology of a particular ecclesial tradition is studied, its liturgical prayers are to be examined following the axiom, *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (The law of prayer establishes the law of faith). Liturgy is the *locus theologicus* in the sense that liturgy itself is an instance of theology. Liturgy has never ceased to be a source and hence the pertinent question is not whether but in what way and to what extent liturgy is a source of theology.³¹ In the liturgical celebration we encounter the mystery of God which the theologian tries to articulate. Liturgy is the natural root of theology. Theological thinking of the Church should be verifiable in the liturgical text of the Church.

2.1. Christological Perspectives of the East Syriac Qurbana

East Syriac liturgy is actually a theological synthesis, dealing with the person and function of Christ, the ontological and functional Christology, emphasizing the mystery of Resurrection. In the beginning of the Qurbana there is a clear allusion to the birth of Christ, "Glory to God in the highest." What Christ did by his incarnation and redemptive death is very well depicted in the prayers of the East Syriac liturgy. *Lakhu Mara* (ܠܚܝܘܢܐ = To you, O Lord) is a famous ancient hymn chanted in almost all the liturgical celebrations of the East Syriac tradition. It is a hymn addressed to Jesus Christ who is the source of our resurrection. Christ is presented as the sovereign Lord and the quickener of

bodies and the saviour of our souls. The hymn summarizes the salvific works of Christ and glorifies him as the Resuscitator.³²

The East Syriac liturgy is the celebration of the mystery of Christ, the Lord of all. Many of the prayers of the East Syriac Qurbana end with the expression 'Lord of all'. The *Lakhu Mara* refers to the trans-historical Lordship and the universal significance of Christ. It is addressed to Christ, the Lord of all, who is the source of life and salvation of all.

The whole anaphora is permeated by christological affirmations. Christ is the mediator of salvation. All the prayers, praise and thanksgiving are pleasing to the Father since they are presented in the unique act of the offering of Christ.

The Eucharistic prayer does express the faith experience of the Church. Liturgy presents Christ as a real man and real God, acting properly through the two concrete *Qnome*. The first part of the third *G'hanta* prayer of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana focuses on the ontological Christology with references to the New Testament and the early Councils. It begins with a descending Christology, a Christology from above. The Word, the hidden offspring from the bosom of the Father (Jn 1.8) and his image (Col 1.15, Heb 1.3), emptied himself and became a servant (Phil 2.6-8). This is the *kenosis* Christology and the two-stage Christology speaking of the one divine person in the two stages of his existence as God and man (Rom 1.3ff). Against the tendencies of Apollinarism and Monophysitism, the full humanity of Christ is clearly presented on the basis of Chalcedonian teaching of Christ as "truly God and truly man composed of rational soul and body".³³ The prayer reads: "...with a rational and intelligent and immortal soul and with a mortal body." It is a clear rejection of the Apollinarian view that the Logos replaced *nous*, the rational part of the soul in Christ and a clear answer to the proponents of docetism regarding the real body of Christ. The mystery of incarnation is always presented as Christ putting on the body. According to the Syriac Fathers like Aphrahat and Ephrem, the whole dispensation of salvation has its source in the human body of Christ.

The second part of the third *G'hanta* contains functional Christology with references to the great salvific actions of Christ: "You put on our humanity in order to vivify it by your divinity and have exalted our low state, raised us who are fallen, vivified our

mortality, forgiven our debts, justified our sinfulness, enlightened our knowledge..." Christ is presented as the unique mediator in the divinization of man. The humanization of Christ was to give life and give it more abundantly (Jn 10.10). The typical eastern theme of deification (*theosis*) is presented in the patristic line of thinking: 'God became man so that He may make us Divine' or 'the humanization of God is for the divinization of man.'

The Lordship and divinity of Christ are affirmed directly or indirectly in the whole anaphora. The opening verse of the *G'hanta* refers to Christ as "God the Word" and the concluding part expresses his divinity with the words "our Lord and our God".³⁴ Thus the liturgical texts clearly bring out the eastern christological thinking that the divine and human natures are united in the one person of Jesus Christ.

2.2. Christological Catechesis in the East Syriac Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the hours of a Church is a special celebration of its faith. The liturgical season of the Assyrian Church (also Chaldean and Syro-Malabar Church) begins with the season of *Subbara* or Annunciation of the good news of the advent of the Messiah as the saviour of the whole world.

In the liturgical prayers of the Sundays of the period of the Annunciation, there is a clear insistence on the dogmatic aspect of Christ's mystery, the unity of his *Parsopa* (person), the duality of his *Qnôme* and of his *Kyâne*.³⁵ The divine nature of Christ, as well as the reception of the human nature in the Incarnation, is specified in this prayer.

Blessed is the merciful One, Who by His goodness provides for us, lives through prophecy. With the eyes of the Spirit Isaias saw the wonderful Child of the Virgin ... Mary brought forth Immanuel, the Son of God, adored by all in two *Qnome*. In his Divinity he is born from the Father without beginning and above time and in His Humanity He is born from Mary at the end of time with a body united. O Christ who is adored in Your Church on the feast of the Annunciation of Your Mother.³⁶

The third hymn in the evening prayer (*Ramša*) of the season refers to the divine and human natures which are found in Jesus. No dualism of person could be found here. In the night

prayer (*Lelya*) of the same season there is a hymn which has the following meaning:

God the Word from the Father, did not take the form of a servant from angels but from the seed of Abraham; and He came in our humanity by His grace. That He may save our race from error.³⁷

In the *Tešbohta* of the *Lelya* of the first Monday of the period of Annunciation, we pray: "Divinity is not received from the mother nor humanity is received from the Father. Both natures are miraculously joined together in Jesus Christ."

In the night hymn of the third Friday of the season of Annunciation the Churches of the East Syriac tradition pray:

Let us all give thanks and glorify the Being who is creator of creations. Because in the fullness of time He visited us in a body which He took from our race. By means of it (His body) He saved us from death, Satan and corruption.³⁸

On the feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ there are many hymns and prayers which refer to the theological position of the Church of the East. Christ, who was born in time without a father and who was born eternally without a mother, is a divine Person, and this divinity of the Babe born from the Virgin Mary is well affirmed in the texts of the liturgical celebration of the Feast of the Nativity by the Church of the East.³⁹

The following prayer confirms that Christ is a person with divine and human natures. The soteriological aspect of incarnation is also very much emphasized:

By his great love and mercies God descended to us and took our earthly body; and gave us his heavenly spirit. Let us all acknowledge his gift, as our own is honoured in heaven with his Godhead.⁴⁰

When we go through the liturgical prayers of the Assyrian Church of the East, one can be quite sure that there is nothing heretical that could be found in the official prayers of this Church.

3. East Syriac Tradition and the Ecumenical Councils on Christology

The first seven ecumenical councils played a crucial role in developing the christological dogma. The first two deal with trinitarian controversy and the rest with christological controversy.

The five councils were struggling with the complex relationship between the divine and the human natures in Christ. The emphasis was on divinity at Ephesus (431); on his full humanity at Chalcedon (451); back to his divinity with Cyril's idea of theopaschitism at Constantinople (553); action and will at Constantinople (680); the anti-iconoclastic definition of Nicaea II (787).

3.1. The Church of the East and the Council of Ephesus

The council of Ephesus (431) was convened in the background of the heresy called Nestorianism. A large body of bishops and others, who could not accept the ecclesiastical condemnation of Nestorius, found a home in Persia.⁴¹ The Church of the East was not opposed to any doctrinal decision of the Council but only to its irregular procedure. In fact, the Council issued no definition of faith.

The Council of Ephesus overemphasized the unity of Christ, mainly basing its thought on Alexandrian theology. Eutyches began to teach that before Incarnation Christ was of two natures, but after it there was one Christ, one Son, one Lord in one *hypostasis* and one *prosopon*. He hated the idea of two natures in Christ after the Incarnation because he understood nature to mean concrete existence. To affirm two natures was for him to affirm two concrete existences, two *hypostases*, and two persons in Christ.

3.2. East Syriac Church and the Council of Chalcedon

Chalcedon (451) is one of the Western Councils which is very much acceptable to East Syriac Church, because the Council's Christology is in agreement with its own Christology. The *Synodicon Orientale* also has several implicit and explicit mentions of the Council of Chalcedon. Chalcedon stressed the duality in natures. The Persians taking their stand from Antiochene theology were content with this emphasis and Nestorius himself was pleased with the formulations of Chalcedon. The actual concern of the Antiochenes and the Persians was the question of the duality in Christ. They believed that Christ is one, the Son of God. However, they could not understand how duality could be explained if one holds a 'natural' and 'hypostatic union,' or a 'composite

hypostasis'. Theodore of Mopsuestia had great influence on the christological formula proclaimed at the Council of Chalcedon.⁴²

At the same time, the East Syriac Church was not so happy with the use of the expression 'one *hypostasis*' because *hypostasis* for them is individual nature, *Qnoma*. But in the definition, one *hypostasis* stands for one person. Hence there is a lack of clarity in the terminologies used.

4. The Christology of the Church of the East According to its Synods

While analyzing the Christology of a Church there is a need to pay special attention to the official documents and prayer formulations of the Church. The synodal documents of the Church are of great importance.⁴³ As Brock says, in the course of eight synods held by the Church of the East between 486 and 612, the name of Nestorius does not occur as an authority to be followed on Christological matters, whereas Theodore was considered on several occasions to be an authority on doctrinal matters and a model for orthodox belief.⁴⁴ But the name of Nestorius was used as a symbol for the continued struggle for the Antiochene cause.⁴⁵ It is the characteristic of the Eastern Churches to speak of Christ in two *Kyâne*, two *Qnome* and one *Parsopa of Filiation*.⁴⁶

Since the Ecumenical Councils were held in the Roman Empire, they came to be accepted by the Church of the East only at a later stage. The Council of Nicaea was formally accepted by the Church of the East at the Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410, eighty-five years after the Council.⁴⁷ Since then, the Church of the East has faithfully followed the Nicæan-Constantinopolitan tradition and has implemented in its trinitarian and christological teachings the essence of the apostolic faith affirmed by the early Church Fathers.⁴⁸ It has also made agreements regarding the celebration of Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Good Friday and Easter, so that Churches everywhere might be unified in their observance of these holy days. The Synod of 424 under Dadišo affirmed the independence of the See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon from the authority of the Western bishops. The Seleucian Church held several synods and formulated doctrinal propositions. All the expositions of these different synods are in line with those of Chalcedon. However, they adopted certain expressions of their own but in substance

there were no basic doctrinal differences between the Persians and the Chalcedonians.

Conclusion

Any christological approach is important and valuable because of the common principle that the mystery of Christ cannot be defined in any one unique formula, but it should legitimately be approached from different starting points, envisaged by diverse points of view, in spite of the fact that the mystery will always escape the full grasp of human language and expression. The phenomenon of pluralism in Christology is to be acknowledged and followed.

We have seen how the Alexandrian and Antiochene Schools differ in their approaches to the mystery of Christ. While the Alexandrians stress on the unity of two natures in the person of Christ, the Antiochenes emphasize the distinction of two natures and their characteristics in the one person of Jesus Christ. The overemphasis and the zeal to bring home their standpoint at times led to heresies on both sides. The failure to understand the approach of the other as complementary rather than contradictory often resulted in the unjust condemnation of the other as heretic. G. Chediath, after the study of the Christology of Mar Babai points out: In their zeal for orthodoxy, both parties forgot that the opponent was only affirming the very same truth for which they were fighting, and condemned the others as heretics.⁴⁹ Both had the burden of showing that Christ is truly God and truly man and that He is one. An overemphasis of their particular standpoint led to opposite errors: Nestorianism denied the unity of the person, monophysitism denied the duality of the natures after the union. Against the danger of undermining either the divinity or the humanity of Christ, the Church affirmed clearly the integrity of the two natures in the one and the same Lord Jesus Christ in unequivocal terms, one and the same Lord Jesus Christ must be acknowledged “in two natures without confusion or transformation, without division or separation”.

A study of the East Syriac Christology assumes great significance as it contributes, as a particular Christology, to the richness of the universal understanding of Christ. It enables us to be conscious of the age-old formulae which have harmed the unity

of the Church to a great extent because of the lack of proper understanding of the use of the terminologies of the other. The different shades of meaning of terms often caused confusion and misunderstanding. Therefore, we have explained the main christological terms. The Greek expressions of *physis* and *hypostasis* and the Syriac expressions of *Kyânâ*, *Qnoma* and *Parsopa* were easily misunderstood and misinterpreted to one's own advantage. Very often the Western theologians translate the Syriac theological terms as if they are synonymous with the Greek and Latin terms. Unless the terms are understood in their own context and in the way understood by the author, they may lead to errors. The two *Qnome* in Christ indicate the reality and actuality of the duality in Christ without confusion. When they are considered two *independent Qnome*, it becomes heretical. But as long as they exist in one and same *parsopa* of Filation, it is orthodox. As the modern theologians like Stirnemann state, instead of just reinterpreting the terminology and expressions of the fifth century it is essential to redefine the mystery of our faith in terms of the concept of contemporary philosophy and theology and use a modern language. As the mystery will always remain inexhaustible and ineffable, our attempts at understanding and defining are only approximations of the truth.⁵⁰

The centuries long antagonism between the Greco-Roman Church and the Church of the East grew out of a dispute which arose over the proper employment of Marian terminology, namely, 'Theotokos' and 'Christotokos,' in describing the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and the divine motherhood of Mary. This was really an ecclesio-political dispute and rivalry between the Sees of Alexandria and Constantinople, played out at the Council of Ephesus (431). This controversy spread throughout the Persian Empire.

It was Paul Bedjan, a Chaldean priest of nineteenth century who introduced in his edition of *Hudrâ* (book of Divine Office in East Syriac liturgy) the term *yaldad alaha*, or 'bearer of God' (Theotokos). Bedjan was afraid of Nestorianism and has made certain changes in the text.⁵¹ This was against the practice of the Church of the East which does not employ this term. Authors are of the opinion that it is not due to the influence of Nestorius that the Church of the East uses the term 'Christotokos' instead of

'Theotokos' in its liturgy. The Church of the East avoids the expression 'Mother of God.' It fears that if the word 'God' is used without qualification (God the Son) it may give the impression that the Divine Trinity or any one of the Trinity became incarnate.⁵² Nevertheless the Church of the East gives great reverence to Mary.⁵³

In the prayers of the Church of the East, the expression 'the mother of Jesus Christ, God and Saviour' is strongly emphasized. From the East Syriac perspective, Christology is always soteriological. The person of Christ is understood in relation to his actions of saving humanity. The famous dictum of the Fathers that the humanization of God is for the divinization of man also holds valid. In this emphasis, both the ontological and functional dimensions of Christology are included which are essential for a total and integral Christology.

Actually the christological position of the Church of the East was always orthodox but was misunderstood in history. Bawai Soro is very clear on this point: "The Church of the East rejects any teaching that explicitly or implicitly suggests that there are two Sons, or two Lords, or two Christs in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but we confess one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever."⁵⁴

The doctrinal enactments of the episcopal synods form an integral part of theological traditions and they are real proofs of the orthodoxy of a particular Church. The Seleucian Church held several synods and formulated doctrinal propositions. All the expositions of these different synods are in line with those of Chalcedon. They employ less technical terms and express the doctrine in a simple way. If we make an analysis of the different creeds and synodal enactments of the Persians, it will be clearly seen that basically the Persians were Chalcedonians; they taught the Chalcedonian doctrine very clearly and fully. However they adopted certain expressions in accordance with their taste, and except in the use of words, there were no basic differences between the Persians and the Chalcedonians.

In the ecumenism-friendly contemporary era, we should look into the various aspects of historical controversies and heresies in an objective way in order to advance genuine dialogue between various non-Catholic Churches and the Catholic Church.

The Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East signed by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and His Holiness Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East on November 11, 1994 was a bold step in the right direction. After a detailed and scholarly study of the Common Declaration and the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East, G.Thumpanirappel asserts: "Nestorianism is held neither by Nestorius nor by the Church of the East. There is no Nestorianism in the Assyrian Church of the East, in the official synodal decisions or in the liturgical prayers of the Church."⁵⁵ In this way misgivings and misunderstandings can be removed and a real communion among the various Churches can be promoted. In the emerging ecumenical outlook and atmosphere, it is necessary to affirm and promote plurality in the expression of christological faith, considering the plurality of theological expression legitimate and complementary in the understanding of the mystery of Christ.

Notes

¹ Alexandria was the second largest city in the Roman empire. It was a Jewish centre. Basically Alexandria followed Platonic philosophical thought. Platonism was more mystical than rationalistic. And in biblical exegesis, the Alexandrian School followed the allegorical method of interpretation.

² Since suffering and death are predicated to the Logos, Arius argued, that the Logos is not of the same nature of the Almighty God but a creature only. Apollinarism also mutilated the humanity of the Lord, saying that the Logos has taken the place of the human soul of Christ. So also Subordinationism considered the Logos as subordinate to the Father.

³ Antioch was the third great city of the Roman Empire. She was considered the queen of the Orient. It was here that the disciples of Jesus were first called *Christians* (Acts 11.26) and *Catholics* (Ignatius, Epistle to the Smyrn.8.2). Antioch always had Aristotelian philosophical basis. It preferred rationalism to mysticism. In Biblical exegesis, it adopted the literal and historical method of interpretation. Its interpretation is known as typological.

⁴ Diodore exercised a profound influence on two outstanding figures of the following generation, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Unfortunately, Diodore's books were destroyed after his death because he

was suspected of Nestorianism. But during his lifetime he was respected as a defender of the faith and Protector of the Church from the two great dangers of the fourth century, namely Arianism and Apollinarism.

⁵ L.D. Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology*, Minnesota 1990, 42-143; Aprem, *The Council of Ephesus of 431*, Trichur 1980, 17.

⁶ Normally each *hypostasis* must possess a *prosopon* and hence each nature in Christ should have its own *prosopon*.

⁷ G. Thumpanirappel, *Christ in the East Syriac Tradition*, Satna 2003, 48.

⁸ V. Poggi, "The Controversy of the Three Chapters," in *Syriac Dialogue II* (1996) 146-148.

⁹ X. Koodapuzha, *Faith and Communion of the Indian Church of the Saint Thomas Christians*, Kottayam 1982, 19.

¹⁰ A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*; vol. 1, 451.

¹¹ H. E. Turner, "Nestorius Reconsidered," *Studia Patristica* 13 (1975) 306.

¹² G. Thumpanirappel, *Christ in the East Syriac Tradition*, 56.

¹³ H.E. Turner, "Nestorius Reconsidered," 320.

¹⁴ A.G. Kollamparampil, *From Symbol to Truth: A Syriac Understanding of the Paschal Mystery*, Rome 2000, 103.

¹⁵ P.S. Russell, "A First Look at the Christology of Ephraem the Syrian," in R. Lavenant, ed., *Symposium Syriacum VII*, Rome 1998, 108.

¹⁶ T. Kalayil, "St. Ephrem's View of Christ as the Unique Mediator of Redemption", in X. Koodapuzha, ed., *Eastern Theological Reflections in India*, Kottayam 1999, 124.

¹⁷ Aprem, *Nestorian Theology*, Trichur 1980, 74.

¹⁸ He made use of Syriac language and a great deal of the misunderstanding has occurred due to the use of the term "*Qnôma*".

¹⁹ G. Chediath, *Christology*, Kottayam 2002, 120.

²⁰ G. Chediath, *Christology*, 128.

²¹ G. Chediath, *Christology*, 193-195.

²² "He is the splendour of the glory of his father and the image of his essence." (Heb 1.2)

²³ G. Thumpanirappel, *Christ*, 78.

²⁴ Nestorius, *The Bazaar of Heracleides: Newly translated from the Syriac (= BH)*, G.R. Driver & L.Hodson eds. & trans., Oxford 1925, 47, 144, 146, 207-9.

²⁵ BH, 261.

²⁶ G. Chediath, *Christology*, 122.

²⁷ G. Chediath, *Christology*, 62-63.

²⁸ BH, 49-50.

²⁹ BH, 162.

³⁰ BH, 99.

³¹ J. Kallarangatt, "Liturgical Foundations of Theology and Ecclesiology," *Christian Orient* XXIV/1(2003) 4.

³² J. Chittilappilly, *Mdabbranuta: The Divine Dispensation of Our Lord in the Holy Qurbana of the East Syrian Tradition*, Kottayam 1999, 107.

³³ ND 614.

³⁴ Sebastian Athappilly gives a detailed scholarly analysis. See his articles "Christological Faith Expressions in the Syro-Malabar Qurbana," *Christian Orient* XIV/2 (1993) 76-90; "Theological Dimensions of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari", in B. Puthur, ed., *Studies on the Anaphora of Addai and Mari*, Kochi 2004, 102-131.

³⁵ P. Yousif, "East Syrian Liturgy as an Expression of Christology," *Syriac Dialogue* II (1996) 176.

³⁶ *Hudrā*, vol.1, 118, *Thešbohta* of the First Sunday of *Subbara*.

³⁷ *Hudrā*, vol. 1, 114; *Onitha d' Basliqê* of the First Sunday of *Subbara*.

³⁸ *Hudrā*, vol. 1, 146; *Onitha d' Lelya* of the Third Friday of *Subbara*; see also Moolan, *Annunciation-Nativity in the East Syrian Calendar: Its Background and Place in the Liturgical Year*, Kottayam 1985, 105.

³⁹ Kuruthukulangara, *The Feast of the Nativity of our Lord in the Chaldean and Malabar Liturgical Year: A Study of Sources*, Kottayam 1989, 213.

⁴⁰ *Hudrā*, vol. 3, 146, *Onitha d' Lelya*, Ist Sunday of Šleeħa.

⁴¹ In 410 in a Synod the Assyrian Church of the East received the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. The other four (Chalcedon is partially accepted) ecumenical councils were not fully received by the Assyrian Church. The Assyrian Church was never in history officially approached by the Catholic Church or any of the Orthodox Churches to accept the Christological formula and dogmatic teachings of the Council of Ephesus (431). B. Soro & M.J. Birnie, "Vienna Christological Formula in an Assyrian Perspective," *Syriac Dialogue* 1 (1994) 35.

⁴² L.D. Davis, *First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 144.

⁴³ The *Synodicon Orientale* (Nomocanon) is a collection by Mar Abdisho (+1318) who was a famous writer of the Assyrian Church of the East. This collection is of great importance for the Assyrian Church of the East.

⁴⁴ S.P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Journal of John Rylands Library* 78 (1996) 29.

⁴⁵ S.P. Brock, "The Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire upto the Sixth Century and its Absence from the Councils in the Roman Empire," *Syriac Dialogue* I (1994) 78-79.

⁴⁶ G. Chediath, *Christology*, 86.

⁴⁷ S. P. Brock, "The Church of the East," 70.

⁴⁸ B. Soro & J.M. Birnie, "The Vienna Christological Formula in an Assyrian Perspective," *Syriac Dialogue I* (1994) 35.

⁴⁹ G. Chediath, *Christology*, 83.

⁵⁰ A. Stirnemann, "The Vienna Dialogue between Catholic and Non-Chalcedonian Theologians and its Treatment of Nestorius and Nestorianism," *Syriac Dialogue I* (1994) 28.

⁵¹ Moolan, *Annunciation-Nativity*, 225-227; Kuruthukulangara, *Feast of the Nativity*, 92-93, 126-128.

⁵² J. Podipara, *Mariology of the East*, Kottayam 1985, 16.

⁵³ Aprem, *Nestorian Theology*, 127.

⁵⁴ Soro, "Assyrian Church," 2.

⁵⁵ G. Thumpanirappel, *Christ in the East Syriac Tradition*, 172.

9

Syriac Portraits of Christian Salvation

Thomas Kollampampil, CMI

Introduction

Syriac Christianity is a natural and the surviving heir to the Hebrew thought patterns and expressions which are the common patrimony of the lived experiences of the people of Israel. Faithful to that tradition the theological orientations and thought patterns of the early Syriac Christianity have developed out of the lived experiences of the believing community. In the Semitic-Hebraic legacy of the two testaments, knowledge and wisdom are experiential fruits of lived out habitudes rather than speculative findings. For the believing community of Syriac Christianity, the theological legacy of divine-human relationship is based on the scriptural deposit of divine-human encounters in the history of salvation. Regarding this communal and communitarian nature of theological patrimony of Syriac Christianity Aphrahat writes: "... whatever is written in these chapters was written neither according to the thinking of one man, nor for the persuasion of one reader; but according to the thinking of all the Church, and for the persuasion of all the faithful" (*Dem XXII. 26*).

In order to facilitate our understanding of the thought patterns of the early Syriac Fathers, the descriptions on the mystery of salvation, are set under three foundational visions of salvation: (1) Mystery of the created humanity and its consummation, (2) Mystery of Adam-Christ complementarity, and (3) Mystery of the history of salvation. In other words, they are based on the theological anthropology, Christology, and the history of salvation respectively. Since Syriac theology is basically narrative and symbolic, the attempt here is to draw portraits with the available symbols, types, figures and narratives.

1. Portraits of Christian Salvation and the Mystery of the Created Humanity

In this section the concern is on the salvific call given to humanity by divinity in creation. Adam/humanity is set in the primordial Paradise in order to make progress, in the sense of a journey towards the eschatological Paradise. The journey of humanity on the road of perfection is presented with a bouquet of portraits. They are, 'dust-salt imagery' of human sanctification by the indwelling of Holy Spirit, 'colour mixing and drawing' imagery and the image and likeness of God in humans, 'recasting, rebirth and resurrection of human beings' through the baptismal life, 'fasting, prayer and integration of life' by Christians, and 'eating from the Tree of life' in the Eucharist.

1.1. Dust-Salt Imagery of Human Sanctification and Perfection

Adam/humanity was created and set in an intermediary state from where with the mode of his exercise of freedom he could either attain immortality or fall into mortality. The dust (Adam) was raised to an exalted position with the conferring of the divine image on it. It was a divine promise in action, by breathing into his nostrils 'the breath of life' he became a living being (Gen 2.7). Salt symbolizes the divine reality in human beings. It preserves individuals and human societies from corruption, sin and decay. Hence Aphrahat says that Messiah has hidden in us the salt which dissolves the putrefaction (*Dem* XXIII. 49). It is believed that eating of salt makes snakes blind, and Ephrem writes, 'He made him (Adam) salt by which the cursed serpent would be blinded' (*HNat* 8,3). According to Aphrahat, God has hidden the promise of Messiah and the blessings of the new covenant in the people of Israel (*Dem* II.6; XXIII.1,13). "We thank you the healer of our illness, who has hidden in us your spirit as the remedy of our body. The natural qualities of salt for taste-giving, preservation, healing and good odour are all symbolically implied into the activity of the Spirit. These implications starting with creation goes on in the incarnation and in the Eucharist by which salvific fruits are provided. For Jacob of Serugh, Christ is the 'salt from the Most High' sent down for giving taste to humanity.¹ This salt has been pre-announced in the salt which Elisha threw into the water.² It is

the call and the way of salvation for everyone to retain the salt within to preserve oneself and attain perfection.

1.2. Imagery of 'Colour-mixing and Icon-drawing' and the 'Image and Likeness of God' in Humans

This imagery stands projected against the backdrop of colour-mixing for the painting of icons. The magnificence of the icon depends on the proper colour-mixing. *The Acts of Judas Thomas* speaks about the effects of evil doings as a change of colour complexion.³ Ephrem uses the metaphor of 'colour' mainly to connote human behaviour within the context of free will. Moreover the gift of free will is considered as the major constituent of 'the image and likeness of God' in humanity. The hymn on Faith no. 31 is quite insightful in this regard (*HFid* 31.5; 33). Ephrem imagines that God is wearying himself to persuade us, who possess free will, to please him and perfect our image (icon) through the colours our free will chooses:

See his kindness ! Though he could have made us fair
by force, without toil, he has toiled in every way
that we might become fair by our own choice,
ourselves the artists of our own fairness:
using the colours our own freedom had gathered.
If he himself had beautified us we had been but an image
painted and beautified with the colours of another artist
(*HFid* 31.5).⁴

Here the direct reference is to human behaviour patterns and customs by which we imprint the divine image on us (*HFid* 3.16; *HVir* 2.15; *HEccl* 10.6). Any wrongdoing would spoil colours and the end result will be soiling the divine image in humanity. What happened to Adam/humanity is thus signified and symbolically demonstrated. It is through Incarnation and baptism that the redrawing of the spoiled image begins (*HVir* 7.5). Ephrem finds incarnation as a proper mixing of colours:

“Glorious is the Wise One Who allied and joined
Divinity with humanity,
One from the height and the other from the depth.
He mingled the natures like pigments
And an image came into being: the God-man” (*HNat* 8.2).

While explaining the role of the priest in baptism, Narsai speaks about how the priest purifies the body with the power of the

Spirit and the body of clay (cf. Gen 2.7) assumes the hue of heavenly beings: "By the heat of the Spirit he purges the rust of body and soul; and instead of clay they acquire the hue of heavenly beings."⁵

According to Jacob of Serugh, God contemplated the celestial Adam, Christ, and made the terrestrial Adam in the resemblance of the corporeality that the Son would assume.⁶ Thus Christ stands as the beginning and the end (*QHC* I. 24). The glorious Artist made an icon in the creation of Adam with rich colours and a beautiful appearance. This icon carries the potential within itself for life or for death⁷ because Adam/humanity is given freedom to choose life or death. By the breach of the commandment Adam/humanity chose death which is repeatedly reflected in the OT through idolatry and adultery. It is the misuse of freedom that spoiled and corrupted the image. Therefore, Christ at his baptism mixed the waters properly with holiness in order to wash and polish humanity so as to brighten the colour of 'the bride' who polluted herself with idols and the oblations to idols.⁸ Moreover, for Jacob of Serugh the 'black girl' of the *Song of Songs* 1.5 is a clear type of the Church of the Nations who put on light from the baptismal water. By the oil and myrrh she was perfumed. By the fire and the Spirit in the baptismal waters 'the bride' was purified, sanctified and was liberated.⁹ Christ by his fasting reintegrated everything that had ended up in disintegration and death. Thus the image has been restored. The image that had been left polluted for six thousand years has been taken care of by its Heir and Perfecter. Jacob of Serugh describes Christ as a Painter who mingled the proper pigments to Adam and restored him without corruption: "Today the Painter restored the image of Adam: because it had worn out, he mingled with it the pigment that it might not get corrupted."¹⁰ The Adam-Christ complementarity in the conception of the divine economy and the manifestation of the same in the history of salvation are well brought out through Adam who is the first and the last in the creation and Christ who is the first and the last in the divine economy.

1.3. 'Recasting, Rebirth and Resurrection of Human Beings' through Baptism

The presence of Christ in 'sacred' or 'liturgical' time is the key to understand the efficacy and results of baptism, the recasting and rebirth of human beings in the Church.¹¹ With this key of interpretation one is able to appreciate the deeper symbolic meaning of Syriac integration of the Johannine view of baptism as 'a rebirth' and the Pauline view of baptism as 'death and resurrection' with Christ. Hence, Mar Jacob calls baptismal waters 'a furnace' and 'a tomb'.¹² Within 'sacred time' the baptism of Christ in Jordan and his death and resurrection are all simultaneously present to the one who receives baptism. Mar Jacob speaks of the everlasting presence of Christ with his apostles and disciples in the form of his peace, which is in fact sustenance from the Trinity.¹³ Moreover, it is the activity of the Holy Spirit that works out the sanctification.

"The debt of mankind the priest pays by means of his ministry; and the written bond of his race he washes out with the water and renews it. As in a furnace he re-casts bodies in Baptism; and as in a fire he consumes the weeds of mortality. The drug of the Spirit he casts into the water, as into a furnace; and he purifies the image of men from uncleanness. By the heat of the Spirit he purges the rust of body and soul; and instead of clay they acquire the hue of heavenly beings. The vat of water he prepares, he sets, in the likeness of a furnace; and then he draws near and reveals the power of his art."¹⁴

1.4. Fasting and Prayer for Salvation

Christ, the Saviour of Adam/humanity, entered into a battle through fasting so as to bring Adam victorious, who was overcome by the evil one through food. Thus Christ defeated the evil one not by his divine powers, but by his human weapon of fasting (*HVir* 12.1). Fasting is the medicine for the first 'grave ulcer'.¹⁵

By fasting the celestial Adam became the healer of the terrestrial Adam who ate without discernment.¹⁶ Divine mercy gave fasting as a medicine (*Hieiun* 4.1). Christ took up the combat of Adam in his fasting in order to defeat the murderer¹⁷ who out of pride and jealousy induced pride and laxity in Adam through food

and caused him to fall from the rank of the adopted sons.¹⁸ Our Lord paid the debt in the same coin as the evil one caused the debt:

Indeed, when the Lord Christ, who is the celestial Adam, sought to heal the ulcer of the terrestrial Adam by fasting, He began to employ that which Adam did not do when he fell. If he had done it, he too would not have fallen.¹⁹

Fasting against the 'grave ulcer' caused by intemperance, and firmness against laxity were instituted as wise healing medicine:²⁰

And the grave ulcer was cured by this wise medicinal herb. For whereby was it right that intemperance be conquered, unless by fasting? Or what weapon is needed to resist laxity, if not firmness? Adam ate, fell and was conquered. Our Lord came down, did fasting and raised him up. For that one who was smitten in a single moment and that wound became aggravated; he fasted forty days to devise for him a healing.²¹

The healing medicine of fasting depicted in the number of 'forty days' has been seen by the clear-sighted eye of the prophecy²² and became depicted in various ways in the Scriptures: firstly, as punishment in the flood,²³ legal punishment of scourging (Deut 25.3 > 2Cor 11.24), Noah's waiting for forty days;²⁴ secondly, as means of purification, in the purificatory rites after forty days of the birth of a child;²⁵ thirdly, as liberation to the Hebrews as shone forth from David against Goliath;²⁶ fourthly, as models in OT, such as the fasting of Moses (Ex 24.18; Deut 9.9; Ex 34.28-29), Elijah (1Kings 19.8,9), that of Nineveh (Jon 3.2-10), and the bearing of the vicarious punishment by Ezekiel (Ezek 4.4ff) for the house of Israel.²⁷

The significance of the OT types of fasting has been made perfectly effective through Christ, rendering purification, integration and perfection, to human nature that was fashioned in the beginning out of four elements.²⁸ The divine wisdom out of its creative energy has painted the rational image on humanity. Thus the four elements that seem opposing one another were brought into a single harmony so as to constitute a single image which the

Wisdom has painted. Fasting is set for the purification of the defiled four elements:

Our Lord therefore was moderate and set up fasting as on a balance against the human nature, to bring about the purification of the four [elements] through the forty [days] and to offer a perfect pardon to those who had been defiled through the transgression of the commandment, while multiplying ten times with the number four because in this number of ten, which is the crown of numbers, upon which they lean and from which they commence, being multiplied four times, the four [elements] shall be perfected and they shall be one without passion, and without admitting aberration.²⁹

Satan became jealous of the wise fashion in which Adam was formed and he began cunningly to deceive and allure Adam in order to induce him to sin which would open the door to death that in turn would dissolve the elements, destroy the image, and annul the wisdom seen in Adam. The deceiver destroyed the yoke of harmony³⁰ of the elements that leads to immortality and effected the yoke of slavery leading to disintegration and death:

For, Satan, on account of his jealousy (Wis 2.24), devised this while deceiving, alluring and provoking so as to corrupt that image which the [divine] wisdom had set up upon the creation and so that the rational image which the creative energy, following the completion of its works, had cast would be dissolved and be made dust. Indeed, he was jealous of how wisely Adam was fashioned and with what knowledge he was constituted, and how the four [elements] which are against one another have come to a single harmony in order to constitute a single image upon which wisdom was painted (Wis 16.15ff). Thus, he acted cunningly to introduce sin, which opened on them the door to death, so that by it they might be separated one from the other and the image might perish so that wisdom might not be seen in it.³¹

Against the introduction of sin, disharmony, and the yoke of slavery by 'the ruler of the world' our Lord took up the combat on himself. By fasting he killed the alien lust that had entered to

corrupt the beauty of creation and taught the human nature the way to proceed until the end without admitting corruption. Since Adam had eaten and died, our Lord took up fasting in order to make him live. Thus he brought victory to human nature by the invincibility of his person and repaid the debt by fasting.³²

Greed leads to sin and obstructs all from noble thoughts and from prayer (*HArm* 23.9-11). Fasting enlightens our mind and heart. It strengthens our thoughts and impels our heart for good behaviour, moreover it is a treasury of delights for heart, mind, soul and spirit, in the manner of a weapon in our battle (*Hieiun* 7.1). Fasting and prayer go together because while fasting purges the filth of the body, prayer purges the filth of the soul (*HEccl* 13.24,25). Genuine fasting is the fasting from evil things (*Hieiun* 4.3). Added to this Aphrahat speaks about 'pure fasting' based on the purity of the heart of the one who fasts (*Dem* III. 1,2).

1.5. Eating from the 'Tree of Life'

In concise terms according to Jacob of Serugh, baptism makes one enter into Paradise and Eucharist is the fruit of the Tree of Life, that one eats to acquire life or salvation.³³ Ephrem too emphasizes the fact that baptism makes one entitled to Eucharist (*HVir* 7.8).

O to the womb that, that having given birth, is nourished and educated by the altar!

O to the babes who immediately eat perfect bread instead of milk! (*HVir* 7.8).³⁴

The standard Syriac theological expression for Christ's manifestation in the body is his 'clothing of humanity', well attested in Aphrahat and Ephrem.³⁵ It was through this medium that Christ effected redemption and salvation. Hence Aphrahat holds that it is through the body he put on that he liberated us from slavery and resurrected us so as to be with him.³⁶ R. Murray sums up Ephrem's views on salvation through the Incarnation as the following: "... the whole dispensation of salvation has its source in the human body of Christ; that same body in which he healed men and rose again, he gave us in sacramental form (in 'mystery') to heal us, to incorporate us in him in the Church, and to give us a pledge of his Resurrection."³⁷

In the Syriac tradition the bond between baptism, Eucharist and the Church is viewed more on a charismatic level with much application to the life of the individual and the community. Primarily it is because of the efficacy of the gifts of the person and activities of the incarnate Son typified in the paschal lamb. Aphrahat explains all statutory prescriptions for the eating of the paschal lamb (Ex 12) as depictions of the needed purifications and the discipline for the eucharistic celebration.³⁸ Ephrem too speaks of how the baptized achieve the right to receive the body of Christ.³⁹ Christ has mingled with us in our body and nourished us, as though a shepherd had become pasture for his sheep (*Epiph* 3.17, 22). Ephrem explains this deeper mingling in the Incarnation and in the Eucharist in his hymn on Nativity 16⁴⁰ where Mary is made to speak out to the child Jesus:

When I see your outward image
before my eyes, your hidden image
is portrayed in my mind. In your revealed image
I saw Adam, but in the hidden one
I saw your Father who is united with you.

Have you shown your beauty in two images
to me alone ? Let bread and the mind
portray you. Dwell in bread
and those who eat it. In hidden and revealed [form]
let your Church see you as [does] the one who bore you
(*HNat* 16.3-4).

Indeed, Child, your bread is far more honourable
than your body. For even the unbelievers
saw your body, but they do not see
your living bread. The distant ones rejoiced;
their portion surpassed that of the near ones.

Behold your image is portrayed with the blood of the
grapes
upon the bread and portrayed upon the heart
by the finger of love with the pigments
of faith. Blessed is He who made
graven images pass away by his true image
(*HNat* 16.6-7).⁴¹

Ephrem speaks again regarding the salvific power of Eucharist in his *Hymns on Faith* 10:

See, Fire and Spirit in the womb that bore you!
 See, Fire and Spirit in the river where you were baptized!
 Fire and Spirit in our Baptism;
 in the Bread and the Cup, Fire and Holy Spirit !

Your Bread kills the Devourer who had made us his bread,
 your cup destroys death which was swallowing us up.
 We have eaten you, Lord, we have drunk you,
 not to exhaust you, but to live by you (*HFid* 10.17-18).⁴²

The typological connections of the expulsion of Adam from Paradise and the Cherub's sword with the pierced side of Christ for the re-entry of Adam/humanity to Paradise play a significant role in the Syriac understanding of both Baptism and Eucharist. Christ, the second Adam, receives the sword on his side and removes it to make all re-enter Paradise.⁴³ The blood and water that flowed from the opened side of Christ are symbols of Baptism and Eucharist, through which one enters Paradise and eats of the Fruit of the Tree of Life who is Christ himself. In the background of the history of salvation Eucharist is viewed as the Fruit of Life contrasted with that fruit that caused the death of Adam.⁴⁴ Our Lord is the Fruit of Life in contrast to the basilisk that killed Adam.⁴⁵

In the Incarnation of the Son 'the Fruit of the Tree of Life' has been set in the manger as nourishment to Adam/humanity.⁴⁶ It is the merciful self-gift of God. Divinity reveals itself in the form of body and blood, typified in the 'Coal of Fire' of Isaiah 6.6.⁴⁷ The one, who is by nature Fire, presented himself in the form of bread and wine.⁴⁸ Humanity is allowed to take and eat this 'Coal of Fire' whereas angels were not allowed to. Jacob of Serugh finds the chariot in Ezekiel as the altar and the 'Coal of Fire' as the Eucharist.⁴⁹ The Eucharist is called 'Pearl'. The body and blood of the Son are pearls of life.⁵⁰ These riches⁵¹ have been given to us in our state of need. In the reception of the Eucharist the Holy Spirit works the spiritual transformation.⁵² Hence the communicants are 'terrestrial angels'⁵³ and the Church 'the heavenly Doctor'.⁵⁴ The wine poured out by the good Samaritan is a symbol of Eucharist⁵⁵ which Christ has given to the priest to cure the members of the Church.⁵⁶

The nature of God's self-gift in the Eucharist is more stressed through the Old Testament types of the Eucharist: 'Paschal Lamb', 'Manna', 'Red-heifer', 'the bread of the presence' (Ex 25.30) and the bread and wine of Melchizedek.⁵⁷ Christ made humanity pass from the blood-sacrifices to the bloodless-sacrifice typified in Melchizedek. The sprinkling of the blood on the door (Ex 12.21-28) is the cup of life.⁵⁸ The earlier generations came into contact with the Father at Sinai and they ate and drank spiritually, but the later generations grasped the Son in Zion and he became food for them.⁵⁹ Christ gives 'the bread of the perfect' instead of the 'milk of the Law' meant for the little children.⁶⁰ The burning of the red-heifer in a pure place (Num 19.9) and the sprinkling of its blood and ashes are all types of the Eucharist.⁶¹ In the Old Testament itself we find signs of the development from blood-sacrifices to bloodless self-offering of the bread of the presence and the bread and wine offered by Melchizedek (Gen 14.18). All these find their fulfilment in the self-offering of Christ, signified especially in the fraction of the bread.⁶² The words of Jesus at the fraction of the bread begin a new practice by which all older practices were replaced through his body.⁶³ The old paschal lamb gave way to the bread and body of Christ for the fullness of life.⁶⁴

2. The Mystery of Adam-Christ Complementarity and Salvation

Transgression of the commandment by Adam was repaired through the Law given to Moses. But the corrupt nature of humanity that spoiled the divine image, needed the hands of the artisan of creation himself who came on the road of Incarnation in order to effect the recreation. The mystery of this recreation/renewal and restoration in Christ is explained through various imageries of redemption and salvation. The language of images is far more powerful than what can be conceptually and literally pronounced.

2.1. Legal Imagery

The road of Law began in Paradise. By his commandment, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2.16-17), God wrote down the first set of Laws on the living tablets of Adam and Eve (*QHC* I. 123). The two destroyed tablets from the

hands of Moses (Ex 32.15-19) are the types of the fallen Adam and Eve. Then God instructed Moses to build new tablets for the Law.⁶⁵ The renewed tablets of the Law and the justice of Moses have run up to Christ. From the time of Christ the higher perfection was established.

Christ, as the Heir of Adam, accepted on himself both to fulfill the purpose of the Law and to accept the chastisement due to the breach of the Law.⁶⁶ Legal repayment of the debt in Adam is clear in St. Ephrem:

In the month of Nisan our Lord repaid
the debts of that first Adam:

He gave His sweat in Nisan in exchange for Adam's sweat
the Cross, in exchange for Adam's Tree.

The sixth day of the week corresponded to the sixth day of
creation.

And it was at 'the turn of the day' (Gen 3.8)
that He returned the thief to Eden (*HEccl* 51.8).

In another hymn Ephrem puts it more casuistically:

Our Lord subdued His might, and they seized Him
so that His living death might give life to Adam.

He gave His hands to be pierced by the nails

In place of that hand that had plucked the fruit;

He was struck on the cheek in the judgement hall

in return for that mouth that had devoured in Eden.

Because Adam had let slip his foot,

they pierced His feet.

Our Lord was stripped naked so that we might be clothed in
modesty:

With that gall and vinegar He made sweet

that bitter venom that the serpent had poured into humankind
(*CNis* 36.1).

Eve's fault was forgiven and her debts were repaid through 'the Precious Treasure' given-birth by a second virgin.⁶⁷ None of the righteous of the OT like Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek or Abraham succeeded in repaying the debt of the deed of Eve. Before legal justice only Christ succeeded as the true Heir to repay the debt and reconstruct the ruins.⁶⁸ Jacob of Serugh is very keen to emphasize how Christ entered into the house of Adam through the door of Law and fulfilled in his own person all legal requirements

before instituting the road of perfection above the Law.⁶⁹ He obeyed the requirement of circumcision. He respected the legal prescriptions of purificatory days and the offering in the temple.⁷⁰ The thirty years before his public ministry is the period of legal prescription for the attainment of maturity for priestly services (Num 4.3-49).⁷¹ By his own baptism he fulfilled the baptisms (washings) of the Law and that of John the Baptist.

The document of the debt of Adam was read out and according to justice Adam was found to be deserving death due to his breach of the commandment.⁷² In the OT legalistic interpretation Jacob of Serugh finds an insightful relationship between Adam who deserved death and Christ who was judged culpable of death. Adam violated the Law and tried to grab Divinity and thus deserved death (Gen 2.16-17). Christ, the heir of Adam, was forcefully decked in the veil of sanctuary (Mt 27.28) to make him deserve death (Mt 27.28) according to the Law (Num 4.15) due to the touching of holy objects. This echoes Adam's daring attempt to grab Divinity. In Adam's attempted grabbing of Divinity and the condemnation of Christ to death out of the cunningness of the priests, Jacob of Serugh finds the same deceitful and cunning operations of the evil one working along.⁷³ Through the suffering and the death on the Cross with the nails thrust on to him Christ tore into pieces the bond of Eve and repaid the debt.⁷⁴ Christ was sent down as a pledge of ransom for the captured image in Adam, that was in the captivity of Sheol. But the Mighty One by his own might defeated the captors and brought Adam back to the Father.⁷⁵

2.2. Captivity/Slavery Imagery

We find ample use of the symbolism of hostage-taking, slavery and captivity, to delineate both the fallen state of Adam/humanity as well as the effective redemption in Christ (*HAzym* 3.6-19). Syriac catechetical synthesis brings out a network of scriptural depictions of captivity and liberation/deliverance of humanity from the sway of the evil one: Adam's alienation from God, the captivity of the people effected out of the deception due to idols and idolatry, exile in Egypt and Assyria, the prodigal son's going away from the house of his father,⁷⁶ the imprisoned Barabba (= Adam),⁷⁷ Christ's entry into Sheol to shatter it, which was

foreshadowed in Samson.⁷⁸ All these are symbolic depictions of the Lord extending his hand a 'second time' that serves as a sign and source of deliverance.

St. Ephrem in his hymns on Nisibis 36 deals with Christ's descend to Sheol and the liberation of the captives of death there:

Death finished his taunting speech
and our Lord's voice rang out thunderously in Sheol,
tearing open each grave one by one,
Terrible pangs seized hold of Death in Sheol; where light had
never been seen,
rays shone out from the angels who had entered to bring out
the dead to meet the Dead One who has given life to all
(*CNis* 36.11).

The Merciful One sends his own Son to snatch away the prey from the captor.⁷⁹ Jacob of Serugh finds Adam/humanity as the pearl that had been stolen away by the captor, the evil one,⁸⁰ that needs restoration. Christ through his nativity renewed and engraved anew the damaged image of Adam. Thus the coin damaged in the captivity by the evil one has been renewed and the ransom for the liberation was paid.

On the day of Nativity freedom came to the enslaved woman, the bride of Light.⁸¹ The prodigal son⁸² and Barabba are types of the enslaved and imprisoned Adam/humanity for whom Christ was bound and crucified.⁸³ Through death Christ entered into the house of slavery, Sheol, where Adam, the pearl, remained a captive. He uprooted Sheol in three days and led out the captives of death and Satan⁸⁴ to the land of freedom and life.⁸⁵ Thus from the great exile humanity was liberated and returned to the house of the Father. After completing his fight with the adversary Christ, the Mighty One, returned his bow to come with strength.⁸⁶ He did not bring back the way at his feet.⁸⁷

2.3. Combat Imagery

St. Ephrem explains that God had neither shown to Adam his naked state if he would disobey, nor his glorious state if he would obey the commandment, so that Adam might receive, by means of his combat, a crown that befitted his actions (*HParad* 3.9). The anthropology of Jacob of Serugh views the creation of Adam/humanity as a setting for a combat which is made complete

and victorious by Christ who enabled humanity attain resurrection into life immortal, i.e., the summit of all divine promises:

When he had created him, he retained him for the combat for righteousness.

When he saved him, he gave him deliverance from exile and when he resuscitated, he bequeathed the bliss as it was promised,

so that Adam might possess everything of his own without any alteration.⁸⁸

Divine justice has so arranged as to respect Adam and make him attain whatever his free will chooses as his own responsible acquisition, be it for his glorification or for his condemnation through the observance or non-observance of the Law.⁸⁹ God's justice is so wise and merciful as to set Adam in such a neutral state with the possibilities of discerning choice for immortality with righteousness or mortality with iniquity in foolishness. This sort of tension was a combat situation, in which Adam/humanity had to make progress with vigilance and discernment.⁹⁰ But Adam failed in the combat and the adversary gained the upper hand. Even the fallen Adam was offered the opening of the door of grace by the merciful and omniscient one⁹¹ with the question, 'Where are you?' (Gen 3.9). Divine mercy sent his own Son to snatch away the wearied prey, Adam, from the captors.⁹² The various titles of Christ the Saviour, such as Mighty One, Warrior, Merchant, Commander, Athlete, Lion's whelp, Swimmer,⁹³ Hunter,⁹⁴ are symbolic depictions of Christ's combat with the evil one, the captor of Adam. The Son of the virgin, the Mighty One, subdued the rebellious one in the contest and let the captives go free.⁹⁵

From the very first moment of his earthly life the Son assumed the combat of Adam (*HVir* 12.1,9,30; 13; 14). This became all the more clear and perceptible in his temptation, in the forty days' fasting and at the suffering and death at Golgotha by which he entered into Sheol. Holy Simeon saw the battle into which Christ would enter in order to raise the side of righteousness.⁹⁶ At his baptism in Jordan Christ himself enters into the water to equip the whole of humanity for the fight as well as to set an armoury for all to engage in the fight.⁹⁷ He polished humanity for the fight. At the Transfiguration Moses and Elijah

spoke of the road of the fight Christ should get into. What Adam failed to do and preserve, Christ, the Heir of Adam and the smitten Redeemer, did by his mighty deeds and rendered redemption to the fallen Adam by justification. The combat of Christ was foreshadowed in the fight of Samson,⁹⁸ in the sufferings of Ezekiel,⁹⁹ and in the episode of Jonah.¹⁰⁰ Through death Christ entered into Sheol, the great captivity of the generations. There the 'Life-giver' fought and shattered the fortifications of the evil one and let the captives go out to proceed to the Father. Christ killed iniquity and sin, conquered death and uprooted Sheol and rose up victorious.¹⁰¹

2.4. Medical Imagery

Adam's inordinate attempt to capture divinity ended up in a sort of 'leprosy' like that of king Uzziah.¹⁰² Adam's false nourishment became poisonous and thus the first and the 'grave ulcer' developed,¹⁰³ not only in the person of Adam, the head of the race, but also in reality within the whole of humanity. The eating without discernment led the whole humanity into laxity of life, intemperance and gluttony.¹⁰⁴ Through Adam the human race was poisoned at its source and the posterity carried along the sickness. To the wounded and poisoned humanity the Son brought 'the Medicine of Life'¹⁰⁵ and became the Physician.¹⁰⁶ Adam failed in his fight against the lures of lust¹⁰⁷ and was wounded and fractured.¹⁰⁸ Christ in his own temptation sought for a cure to the fallen and sick Adam and taught the human race the wise 'medicinal herb' of forty days' fasting as a cure to the first 'grave ulcer'.

Fasting was established as a model and device for the purification of the four elements¹⁰⁹ that have turned into disintegration due to the false eating of Adam. The celestial Adam cured the ulcer of the terrestrial Adam and repaid the debt of gluttony, intemperance and laxity of life by his abstinence and firmness. "Our Saviour came and underwent suffering in order to heal Adam's wounds and to provide a garment of glory for his nakedness" (*CDiat* 16.10). Christ devised a healing for Adam/humanity¹¹⁰ as he really became a 'Physician' as well as the 'Medicinal Herb' to the wounds of Adam/humanity and carried away all pains.¹¹¹ He now stands as the Strengthener to all who are

infirm to make them stand erect as well as to feed them by his diligence.¹¹² Beyond the driving away of sickness, as 'the vivifier of all', Christ vivified the dead and gave new life.¹¹³ Above all in referring to Adam's eating without discernment as the 'false nourishment' alludes in a symbolic manner to all forms of false nourishments in human existence, covering the physical, sensorial, mental and spiritual realms of human life.

2.5. Dough/Baking Imagery

With regard to the redemptive incarnation, life, suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, the imagery of leaven takes a primary position. The hidden but transforming power of leaven is the key element of this imagery. Syriac literature presents a coherent synthesis of theological truths or divine realities through this imagery.¹¹⁴ This imagery with its theological language explains the economy of salvation in creation, incarnation and resurrection. The underlying vision could be summarised as follows: The merciful Father bestowed his image upon the dust and made it great, but the evil one snatched it away into captivity in Sheol and made it turn back to the dust devoid of glory. Through Adam the creation that was wisely and skillfully moulded became mingled with death. The evil one poisoned the human dough at its source and there was the need of 'the Leaven of Life' to counteract that. The mercy of the Father had concern for his image and he took pity on it giving his Son as 'the Leaven',¹¹⁵ and the Salt¹¹⁶ to season and give taste to the race of Adam. Humanity remained unleavened before the advent of Christ and by the Incarnation of Christ, 'the Leaven of Life' pervaded the lump of humanity.¹¹⁷ Thus Christ is the 'Leaven from the Most High'¹¹⁸ who brought himself down and kneaded himself into humanity.

The exegesis of the Gospel parable of the Kingdom of Heaven as leaven in the world¹¹⁹ (Mt 13.33; Lk 13.20-21) serves as a discerning teaching. According to Jacob of Serugh it gives a holistic vision of the person and activities of the Son of God in the whole economy of salvation. The leaven is our Lord who is the Word, the Son of God. The wise woman who took it is Godhead and the three measures of the flour is the three branches of humanity that proceeded from the Ark of Noah (Gen 9.18-19). Thus the Son of God was hidden in the three nations from the Ark.

The death inherited by Adam remained in these nations and hence the need of the 'Leaven of Life'.¹²⁰ In the symbol of the kneading of the Son into humanity as the Leaven explains a series of theological factors vividly. It includes all divine teachings in the OT regarding the advent of the Son for redemption, his assuming of the body of Adam with all its passions and debts, his hidden life (as the leaven in the dough), his suffering and death and even his kneading into Sheol¹²¹ of the dead, where the dead assumed life from him in order to enter into the region of life. Incarnation is our Lord's putting on our body to grant us life. The Son by putting on our likeness gathered us into his likeness.¹²² St. Ephrem describes the matter shortly and vividly:

"You put on our visible body; let us put on Your hidden power. Our body became Your garment; Your spirit became our robe. Blessed is He who was adorned and adorned us!
(*HNat* 22.39).¹²³

Kneading of the Son depicts symbolically the divine self-emptying (as the kneading of leaven into the dough), the unification of the peoples from various errors of the idols, the transforming power of Christ and his teachings, the healing and taste-giving role of the Son who elevates all to the status of the sons of his Father, as well as the giving of good hope to the living and the dead.¹²⁴ The dynamic effects of Baptism too are symbolically depicted in the leaven imagery. In place of the poisoned water of Eden the Divinity sets the dough of humanity in the sanctified water of baptism together with the oil of anointing to give good-taste to all.¹²⁵

2.6. 'Light and Darkness' Imagery

The ups and downs of the history of salvation can be depicted through the imagery of light and darkness. Darkness implies wrong discernment, lack of understanding of the divine purpose, idols and idolatry. The wrong discernment of Adam made humanity enter into the path of darkness. Although among his posterity there were just people like Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Moses, who fought against darkness and lived in the light, their existence and functions were due to Christ, the Light that enlightens all. Thus righteous people of the OT lived and acted on account of Christ, and they somehow depicted Christ's own

salvific enlightening of the world. Christ stands as 'the Sun of Righteousness' who sheds his light backward and forward without any shadow around him. St. Ephrem in his hymns on the Church 36 depicts Christ, the Light, shining out from Mary and Jordan. From Mary's womb the whole humanity began to cloth Christ and Jordan's womb became the fountainhead of Christian baptism. In the tomb and in Sheol, Christ was the Bright One, who illumined all. From his birth till ascent Christ was illumining all from his light for salvation (*HEccl* 36.3-6).

As the Daystar in the river,
The Bright One in the tomb,
He shone forth on the mountain top
and gave brightness too in the womb:
He dazzled as He went up from the river,
Gave illumination at his ascent (*HEccl* 36.5).¹²⁶

In the advent of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, the whole Law and the prophets became merged in him and he did away with all small lamps such as the just and the prophets.¹²⁷ Christ who is called 'Sunrise' stands as 'the Day' which has no evening or morning.¹²⁸ The salvific activities of Christ expelled all types of darkness and their scars on humanity and through his light he exposed all agents of darkness, i.e., the evil one and his company. Adam/humanity became a prisoner of darkness behind the gates of the house of darkness.¹²⁹

At the Nativity, the Light shone forth from the house of David to dispel darkness.¹³⁰ From the people 'the Sun for the Peoples' shone forth in darkness.¹³¹ The 'Great Sun' by dwelling among humanity clothed all with his light and the great Day of truth dawned,¹³² in which all are made sons of the Light. Christ, the Bridegroom of light, appeared as 'the Day-Star/Sunrise'¹³³ to betroth the bride of light at Jordan.¹³⁴ During the fasting and temptations Christ exposed Satan and his darkened ways of idols and idolatry.¹³⁵ The great Sun, Christ,¹³⁶ made his light shine in the place of the dead or Sheol and caused its downfall to make all the mournful and wearying ones rejoice.¹³⁷ The day of the Resurrection is the beginning of the new world.¹³⁸ At the Ascension, Christ, the Globe of Light, sent out his rays, the apostles, to the whole creation.¹³⁹ From the light of the Son all assume light and glory.

2.7. Clothing Imagery

Different aspects of the fall of humanity in Adam and the various stages of the salvation history are well depicted through clothing imagery with an originality of its own in the early Syriac Christian theology.¹⁴⁰ The inspiration behind this theological expression is from the biblical usages in Gen 3.21 (clothing of Adam/Eve), Heb 5.7; 10.5 (Christ's coming clothed in a body), Rom 13.14; Gal 3.27 (Christians' putting on Christ). The interpretation of Gen 3.21 in terms of 'the Robe of Glory' with which Adam was clothed before the fall is a common heritage of the Jewish and Christian interpretations, and was an inspiration to the early Syriac tradition.¹⁴¹ St. Ephrem gives clear expression to this, "Our Saviour came and underwent suffering in order to heal Adam's wounds and to provide a garment of glory for his nakedness" (*CDiat* 16.10). Jacob of Serugh follows the interpretations and the symbolic views developed by Ephrem and others. Jacob envisages the Incarnation and the redeeming activities of Christ as enabling Adam regain the robe of glory/light he had lost or rather the serpent took away from him from among the trees of Eden.¹⁴² The four stages or scenes of the dramatic development of the history of salvation:¹⁴³ Adam before the fall, Adam after the fall, Christ who puts on Adam in the Incarnation and the Christians who put on Christ in the Baptism, envisaged in the theological expression of the 'garment of glory' frame-work, remain a legacy of Syriac tradition.

The serpent gave deceitful advice to Eve in the garden so as to take away the 'garment of glory' and wove a tunic of iniquity in which the first parents remained naked and shameful. The fig leaves came as a clothing of shame. Jacob of Serugh finds this as a punishment as well as a promise regarding the return of the expelled Adam into Paradise.¹⁴⁴ But the angel Gabriel spoke the truth to Mary and, by contrast, he was not weaving a 'garment of shame' but 'a garment of glory' to clothe the stripped and naked Adam/humanity.¹⁴⁵ In the Incarnation by being robed in swaddling clothes¹⁴⁶ Christ exchanged glory for Adam/humanity's garment of shame. At the baptism of Christ the 'robe of glory' was placed in the waters and the bride was sent down to clothe herself to be adorned.¹⁴⁷ The bride needs to be adorned by the hearing of prophets (the voice of the Word) and the apostles. It is noteworthy

that Jacob of Serugh describes John the Baptist, being at the frontier of the testaments, as both a prophet and an apostle (ambassador of the Word) at the same time.¹⁴⁸ It is Christ, the Bridegroom, who gives the white garments of the Spirit from the waters of baptism.¹⁴⁹ This garment is at the same time an armour too to fight against the evil one and his machinations.¹⁵⁰ The onward journey of Christ through his sufferings and death is a model for Adam/humanity in the fight against the evil one and death. Finally at the Resurrection Christ assumes the garment of glory and leaves the garment of the dead in the tomb.¹⁵¹ Then Christ makes all put on the garment of glory of which the thief is the first recipient.¹⁵² Syriac authors, with their catechetical thrust, lay much emphasis on the 'putting on' of Christ in the form of the 'garment of glory/spirit' in baptismal waters.¹⁵³ Ephrem writes, "Christ came to find Adam who had gone astray, He came to return him to Eden in the garment of light (*HVir* 16.9).¹⁵⁴

2.8. Nuptial Imagery

The nuptial imagery employed by Syriac writers assumes a wider significance so as to embrace the whole economy of salvation. They are keen to show how the restoration of the disrupted 'marriage feast' in Eden has been made possible through Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom. In fact all divine-human encounters in the OT starting with Paradise are betrothals and covenants which were looking forward to their actualization in Christ and the realization in the 'marriage feast' in the eschatological Kingdom. Syriac authors find all the staging posts of the incarnate Son, womb of Mary, womb of Jordan and the womb of Sheol, as betrothals in view of the marriage feast in the Kingdom.

In the Nativity the divine Bridegroom made himself small within the dimensions of humanity¹⁵⁵ so as to enter into the bridal chamber of the cave in Bethlehem.¹⁵⁶ At Jordan the Bridegroom brings in sanctification and the 'garment of the Spirit', both as an armoury and as an enlightenment. The betrothal that has been initiated and continued in the OT, at the Nativity and at the Baptism in Jordan, reaches its summit in the paschal events. At Golgotha the betrothal becomes consummated with the Bridegroom's total self-giving to the bride as the dowry. The Son

passes through various bridal chambers such as the cave of Bethlehem, the river Jordan, at Golgotha, and at the cave-tomb, and in Sheol. Jacob of Serugh even mentions the commencement of the marriage feast in the bride's partaking of the body and blood of the Bridegroom in the Eucharistic context. The body of the Bridegroom is placed as food for the guests.¹⁵⁷ This feast finds its fuller realization in the eschatological kingdom.

3. Mystery of the History of Salvation

By a narrative theological reflection through images the history of salvation can be depicted in different aspects. Five portraits of the history of salvation are presented here.

3.1. Salvation on the Road of Righteousness and on the Road of the Cross

Syriac Christianity has something unique to offer through the metaphor of 'the way'.¹⁵⁸ Some important general factors are: the progressive nature of the divine self-revelation, various stages of the divine teachings through symbols and types, the divine Incarnation, and the progressive levels of human response to the divine mercy in the history of humanity, etc. The Syriac legacy presents the imagery of 'the way' in integration with other imageries such as 'merchants', 'merchandise', 'ship', 'sea', 'milestones' and 'inns', in order to provide an integral vision of the dynamics of divine revelation, the life of faith and the realization of salvation. Herein lies the richness and freshness of the early Syriac symbolic theology of 'the road of salvation'. As regards the general structure of the imagery of 'the way' the description of Ephrem is the standard one.¹⁵⁹ He works out many of the details in the *Hymns against Heresies* 25-27.¹⁶⁰ *Hymns against Heresies* 26.4 can be taken as a summary statement of Ephrem:

For the sake of the fruit he laid the way
which [runs] from the Tree right to the Cross;
it extended from the Wood to the Wood
and from Eden to Zion,
from Zion to Holy Church
and from the Church to the Kingdom (*CH* 26.4).¹⁶¹

This road can be viewed in detail as: from Adam to Moses, from Moses to Christ, and then the period of the Church. There are

'mile stones' and 'inns' on this way built by truth and love. The milestones are the prophets and the inns, the apostles. In the latter period the milestones are the names of the holy Trinity, the sacraments and the Scriptures. The way is still beset with stumbling blocks of idols, false teachings, robbers who are waiting to steal the sheep and to construct false paths. Yet the way invariably leads to the Kingdom.¹⁶²

Jacob of Serugh combines the imagery of the road/way of salvation and the divine teachings to humanity through the Scriptures. He finds the starting of the road of Law from the first commandment given to Adam/Eve in Paradise. There began the divine pedagogy destined to make humanity attain salvation. But the disobedience of Adam/humanity tilted the balance leading to the breach of the Law and the corruption of human nature. Hence, the renewal of the Law was through Moses and of human nature through Christ, the incarnate Son.

In their typological thought pattern the early Syriac authors find the actualization of all symbols and mysteries in Christ. Ephrem calls this the state of 'truth' or 'reality' contrasted with all shadows that are depicted through the mysteries and types of the Old Testament. Jacob of Serugh calls this 'a coming out into effect or actualization'.¹⁶³ The process of 'coming into effect' faces many stumbling blocks. All Old Testament symbols and types are in fact borrowings from Christ, the source and fountain of the mysteries. As Christ came in person to manifest the truth all ancient borrowings returned to their source. This fact is explained by the imageries of 'the tree and the grafting of branches' (*SdDN* 55), and 'the sea and the flowing of rivers'.¹⁶⁴ The power of the economy of salvation, or rather, of Christ himself, removes all stumbling blocks from the road of his economy.

In treating the imagery of the way of salvation we find generally three stages. They are the prophetic vision of the road of Christ in types and mysteries, the historical fulfilment of those types and mysteries in the incarnate Son, and the spiritual realization of the same in the individuals and the community of believers in Christ through the Church. Through Moses the road of law has been rectified by giving the deposits of the law and its sequences such as prophecy, priesthood, etc. This road of the Law (Righteousness) runs, together with the lights of prophecy, till John

the Baptist. After John the Baptist the incarnate Son himself leads the road, the road of the Cross.

Prophecy has viewed the path of Christ, the path of the Cross, in the light of the Spirit.¹⁶⁵ The path of the Cross of Christ brings in the perfection of all promises of God and renders justification to iniquitous Adam/humanity. Hence the path of the Cross is called the path of perfection. The way of Christ is a sequel to the initial descent of divine mercy to create Adam. The humble way of Christ in the order of birth and death is the result of the descent of divine mercy to liberate Adam from the bondage of the evil one and from the state of disintegration in the hands of the adversary. Christ came on the road of the serpent that was bitter, and filled it with sweet honey through his steps.¹⁶⁶ By assuming the fallen body of Adam Christ sought the redemption of the fallen human nature. He traveled the entire road of Adam in order to provide redemption. From the womb of the virgin to that of the baptism and to the womb of Sheol¹⁶⁷ he traveled and finally effected the resurrection of the body. On the incarnate road of our Lord, in all his 'staging posts' divinity has been introduced as a support to human nature so that it might not fall again,¹⁶⁸ but attain salvation. The response of humanity in the context of free will towards the divine invitation to repentance, conversion and faith is a prominent factor on the road of the economy of salvation.

3.2. Salvation as Demolition of Idols and Idolatry for the Liberation of Slaves

Ephrem finds idolatry as the wound and slavery for which freedom is brought as a healing by incarnation. Creatures were worshipped by foolish worshippers in their slavery. Hence divine compassion came down and broke the yoke of slavery and released humanity (*HNat* 22.4) and by the incarnation redeemed us:

The All-Knowing saw that we worshipped creatures.

He put on a created body to catch us by our habit,
to draw us by a created body toward the Creator.

Blessed is He Who contrived to draw us [to Him] (*HNat* 22.16).¹⁶⁹

The result of incarnation is so dramatically set by Ephrem, "You put on our visible body; let us put on your hidden power. Our

body became Your garment; Your spirit became our robe” (*HNat* 22.39). At the birth of Christ all idols were demolished.

Jacob of Serugh finds idolatry as an alien love/lust¹⁷⁰ that emerges into existence due to the allurements of the envious evil one and human submissiveness out of free will to those allurements. Eve became the first victim to the allurements of the evil one. Thus came into existence the first act of human infidelity by disobedience to the first commandment, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen 2.16-17).

Anything that hinders and distorts the vision of the richness of the economy of Christ is an idol and a stumbling block. All such idols hinder the light of the divine ‘teaching of salvation’.¹⁷¹ The image of ‘light and darkness’ is widely used by our author to demonstrate the phenomenon and the effects of idolatry. Idols make humanity blind and lead further into the darkness of estrangement from the divine light. They set all on the darkened roads that lead into iniquity and to slavery to the evil one. Hence, Christ manifests himself as ‘Day-star’ or ‘Sun-rise’ (ܕܢܗܐ *denhā*);¹⁷² in the darkened world. Christ is called ‘the Sun of Righteousness’ (Mal 4.2) who enlightens all and gathers all from the darkened roads of vanity and iniquity.¹⁷³ This ‘Sun of Righteousness’ had enlightened all in the old dispensation through his light in the law and the prophets. In the new dispensation the Sun of Righteousness was born from the virgin to overthrow darkness from all regions¹⁷⁴ and to expose all idols and make them fall away into insensibility.¹⁷⁵

The jealousy of the evil one introduces alien lust¹⁷⁶ by way of an alien love into the natural and pure state of human soul.¹⁷⁷ This alien lust, if the free will submits to it, introduces an alien order that displaces the original order set for humanity to run up to the ‘meeting point of immortality’.¹⁷⁸ Wrong discernment leads to the wrong course of action under the sway of alien lust/love.¹⁷⁹ Once harmony is lost, disharmony prevails and disintegration rules along under the ‘yoke of slavery’.

There is an underlying relationship between ‘the alien-love’, ‘alien-lust’, ‘idols of vanity’, ‘stumbling blocks’, ‘love of the world’, and ‘love of gold’. All these stem from the adversary’s

cunning calculations to estrange humanity from the right path. All stumbling blocks in Christian life, in whatever form they might be, are idols that allure humanity towards an alien love that alienates it from the true path.¹⁸⁰ This 'alien love' or 'the love of the world' distorts the vision of the economy of Christ and hinders the light from 'the teaching of salvation',¹⁸¹ leading all to false discernment. The false discernment of Eve is carried along by the Children of Eve. The alien desire is an intruder in the internal harmony and destroys the 'yoke of harmony',¹⁸² and the yoke of slavery prevails.

As the culmination and consummation of the divine pedagogy designed by the Father, Christ came to liberate the captives from slavery and idolatry.¹⁸³ The four out of the five alliances, i.e., through Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses, served like instructions to children who were growing up.¹⁸⁴ Thus God, the Merciful One, prepared the generations, through the divine pedagogy,¹⁸⁵ for the manifestation of his Only-Begotten in order to show that there are no multiple gods but only one God.¹⁸⁶ Through Christ the divine pedagogy attained its fullest efficacy and perfection. God the Father knew that humanity needed a tangible God through whom the rupture in relationships could be repaired and reconciliation brought about. It is fulfilled in Christ. Hence what is offered in Christ is not only an informative knowledge but a transformative teaching of God because Christ came down as 'Leaven of Life' and mingled with humanity in order to transform it.

3.3. Salvation in the Renewal of the House of Adam and Renewal of the Kingdom and the Priesthood

Aphrahat affirms how Jesus assumes the High-Priesthood of the Jewish nation from John the Baptist. Similarly Christ becomes King of those who believed in him as depicted by David who was king of a single tribe. But unlike David Christ is destined to reign over all at the end (*Dem XXI.13*). John the Baptist had only held the title of Priesthood¹⁸⁷ which had to come upon Christ by the imposition of the hands of John at Jordan.

Ephrem speaks of the flowing of Priesthood from the hands, and the prophecy from the lips, of the aged priest Simeon upon Christ at the temple (*SdDN 53-54*).¹⁸⁸ Ephrem writes:

Then Mary received her firstborn and went forth. He was outwardly wrapped in swaddling clothes, but secretly He was clothed with prophecy and priesthood. Whatsoever then was handed down from Moses, was received from Simeon, but continued and was possessed by the Lord of both (*SdDN* 54).¹⁸⁹

The whole deposit was given to Moses, the steward, and it was carried along until Simeon, the treasurer, who handed it over to Christ (*SdDN* 54). At Jordan Christ received baptism from John the Baptist (*SdDN* 55-58).¹⁹⁰ All those powers handed over to Moses and carried along thereafter became barren like the fig tree without fruit (Mt 21.19 *et par.*). Hence they were cut away and through Christ those powers flourished among the gentiles (*SdDF* 58).¹⁹¹ In this respect Priesthood came from Simeon to Christ and remained with him, even though Annas exercised it; baptism came from John the Baptist; and the Kingdom of the House of David as well even though Herod exercised it (*SdDN* 56).¹⁹² As all these gifts remained grafted on bitter trees (evil kings and priests), at the manifestation of Christ all of them came back to the One who gave those powers. In Christ all of them were grafted on to their natural tree (*SdDN* 57)¹⁹³ and from there all the gifts flow towards the gentiles (*SdDN* 58).¹⁹⁴

3.3.1. Renewal of the House of Adam: Human Nature, Humanity and the Creation

In Christ, the divine mercy came down to the level of the fallen one in order to render good hope as well as to govern (Kingship) and sanctify (Priesthood). The economy of salvation viewed as 'the renewal of the house of Adam' is in several levels. The major levels being those of human nature,¹⁹⁵ the whole of humanity (*QHC I* 246), and the whole creation.¹⁹⁶

3.3.1.1. The Renewal of Human Nature

The whole economy of salvation is envisaged as a realization of Adam-Christ complementarity in the aspect of the healing and renewal of the terrestrial Adam by the celestial Adam, Christ.¹⁹⁷ The law that had been broken was renewed through Moses but the (human) nature that had been damaged was repaired and renewed by Christ, the incarnate Son.¹⁹⁸ From the point of

view of 'image and likeness upon clay' Adam became 'the damaged coin'¹⁹⁹ in which 'the image' is destroyed.²⁰⁰ Based on the view of the harmony of the four elements Adam became a tilted equilibrium of elements and the five senses that had lost their proper foundation due to the disintegrating body.²⁰¹ On account of the venom of the serpent the whole structure of Adam fell into perdition and turned to mortality. Against this serpentine venom, Christ, 'the Leaven of Life'²⁰² pervaded the whole of humanity by his Incarnation. To 'the fallen house of Adam' 'the Master-BUILDER' himself descended in his Nativity to rebuild it. Moreover, the Divinity itself entered in support of the 'house of Adam' so that it should not fall again.²⁰³

The imagery of 'leaven', with its connotations and allusions to the mystery of the Incarnation, serves as a paradigm for all forms of renewal through Christ. Wherever the 'Leaven of Life' enters disintegration, death and Sheol cannot withstand. The bitten and worn out Adam was restored²⁰⁴ in order that he might be written in 'the Book of Life'.²⁰⁵ Christ, the Leaven of Life, through the assumed body, led astray the evil one and his programmes. This 'Leaven of Life', Christ, on the road of his birth and death renewed everything, choked death and uprooted Sheol. To the four elements that fell into the road of disintegration Christ gave the teaching of fasting as a remedy for the breach of the first commandment²⁰⁶ that opened the 'first ulcer' by false nourishment. Fasting and endurance remain as paradigms of remedy for all types of false nourishments and alien desires with their symbolic allusions to all false nourishments and inordinate desires of human existence in body and soul.

3.3.1.2. Renewal of Humanity

As 'the house of Adam' the whole of humanity is reconciled and restored in Christ. As the intermediary of reconciliation and rebuilding of humanity the activities of Christ are explained figuratively through various images:²⁰⁷

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Christ, 'the Mighty One' | - bound the rebellious one for the liberation of the bound ones. |
| Christ, 'the Warrior' | - bound the captor and made the captivity return home. |

- Christ, 'the Physician' - bandaged and healed the wounded and rewarded the healed.
- Christ, 'the Doctor' - bound the fractured, nourished and restored by his care.
- Christ, 'the Leaven of Life' - pervaded the lump of humanity that was unleavened.
- Christ, 'the Salt' - came down from the Most High to give humanity the stable taste.
- Christ, 'the Strengthenener' - came to the infirm to strengthen them by feeding through his diligence.

Jacob of Serugh summarizes the whole redeeming activity of Christ as follows: "He walked on earth and sprinkled mercy and filled it with hope and made peace between the earthly and the heavenly beings".²⁰⁸

On the road of the saving activity, Christ, the celestial Adam, repaid the debt of the terrestrial Adam by fasting to cure the 'first ulcer'.²⁰⁹ The serpent had bitten a maiden and another maiden gave the medicinal herb for her cure.²¹⁰ A teaching for the weak human nature has been given in fasting.²¹¹ As the Heir to Adam our Lord accepted the debt of sins and the whole heritage of ruin of the house of Adam. In his body Christ repaid the debts and reconstructed the ruins and redeemed the corrupted image from Sheol.²¹² At the resurrection of the Lord death was defeated and Sheol was uprooted for liberating the captives whom the evil one had unjustly subjugated. Ezekiel who suffered for the iniquities of the nation of Israel²¹³ and of Samson who destroyed the camp of Philistines²¹⁴ allude to the deeper mystery of the suffering and death of the Lord and the uprooting of Sheol respectively.

3.3.1.3. Renewal of the Whole Creation

The error of Adam brought about the curses on himself and on the whole creation. It is the redeeming mercy that descended and mingled with the earthly to give life to the world. By the Nativity of the Son the enmity between Adam and God has been resolved and reconciliation brought about,²¹⁵ the heavenly and the earthly have been reconciled. They began praising in a single hymn.²¹⁶ All the curses on the earth have been revoked by Christ and hence there began to reign peace on earth. The earth and the

Garden with its trees exulted as the expelled heir returned.²¹⁷ The thorns of the earth have been removed by the crown of thorns²¹⁸ and blessings were showered on the day of the Nativity.²¹⁹

3.3.2. Christ, the King of Kings and the High Priest, Renewing Everything from what is His own

The powers given to Adam, especially his kingly and priestly roles, have developed into social institutions in Israel. But in their developments human pride, greed and lust began to rule, rather than the divine will²²⁰ and hence the need of renewal and redemption. Christ was king in essence, as was proclaimed by the patriarch Jacob who had been enriched with revelations.²²¹ Christ emerged from the tribe of Judah, which carried the kingdom and hoped for the renewal to set itself aright in an incorruptible state as David himself had said with consolation in the Holy Spirit.²²² Thus in Christ the promises of the patriarch Jacob, the words of David and the explanation of Daniel (Dan 2.44) regarding the kingdom are fulfilled.²²³ As the kingdom forms part of his essence and belongs to him Christ received it from no one nor did he hand it over to anyone. The kingdom of David continues for eternity through Christ.²²⁴

Far above the order of the Levitical priesthood Christ wanted to establish his perfect priesthood. That perfection and its higher order in Christ is foreshadowed in Melchizedek. By his offerings to Melchizedek Abraham mingled himself with the dominical priesthood.²²⁵ David, through the spirit of prophecy, sought a type to depict the exalted sacrificial offering of Christ.²²⁶ Searching through the offerings of Abel, Noah, Abraham and those of the Levites, David found only Melchizedek. The offering of Melchizedek was a self-offering of his sufferings instead of the blood of animals. Thus he depicted the offering of Christ. As Christ did not receive his priesthood from anyone nor did he hand it over to anyone, so Melchizedek also did not receive his priesthood nor did he hand it over to anyone. He was priest forever.

Christ entered into his royal domain at Ephratha²²⁷ and proceeded from there on the road of his salvific activity. At Jordan at his baptism kingship and priesthood flew to him as waters naturally flow into the sea.²²⁸ Christ assumed the Davidic Kingship and the Priesthood of Aaron, not because he lacked anything, but in

reality Kingship and Priesthood belong to him essentially. All orders of priestly and kingly ministry gain perfection from Christ.²²⁹

3.4. Salvation as 'Betrothal and Marriage Feast' versus 'Idols and Idolatry'

The divine-human relationship, exemplified in the relationship of Christ and the Church, which is destined to fuller realization in the eschatological Kingdom, is best described by the imagery of betrothal and marriage feast. This imagery and the typologies that depict it are the best means to give an account of the existential tension between the primordial and the eschatological Paradise. It also takes into account the progressive nature of both the divine revelation and the realization of the divine promises. The promises were given to Adam/humanity in the primordial Paradise. These promises are realized through the divine economy that respects human free will. This imagery of the divine-human relationship is depicted in concrete form in the life of Israel, and in symbolic form through nuptial imagery.

Israel is the betrothed of God. The betrothal took place through various covenants and the Law given on Mount Sinai. The realization of the divine economy with respect to human freedom progresses. This progress with its inherent dynamic tension is best depicted through the history of the faithful and unfaithful behaviour of Israel. On the one hand the betrothal with a view to the marriage feast takes place at various levels and on the other hand idols and idolatry set stumbling blocks on the road of the betrothed life of Israel.

Ephrem's third hymn on the Resurrection is highlighted by S.P. Brock as a concise framework of an insightful vision of the imagery of betrothal and marriage feast.²³⁰ Ephrem finds the betrothal of Christ, the Bridegroom, to the Church taking place at Jordan (*HVir* 5.9; *CH* 24.6) and on the Sunday of Hosannas at Jerusalem (*Resur* 3.2-5; *Crucif* 1.1-4).

The imagery of 'betrothal and marriage feast' is a more recurrent theme in Jacob of Serugh by which he attempts to present a wider coverage of the events of salvation history. Jacob makes clear references to the starting of the betrothal and marriage feast in Paradise itself. Eden is the bridal gift and bridal chamber. But the

evil one through the serpent had spoiled the marriage feast. Even then the purpose of the merciful Father stands effective and runs to its realization through the purification and adorning of the polluted bride to make her 'the bride of light' before 'the Bridegroom of Light', Christ. According to Jacob of Serugh the adorning and betrothal of the bride take place at all levels of the divine-human encounter in the course of salvation history: at Sinai by Moses, later by the prophets and at Jordan and Zion. This process finds its culmination at Golgotha where the betrothal and marriage feast take place simultaneously as the slain Bridegroom gives his own body as food for the guests of the marriage feast. Thus the Eucharist depicts the already initiated heavenly marriage feast.²³¹ In fact Mar Jacob makes a creative inheritance of Ephrem's insights and composes imaginative expositions of them in various exegetical contexts, according to his own needs, by reading into the suggestions already seen in the scriptural episodes. His originality in this respect is pointed out by S. P. Brock in connection with the biblical episode of 'the pierced side of Christ'.²³² Through this single episode Jacob reads the whole salvation history. Christ, the Second Adam, by the piercing of his side reopens Paradise that was closed against the first Adam from whom Eve was born, who caused the entry of death. But from the side of Christ, the Church and the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist were born. The betrothal and marriage feast are seen taking place together at Golgotha because Christ, the Bridegroom, gave his own body and blood as 'bride-price' and 'wedding feast', which is a foretaste of the eternal wedding feast. Thus the linking between the primordial Paradise, the fall, the betrothal of Christ and his Church, the sacraments, the Eucharistic wedding feast and the wedding feast in the heavenly Kingdom are all effectively brought around a single scriptural episode through rich typological allusions.

3.5. Salvation as God's Mercy Seeking Adam and Adam's Re-entry into Paradise

The solidarity of humanity in the terrestrial Adam and in Christ, the celestial Adam remain basic to this vision.²³³ It is from this vision that the perfection rendered to humanity by Christ takes on its wider significance and concrete efficacy. Adam had been created in the model of the uncreated Only-Begotten. Among the

created beings Adam is older in conception and younger in birth. This view on the creation of Adam is prominent in Syriac Christianity²³⁴ possibly by a carrying over from Rabbinical traditions.²³⁵

3.5.1. Creation of Adam/Humanity

As Aphrahat puts it, Adam was conceived in the mind of God first and then the whole material world was created so as to arrange a marriage feast for Adam. As soon as the material world has been prepared, Adam, who was old in conception, came into birth as the youngest. Hence, in the material world Adam stands as the first as well as the last (*Dem* XXII.7).²³⁶ Ephrem too speaks of Adam's pre-existence in the mind of God, unlike other creatures, before his birth in the world. Thus Adam is oldest in conception and youngest in birth.²³⁷ Ephrem is much dependent on the Pauline Col 1.15-20 and the Johannine Prologue in handling Gen 1.26.²³⁸ Jacob of Serugh is quite clear on how Adam had been honoured with the resemblance of the future corporeality of the celestial Adam conferred on him at the creation. The Father contemplated on the incarnate Son and moulded Adam in that resemblance.²³⁹

The creation of Adam in the image of God is for Ephrem a mysterious revelation of God's First-born who is active in creation and redemption. What God has begun in the creation of man out of his mercy (*HFid* 67.19-21) would reach perfection by justification through the same mercy that forms Adam a second time (*CNis* 69.1-7). The bringing into existence of Adam by the divine mercy is a foreshadowing of the redemptive salvation offered to Adam through the Son who is the incarnate mercy of the Divinity.

3.5.2. The Fall of Adam/Humanity and the Expulsion from Paradise

The cunningness of the evil one set a trap and made Adam fall from his dignified status. Adam had a three-fold fall: He was expelled from the house of his father, he had been expelled from his status as the adopted son, and finally he was expelled from his own existence by turning to dust. Hence, disintegration began to rule over him. He began to revert to dust and to the state of animals that are devoid of rational image.²⁴⁰

The divine-human relationship through Christ, as envisaged by early Syriac Christian writers, has both aspects of human becoming and divine transcendence. The image of God in man is not yet a realized reality, but something in the process of realization. It is the human freedom that sets the human counterpart of the mode of progress in salvation history. It was the wrong exercise of this freedom that caused the expulsion of Adam/humanity from the primordial Paradise. In the light of Ephrem's views S. P. Brock explains that the salvific activities of Christ do not bring back the expelled Adam/humanity merely to the primordial Paradise but in reality to the eschatological Paradise. Both primordial and eschatological Paradises belong to sacred time and space.²⁴¹ The expulsion of Adam from Paradise represents the transition from sacred to historical time and space where the divine pedagogy provides the teaching. Due to the sacramental presence of the risen Lord, humanity's tangibility to the ultimate goal remains a meta-historical reality transcending all boundaries of chronological time and space. In this respect the emphasis given by early Syriac writers to Christ's death and his journey to Sheol in order to uproot it and redeem the older generations, assumes greater importance. This prominent theme describes the efficacy of salvation in Christ to all the past, present and future members of humankind.

Jacob of Serugh writes, "Your love compelled you on account of us to come to our place".²⁴² Divinity came down to the level of humanity to manifest itself in creation, redemption and resurrection.

According to Jacob of Serugh this searching journey of the incarnate Son is symbolically depicted through several stages of divine descent. It began with the Divinity/divine Word coming down as voice in the inquiry, "Where are you?" (Gen 3.9).²⁴³ This seeking voice appeared later through the centuries in the ambassadors and prophets, and finally the Word himself became flesh so as to reach out to the fallen Adam/humanity. This searching is depicted in another respect in the image of Divinity seeking the lost coin (Lk 15.8-10), as well as in the image of the shepherd who sought the lost sheep.²⁴⁴ The journey of Christ assuming the fallen Adam is depicted as his road of humility because the fall of Adam was a fall from glory to humiliation and

shame. His feebleness is the cause of shame and suffering in his degraded state. Corresponding to all shameful situations and passions of Adam the redeeming activity of the incarnate Son too is depicted through images proper to them. Here we mention a few of them: medical imagery depicts the Fall as the 'first ulcer' and Christ as the Physician²⁴⁵ to cure that malady; combat imagery depicts the fall as a fall in the battle with the evil one and the consequent captivity and bondage to which Christ arrives as the Mighty Warrior²⁴⁶ and the Liberator of the captivity; clothing imagery presents the fallen Adam/humanity as naked yet having a tunic of shame fabricated from fig leaves and Christ as the one who was wrapped in swaddling clothes in exchange of his 'garment of glory'²⁴⁷ for 'the garment of shame' of Adam/humanity; legal imagery depicts the fall as the deed of Eve/Adam in legal bondage to the evil one and Christ as the Heir²⁴⁸ who pays the ransom price for the liberation by his suffering and blood.

3.5.3. The Re-entry of Adam into Paradise

In the life of the incarnate Son there are various typological depictions of the mystery of the re-entry of Adam into Paradise. The birth of Christ and the imperial order for the census, which required the returning of everyone to their own districts to register their names, signify the returning of all expelled ones in Adam.²⁴⁹ At Tabor and at Golgotha Adam's re-entry into Paradise was enacted in mysteries. Moses who sinned against God (Deut 4.21; 32.48-52) is a type of Adam expelled from Paradise after the sin.²⁵⁰ Christ had the power to repeal the orders of the Father. Hence, at the Transfiguration Christ made Moses enter into Tabor, the land into which he was prohibited to enter (Deut 4.21; 32.48-52), and it became a sign of Adam's re-entry²⁵¹ into Paradise. Barabbas was liberated as a sign of Adam's liberation.²⁵² At Golgotha the robber²⁵³ is a type of Adam who tried to rob divinity prematurely and unjustly.²⁵⁴ The robber's entry into Paradise through Christ was Adam's re-entry (Lk 23.43). Christ, the High Priest, died on Golgotha for the return of those expelled from Eden which was preannounced by the tradition of the liberation and return of prisoners to their own premises at the death of each high priest.²⁵⁵

Adam, who was expelled from Paradise and was written off from the 'book of life', was written again in the 'book of life' at

the Nativity of the Son. On the road of his redeeming activity Christ annulled the curses of the fall and brought Adam back into Paradise. The piercing of the side of Christ by a soldier did away with the flaming sword of the Cherub (Gen 3.24) that guarded Paradise and 'the Tree of Life' within. Thus, through Christ by justification, the garden and the Tree of Life became accessible to Adam who had initially wished for the same but in a wrong way at a wrong time. Jacob exposes quite vividly and dramatically how Christ received in his own body the sword (Jn 19.34) that guarded Paradise in order to open the way for Adam's re-entry.

Conclusion

According to the spirit of Syriac theological reflection it is improper to draw hard and fast conclusions. Yet some general patterns of vision can be identified. While keeping the mystery aspect of the divine-human relationship some portraits of the experience of salvation have been drawn with the types, symbols and narrative modes. All the drawn portraits can be enlarged or given yet other shapes from other aspects by finding out more symbolic and typological connections. All the drawn portraits are going deeper into the experiential, subjective and life-bound horizon of Christian faith and experience of salvation. Such portraits are fluid and dynamic enough for fresh applications according to the changes in life situations in the context of catechetical, pastoral and spiritual growth concerns of Christian life.

Abbreviations of the Important Works

- CDiat* St. Ephrem, *Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant ou Diatessaron*, Syr. text and LT., L. Leloir, (Chester Beatty Monographs 8), Dublin 1963. FT of Syr. and Armenian, L. Leloir, SC 121, Paris 1966.
- CH* *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Hymnen Contra Haereses*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 169/170; syri 76/77, Lovain 1957.
- CNis* *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Carmina Nisibena*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, I CSCO 218/219; syri 92/93,

- Louvain 1961; II CSCO 240/241; syri 102/103, Louvain 1963.
- Crucif* “Hymnen de Crucifixione”, in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers paschahymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 248/249; syri 108/109, Louvain 1964, 42-78; 34-62.
- Dem.* Aphraatis Sapientis Persae, *Demonstrationes*, Syr. text and LT, J. Parisot, PS I, Paris 1894; PS II, Paris 1907, 1-480.
- Epiph* “Hymnen de Epiphania” in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 186/187; syri 82/83, Louvain 1959, 144-191; 134-177.
- FH* T. Kollampampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies*, Rome & Bangalore 1997.
- HArm* *Hymnes de S. Ephrem Conservées en version Arménienne*, Armenian version and LT, L. Maries & C. Mercier, PO 30, Paris 1961.
- HAzy* “Hymnen de Azymis”, in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Paschahymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 248/249; syri 108/109, Louvain 1964, 1-41; 1-33.
- HCJ* *Jacques de Sarug, Homélie contre les juifs*, PO 38.
- HEccl* *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Ecclesia*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 198/199; syri 84/85, Louvain 1960.
- HFid* *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 154/155; syri 73/74, Louvain 1955.
- Hieiun* *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Ieiunio*, (ed.) E. Beck, CSCO 246/247; syri 107/108, Louvain 1964.
- HNat* “Hymnen de Nativitate”, in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 186/187; syri 82/83, Louvain 1959, 1-143; 1-130; ET, McVey, *Hymns*, 61-217.
- HParad* *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und contra Julianum*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 174/175; syri 78/79, Louvain 1957.

- HS* *Homiliae selectae Mar Jacobi Sarugensis*, Vols. I- V, (ed.) P. Bedjan, Paris-Leipzig 1905.
- HVirg* *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen de Virginitate*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 223/224; syri 94/95, Louvain 1962; ET, McVey, *Hymns*, 259-468.
- QHC* *Jacques de Sarug, Quatre Homélie Métriques sur la Création*, (ed.) Khalil Alwan, CSCO 508/509.
- Resur* "Hymnen de Resurrectione", in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Paschahymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 248/249; syri 108/109, Louvain 1964, 63-75.
- SdDF* *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Sermones de Fide*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 212/213; syri 88/89, Louvain 1961.
- SdDN* *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Sermo de Domino Nostro*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 270/271; syri 116/117, Louvain 1966.
- SHF* *Jacques de Sarug, Six Homélie Festales en Prose, P.O 43* (ed.) Frédéric Rilliet, Turnhout/Belgique 1986.

Notes

¹ SMS 771,14/FH I 1083.

² 2Kings 2.19-22; SMS 795,3-4/FH III 97-98.

³ Cf. *AAA* (1968^R), p. 194 (syr.), tr. p. 167.

⁴ CSCO 154 (syri 73), p. 106; tr. by R. Murray, "Theory of Symbolism", 17.

⁵ Cf. Narsai, Homily XXI, Dom R.H. Connolly, *Texts and Studies*, 49.

⁶ *QHC* I 181-182, 185-186.

⁷ *QHC* II. 275-278.

⁸ *HS* I 167,7-168,7/FH VI 7-14.

⁹ *QHC* VI.323-30. Cf. S. P. Brock, "Baptismal Themes", 342.

¹⁰ SMS 770,10,11/FH I 1057,58.

¹¹ Cf. S. P. Brock, "Baptismal Themes", 326.

¹² *HS* I 181,6,10/FH VI 281,285.

¹³ SMS 818,1-16/FH XVI 195-210.

¹⁴ Narsai, Homily XXI, Vol. I, p. 343, tr. Dom R.H. Connolly, *Texts and Studies*, p. 48/49.

¹⁵ Adam transgressed the commandment and ate from the tree. Hence, poison entered in him causing sickness which is called the first grave ulcer.

¹⁶ *SHF III 5-7/FH IX 5-9.*

¹⁷ *SHF III 8/FH IX 8.*

¹⁸ *SHF III 7-8/FH IX 7-9.*

¹⁹ *SHF III 6/FH IX 6.*

²⁰ *SHF III 11,12/FH IX 11,12.*

²¹ *SHF III 12/FH IX 12.*

²² *SHF III 26/FH IX 26.* Prophecy is a gift of the Spirit that enables one to see distant things clearly, especially in the context of typological vision of salvation history.

²³ Gen 7.12; *SHF III 14,15/FH IX 14,15.*

²⁴ Gen 8.6; *SHF III 17/FH IX 17.*

²⁵ Lev 12.2-5; *SHF III 20/FH IX 20.*

²⁶ 2 Sam 17;16ff; *SHF III 22/FH IX 22.*

²⁷ *SHF III 23-25/FH IX 23-25.*

²⁸ Mar Jacob takes up contemporary philosophical categories too - of course by the time of Jacob it was an accepted practice in the patristic tradition - in explaining biblical anthropology. The four elements are: earth, air, fire and water. Plato's *Timeus* is the underlying influence; cf. K. Alwan, *Anthropologie*, 29 (ns. 59-64); T. Bou Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, Tome I, 71-76.

²⁹ *SHF III 30/FH IX 30.*

³⁰ Jacob often speaks of the integration of the four elements in human body as a 'yoke of harmony' (*SHF III 31/FH IX 31*) against 'the yoke of slavery' which is the result of sin and transgression of commandments.

³¹ *SHF III 32/FH IX 32.*

³² *SHF III 44/FH IX 44.*

³³ *SHF I 14/FH IV 14.*

³⁴ Cf. Heb 5.13,14.

³⁵ Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 70.

³⁶ *Dem XXIII 50/PS II 97.*

³⁷ Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 70.

³⁸ Cf. *Dem XII. 9 (PS I 528).*

³⁹ *HVir 7.8; Crucif 4.16; Epiph 7.4; 8.17.* Cf. P. Yousif, "L'Eucharistie chez Éphrem", 334-336.

⁴⁰ Cf. E. Beck, "Eucharistie bei Ephräm", 62-67.

⁴¹ *CSCO 186 (syri 82) 83-84; tr. K. E. McVey, Ephrem the Syrian*, 149-150.

⁴² *CSCO 154 (syri 73)*, pp. 51-52; *tr. R. Murray, "A Hymn of St. Ephrem to Christ"*, *ECR 3(1970-71)*, 144.

- ⁴³ Cf. R. Murray, "The Lance which re-opened Paradise", 224-234.
- ⁴⁴ *HS II* 238,11-20.
- ⁴⁵ *HS III* 653,13-14; *HS III* 653,15-16.
- ⁴⁶ *SHF I* 14/*FH IV* 14.
- ⁴⁷ *HS II* 218,7ff.
- ⁴⁸ *HS II* 219,7-8. Eucharist as 'Coal of Fire' in the Syriac tradition: cf. *CEC I* 5; *HNat* 6.13-14; *HFid* 10.8-10.
- ⁴⁹ *HS IV* 596,4-5. 8-9; 599,13-14.
- ⁵⁰ *HS II* 221,19-222,4; *HS II* 222,1-4.
- ⁵¹ *HS IV* 597,12-13.
- ⁵² *HS I* 545,16-17; *AMS V* 623,19-624,1.
- ⁵³ *HS IV* 607,16.
- ⁵⁴ *HS IV* 609,8.
- ⁵⁵ *HS II* 327,17-18.
- ⁵⁶ *HS II* 328,2-3. 6-7; 329, 3-4. 13-14.
- ⁵⁷ Cf. "Homily on the Types and Symbols", *HS III* 305-321; "On the Red-Heifer", *HS III* 242-259; "On Melchizedek", *HS II* 197-209 [ET by J. Thekkeparampil, *Harp* 6 (1993), pp. 53-64]; see also T. Bou Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, Tome I, 287-229.
- ⁵⁸ *HS III* 275,3-4.
- ⁵⁹ *HS II* 235,13-14.
- ⁶⁰ 1Cor 3.2; *SHF II* 2/*FH VII* 2.
- ⁶¹ *HS III* 308,1-10.
- ⁶² *HS I* 536, 12-19; 537,1ff; 538,6ff.
- ⁶³ *HS II* 484,15 -485,9; 486,10-11. 16-22.
- ⁶⁴ *HS II* 482,13-14; 483,9-10. 19-20.
- ⁶⁵ *QHC I* 105-144.
- ⁶⁶ Col 2.14; Heb 1.2, 9:28; *SHF V* 4, 5, 10, 35/*FH XII* 4, 5, 10, 35.
- ⁶⁷ *SHF I* 12/*FH IV* 12.
- ⁶⁸ *SHF V* 5,6/*FH XII* 5,6.
- ⁶⁹ *SHF II* 1/*FH VII* 1.
- ⁷⁰ *HS V* 448,17-449,6/*FH V* 21-32.
- ⁷¹ In the Jewish tradition no one was selected for the service in the tent before he attained thirty years of age. Jacob mentions how Christ fulfils the thirty years period of maturity; cf. *HS III* 327,13-328,3; 330,12-15; 333,20-334,4 (Homily "Why Our Lord abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years", ET from HTM, *TV* 2.4 (1990) 37-49.
- ⁷² *SHF V* 7/*FH XII* 7.
- ⁷³ *SHF V* 17,18/*FH XII* 17,18.
- ⁷⁴ *SMS* 813,5-6/*FH XVI* 95-96.
- ⁷⁵ *HS III* 423,6-7. Homily "On 'the Kingdom of Heaven is Like unto Leaven'"; ET from HTM, *TV* 3 (1989), 44-57.

⁷⁶ *HS I* 278,15-21; 281,2-282,5.

⁷⁷ *SHF V* 32-34/*FH XII* 32-34.

⁷⁸ *HS II* 632,5-633,18/*FH XIV* 167-200.

⁷⁹ *SMS* 725,19-726,4/*FH I* 121-128.

⁸⁰ *SMS* 768,3-4/*FH I* 1007-8.

⁸¹ *SMS* 770,2-9/*FH I* 1049-56.

⁸² *HS I* 280,21-282,5.

⁸³ *SHF V* 33,34/*FH XII* 33,34.

⁸⁴ 1Cor 15.55; *HAzym* 3; *HS II* 613,5-6/*FH XII* 41-42; *SHF VI* 7/*FH XV* 7.

⁸⁵ *SMS* 813,7-20/*FH XVI* 97-110.

⁸⁶ *SMS* 814,6; 819,15/*FH XVI* 116, 230. 'The bow returning to come with strength' is a biblical usage indicating total victory (1Sam 2:4; 2 Sam 22:35); *SMS* 814,6. 819,15/*FH XVI* 116, 230; *HS III* 419,14-15.

⁸⁷ *SMS* 814,16/*FH XVI* 126. 'To bring back the way at one's feet' is a sign of failure; compare with *CEC VIII* 6.

⁸⁸ *QHC IV* 213-16. *CSCO* 508 (syri 214), 90.

⁸⁹ Jacob of Serugh explains the reasons for combat and victory:

And as the law was instituted for Adam among the trees
that became a sphere for the adversary to make combat with him.
For without the law sin also would not have come into effect,
And without combat there is no victory either.

Unless man fights there are neither the conquered nor the victor.
And if one does not encounter the fight he would not become
glorious.

Without combat there is no crown for the athlete either;
and without a battle bravery would not be recognized (*QHC III*

187-194).

⁹⁰ *HParad* 6.24; 7.23; 9.1; 12.17,18; *Com Genesis* 17,22.

⁹¹ Rom 5.20; *SHF IV* 8/*FH IV* 8.

⁹² *SMS* 726,3-4/*FH I* 127-128.

⁹³ *HS II* 630,19-632,4/*FH XIV* 139-166.

⁹⁴ *HS III* 326,24-327,2.

⁹⁵ *SMS* 776,17-18/*FH II* 33-34.

⁹⁶ *HS V* 456,20-457,18/*FH V* 193-212.

⁹⁷ *HS I* 180,10-181,5/*FH VI* 265-280.

⁹⁸ *HS II* 632,5-20/*FH XIV* 167-182. "A Homily on Samson" (*HS V* 331-355), ET from HTM, *TV* 11 (1992), 50-70.

⁹⁹ *HS II* 627,8-630,18/*FH XIV* 65-138.

¹⁰⁰ *HS II* 626,19-20/*FH XIV* 55-56.

¹⁰¹ *HS II* 624,4-627,7; 628,21-630,18/*FH XIV* 1-64, 99-138.

¹⁰² 2 Chro 26.6; *HParad* 3.14; 12.4; 15; 9,10.

¹⁰³ *SHF III* 5,12/*FH IX* 5,12.

¹⁰⁴ *SHF III 10-12/FH IX 10-12.*

¹⁰⁵ *HNat 13.2; HVir 31.3; HNis 36.14;46.8.*

¹⁰⁶ Ephrem: *Homily on the Nativity* 195-98; Jacob of Serugh: *SMS 771,6-11/FH I 1075-80.*

¹⁰⁷ *SMS 771,16-17/FH I 1085-86.*

¹⁰⁸ *SMS 771,8-9/FH I 1077-78.*

¹⁰⁹ *SHF III 30/FH IX 30.*

¹¹⁰ *SHF III 12/FH IX 12.*

¹¹¹ *SHF V 31/FH XII 31.*

¹¹² *SMS 771,10-11/FH I 1079-80.*

¹¹³ *SMS 812,11-16/FH XVI 81-86.*

¹¹⁴ See E. Beck, "Das Bild vom Sauerteig bei Ephräm", *OrChr* 63 (1979), pp. 1-19 for a general view of the treatment of the imagery of 'Leaven' in Ephrem.

¹¹⁵ *HS III 422,19-424,18.*

¹¹⁶ *SMS 771,15; 795,3-4/FH I 1083; III 97-98.*

¹¹⁷ *SMS 771,12-15/FH I 1081-84.*

¹¹⁸ *HS III 418,9.*

¹¹⁹ Homily "On 'the Kingdom of Heaven is Like unto Leaven'" (*HS III 411-424*); ET from HTM, *TV 3* (1989), 44-57.

¹²⁰ *HS III 415,14-416,8.* Jacob of Serugh envisages 'the woman and three measures of flour' (Mt 13.33) as the Godhead who kneaded the Son into humankind:

And the Godhead was in the likeness of some discerning woman who seeks a sweet-tasting leaven to prepare dough. She kneaded Her Son into the dough of mankind as if He were leaven, and in the Son of God the whole race was sweetened. The heavenly One was descended and was mixed in with the earthly.

¹²¹ Cf. Homily "On 'the Kingdom of Heaven is Like unto Leaven'" (*HS III 419,15-420,10; 421,20-21; 422,5-18; 423,3-424,4*); ET from HTM, *TV 3* (1989), 44-57.

¹²² *CNis 3.2,3; HdF 19.8; HParad 11.6.*

¹²³ Tr. K. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 185.

¹²⁴ *HS III 416,21-420,14.*

¹²⁵ *HS III 416,9-20.*

¹²⁶ Tr. S.P. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 91,92.

¹²⁷ *HS III 303,4-304,20.* Cf. Homily "On the Veil on Moses' Face" (*HS III 283-305*); ET by S. P. Brock, "On the Veil of Moses", *Sobornost/ECR* 3:1 (1981), 83-84.

¹²⁸ *SHF VI 2/FH XV 2.*

¹²⁹ *SMS* 763,6. 770,9/*FH* I 904,1056; *HS* II 624,10/*FH* XIV 10.

¹³⁰ *SMS* 777,16/*FH* II 53.

¹³¹ Lk 1.78; Mt 4.16; 2Cor 4:6; *SMS* 796,10-11/*FH* III 123-124.

¹³² *SMS* 804,5/*FH* III 286; *SHF* I 22/*IV* 22.

¹³³ *SMS* 768,14/*FH* I 1018; *SMS* 795,19/*FH* III 113; *HS* I 189,2/*FH* VI 443.

¹³⁴ *HS* I 173,6; 181,18; 186,21/*FH* VI 115, 293, 401.

¹³⁵ *SMS* 778,9,19/*FH* II 67,77.

¹³⁶ *SMS* 804,5/*FH* III 286.

¹³⁷ *HS* II 633,15/*FH* XIV 197.

¹³⁸ *HS* II 612,1-2/*FH* XIII 17-18.

¹³⁹ *SMS* 818,21-819,1/*FH* XVI 215-216; *HS* II 688,6-9.

¹⁴⁰ For a detailed survey see S. P. Brock, "Clothing Metaphors", 11-38 (= S.P. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, No. XI, 11-38); E. Peterson, "Theologie des Kleides", *Benediktinische Monatschrift* 16 (1934), 347-56; A. Kowalski, "Rivestiti di gloria", *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 3 (1982) 41-60.

¹⁴¹ The Targumic traditions speak of the vestments God had provided for Adam and Eve as not of skin but of glory/light which refers to the state before the fall. Early Syriac Christianity, as it stands in closer correspondence with much Judeo-Christian perspectives, took up many Haggadic elements and Rabbinic features in the exegesis of the early chapters of Genesis. Cf. T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis*, Uppsala 1978, 215-224.

¹⁴² *HS* I 197,11-12. In the context of salvation in Christ Jacob speaks of 'the robe of glory' quite often with its strong baptismal implications: Baptism is the 'garment of glory' given to Adam.

¹⁴³ Cf. S. P. Brock, "Clothing Metaphors", 11-13.

¹⁴⁴ *QHC* III 993-1040.

¹⁴⁵ *SMS* 733,4/*FH* I 278.

¹⁴⁶ *SHF* I 15,16/*FH* IV 15,16; *SMS* 772,12/*FH* I 1102.

¹⁴⁷ *HS* II 168,8-9/*FH* VI 15-16.

¹⁴⁸ *SHF* II 4/*FH* VII 4.

¹⁴⁹ *HS* I 173,19; 174,2/*FH* VI 128, 132.

¹⁵⁰ *HS* I 180,12-181,5/*FH* VI 267-280.

¹⁵¹ *HS* II 619,17-621,14/*FH* XIII 175-212.

¹⁵² *HS* V 669,9-10: "I will clothe you with a robe of light in the marriage chamber on high. Take for yourself the key of light and come to the garden of blessings."

¹⁵³ Cf. *HS* I 211,4-7; III 288,7-11; V 681,19-20; S. P. Brock, "Baptismal Themes", *OCA* 205 (1978), 325-347.

¹⁵⁴ Tr. S.P. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 87.

- ¹⁵⁵ Cf. Homily "Why Our Lord Abode upon the Earth for Thirty Years" (*HS III* 325,16-329,2); ET from HTM, *TV* 4 (1990), 40-43.
- ¹⁵⁶ *SMS* 775,10/*FH* II 7.
- ¹⁵⁷ *HS III* 290,16-291,4. Homily "On the Veil on Moses' Face" [*HS III* 283-305, ET by S. P. Brock, "On the Veil of Moses", *Sobornost/ECR* 3:1 (1981), 75-76.
- ¹⁵⁸ For a detailed survey on Ephrem's contributions see E. Beck, "Das Bild vom Weg", 1-39.
- ¹⁵⁹ Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 246-249 for a synthesis of Ephrem's vision.
- ¹⁶⁰ For a detailed analysis see E. Beck, "Das Bild vom Weg", 11-35.
- ¹⁶¹ *CSCO* 169 (syri 76), pp. 104-105; tr. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 247.
- ¹⁶² Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 249.
- ¹⁶³ *SMS* 794,18/*FH* III 91.
- ¹⁶⁴ Cf. Ephrem: *HVir* 9:15; Jacob of Serugh: *HS I* 192,10-19/*FH* VI 513-522.
- ¹⁶⁵ Cf. E. Carr, "L'esaltazione della croce", 10-13.
- ¹⁶⁶ *SMS* 812,1-2/*FH* XVI 71-72.
- ¹⁶⁷ Christ's 'staging posts' in various wombs: They are the 'womb of Mary', 'womb of Jordan' and 'womb of Sheol'; cf. *HS I* 178,1-179,2/*FH* VI 213-236; *HS I* 154,5-10; *III* 593; S. P. Brock, "Baptismal Themes", 326.
- ¹⁶⁸ *SMS* 770,12-13/*FH* I 1059-60.
- ¹⁶⁹ Tr. K. Mcvey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 182.
- ¹⁷⁰ *SHF* II 33/*FH* IX 33; *SHF* IV 2/*FH* XI 2.
- ¹⁷¹ *SHF* IV 1/*FH* XI 1.
- ¹⁷² Zech 6.12; *SMS* 795,19-796,1/*FH* III 113-114; *HS I* 189,2-3/*FH* VI 443-444.
- ¹⁷³ *SMS* 811,11-16/*FH* XVI 61-66.
- ¹⁷⁴ *SMS* 800,15-18/*FH* III 211-214.
- ¹⁷⁵ *SMS* 776,13-14/*FH* II 29-30; *SMS* 785,14/*FH* II 222.
- ¹⁷⁶ *SHF* III 33/*FH* IX 33.
- ¹⁷⁷ *SHF* IV 2/*FH* XI 2.
- ¹⁷⁸ *SHF* III 31/*FH* IX 31.
- ¹⁷⁹ *SHF* III 31/*FH* IX 31.
- ¹⁸⁰ Cf. J.-J. P. Martin, "Sur la chute des idoles", 109 (tr. p. 130).
- ¹⁸¹ *SHF* IV 1/*FH* XI 1.
- ¹⁸² *SHF* III 31/*FH* IX 31.
- ¹⁸³ *HCJ* IV 30,61-62.
- ¹⁸⁴ *HCJ* IV 145-169.
- ¹⁸⁵ *HCJ* IV 87-176.

- ¹⁸⁶ *HCJ IV 45-48.*
- ¹⁸⁷ *Dem XXIII 20; HS I 176,17/FH VI 187.*
- ¹⁸⁸ Cf. *CSCO 270* (syri 116), 50-51; ET by A. E. Johnston, "Three Homilies" ('On Our Lord' 51-52), *NPNF*, Vol. XIII, 328-329.
- ¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 51; ET by A. E. Johnston, "Three Homilies", 329.
- ¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53; ET, *Ibid.*, 329-330.
- ¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 53; ET, *Ibid.*, 330.
- ¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 52; ET, *Ibid.*, 329.
- ¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 52-53; ET, *Ibid.*, 329-330.
- ¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53; ET, *Ibid.*, 330.
- ¹⁹⁵ *QHC I 115-118; II 165-178.*
- ¹⁹⁶ *SHF V 35/FH XII 35; HS III 103,6-7; 104,14; 105,5; 106,10-15; 119,21; 128,20.*
- ¹⁹⁷ *SHF III 6/FH IX 6.*
- ¹⁹⁸ *QHC I 125-144.*
- ¹⁹⁹ *SMS 733,17-18/FH I 291-292.*
- ²⁰⁰ *SMS 770,10-11/FH I 1057-58.*
- ²⁰¹ *QHC IV 69-96; SHF III 28-31/FH IX 28-31.*
- ²⁰² *SMS 771,12-13/FH I 1081-82.* Christ, 'the Leaven of Life'; cf. *HS III 411-424*, "On 'the Kingdom of Heaven is Like unto Leaven'"; ET from *HTM, TV 3* (1989), 44-57.
- ²⁰³ *SMS 770,12-13/FH I 1059-60.*
- ²⁰⁴ *SMS 812,5-6/FH XVI 75-76.*
- ²⁰⁵ *SMS 757,16-17; 757,20-21; 759,2-3/FH I 791-792; 795-796; 821-822.*
- ²⁰⁶ *Gen 2.17; SHF III 33/FH IX 33.*
- ²⁰⁷ *SMS 771,2-15/FH I 1071-84.*
- ²⁰⁸ *SMS 812,17-18/FH XVI 87-88.*
- ²⁰⁹ *SHF III 5/FH IX 5.*
- ²¹⁰ *SHF V 5/FH XII 5.*
- ²¹¹ *SHF III 39/FH IX 39.*
- ²¹² *SHF V 5,6/FH XII 5,6.*
- ²¹³ *Ezek 4.4; HS II 627,8-630,2/FH XIV 65-122.*
- ²¹⁴ *Judg 16; HS II 5-20/FH XIV 167-182.*
- ²¹⁵ *SMS 812,17-20/FH XVI 87-90.*
- ²¹⁶ *SMS 764,12-765,10/FH I 931-950.*
- ²¹⁷ *SMS 767,9-10/FH I 991-992.*
- ²¹⁸ *SHF I 32/FH IV 32.*
- ²¹⁹ *SMS 767,3-4/FH I 985-986.*
- ²²⁰ *SHF IV 31-39/FH XI 31-39.*
- ²²¹ *Gen 49.10; SHF IV 14/FH XI 14.*
- ²²² *Ps 45.6,7; SHF IV 12,13/FH XI 12,13.*
- ²²³ *SHF IV 14/FH XI 14.*

- ²²⁴ *SHF IV 15,16/FH XI 15,16.*
- ²²⁵ Heb 7.1-2; *HS V 167,4.*
- ²²⁶ *HS II 208,10-15.*
- ²²⁷ *SMS 759,2-7/FH I 821-826.*
- ²²⁸ *HS I 192,10-193,1/FH VI 513-524.*
- ²²⁹ Cf. E. Carr, "Diaconate in the Ordination Rites", 48-54.
- ²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 116-119.
- ²³¹ *HS III 290,12-291,9.* Cf. The Homily "On the Veil on Moses' Face" (*HS III 283-305*).
- ²³² Cf. S. P. Brock, "Wedding Feast of Blood on Golgotha", 121-134.
- ²³³ *SHF III 5,6/FH IX 5,6.*
- ²³⁴ Cf. Aphrahat, *Dem XVII. 7*; Ephrem, *CNis 37:8ff*; *HEccl 47:11*; see also M. J. Pierre, *Aphraate le Sage Persan, Tome II*, 736 (n. 15); T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis*, 48-51.
- ²³⁵ Cf. T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis*, 48 (ns. 7 & 8).
- ²³⁶ Cf. *PS I 797*; see also M. J. Pierre, *Aphraate le Sage Persan, II*, 736 (n. 15).
- ²³⁷ *CNis 38.8-9*; *HEccl 47.9-11.*
- ²³⁸ Cf. Jn 1:1-18; T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis*, 47.
- ²³⁹ *QHC I 181-188.*
- ²⁴⁰ *SMS 796,17/FH III 130.*
- ²⁴¹ Cf. S. P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 32.
- ²⁴² *SMS 791,6/FH III 17.*
- ²⁴³ Jacob of Serugh makes an exegetical exposition of the question, "Where are you?" in his homily "On the Departure of Adam from Paradise", cf. *QHC III 689-792*; See also *Dem VII. 8*.
- ²⁴⁴ Lk 15.4-7; *QHC III 703-710*; *IV 195-196*. Cf. T. Jansma, "L'Hexamèron de Jacques de Saroug", 40.
- ²⁴⁵ Cf. Mt 9:12; Mk 2:17; Lk 5:31; Christ, 'the Physician' (*SMS 771,6/FH I 1075*; *SHF V 31/FH XII 31*; *SMS 812,11/FH XVI 81*); Christ, 'the Doctor' (*SMS 771,8/FH I 1077*).
- ²⁴⁶ Christ, 'the Warrior' (*SMS 771,4/FH I 1073*); 'Mighty One of the Generations' (*SMS 801,15/FH III 232*; *SHF V 4/FH XII 4*); 'Mighty One' (*SMS 763,5 + 770,5 + 771,2/FH I 903 + 1052 + 1071*; *HS II 447,10/FH X 47*; *HS II 613,19 + 616,9 + 617,15 + 622,3/FH XIII 55 + 106 + 131 + 222*; *HS II 624,16 + 626,3 + 629,5 + 630,15 + 632,3/FH XIV 13 + 39 + 104 + 135 + 165*; *SMS 813,20/FH XVI 110*).
- ²⁴⁷ Cf. Lk 2.7, 12; 'garment of glory/light' (*SMS 733,3-4 + 772,12/FH I 277-278 + 1102*; *SHF I 15/FH IV 15*).
- ²⁴⁸ Christ, 'the Heir' (*SMS 767,21/FH I 1003*; *SMS 795,6 + 807,16/FH III 100 + 361*; *SHF I 28/FH IV 28*; *HS II 372,18/FH VIII 538*; *HS I 450,2/FH X 102*; *SHF IV 24, 30, 33/FH XI 24, 30, 33*; *SHF V 4, 5, 6, 20/FH XII 4, 5, 6, 20*).
- ²⁴⁹ *SMS 758,16-17/FH I 813-814.*

²⁵⁰ *HS II 360,4-9/FH VIII 267-271.*

²⁵¹ *HS II 359,21-360,13/FH VIII 262-276.*

²⁵² *SHF V 32-34/FH XII 32-34.*

²⁵³ The 'robber' entered Paradise on the sixth day in contrast with the sixth day on which Adam was expelled from Paradise; cf. T. Jansma, "L'Hexamèron de Jacques de Saroug", 42. Ephrem speaks of the 'robber' in *HFid* 84:1 where the 'robber' is described as seeing the 'Tree of Life' on the Cross through his faith and immediately eats from 'the Fruit' in Adam's stead and returns to Paradise.

²⁵⁴ *HS II 360,9/FH VIII 272.*

²⁵⁵ Num 35.28; *HS III 308,11-14.*

10

East Syriac Pneumatology

Thomas Neendoor

Introduction

Pneumatology has always been at the very heart of Eastern Christian theology. It is not a doctrine apart, but an integral aspect of Eastern theological teaching. The Easterners were hence, sometimes falsely accused of 'Pneumatocentrism' and the Westerners in turn, of 'Christocentrism'. A systematic treatise on Pneumatology in the Syriac Orient is at best a colorful dream. It is not that they do not say anything on the Holy Spirit, but that they do not systematically teach the dogma on the Holy Spirit. Instead of teaching about the nature of the Spirit they sing his wonderful deeds in the life of the Christians. They are not very much concerned with the nature of the third Person in the Godhead, but they are interested in the way He lives in the community of believers. The Syrians sing the praises of the Holy Spirit; and refrain from teaching anything or defending anything. They think about the function rather than the person of the Holy Spirit. Their pneumatology is experiential and not philosophical and dogmatic. Before we attempt at a systematic exposition of the Pneumatology of the Syriac Churches, this basic notion must be born in mind.

The absence of a systematic treatment of a pneumatology may be due primarily to an absence of a felt need for the same. The Churches in Byzantine tradition abound in the dogmatic teachings on the Spirit. It is understandably so, because of the historical need to counteract a number of pneumatological controversies. Generally, the appearance of a heresy demands a clarification of the dogmas, and hence a growth in the understanding of the dogmas. The inter-trinitarian relation and the nature and function of the Holy Spirit would naturally get an in-depth explanation, for which the existent philosophies would be profusely made use of.

All the Churches in the Roman Empire are, in one way or another, involved in the Spirit-controversies. They explained the function and nature of the Spirit in no uncertain philosophical

terminologies. The Churches in Persia, however, were not involved in such controversies, primarily because of their alienation from the Roman Empire, hence an absence of a systematization of the theology of the Holy Spirit. In order to get into the pneumatological understanding of the Syriac Churches we will have to search in the Syriac patrology and liturgy.¹ Several attempts have been made in the past and also in the present to trace out an East Syriac pneumatology.²

1. Theological Reflections on the Holy Spirit in the Early Church

The teaching on the Holy Spirit developed very slowly in the faith of the Church from the indications of the Scripture. Pneumatology was only an appendix to Christology. In general, Scripture speaks more of the Spirit's function in our salvation than of his nature. Pneumatology has suffered from much neglect and has always been one of the most difficult doctrines to discuss. The doctrine of the Spirit did not occupy the major part of the attention of theologians, and the controversies of theology centered on the person of Christ. The Spirit seems to have been included in the doctrine of God almost as an after thought about which men had no strong feelings, either favorable or hostile.

The Holy Spirit cannot as such become an object of theological reflection as other theological matters can. This is because He is that infinite theological horizon inside of which any theological reflection should be performed. It is usual for theologians to start to reflect from the Christocentric perspective and complement it with a material pneumatocentricity. As the description of the virginal birth shows, pneumatology in general has a logical priority to Christology because in order to explain the Inhominization of the Logos it is necessary to expound pneumatology.

2. Holy Spirit in the Bible

The Fathers of the Church, both Eastern and Western interpreted the OT from the perspective of the NT. They were reading into the OT things, which were not there. They even dared to find arguments in the OT in order to fight against Tropici, Macedonians, Pneumatomacheans and other heresiarchs denying

the divinity and/or distinct personality of the Holy Spirit. Some Eastern theologians, even now, uncritically repeat the teachings of the Fathers and try to draw arguments from the OT for the distinct personality and divinity of the Most Holy Trinity.

2.1. Ruah in the Hebrew Bible and Pneuma in the LXX

The nature of God as Spirit is well brought out in the OT. He is the super worldly and super historical God. But He enters into historical and personal relationship (Covenant). Pneuma is the translation of ruah (atman, Spiritus)- it means moved air or wind (Gen 3.8 et al).³ In the OT ruah is distinguished from the Hebrew *hebel*. The latter means a mere transitory, fleeting puff of breath or vapor (Prov 21. 6); figuratively it speaks of the vanity, futility or meaninglessness of life apart from the Lord (Eccl 1. 2,14; 2. 1,17,19,21; 3. 19; 6. 2, 4,12). On the other hand, ruah is powerful and continuous; for example, “the breath (ruah) of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall” (Is 25. 4). Breath is air in motion. Strong prolonged breathing easily suggests the wind. The men of the OT were aware of the life-giving power of the wind and of other natural phenomena. For the ancient Hebrews, wind was a power of the Creator (Gen 1.2) and the giver and preserver of life (Gen 1.8).

2.2. Vitality and Invisibility

The common denominator of these usages is their vitality and invisibility. As in the case of the human spirit, God’s ruah or pneuma is the expression of His personality. The ruah of God is the very living personal presence of God Himself (Ps 139. 7-8) breathing or blowing mightily upon a situation or individual to create or effect change. God’s Spirit is God revealing Himself in ongoing power. The Spirit is God manifesting Himself as transcendently glorious and at the same time wonderfully and mysteriously immanent, present with us. The divine Spirit is the presence of the infinite, eternal God always proceeding to make Himself known and to act in His created universe in the exercise of His sovereignty. Psalm 140. 30 says, “Thou dost send for Thy Spirit, they are created”. This idea is also found in Jn 15. 6, which speaks of “the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father. This powerful, mysterious Spirit belongs to God, and to God alone. It is

essentially the personal God, Yahweh in action. The acts of the Spirit described most frequently in the Bible concern His work to fulfill God's redemptive plan for sinful humanity.

The second and higher meaning of ruah in the OT is "breath" as a gift of life from God Himself (Gen 2.7) in both the human beings (Gen 6.17, Ez 37.10) and in animals (Gen 7.22, Ps 103/4. 29). The absence of ruah is death, the absence of vital force (Jer 10.14, 51.14). It is a gift of God who is the life-giver (breath-giver) and the human being is alive as long as the breath of God remains in him or her (Job 27.3, Is 42.5, Zech 12.1).

2.3. Christ the Pneumatophor, or the Carrier and Revealer of the Holy Spirit

The fullness or abundance of the Holy Spirit in the NT was brought about by Christ and at first bound to Him. From Christ's death and Pentecost a new and divinized mankind was born, the life principle of which was the resurrected and glorified Lord in the Holy Spirit. Christ's inner dimension was totally imbued with the Holy Spirit, and who from this inner principle would imbue mankind and all of created reality with the Holy Spirit in order to divinize and spiritualize them. Thus, Christ is both the carrier and the revealer of the Spirit both by his life and by his teaching.

2.4. Hovering, Fluttering- Rahhep (ܪܗܗܦ)

In the Odes of Solomon we have a remote allusion to the Spirit's action in Gen 1.2. Accordingly, in Ode 24, 1, we read about the dove that fluttered over the head of the Messiah. In fact, this fluttering activity of the dove can be brought near to the 'hovering' action of the Spirit of God over the primordial waters. Here it is true that the imagery is immediately linked to the baptismal event at Jordan.⁴ We find in the Acts of Thomas one of the earliest and clear attestation of identifying the ruha of Gen 1.2 with the Holy Spirit. In the Acts of Thomas ch. 39 we read; "...and the Holy Spirit that broods or hovers over all created things."⁵

2.5. The Spirit of God and the Original State of Human Existence

Aphrahat elaborates on the question of a relationship between the Spirit of God and the creation of humankind. He is

clear about his idea on the original state of the human person and the question of immortality. What the creator had breathed into them is His own Spirit. Reflecting on Gen 2.7 he interprets the “breath of life” that God had imparted into the human person as a sort of participation in and a relationship to the Spirit of God Himself. According to Aphrahat, it is, therefore, in and through His Spirit that God dwells in a human person and enables him to be immortal. That means, from the very beginning of his creation the human person is provided with a capacity to enter into relationship with God thanks to the presence of the Spirit of God in him.⁶

Aphrahat maintains that every human person has something of the Spirit of God Himself in him from his birth onwards. The human person, created in the image of God, is a totality of body, soul and Spirit: the human spirit is intimately connected to the Spirit of God. In fact, this understanding of Aphrahat comes from his reading of Gen 2.7 in the light of his belief that the Messiah, the true Adam, is the one who possesses the Spirit of God in fullness and is the giver of this Spirit to human beings.⁷

2.6. The Revealing and Guiding Function of the Spirit of God

According to the understanding of the early Syriac literature, the decisive intervention of the Spirit of God is not terminated at creation. In the history of salvation, the Spirit of God continued to confront and strengthen the feeble human beings- the prophets- to proclaim the word of God and to promote God’s plan of salvation. The word of God in the prophets was supported and preceded by the Spirit of God. In the Odes of Solomon and the Acts of Thomas we have only certain general and vague expressions of this revealing activity of the Spirit of God in the OT.⁸

While the Odes and Acts of Thomas do not give much attention to the function of the Spirit of God in OT revelation, it is Demonstrations of Aphrahat that give more explicit and rather elaborate treatment of on this subject. For Aphrahat, every Scripture, both old and new, is according to the Spirit of God; and they are good for learning and for teaching.⁹ According to Aphrahat, the Spirit of God, which hovered over the primordial waters and through whom God entered into relationship with the

human persons, continued to guide the people of God through the prophets. Aphrahat says that God continued to bless human beings, despite their sins, through just men. In this context Aphrahat explains that it is the Spirit who had spoken through the mouth of a just man, Noah, after deluge. For Aphrahat, the Spirit who was present at creation, was also present at the renewal of creation, namely, the Covenant with Noah (Gen 9.1ff.). He also presents the Spirit as one who consoled the just ones of the old.

3. Spirit in Tradition

Patristic literature abounds in references to the Holy Spirit. This is the case particularly in the writings of the great Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries. St. Athanasius, St. Hilary, St. Basil, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Epiphanius, Didymus the Alexandrian, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine and St. Cyril of Alexandria have all written extensively about the Holy Spirit. For these Fathers, the Holy Spirit is the source of the Christian tradition, which constitutes the foundation of the Church. The Church is founded on the tradition of the Spirit, which is revealed in Christ. St. John Chrysostom said that without the Spirit there is no Church (*Homilies on Pentecost*).¹⁰

The Fathers argue that Christ should not merely be understood in terms of the Son. Though it is the Son who becomes incarnate, the incarnation is essentially related to the Holy Spirit. The incarnation takes place by the Holy Spirit, through him it runs its course and in him it reaches its end in humanity. The Holy Spirit is central to Christian economy, intensively in Christ and extensively in his body, the Church. The Fathers stressed this pneumatological perception of tradition, which binds Christ and his Church together over against false traditions, which did not take the Spirit seriously and tried to build on other foundations. Viewed from the Church, the chief distinction between Fathers and heretics is that the former are Spirit bearers (*pneumatophoroi, pneumatikoi*) whether individually or synodically, whereas the latter are mere philosophers, mouthpieces of 'independent' human reason. For the Fathers tradition is God's, a tradition of Life, of the Spirit 'that maketh alive'. The Holy Spirit is here the source of the faith, which is required in order to transcend the dictates of human reason.¹¹ For

the heretics tradition is based on private opinion or independent human reason. According to the Fathers the Spirit informs and enlightens human reason and not the other way round.¹²

In the patristic period, the Spirit is named in the baptismal formula with the Father and the Son. According to Iranaeus, "Proof of the Apostolic Preaching" (1:16ff), the baptism of our rebirth comes through these three articles, granting in rebirth unto God the Father, through His Son, by the Holy Spirit. For those who are bearers of the Spirit of God are led to the Word, that is, to the Son, but the Son takes them and presents them to the Father and the Father confers incorruptibility. So, without the Spirit there is no seeing the Word of God, and without the Son there is no approaching the Father, for the Son is knowledge of the Father and the knowledge of the Son is through the Holy Spirit.

3.1. Divinity of the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit, according to the Syriac Fathers, is experienced as a divine person by the believing man. Aphrahat says, "This then is faith; that a man believe in God, the Lord of all, who made the heavens and the earth and the seas and all that is in them; and He made Adam in his image; and He gave the Law to Moses; and He sent forth His Spirit upon the prophets; and afterwards, He sent His Christ into the world" (Dem I.19)

"And Christ received the Spirit not by measure, but His Father loved Him and delivered all into His hands, and set Him over all His treasure. For John said: "Not by measure did the Father give the Spirit to His Son; but He loved Him and delivered all into His hands". (Dem. VI.12). "For from Baptism we receive the Spirit of Christ. At that same moment in which the priests invoke the Spirit, heaven opens, and he descends and rests upon the waters; and those who are baptized are clothed in Him".

St. Ephrem says: "Our Lord Jesus took in His hands what in the beginning was only bread; and He blessed it, and signed it, and made it holy in the name of the Father and in the name of the Spirit; and He broke it and in His gracious kindness He distributed it to all His disciples one by one. He called the bread His living Body, and did Himself fill it with Himself and the Spirit."

Ephrem views the liturgical celebration as a privileged occasion for encountering the Spirit of God.

“That oil is a friend of the Holy Spirit, and his servant.
 Like a disciple, it accompanies Him, that with which the priests
 and the anointed are sealed. By means of the oil, the Holy
 Spirit impresses His seal upon the sheep;
 Like a signet pressed in wax, He impresses His seal.
 So also the invisible seal of the Spirit is impressed on our
 bodies with the oil
 With which we are anointed in Baptism, whereby we bear His
 seal.” (*Hymns on Virginity*)

3.2. Holy Spirit is the Spirit also of Christ

Aphrahat says, “therefore dearly beloved, we too have received of the Spirit of Christ; and Christ dwells in us, accordingly as it is written that the Spirit said through the mouth of the prophet as follows: “I will dwell among them, and will walk about among them.” Let us therefore, prepare our temples for the Spirit of Christ; and let us not grieve Him, so that He will not depart from us.”

4. Symbolism

4.1. Symbols for the Trinity

Eastern Churches have approached the subject of Trinity as a mystery. They approach the interrelationships between the Father, Son and the Spirit usually in a symbolic manner. Either they are portrayed as identical, for the purpose of expressing common essence within the Godhead, or they are depicted as three characteristics or manifestations of the same phenomenon for the purpose of expressing distinctiveness, yet mutuality of functions.

4.2. Symbols for the Holy Spirit as Creator and Re-Creator

The Eastern writers see the different works of Holy Spirit as creation and re-creation. In all redemptive process, the Spirit is the non-corporeal “finger of God” (Severus of Antioch). He becomes the architect of creation (Ephrem) the treasure of life (Abdiso Hazzaya) and the heavenly treasure (Narsai and Gregory the Illuminator).

The Eastern writers select symbols from the nature to explain the Spirit’s salvific offices. Throughout the history of creation and re-creation the Spirit’s finger moves upon the water-

whether that be the primeval water in Gen 1, the water of the Red sea, the watery womb of the Virgin Mary, the waters of Baptism or the still crystal sea described in Apocalypse (15.2).

Ephrem sees the Holy Spirit as the light and contrasts Mary who saw clearly because she allowed the Spirit to shine through her eyes and then to radiate the same light outwards to the disobedient Eve, who remained blind because she would not allow the divine light to enter.

4.3. Fire, Dove and the Oil

In the early Christian writers three symbols of the Holy Spirit stand out: fire, dove and the oil. Of these by far the most prominent and important in Syriac tradition is that of fire.¹³ In the 73rd of his Hymns on Faith Ephrem provides, as an illustration of the Trinity, the example of the sun: the sun corresponds to the Father, the light to the Son, and the heat to the Spirit (*HFid* 73.1). The familiar symbol of the Spirit as fire occurs in abundance in the East. According to the 7th c. Assyrian Abdiso Hazzaya, the fire of the Spirit is the divine impulse in human affairs. In Ephrem, as in many Eastern writers, the fire of the Spirit is imparted to participants in the Eucharist in order to sanctify them.

The Holy Spirit as fire has two aspects: the fire is a sign of acceptance of a sacrifice (Gen 4.4; 2 Chron 7.1), and at the same time it also consecrates it. In the case of the coming of the Holy Spirit on to the baptismal oil and water the former aspect is of course not applicable, but at the Eucharist both aspects are very much present.¹⁴ The ‘fire’ of the Holy Spirit is also imparted to the baptized in the Eucharist, thus effecting a continuing process of sanctification in them (*HFid* 10. 8-13).

Fire, like water, is an ambiguous symbol- it can also be destructive. But in the case of the Holy Spirit as fire, what is destroyed is only what is impure or evil: “Your Bread slays the Greedy one who had made us his food, your cup destroys Death who had swallowed us up.” (*HFid* 10.18).

The Spirit also is depicted as fire in the furnace that burns away sins. Narsai (5c.) speaks of the furnace as the place where the Spirit heats man’s weak clay. Ephrem speaks of the Spirit’s divine warmth that thaws all that is frozen, crushing the icy bond of sins, ripening all things and bringing springtime to the Church. The

Spirit is also identified with the lightening that many ancients believed struck mussels in the sea, thereby producing pearls. In his famous five sets of poems on the Pearl, Ephrem meditates on the many analogies with the Incarnation that the pearl offers: Christ the pearl is born through the coming of the Fire of the Holy Spirit upon Mary the mussel. From an early date the consecrated Eucharistic elements also came to acquire the technical name of ‘pearls.’ ‘Christ gave us pearls, his Body and holy Blood,’ says Ephrem in his *memra* on the Sinful Woman.¹⁵ It is the descent of the ‘Fire’ at the epiclesis, which has given rise to the terminology.

One of the most popular symbols of the Spirit is the dove, sometimes depicted hovering over the waters, at other times descending, signaling a new era for mankind and the cosmos (Odes of Solomon, Ephrem, Narsai). At Christ’s baptism the Holy Spirit descended in the likeness of a dove, and on the basis of this episode the dove has, from at least the fifth century on, been a regular symbol of the Holy Spirit in Christian art. May be due to some pagan connotations, the ‘dove’ symbolism is not so prominent in Syriac writers as it is in some other Christian traditions.¹⁶

It is possible that the vocabulary of ‘flying,’ very frequently found in connection with the activities of the Spirit, derives from the imagery of the Holy Spirit as a dove. However, it could just as well have had its origin in the use of the verb *rahhep* (ܪܗܗܦ) ‘hover’ in Gen 1.2, or the phrase ‘wings of the Spirit/wind’ in Ps 104.3, both passages frequently alluded to by Syriac writers. The Gospel accounts of Christ’s baptism do not use ‘fly’ only ‘come down’.

On the whole Syriac writers prefer to use ‘dove’ imagery in quite a different context, and derived from another biblical passage, Song of Songs 6.8. It is Mary who is the dove, and she bears the heavenly Eagle. There is a tendency in most Syriac writers to move away from seeing the dove as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and to transfer the imagery to Mary.¹⁷

4.4. The Holy Spirit and Myron

Olive oil is very closely associated with the Holy Spirit in the Syriac literature, but this is because the oil was understood as the ideal ‘conductor’ for the power of the Spirit, rather than as an

actual symbol of the Spirit. As Ephrem puts it: “This oil is the Holy Spirit, it serves him, following him like a disciple” (*HVirg* 7.6. 1-2). Thanks to the play on words available in Syriac, the olive oil (ܡܫܗܐ *meshha*) is much more commonly understood as a symbol of Christ (ܡܫܝܗܐ *mshiha* ‘the anointed’) in our texts as Ephrem puts it later on in the same poem: “From whatever angle I look at the oil, Christ looks out at me from it” (*HVirg* 7, 14.6). Characteristically the Syriac commentators prefer to see the myron as symbolizing Christ, rather than the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

4.5. Occupational Symbols

In addition to employing symbols of nature, Eastern writers, often resort to familiar occupational terms to describe the Spirit’s activities. According to the *Odes of Solomon*, the Spirit plays on the strings of the human harp. Similarly Narsai declares that the Spirit is the musician who played on the harp of Mary’s soul. Those who allow him to do this become themselves “Harps of the Spirit”. Ephrem and Narsai were given this title.

Moreover, the Spirit is called the knife of circumcision by which one gains salvation (*Odes of Solomon*), the master craftsman training the apprentice (*Philoxenus*), the adopter of sons and the worker of wisdom (*Psuedo-Dionysius*). He seals the crown given by Christ to his faithful (*Narsai*) he anoints them with oil (*Ephrem, Severus*) and places them over the treasury of his Father.

4.6. Feminity of the Holy Spirit

There are a few theologians who try to introduce male and female images, distinction or elements into the Godhead Himself. They rely on the feminine gender of the Hebrew word *ruah* and identify the Holy Spirit as feminine. Early Syriac writers (until Ephrem in the 4th c.) and certain Gnostics represented the Spirit as the feminine member of the Trinity. Hence, there is a Father, a Mother and a Son. In the *Odes of Solomon* the Spirit opens her bosom giving milk to the world. Again the divine third Person is a feminine dove that descends on Jesus at baptism. In the Gnostic Gospel of the Hebrews, Jesus is said to speak of “My Mother the Holy Spirit”. In the Gospel of Thomas Jesus contrasts his earthly mother and father with his heavenly Mother and Father.

It has become commonplace for Church historians to point out that in Syriac Christianity prior to the year 400, the Holy Spirit was most often understood to be feminine. The distinction between metaphor, or image, and the identity is crucial to understanding the early Syriac portrayal of the Holy Spirit. Early Syriac Christian writers did not present the Spirit as a female being, in distinction from, though not necessarily in opposition to, a male God.¹⁹ Such a concrete identity characterized the traditional pagan religions of the Syriac Orient, where a triad of mother, father and son was a common configuration of divinity;²⁰ and it characterized certain Gnostic traditions where the balancing of opposites (including genders) was essential for the speculative cosmological systems.²¹ Both the Gospel of the Hebrews and the Gospel of Philip, for example, refer to the Spirit as a female entity. In the Gospel of the Hebrews, Christ states, “Even so did my mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs and carry me away onto the great mountain, “Tabor”.”²² In the Gospel of Philip, we read, “Some said that Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit: they are mistaken, they do not realize what they say. When did a female ever conceive by a female? Mary is the Virgin whom the forces did not defile.”²³ The Spirit invoked as a compassionate Mother in the original version of the Acts of Judas Thomas²⁴ falls into this category also.²⁵

Early Syriac literature customarily spoke of the Holy Spirit as feminine, as in Ode.19. The same trend is also seen in Odes 8.17 and 35.6. Jesus refers to the Spirit as feminine in Ode 36: 1-3, and in 24 (dove as feminine). The Spirit has two functions in the Church: he brings Christ to the Church, and he brings the Church to Christ. However, the mainstream Christian tradition of the Syriac Orient does not indicate either an understanding of a female being per se, or of a feminine Spirit like that of Gnostic cosmology. Rather, the texts present a portrayal of the Spirit with feminine images rising first out of the grammatical gender or the noun for spirit-ruha (ܪܘܚܐ) is feminine in Syriac²⁶, as ruah in Hebrew- and secondly out of the verbs which are used to describe the Spirit’s actions. That is, starting from the simple grammatical cue that the Spirit, its adjectives and verbs, were all in the feminine gender, that feminine identification was enhanced by the works ascribed to the Spirit. By far the most important of these was the verb *rahhep* (ܪܗܗܦ), “to hover,” used especially of a mother bird hovering over

her nestlings.²⁷ The term had profound biblical roots for the Syrians. In Gen 1.2 in the Peshitta version, the Spirit hovers over the face of the waters at creation- the archetypal image of the Spirit for the Syrians.²⁸ The image was granted further life by the gospel accounts of the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, where the Spirit descends as a dove. In the Peshitta OT, *rahhep* and its noun form *ruhha* (ܪܗܗܦܐ) translate the Hebrew terms for mercy, pity, and compassion; in Zech 12.10, the image is specifically linked with the Spirit, “I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of *ruhha* and mercy.”²⁹

Rahhep, hovering, was the basic action behind the Syriac image of the feminine Holy Spirit, and the most characteristic for the Syriac tradition even after the gender was changed during the fifth century. Many other images abound in our earliest texts as well as later, some of which are again easily construed as metaphors in feminine terms- such as the Spirit comforting, or giving birth. Other verbs used with the Spirit did not carry gender connotations in their meanings, though they were conjugated in the feminine with this noun: to come upon, dwell in, search out, and lead.³⁰ In other words, the understanding of the Spirit as feminine in Syriac tradition had to do with the experience of some of the Spirit’s actions and not with an attempt to define identity. To understand divine activity as expressive of divine essence is, then, to understand that gender may somehow be an attribute of the essence without being equivalent to it.

The Spirit is not always feminine even grammatically in the earliest Syriac texts: in the Odes of Solomon it is most often feminine, especially when its actions are being elaborated, but it is sometimes masculine. Or, the Spirit could be treated as feminine without this being expanded into a full image or metaphor, as is most often the case in Ephrem’s writings. Feminine imaging was not the sole language for the Spirit in early Syriac writers, and was certainly not the dominant one, but it was an imagery taken for granted by all our writers. It could appear easily, because grammar kept it accessible.³¹

Around the year 400, a change emerges in our texts. Starting in the fifth century, and almost universally by the sixth, the Spirit is masculine in Syriac writers. *Ruha* (ܪܘܗܐ) when referring to wind or spirit continues to follow rules of grammar and to be

construed in the feminine; but when referring to the Holy Spirit, it is now construed as masculine, although this does violence to the fabric of the language.³²

No surviving text explains how or why Syriac writers changed the gender of the Holy Spirit. At the same time that the term for Spirit was transformed from feminine to masculine in Syriac, the same change took place for the Word (Logos), *melta* (ܡܠܬܐ) also a feminine noun in Syriac. From the turn of the fifth century, *melta* is masculine wherever it refers to the Logos.³³ Sebastian Brock has suggested that the change took place because of a change in translation techniques, wherein it became important to render technical terms according to their Greek forms.³⁴ This change accompanied the great Christological debates of the fifth century, when the whole pursuit of theology in the Syriac Orient came increasingly to be undertaken according to Greek forms of discourse.

The feminine imagery of the Spirit in the Odes of Solomon needs no explanation. But what is interesting is the gender imagery used with reference to Father and Son, and not only to the Spirit. In Ode 35, God is the nurturing mother for the Odist who seeks his protection. In Ode 8, Christ too is the nursing mother: "I fashioned their limbs/ and my own breasts I prepared for them/ that they might drink my holy milk and live by it" (8.14). Moreover, in the Odes the Word, clearly identified as Logos, is alternately masculine (*petgama* ܦܬܓܡܐ) and feminine (*melta* ܡܠܬܐ).³⁵ The usages do not appear to be indiscriminate. The feminine (*melta*) seems to occur in instances where the Word is presented as God's agent and associated with the figure of Wisdom as an active force; the masculine (*petgama*) is found in association with the Word as Truth or Knowledge as a static state.

The following distinctions may be born in mind. Ancient Syriac writings employ feminine images for divine activity (birth, nursing, comforting) to relate to social and biological understanding of gender. These usages do not correspond to social or biological constructions of gender; because it is beyond our capacity to understand what gender within the divine essence might mean. In these instances gender's metaphorical significance lies precisely in its suggestive capacity; it is related to its prototype, yet it cannot be equated with it.

It seems clear that for the Syrians, the cue from grammar-*ruha* as a feminine noun- was not entirely gratuitous. There was real meaning in calling the Spirit “She,” which in turn bore upon the human understanding of gender.³⁶ When the feminine language for the Spirit was lost, Syriac theological language may well have lost more than a metaphor; it may have lost a bond of identification, making the divine less accessible to the human.³⁷ To reduce the metaphor to its simple, literal sense was to destroy the element that rendered it iconic. A link between the human and the divine, however tenuous, was severed.³⁸ Rather than making our understanding of the Godhead more precise, the change diminished it.

4.7. Beyond Symbolism

Not all Eastern writers speak of the Spirit in symbolic language. Certain mystics, such as Isaac of Nineveh, contend that the Spirit could not be described, even in symbolic language, and could be comprehended only in part as he was personally experienced. So also Pseudo-Dionysius declares that the closer one gets to God, the fewer are the words. Seventh century Assyrian Abdiso Hazzaya insists that the divine essence is higher than all images and representations in our creation experienced through the senses. God is to be experienced at a level higher than natural powers can reach and human language can describe.

5. Theology of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is central to the spiritual life of the Syriac Churches. He is the divine agent of creation and re-creation. He is active in baptism and Chrismation. He is invoked in the epiclesis. He provides divine gifts to all, especially to those attempting to live a life of asceticism.

5.1. St. Ephrem

The nature of the Trinity and of the interrelationships of the Three Persons within is ineffable. His essence is knowledge, yet the wisest of men are strangers to that essence. Human knowledge is merely feeble twilight to that of the angels, which in turn is but a little twinkling to the knowledge of the Spirit. Ephrem cautions that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are comprehended

by the names only. It is enough to dwell thoughtfully upon their names, without attempting to pry into their essence- a folly from which one can only perish. Specifically Ephrem warns that the Spirit cannot be painted in color.

Ephrem uses the figures of flame, heat and light to explain Trinity. "A one that is three and a three, one". In Hymns on Faith, as is customary to many Eastern Fathers, he articulates the doctrine of perichoresis or circumincession- the reciprocal being of the Three Persons of the Trinity in each other. "The fire marvelously, the heat distinctly and the light gloriously dwell at unity in one another". There is no confusion in the intermingling, because there is perfect order therein. The Three Persons are blended, though not confounded, distinct, though not divided. Each act of each Member of the Trinity is the work of the whole Trinity. The Son is present in the Eucharist by the will of the Father and by the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

Undoubtedly because of the Aryan and Macedonian challenges, Ephrem is careful to declare the full equality of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. The Spirit is not created but is sent by the Son. This in no way implies subordination because the Spirit is high above all creatures, including servants and ministers.

Ephrem recognizes Spirit-activity throughout the entire panorama of salvation, reaching in ordinary linear time from the creative beginning to the climax of the ages and final judgement. Through symbols, Ephrem shows relationships between various acts of divine creativity, ranging from several examples of deliverance to the constant process of illumination by the Spirit, to re-creation or perfecting of creation in its entirety whereby the heavenly Paradise lost at humankind's fall is fully regained.

5.2. Narsai

According to Narsai the Holy Spirit is an eternal being equal in essence and in the Godhead to the Father and the Son. He proceeds from the Father in a manner that is beyond searching out and gives life to "all reasonable being created by him". There are three hypostases of fatherhood, generation and procession in the one God- a mystery hidden from all.

Instead of giving a dogma of the Spirit, he is prone to give the explanation of the works of the Spirit in our life- and it is

customary to the Syriac Fathers. But consistent with his dyophysite Christology, Narsai differentiates between the essence and the power of the Spirit. Narsai argues that the Spirit who descended at Pentecost did not come in his essence or nature, but rather in his power.

5.3. Holy Spirit as Divine Presence

Taking into consideration the Jewish background of *Addai and Mari* Gregory Dix tries to analyze the meaning of epiclesis “Thy Holy Spirit” in a prayer addressed to the Son. In Jewish literature also the “Holy Spirit frequently occurs in connection with “the Presence” (*shekinah*).³⁹ It is clear that in the OT ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ which brings super human strength, wisdom, insight etc., is not intended to represent a personal agent, but a force- in the older stories often a physical force. ‘The Spirit of the Lord’ seems to refer particularly to God’s presence as energizing; while the much rarer term ‘the holy Spirit’, though equally impersonal, seems to refer to God’s presence as ‘brooding’ or ‘resting’ on a thing or person, like ‘the cloud’ of the *shekinah* resting upon the Mercy Seat.⁴⁰ “If we take it that in the very archaic prayer of Addai and Mari the words ‘Thy Holy Spirit’ applied to the Son are to be understood as the virtual equivalent of ‘Thy presence’ or the ‘power whereby Thy glorified Body is present to us’ in the fashion of the OT and NT writers, the whole construction and meaning of the petition become perfectly clear and straightforward”.⁴¹ The prayer is addressed to the Son, Who is reminded of His own ‘example’ given at the last supper. ‘May Thy glorified Body or Person come upon this oblation of Thy servants to bless and hallow it that it may be to us the means of sharing here and now in Thy glorified life’. For Gregory Dix, this seems to be the only reasonable interpretation of the actual things for which the petition as it stands makes request. “I venture to think”, says Dix, “that this is not a ‘later’ but a very early conception indeed of the results of receiving holy communion, exactly in line with that conception of the whole Eucharist as an anticipation of the second coming of our Lord which began to die out in most Churches before the end of the third century, or even earlier.”⁴²

5.4. Spirit and Logos

It is important to note that the pre-Nicene theology of the incarnation as a rule regarded it as the effect of a conception 'by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary', but as a conception 'by the Logos of the Virgin Mary'.⁴³ "However perverse it may seem to us, 'the Spirit' which came upon Mary and 'the Power of the Most High' which overshadowed her were unanimously interpreted by the second century Christian writers as meaning the Second and not the Third Person of the Holy Trinity".⁴⁴ This 'Spirit = Word' terminology is obviously related to the 'Spirit = Presence-of-God' terminology. This is a survival of the NT conception of the 'presence' of the heavenly Christ as the 'quickening Spirit'⁴⁵ in His members on earth. It is obvious that as soon as the incarnation came to be understood generally as a 'conception by the Holy Ghost' and not a conception by the Word, the parallel would be likely to suggest that the Eucharist also is an operation of the Holy Ghost. We do in fact find the argument that as Christ's Body was conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Ghost, so His Body is 'made' in the sacrament by the operation of the Holy Ghost, elaborated at some length in later Eastern writers, beginning with St. John Damascene, before whom it is not generally found in Syriac writers.⁴⁶

5.5. Work of Holy Spirit in Baptism and Eucharist

The many symbols and symbolism which he finds in baptism bring out the works of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, and not Christ, who sanctifies the Jordan waters. Baptism is the womb that gives birth without pangs to the children of the Kingdom. The baptized one comes up from the waters in the armour of the Holy Spirit, shining in the likeness of angels, having entered the divine bridal chamber. The newly baptized puts on the garment or robe of the Spirit, as had the naked apostles, for in the new paradise of the Church none of the saints is naked.

The Holy Spirit effects for the recipient an entry into sacred time as the bread of angels is eaten. Following the epiclesis, the Eucharist, while outwardly bread, has become, by the descent of the Spirit, the Body of Christ. In order for the Spirit to re-create the world, he requires human co-operation, which is contrary to the ungrateful human will. The fire of the Holy Spirit is imparted to

participants in the Eucharist in order to sanctify them. His divine warmth provides clothing for the otherwise naked. Warmth ripens all things, and in like fashion, the Spirit sanctifies all.

Aphrahat has no reference to eucharistic consecration by the Holy Spirit. In his references to the Eucharist he always takes it for granted that it is the act of the Son. Ephrem occasionally says that it is Christ Who ‘called the bread His Body and filled it with Himself and the Spirit’.⁴⁷ “He called the bread His living Body and *He filled it with Himself and the Spirit*...Take it, eat with faith, nothing doubting that it is My Body, and that *whosoever eats it with faith eats it in it fire and Spirit*...eat ye all of it, and *in it eat the Holy Spirit*; for it is in truth My Body”.⁴⁸ The same line of thinking is continued in Theodore Mopsuestia and Narsai. In the liturgy of St. James we read, “He took the cup ...and gave thanks and hallowed and blessed it and *filled it with Holy Spirit* and gave.”

Conclusion

Any survey of Syriac Pneumatology would bring home to us the experiential approach. The Syriac orient views the topic in and from the Church. They try to grasp what they lived; in the background of bible, patrology and liturgy. As the life-principle, Holy Spirit is the life of the Church. Syriac theology, as usual, continues to be rather functional than ontological. Their language and symbols, while expressing their inability to apprehend the mysteries of God, do as well testify to their belongingness to these mysteries. God is at once transcendent and immanent; He is among the people but at the same time, spiritual. The Syriac writers do not explain transcendence nor do they explain what spiritual means to them; but they could experience the transcendent in the immanent, to see the spiritual in the material, to get into the ineffable through the ordinary elements of life.

The Syriac theology does not narrate what the Trinity is in Himself, but they know what the Trinity is for them. They do not express in detail or in dogmatic form what the Holy Spirit is in Himself or in relation to the Triune God, whereas they try to understand His identity from their ecclesial experience. They highlight the all-pervading presence of the Holy Spirit in the salvation history in the OT; they also underline the same impact of the Spirit in the ongoing mystery/history of salvation in the NT/life

of the Church. The salvific interventions of God (*magnalia Dei*) in OT are continued in the Church, of course, through His sacramental interventions, especially Baptism and Eucharist where the 'agent' of God or the 'power' of God is operative. For the Syriac orient, in general, the actions of the Spirit- in the OT as well as in the NT- would explain His nature.

Notes

¹ The important sources for such a study would be mainly the Odes of Solomon, The Acts of Judas Thomas, Didascalia Apostolorum, Anaphora of Addai and Mari, Aphrahat and St. Ephrem.

² The excellent works on the Syriac literature made by R. Murray and S.P. Brock shed light on the remarkable scholarly attempts so far made. The recent thesis of Emmanuel Kaniyampampil on the Syriac pneumatology deserves special attention. Emmanuel Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life- A Study of the Holy Spirit in the Early Syriac Tradition*, OIRSI, Kottayam 2003. This thesis deals at length with almost all the themes in connection with the nature and works of the Holy Spirit in Syriac tradition.

³ The very first words of the Bible (Gen 1.2) speak of *ruheh d-'alaha* that was moving or hovering (*mrahpa*) over the waters at the beginning of creation. The early Christian tradition, in general, interpreted this ruha as "the Spirit of God" and identified, thereby an important activity of the Spirit of God at creation. Emmanuel Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life*, 36.

⁴ Emmanuel Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life*, 37.

⁵ A.F.J.Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, 86. quoted in, Emmanuel Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life*, 37.

⁶ Emmanuel Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life*, 39.

⁷ Emmanuel Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life*, 41.

⁸ Cf., Emmanuel Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life*, 44-45.

⁹ Cf., Emmanuel Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life*, 45-46.

¹⁰ George Dragas, "Holy Spirit and Tradition: The Writings of St. Athanasius", *Sobornost* Vol 1.1 (1979) 51.

¹¹ S.P.Brock, "Dialogue Hymns of the Syriac Churches", *Sobornost* Vol. 5:2 (1983) 35-45.

¹² George Dragas, "Holy Spirit and Tradition: The Writings of St. Athanasius", *Sobornost* Vol 1:1 (1979) 51.

¹³ Cf., S.P.Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, Jacob Vellian (ed.) The Syrian Churches Series Vol.9, 1998, 27.

¹⁴ Cf., S.P.Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, Jacob Vellian (ed.) The Syrian Churches Series Vol.9., 1998. 28.

- ¹⁵ S.P.Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 29-31.
- ¹⁶ S.P.Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 32.
- ¹⁷ S.P.Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 33.
- ¹⁸ S.P.Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 35.
- ¹⁹ R.S. Craemer, ed., *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: A Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Graeco Roman World*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1988, 333-92.
- ²⁰ J.B. Segal, *Edessa; the Blessed City*, Clarendon, Oxford 1970, 43-61.
- ²¹ Cf. J.J. Buckley, *Female Fault and Fulfilment in Gnosticism* (Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina Press, 1986).
- ²² S.P.Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 4, 8-9.
- ²³ In a certain number of writings from the general area of north Mesopotamia, in both Greek and Syriac, we have specific references to the Holy Spirit as a 'mother.' Cf., S.P.Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 18.
- ²⁴ A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, chs. 6, 27, 50, 108, 133, E.J.Brill, Leiden 1962.
- ²⁵ S.P. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 19.
- ²⁶ S.P.Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 17
- ²⁷ Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 142-4, 313.
- ²⁸ Cf., S.P.Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 5.
- ²⁹ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, The Odes of Solomon and Early Syriac Tradition", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (SVTQ) Vol. 37/2&3 (1993) 116.
- ³⁰ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine", 116.
- ³¹ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine", 117.
- ³² Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine", 118.
- ³³ E.g., Jacob of Sarug, Hom. 79, "On the Veil of Moses." Cf. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 130-32.
- ³⁴ S.P. Brock, "Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 20 (1970), 69-87.
- ³⁵ Cf., S.P. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 6.
- ³⁶ It must be stressed that the social situation of women in early Syriac Christianity did not offer unambiguous reflection of this theological understanding.
- ³⁷ "Thus in early Christian tradition we find, alongside the more familiar male imagery, references to the Father's breasts being milked and to the Godhead as a wet nurse. Such images, which may strike the modern reader as surprising, or even bizarre, are in fact no less appropriate than the male imagery which we have (sadly) grown accustomed to expect, for any description of the Godhead which confines itself to solely male (or solely female) imagery is both inadequate and misleading, seeing that the

Godhead transcends all gender. As the great Syriac poet Ephrem, writing in the fourth century, pointed out: if someone concentrates his attention solely on the metaphors used of God's majesty, he abuses and misrepresents that Majesty by means of these very metaphors with which God has clothed himself." S.P. Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 17.

³⁸ "To speak of God we should be at once poets, musicians and saints. The poetical talent is rare; the gift of holiness cannot be improvised, it can be acquired only by means of labor, suffering and a continuous search for God." Boris Bobrinskoy, "Revelation of the Spirit, language beyond words", *Sobornost*, Vol.8/1 (1986) 7.

³⁹ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, London 1993 (12th edition), 183-4.

⁴⁰ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 184.

⁴¹ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 184

⁴² Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 184-5.

⁴³ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 276.

⁴⁴ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 276.

⁴⁵ 1Cor 15.45.

⁴⁶ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 277.

⁴⁷ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 280.

⁴⁸ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 266.

Theology of 'Rāzē: The Mysteries of the Church in the East Syriac Tradition

Jose Kochuparampil

Introduction

The sacramental theology of the ancient Church of the East (East Syriac tradition) is unique in many respects. It presents an alternative list of sacraments with a distinct theology, which stands side by side with the sacramental theologies of the Greek and Latin traditions. Another interesting fact is that the sacramental theology of the East Syriac tradition is a *terra incognita* to most of its followers themselves like Chaldean and Syro-Malabar traditions as they follow a sacramental theology which is hardly distinguishable from that of the Latin tradition. So, the task is not an easy one to present the sacraments and their theology, which is often conceived of in the past as incomplete or error stricken. The categories, concepts and practices of the sacraments are very different. This is their strength and weakness. The strength is that it offers an alternative and a rich theology of sacraments, in Christian tradition. The weakness is that most of its categories and practices were once misunderstood, and therefore, they are still unfamiliar to the other Christian traditions at large. This article is an attempt to introduce the theology of sacraments of this venerable ancient tradition.

1. Sources and Studies

The East Syriac tradition has not produced systematic treatises on sacraments in its early history. However, the early Syriac patristic literature, the writings of Aphrahat, Ephrem, Narsai, and the Syriac translations of the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, furnishes us with a clear picture of the sacramental theology of this tradition. Other sources like the numerous liturgical commentaries from the time of Narsai (+503) up to Timothy II (1332), Canonical Collections like the *Synodicon Orientale* (SO)¹, other collections like that of Gabriel of Basra: Ms Seert 67, (884-893),² and the ninth century collection of Elia of Damas (Vat. Syr. 157)³ are notable sources. The work in Arabic of Abulfaraj Ibn-at-Tayyib (+ 1043), entitled *Fiqh An-Nasrāniyā* --

The Law of Christianity,⁴ and the collection entitled the *Nomocanon* of Abdišo (+1318)⁵ are further sources for Eastern Sacramental life. Another area is the casuistic literature which is yet to be fully explored.⁶ Only the questions ascribed to Patriarch Išo'yahb IV (ca. 1010) are edited.⁷ The liturgical canons of Patriarch Yohannan bar Abgareh (900-905)⁸ also belong to this genre.⁹ The theological synthesis on feasts by Cyrus of Edessa (sixth century): *The Explanations of the Liturgical Feasts*,¹⁰ the christological treatise of Babai the Great (+ 628), *Liber de Unione*,¹¹ *The Book of Governors* of Thomas of Marga (840), and the thirteenth century collection *Liber Patrum*¹² are important sources.

There are only two systematic treatises on the Mysteries of the Church in the fourteenth century: (1) *The Book of the Seven Causes of the Mysteries of the Church* composed by the Catholicos Timothy II (1318-1332); (2) *The Liber Margaritae* of Abdišo (+1318).¹³ Both works were known in the Malabar Church since the Synod of Diamper (1599) condemned them claiming that parts of these works contained errors.¹⁴ Whereas Abdišo's treatise is systematic and concise, Timothy II explains the mysteries of the Church together with their liturgical theology in a systematic way. Besides these sources, the liturgies of the administration of the mysteries serve as primary source for the understanding of the sacramental theology of the East Syriac tradition.

The earliest study on East Syriac sacraments together with their appropriate texts perhaps is the English translation of G.P. Badger (1852), *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, giving a sympathetic view on the sacramental theology of the East Syrians from an Anglican point of view.¹⁵ The most valuable collection of East Syriac sacramental theological source is still the German work by, Wilhem de Vries S.J., (1947) the *Sakramententheologie bei den Nestorianern*.¹⁶ Although it is a groundbreaking work, most of his interpretations are in Western categories and they are outdated. The lecture notes of P. Yousif, with the Italian translation of all the sacraments are a comprehensive and systematic study on East Syrian sacraments.¹⁷ There are numerous studies on individual sacraments, the latest ones being the articles published on the East Syriac sacramental theology in the Syriac Dialogue series no. iv (2001) and no. v (2003),¹⁸ all of which tend to understand the

theology of the mysteries in a more judicious and unbiased way. Recently J Alencherry has made a general survey on studies on East Syriac sacramental theology.¹⁹ In our study on the Mysteries we concentrate mainly on the treatises of Abdišo, Timothy II and the texts of the liturgies of the sacraments in the East Syriac tradition. I have made an attempt to illustrate the general theology of the mysteries in the East Syriac tradition, focusing on the treatise of Timothy II, “On the Seven Mysteries of the Church.”²⁰

2. General Theology of the Mysteries of the Church

2.1. The Term “Mystery” (*'rāzā*) and the Development of the “Mysteries”

The favourite term for sacrament in the Syriac tradition is Holy Mysteries (*'rāzē qaddisē* ܠܘܨܘܬܐ ܠܝܫܘܬܐ). The multi-faceted implications of the term *'rāzā* in Syriac literature have not yet been studied exhaustively. The Syriac noun *'rāzā* means: (1) a secret; (2) anything having a secret or mystical meaning; (3) a type, figure, sign, symbol, likeness; (4) mystery, sacrament, the holy eucharist, etc.²¹ *'Rāzā*, comes from the Persian word *'raz*, borrowed from the Proto-Aryan *rahas*, which in turn was passed to the Hebrews following the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus (BC 538). In Ben Sira the word *'rāz* is employed twice but in a secular sense (Sir 8.18; 12.11).²² In the book of Daniel (chapters II and IV in the large Aramaic section) the term *'rāz*, appearing in “its comprehensive sense, involves the realisation of God’s plan for the salvation of mankind, and in this sense it can very well be defined as the working of his salvific will vis-à-vis humanity.”²³ In the Dead Sea Scrolls, *'rāz* occurs fifty-five times in its cosmological and eschatological significance.²⁴ The Gospel of Mathew, the Book of Revelation, and the Pauline letters use *'rāz* to refer to the accomplishment of God’s plan revealed to the prophets, and to its christological and eschatological nature.²⁵ According to Brock, *'rāzā* is most probably the Semitic term lying behind Paul’s use of the word *Mysterion*.²⁶ The Mystery of Christ presented in Ephesians and Colossians has, according to K. Luke, “a necessary connection with the public worship of the Church, to the celebration of the Eucharist, wherein the Mystery is made present.”²⁷

The biblical concept of *'rāz* naturally passed into the Syriac literature. The term *'rāzā* is frequently employed in early Syriac literature, especially by Aphrahat and Ephrem. In Ephrem, *'rāzā* is employed in a wide variety of connotations, and the plural form *'rāzē*, like the Greek *mysteria*, refers to the liturgical Mysteries.²⁸ Aphrahat cites the term *'rāzā* with the meaning “type” or “symbol” of Christ in the Scripture, and in the sacrament of baptism and Eucharist.²⁹ Ephrem goes beyond this, using *'rāzā* to signify also the sacramental character of the world and the Word (Scripture), both being valid pointers to Christ.³⁰ These pointers function on two axes, as M. Murray puts it: “the horizontal axis of time including all history from creation to the eschatological kingdom; and from the vertical axis that is ontological, from God above to creatures below. The point of intersection is Christ’s incarnation, passion (appropriately by our figure) and resurrection.”³¹

Brock emphasises that the term *'rāzā* in Ephrem, which is normally rendered as “symbol” is quite different from that of modern usage, which tends to imply something essentially different from the thing it symbolises, but more in a strong sense as the patristic view suggests.³² E. Beck shows that the *'rāzā* in Ephrem means more than *tupsā* (ܬܘܦܫܐ), taken from the Greek word *typos*.³³ Ephrem’s view that the *'rāzā* is a meeting point of the past, present and future has particular implications in the Syriac liturgies of the mysteries and their commentaries, as they ultimately deal with the Mystical presence of Christ as the central point of past, present and future.³⁴

The East Syriac concept of mysteries is heavily influenced by Ephrem’s idea of the general symbolic character of creation. Since the whole of creation is made up of such types and symbols, anything in creation can be distinguished as having added significance and as being pointers to the invisible realities of God. Through incarnation, Christ inaugurated this possibility in concrete ways as in the institution of the Church, of which he himself is the cornerstone and his Apostles the pillars (Eph 2.20), or he himself as the head and the Church as his body (Eph 1.22). Thus the Mysteries of the Church, which themselves are constitutive of the set of symbols (*'rāzā*) of Christ, were developed in the Church. These Mysteries are the privileged order (ܬܘܦܫܐ *taksā*) of symbols

(*'rāzā*) through which Christ himself communicates his salvation to his members in the Mystical Body. For our part it is the participation in the redemptive acts of Christ.

From the fourth century onwards the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia was also added to the traditional concept of mysteries: "Every sacrament (Mystery) consists in its representation of unseen and unspeakable things through signs and emblems, which require explanation and interpretation for the sake of the person who draw near to the sacrament so that he might know its power."³⁵ This view needs to be compared with Ephrem's concept that *rāzē* contains the *h'ylā kasyā* (ܚܝܠܐ ܕܟܝܣܝܐ the hidden power) of God.³⁶ Theodore established a principle that for the right participation in the sacraments, proper disposition of the receiver is necessary from the part of the believer and that requires mystagogy, i.e., training into the mysteries of the Church, by way of learning liturgical commentaries. His own commentary on the liturgy of baptism and Eucharist,³⁷ and inspired by him, the commentaries of Narsai and subsequent writers of the Church of the East served the purpose of ongoing mystagogy in the Church of the East.

According to Theodore, the Mysteries of the Church are not isolated human rites of passages, rather they are a shadow of the heavenly realities and at the same time pledge and foretaste of the future glory in heaven. Time and again he emphasises on this point.³⁸ On baptism he says: "The power of baptism consists in this: it implants in you the hope of the future benefits, enables you to participate in the things which we expect, and by means of the symbols and signs of the future good things, it informs you with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the first-fruits of whom you receive when you are baptised."³⁹ In the case of Eucharist it "symbolically or sacramentally feeds the Christian in order to nourish that foretaste of this future immortal existence. This nourishment consists in the hope of the future benefits of salvation, which hope is generated by the sacramental image of Christ's works of redemption."⁴⁰ Through the mysteries of the Church, one enters into a new mode of existence, into a new incorruptible and impassable world, a world of future glory in heaven, which is inaugurated by Christ's redemptive actions. Therefore, sacraments

are participation in the saving actions of Christ through the symbols of the Church.

2.2. Enumeration of the Seven Mysteries

In the East Syriac tradition, the enumeration of the seven Mysteries makes its first appearance in Abdišo.⁴¹ Timothy II also furnishes us with the list of seven mysteries. According to M. Jugie, the development of the number of Mysteries into seven in the Church of the East is definitely a result of Latin influence via the missionaries from the West.⁴² The Dominican missionary, Ricoldo de Monte preached in the churches of Baghdad in 1290. Besides, Pope Nicholas IV sent to Yahballaha (1281-1317),⁴³ the immediate predecessor of Timothy II, the *Professio fidei Michaeli Palaeogi*,⁴⁴ in which the seven sacraments were enumerated.⁴⁵

However, at the end of the fourteenth century we find difference in the lists of seven mysteries in Abdišo and Timothy II. Timothy maintains the consecration of altar, the blessing of monks and the service for the dead as Mysteries of the Church, yet does not include confirmation and the anointing of the sick in his enumeration.⁴⁶ It seems that Timothy, following Abdišo, has taken only the number seven from the Latin Church and accommodated it to the usage of the Church of the East. Timothy's enumeration differs from that of Abdišo, for Timothy depends on Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286), who in turn depends on Ps Dionysius (early sixth century), and leaves the Mysteries of holy leaven, the remission of sins and the sign of the cross from the list of Abdišo.⁴⁷ See the table for details.⁴⁸

Timothy	Bar Hebraeus	Ps. Dionysius	Abdišo
1. Priesthood	2. Church	3. Baptism	1. Priesthood
2. Church/Altar	1/5. Priest/Monk	4. Eucharist	3. Baptism
3. Baptism	Holy Chrism	Holy Chrism	Holy Chrism
4. Eucharist	3. Baptism	1. Priesthood	4. Eucharist
5. Of Monks	4. Eucharist	5. Of Monks	Absolution of Sins

6. For the Dead	6. For the Dead	6. For the Dead	Holy Leaven
7. Matrimony			Sign of the Cross

Of the seven Mysteries listed by Timothy, four had already appeared in the liturgical homilies of Narsai, namely the Mysteries of the Eucharist, baptism, Church and priesthood.⁴⁹ Also worth mentioning is that while describing the mediatory role of the priest, the Hom. 17 of Ps. Narsai (sixth century) mentions the Mysteries of baptism, Eucharist, betrothal/marriage and burial.⁵⁰ Mention of the Mystery of the blessing of Marriage is seen in the casuistry of Išo'yahb IV (ca. 1010) along with the questions concerning baptism, blessings and Eucharist.⁵¹ The thirteenth century *Liber Patrum*,⁵² referring to the faculties of priesthood, speaks of baptism, the Eucharist, the reading of the gospel, the blessing of marriage, burial, reconciliation of converts, the power of binding and loosing and the laying of hands on the sick.⁵³ The small appendix regarding the "sign of absolution" at the conclusion of Timothy's treatise cannot be considered a Latin influence, since we already have references to the confession of sins and absolution, in the early East Syriac writings (see below. 3.5.4). And despite the fact that the anointing of the sick was not considered a mystery in the strict sense, imposition of hands on the sick was practised by the Church of the East.⁵⁴ Since Timothy bases his work on the gospel, on the synodal canons and the books of the holy Fathers,⁵⁵ we can assume that the enumeration of the seven Mysteries in his treatise is a development of the theology and liturgical practice of the Church of the East, while taking into account the influence of the Latin Church.⁵⁶

2.3. The Trinitarian and Ecclesial Dimensions of the Mysteries

Both Timothy and Abdišo present the Mysteries in their existential order, i.e., in the order of their institution: from the priesthood, the Church, and then the other Mysteries.⁵⁷ All the Mysteries have their existence from Christ, who in the first instance bestowed the power of priesthood upon the Apostles through his words to Peter: "You are Peter and on this rock shall I build my Church" (Mt 16.18) and, "I will give you the keys of heaven" (Mt 16.19).⁵⁸ In another instance Timothy notes that

“priest is the one who performs the Mysteries in the Church and no Mystery is fulfilled without his mediation.”⁵⁹ According to him, the mediation and the blessing of the priesthood functions as the “seal” which makes a Mystery valid, as he says: “God has entrusted his seal to the Patriarchs, bishops and priests.”⁶⁰

After the priesthood, which confers the power to celebrate the Mysteries, there comes the consecration of altar, the central part of the of the church. This is naturally followed by other Mysteries conducted on behalf of the Church, such as baptism, Eucharist, the blessings of monks, the service for the dead and marriage. Thus, Christ is the fountainhead of the Mysteries, who founded his Church on the Apostles. At the same time, Christ is not only the source of the Mysteries, but their content as well, since they make one share in the salvation of Christ. However, these mysteries are not ‘things’ but living and dynamic actions of the Holy Trinity, where the Father is the ultimate source of the mysteries and Son in whom they exist and the Holy Spirit through whom they are effective as Timothy writes:

... We will draw near to speak, commencing in our utterance to the glory of God, the Father and Lord of all Mysteries and of the Son, in whom the Mysteries exist, and through the power of the Holy Spirit effective in all...we are guided by the opinions of the holy Fathers gathered in their ecclesiastical writings.⁶¹

It should also be noted that in Timothy’s treatise, all the Mysteries are perfected and fulfilled by the sign of the cross (*rušmā* ܠܘܚܘܿܫܐ), in the name of the Holy Trinity.⁶²

The Mysteries exist in the Son, and therefore, these are the actions of the Son extended into his Church through the mediation of the true priesthood. Abdišo sums up the true character of the Mysteries: “(1) A true priest who has attained the priesthood rightly according to the requirements of the Church (2) The word and command of the Lord of the Mysteries whereby he ordained each of them (3) The right intention and confirmed faith on the part of those who partake of them, believing that the effects of sacraments take place in heavenly power.”⁶³

The Fact that the Father remains the source is very important in the effectiveness of the mysteries, as they are

operative by epiclesis, the coming of the Holy Spirit who in turn proceeds from the Father. Timothy says:

What is the hindrance, so that the matter concerning the brooding of the Spirit upon the dominical Mysteries should be difficult? Also because from the beginning [this happened] through the blessing of the praiseworthy pontiff who is eternal. For just as in the beginning God blessed only once that they should yield fruit and multiply, [yet] his blessing runs its course with all and is mingled in all, and has perfected this in every deed in every travail of conception and birth[giving], this being something which was [only] on one occasion said by him (Jn 16.21).⁶⁴

Timothy highlights the role of the Holy Spirit that “in the Church nothing is established by chance or in vain. The Holy Spirit is the one who orders everything in it.”⁶⁵ It is remarkable that for Timothy the invocation of the Spirit is a determining factor that even distinguishes certain differences of grade between the Mysteries. The Mystery of the blessing of monks is of the second grade, since it contains no invocation of the Holy Spirit, which in itself differentiates it from priestly ordination.⁶⁶ In the Mystery of the consecration of the altar there is an invocation of the Holy Spirit over the oil,⁶⁷ and consecration takes place by the mediation of the power of the Spirit.⁶⁸ In baptism, water and baptismal oil are consecrated by the invocation of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹ In the Eucharist, the elements are transformed into the body and blood of Christ through the “tabernacling” of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰

Therefore, the mysteries are benevolent gifts and blessings of the grace of God the Father, and nothing, even unworthiness of the celebrant doesn't obstruct the flow of this blessing. According to Narsai, the declaratory form in the rite of baptism, that “so and so is baptised in the name of the Father...” is indicative of the fact that Holy Spirit is fulfilling the Mysteries.⁷¹ Narsai referring to the worthiness of the priest, comments on the power of epiclesis in the Eucharist: “the righteous cannot by their purity bring down the Spirit; and the sinful by their sinfulness cannot hinder his descent.”⁷²

3. Liturgical Understanding of the Mysteries of the Church

Since Timothy's treatise is more comprehensive, and it deals also with the liturgical aspects of the Mysteries, we follow

mainly, the order of his enumeration, considering also the liturgical texts and the treatise of Abdišo. In the East Syriac tradition Mysteries are primarily actions of God the Father in Christ, where Christ himself is the “chief protagonist.”⁷³ At the same time these are actions of the Church, through which and through due disposition the faithful participate in these holy gifts. Mysteries are ecclesial acts in their proper liturgies. Therefore, Mysteries are understood always in terms of the actions of God in public worship of his Church. Here we explore a few instances of the representative character and how Christ operates and imparts his salvation through the signs and symbols of the Church in each Mystery.

3.1. The Mystery of Priesthood

The Mystery of priesthood is intrinsically related to the Mysteries of the Church. For Timothy, the Mysteries are those rites celebrated in the Church by the mediation of both the priesthood and chief-priesthood.⁷⁴ “Priest is the perfecter of the Mysteries, and without his mediation no mystery is performed in the Church.”⁷⁵ Only the priests of the true Church can validly administer the Mysteries and, therefore, majority of the authors consider the baptism of the heretics invalid.⁷⁶ However, authors like Timothy I points out that those who confess the two natures of Christ can administer valid baptism, since the nature of water, and of the Spirit is the same for the Orthodox as well as the heretics.⁷⁷ Referring to its essential ecclesial and liturgical ministry, Timothy II says that the priesthood is the “way that, by the mediation of the veil of material things, which are the type of the spiritual things, leads mankind from the customs of animals to the angelic things.”⁷⁸ Priest performs the “type of another reality,”⁷⁹ and these Mysteries are encounters and a “participation” in the life of Christ, through the signs and symbols established in the Church, that guarantees “immortality and impassability.”⁸⁰

In the Mystery of the Imposition of Hands, which imparts “the grace of the Holy Spirit,” a man receives the task of administering the Mysteries of the Church, not in the manner of the Aaronite traditional priesthood of the Old Testament, but through “the imposition of the hands, that comes from Christ himself.”⁸¹ “Through the imposition of hands, Christ handed it on to his

Apostles that they might, in turn pass it on to us.”⁸² After “Christ offered himself as a living sacrifice, and entered into the great and perfect tent, and accomplished eternal salvation (Heb 8.2; 9.12), he offered the gift of his chief-priesthood to the priests (of the) the human race.”⁸³ There is only one Chief-priest, Christ, in “whose priesthood all the chief-priesthood or priesthood in heaven or on earth is confirmed and fulfilled.”⁸⁴ As Christ “permits the priesthood to do what he does in heaven,”⁸⁵ the priest “stands in the place of Christ for the children of the Church.”⁸⁶ The priesthood undertakes the ministries of Christ in the Church. Timothy characterises the ministry of priesthood as having the function of “illuminating,”⁸⁷ which performs the ministries of baptism for the forgiveness of sins, heals the diseases of the body and the spirit, and provides the faithful with the Mysteries of the Body and Blood.⁸⁸ Priesthood is the ministry of perfect mediation of the Church, which imparts forgiveness of sins and convey blessings,⁸⁹ which comes from Christ and passed through apostolic succession and conferred through the unction of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁰

3.1.1. The Liturgy of Syāmidā (Imposition of Hands)

The liturgy of the mystery of priesthood contains the imposition of hands (*syāmidē* ܣܝܡܝܕܝܐ) of the bishops, priests and deacons, and imposition of hands for other lesser degrees, which in turn does not have a descent of the Holy Spirit. The general structure in all the services is: Initial prayers, psalms and *qānōnē* (ܩܢܘܢܝܐ), which are finally followed by two prayers and the imposition of hands, in which the charismas of each ministry are spelled out. Their salient features are (1) The prayers are addressed to “The Good God, full of mercy, who showers the talents of spiritual ministries to administer his holy Mysteries”, pointing out the Father, as the source of Mysteries. (2) It also articulates that the celebrant (bishop) is a mediator of the ecclesiastical tradition, that is transmitted to him. (3) It also shows that the descent (*maggnānūtā* ܡܘܓܓܢܘܬܐ) of the Holy Spirit elects and consecrates the candidate. (4) The second *syāmidā* also articulates the specific ministry of each order, (5) pointing also to its the eschatological aspect: for deacons, “to serve at your altar with pure hearts...to merit eternal rewards in the world to come.” It is followed by signs and gifts of vestments.⁹¹ For priests: “elect him through the descent

of the Holy Spirit to heal the sick by the imposition of the hands, to offer prayers and sacrifice of praise, to sanctify of the womb of baptismal font for the regeneration of the adoption of sons, to decorate the sons of the Church with acts of justice, so that he may stand before his bema with open face..." After giving the vestments and the gift of gospel, it is declared that the candidate is "separated, sanctified, completed and perfected for the service of the Church and for the priesthood in the order of Aaron."⁹² For *syāmidā* of the Bishop the main celebrant prays to make him a perfect priest, to pasture God's folk with true faith, with a sincere heart, let him be light to those in darkness, counsellor for the ignorant, teacher to the youth and children, let him bind an loose in heaven and earth, do wonders for the glory of His Name, appoint priest and various ministers of the Church, and finally "stand at your fearful throne with open face and get the reward of his servant in the end"⁹³ This is followed by coronation and the giving of the gift and sign of the ministry, the Crosier. All these prayers indicate that the Mystery of *Syamidā* comes from God the Father, enables to participate in the saving actions of Christ through the Holy Spirit and leads ultimately to the eschatological fulfillment.

3.2. The Mystery of the Church

According to Timothy, the "earthly Church is the type and icon of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church in the Highest."⁹⁴ After the pattern of the Cherubim, Seraphim and the Archangels of the heavenly Church, the chief-priests and the priests sanctify the (earthly) Church by their hymns and praises.⁹⁵ The liturgical actions of the bishop in the rite of the consecration of the altar signify the divine economy of Christ. The sign (consecration) of the oil and of the Church depicts the "Mysteries of humanity and divinity of Christ."⁹⁶ The bishop places the oil on the altar and covers it, signifying that the "godly life of Christ was at first hidden."⁹⁷ As it says "at the beginning of the *qānōnā*, 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...' signifies that through the grace that is given to us by the unity (of the human nature) with the divine nature we obtain familiarity to cry out to the Father and the Spirit."⁹⁸ The second *g'hāntā* is addressed especially to Christ the Son, where the bishop makes mention of "the intense (*sbisut*) grace and love of Christ towards his Church."⁹⁹ The propitiatory altar is

the type of Christ's tomb.¹⁰⁰ The anointing of the altar points to the women who prepared the spices (Lk 24.1), and the anointing of the feet of Christ by Mary, the sister of Lazarus (Jn 12.3).¹⁰¹

3.2.1. The Quddāšā of the Church

The first priestly prayer in East Syriac tradition is usually an entreaty for the divine power to administer the Mystery. The prayers of consecration of the oil are modelled after the anaphora of AM with three *G'hānātā*, which entreats (1) for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit on the altar (intro), (2) the establishing of the earthly Church, in the type of the heavenly Church, (2nd *G'hāntā*), which is built on the faith of the Apostles, and where the saving mysteries are celebrated.¹⁰² (3) The third *G'hāntā* entreats for the indwelling of the Spirit as in the case of the tabernacle of Moses and the Upper Room of the Apostles (Acts 2.1-4). It also prays that "let the Church be consolation for the oppressed and shelter for the distressed and for forgiveness of sins and deliverance from debts."¹⁰³ This follows the gifts of the Sacrament: signing of the altar, *beth madqudša* (ܒܝܬܡܕܩܘܫܐ), the pillars at the entrance of the *madbahā*, *beth-hūssāya*, *beth gāzē*, *dappā* and liturgical vessels.¹⁰⁴

3.3. Mystery of Baptism

One of the characteristics of East Syriac tradition is the pre-baptismal anointing which marks the descent of the Spirit and, no post-baptismal anointing was known to it up to fifth century. In fact baptism was known as *rušmā* in the early tradition as seen in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari: "those who are marked by the living and life-giving sign of holy baptism"¹⁰⁵ This is based on one of the biblical traditions in which the Holy Spirit is sent down first upon those who are chosen, and then, they receive the Baptism of water (Acts 9.17-18; 10.44-48). The emphasis given to baptism as participation in the death and resurrection of Christ by Theodore of Mopsuestia and the contact with Greek Churches resulted in the adoption of post-baptismal anointing.¹⁰⁶

Baptism is understood in terms of adoption of sonship and participation in the mysteries of Christ. The concept of "original sin" is understood not as the inherited sin of Adam, but as the sinful orientation of mankind. Therefore, although children have no

sins they are baptized for adoption of sonship and for the image of immortality¹⁰⁷.

Quoting the classic texts on baptism in the New Testament (Jn 3.5; Mt 28.19), Timothy affirms that the Mystery of baptism was founded by Christ himself.¹⁰⁸ Christ operates throughout the celebration of the Mystery of baptism. Through the media of “the priest, priestly prayers, water and oil,”¹⁰⁹ one participates in the “death and resurrection of Christ.”¹¹⁰ The triple immersions into the baptismal “womb” (*‘ubā d-ma‘mōditā* ܘܒܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܕܝܬܐ) signify “the three days during which our Lord remained in the tomb.”¹¹¹ The signing of the priest in the declaratory form signifies that the sign “belongs not to himself but to his Lord, and that the priest is only a mediator and is appointed to minister according to His grace.”¹¹² For Abdišo, baptism of Christ is the perfect one, in which we receive the Holy Spirit, which is a spiritual circumcision, putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. He also speaks in terms of scholastic theology that the matter of baptism as the water and form as the trinitarian formula.¹¹³

Abdišo considers the oil of unction also one of the Seven Mysteries, for Christians who are set apart for the kingdom of heaven and true priesthood, in which pure Olive oil is the matter and blessing the form.¹¹⁴

3.3.1. The Liturgy of Baptism

The liturgy of Baptism is a much developed and theologically rich celebration, which includes introductory rites with the imposition of hands, pre-baptismal anointing, liturgy of the Word and liturgy of the Mysteries where the baptismal oil and water are consecrated in three *g’hānātā*, which culminate in the descent of the Spirit on the oil and water. This follows the gift of baptism. This is followed by the post-baptismal anointing, crowning and Holy Qurbana.¹¹⁵

The *kārōzūthā* (ܟܪܘܙܘܬܐ) composed by Theodore in the baptismal liturgy is a summary of the mystery of baptism: “...by the holy token of absolving baptism they shall become members and like unto Him, which is the head of the Church, the first born from the dead let us pray that: (1) he will make them worthy of the incorruptible state shown forth by Christ, who alone is the First fruit of the resurrection of life (2) sending on them the gift of the

Spirit who girds up the feebleness of their nature that they be not doubtful of the visible mysteries, whereby (3) they receive the good things to come that do not pass away, (4) and who pour forth the power of his gift upon the oil and water, that thereby may fulfil the type of death and resurrection, (5) with the earnest of the kingdom of heaven for ever.”¹¹⁶

The disposition of the oil is followed by its consecration with three *g'hanātā* which are culminated in the epiclesis: “there may come the grace from the gift of the Holy Spirit who is of Thee (the Father), in his perfect *qnōmā* (ܩܢܘܡܐ) and is partaker of thy divinity and creatorship be mixed with this oil and grant those who anoint with it (1) pledge of resurrection from the dead (2) unto the perfecting of the adoption of the children of thy lordship and (3) unto the deliverance from sinful passions and (4) unto the rejoicing of heavenly rest.”¹¹⁷

3.4. Qurbānā: The Offering of Christ and Communion with Christ

The rite of the Mystery of the Eucharist is “marked out as being participation, that is, with God and divine things, through the mediation of the communion in the Body and Blood.”¹¹⁸ It is Christ himself who perfects the living Body and the dominical Blood, from ordinary materials” through his constant sending of grace.¹¹⁹ For Timothy, one of the five appellations of this mystery is “offering” (*qurbānā* ܩܘܪܒܢܐ), because this is the symbol of Christ who offered himself to his Father (as) the oblation (*qurbānā*) on our behalf.¹²⁰ It is also called *šawtāpūthā* (ܫܘܬܐܦܘܬܐ communion), and on account of the reception of these Mysteries, we become members of Christ.”¹²¹ The five titles given to Eucharist by Timothy point to its divine and ecclesial dimensions: (1) *knušyā* (assembly), (2) *šawtāpūthā* (3) *qurbānā* (4) *'rāzā* (mystery) (5) *qaddišā* (sanctification).¹²²

In the fifteenth section of chapter IV, Timothy explains in detail how the worshipping community celebrates the divine economy of Christ in the *qurbānā* through prayers, hymns and actions.¹²³ Not only is the whole *qurbānā* the celebration of the economy of Christ, but also the very theology of the Eucharist itself is presented in terms of the “Christology” of the Church of the East: Timothy explains: “just as the human nature of Christ,

though not by its own nature, but on account of the union that is with the divine nature to be called God, likewise, this bread and wine, although not by nature, body and blood, nevertheless on account of that Grace of the Spirit which tabernacles upon them, they are called body and blood of Christ.”¹²⁴ Abdišo also points out that through the descent of the Holy Spirit the bread and wine are changed into Christ’s saving body and blood. Referring also to the epiclesis of the anaphora of Nestorius he says that we attain (1) forgiveness, (2) pardon, (3) purification, (4) enlightenment and (5) great hope of resurrection for the dead and inheritance from heaven.¹²⁵

Abdišo presents Holy Leaven (also known as *malkā* (ܡܠܟܐ the King) as one among the seven mysteries, which is “handed over to the Church by Apostle Thomas and his disciples.”¹²⁶ It is a symbol of ecclesial communion, and communion with the uninterrupted tradition of the Church.¹²⁷

3.5. Other Mysteries

3.5.1. Perfection of the Monks

The perfection of the Monks is in Timothy’s list of seven mysteries. According to him, in the blessing of a monk one is “offered another type of baptism into the death and resurrection of our Lord.”¹²⁸ The different liturgical actions in the service signify the monk’s participation in the life of Christ. “The new clothing that he receives signifies that he puts on the “new man” in the pattern of his Creator...The cross he receives on his shoulder signifies that he has received the cross of suffering and joins hereafter his Lord.”¹²⁹

3.5.2. Matrimony

According to Timothy, the law of marriage is a “God-given” Mystery.¹³⁰ God created woman from the rib of man. Christ confirmed this commandment through his words (Mt 19.6).¹³¹ Following Paul, Timothy affirms that the relationship between the partners in marriage is the type of a spiritual relationship: as Christ is the head of the Church, the husband is the head of the wife (Eph 5.24).¹³² In section three, Timothy illustrates the symbolic meaning of the rite of marriage, all of which point to the economy of Christ and union with him.¹³³ To cite an instance, the drinking of the cup

mixed with water, *hanānā* (ܚܢܢܐ),¹³⁴ and wine signifies that the partners become one body in the type of communion in the Eucharist, where we become one body in Christ.¹³⁵

3.5.2.1. The Quddašā of Marriage

The rite is theologically rich and celebrated without Holy Qurbana. The cup, ring, cross *hanānā* and apparel are put in order. The prayers while mingling water and wine in the cup express the joy of the Church, and refers to the True Bridegroom, espoused to him, who gave for a “dowry His precious body and blood” and cleansed and sanctified her through his sacrifice.¹³⁶ One of the initial *'oniyathā* expounds the meaning of the rite as follows: the celebration of spouses among Christian people is praiseworthy, in which (1) the service the priest acts as a mediator, and (2) the ring is in confirmation of the promise made, and (3) the cup of wine, a symbol of the blood and water, and (4) the living cross is a witness thereto, and (5) the *hanānā* stands for the blessing of the forgiveness, which the people receive. Blessed is the one who ordained the rite in the beginning and hath handed it down to us (God as the source of this mystery).¹³⁷

The blessing of the ring is remarkable: prayer is addressed to Christ the True Bridegroom. The ring is a transcendental symbol of faithfulness all through the ages. The prayer expresses the sacramental realism of the meaning of ring: articulating that “this is the ring,” with which the holy Church is espoused to the Heavenly Bridegroom, and the body and blood it received for the forgiveness of sins. Prayers go on identifying this ring with that of the rings with which Sarah, Rebecca, Rachael were espoused to their respective husbands, who in turn were great Fathers of faith. The rings stand as a sign of the truthfulness of Tamar, Joseph in Egypt, Daniel etc. The blessing of the cross also is conducted in similar vein. “It is the cross” by which the Church is saved by her heavenly bridegroom. It is through this symbol that Constantine conquered enemies, Moses slew Abimalek, martyrs shed their blood, the three children were saved from the furnace, Daniel was saved from wild beasts.¹³⁸ After having thrown the cross and the *hanānā* in the cup, it is declared blessed in the name of the Trinity. The Blessing of the attire prays for the power of God’s grace: “May the blessing which was poured out upon the vestments of the

first tabernacle rest upon this attire and these garments of thy worshippers ... As garments are close to man's body, let thy servants cling one another in love and affection.¹³⁹

The anthem after the blessing of the crown and coronation also points to Christ: "The Son of God hath crowned the Church which he has espoused with beauty and glory, and hath called to her wedding the heavenly and earthly assemblies that they may dance in their courts, he has made her crown of the glorious rays of the light of his Hidden Father."¹⁴⁰ It is also notable that all petitions of the *kārōzūthā* are addressed to Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom¹⁴¹.

In the liturgy of matrimony the spouses are merged into the great Church of heaven and earth, and into the dispensation of Christ. The actions: the consenting ceremony, blessing of the cup, the cross, the ring, the attire and the crown, and the participation in the cup, putting on the ring, and the attire, crowning and final blessings, all integrate the spouses into the great mystery of union in marriage, which is modelled after the union of Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom to his Church.

3.5.3. The Mystery of the Sign of the Cross

The sign of the life-giving cross forms the seventh Mystery in Abdišo's enumeration of the Mysteries.¹⁴² He explains it in East Syriac Christological terms: "Just as we worship the humanity of Christ on account of the divinity in him we worship the cross as the killed and the worshipped, and symbol of Christ's advent. It is the powerful sign with which Apostles produced miracles and the mysteries of the Church are perfected."¹⁴³ Timothy also mentions the importance of the cross. Referring to the cross and the gospel, which are placed on the altar Timothy remarks: "the cross in the place of Christ, and the gospel in the place of his holy words; so that through his proximity and his words, the Mysteries will be sanctified."¹⁴⁴ He dedicates an entire section in chapter IV to illustrate the significance of the sign of the cross (*rušmā*) in the celebration of the Mysteries.¹⁴⁵ Išo'yahb IV, also says that the Mysteries are perfected by the sign of the life-giving cross.¹⁴⁶ According to Timothy, the signing of the cross is obligatory over the ordinandi, over the oil of baptism, over the baptismal font, over the wedding ring and over the thurible and incense.¹⁴⁷ The signs are

to be perfected in the name of the Trinity.¹⁴⁸ The sign of the cross signifies belonging to Christ.¹⁴⁹ The periodic signing of the cross in the celebration of the Mysteries thus functions as a constant reminder that Christ, the principle protagonist of the Mysteries, operates and perfects all the services of the Church.

3.5.4. Penitence

The East Syriac tradition recognizes the possibility of remission of sins after having received baptism. Early Syriac Fathers like Narsai, Babai the Great, Timothy the Great speak about it.¹⁵⁰ Aphrahat (345) mentions the ministry of absolution, which is entrusted to priests and healing through the spiritual doctors.¹⁵¹ We have clear evidence of private confession in the letter of Išo'yahb I (585) to bishop James of Darai.¹⁵² On the Mystery of the remission of sins Abdišo says: "Our Lord has committed the medicine of repentance to learned physicians, the priests of the Church. Whomsoever, therefore Satan has cast into disease of sin, let him come and show his wounds to the disciples of the wise physicians who will heal him with spiritual medicine."¹⁵³ The appendix of Timothy's treatise also gives a commentary on the sign of absolution.¹⁵⁴

The ecclesial dimension of the forgiveness is expressed in the *Taksā d hūssāyā* (ܬܟܣܐ ܕܗܘܫܝܝܐ, The Order of Pardon). The prayer of imposition of the hands followed by the sign of the cross on the forehead, composed by Catholicos Išo'yahb III, gives the true meaning of this Mystery: "Our good God full of mercy, transform this your servant with the hope of renewal of the life of penitence. Renew in him your Holy Spirit by which he is sealed for your day of salvation; purify him by your mercy ... make him participate with the saints of your Church to the firm hope of adoption of sonship, and participate in the life-giving mysteries."¹⁵⁵

3.5.5. Anointing of the Sick

The anointing of the sick doesn't appear in the lists of the Mysteries. However, the practice of imposition of the hands over the sick and anointing them with oil was prevalent in the Church of the East, as the ordination rites refers to it as one of the ministries of the priest.¹⁵⁶ The "synod of Diamper says that this rite is unknown in Malabar.¹⁵⁷ However, one can see that the early Syriac

sources, especially the writings of St Ephrem lay special emphasis on the aspect of both spiritual and physical healing in Christian life.¹⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that the first ever use of the oil for anointing of the sick in the patristic period is attested in the writings of Aphrahat, who in his *Demonstration 23* “On the Cluster of Grapes,” says that the oil, which “perfect those who are anointed (priests, kings, and prophets) anoints the sick, and in a hidden and mysterious way brings back those who repents.”¹⁵⁹

There is further mention of the anointing of the sick with oil in the biography of Catholicos Mar Aba (+552), whose acquaintance with the rites of the Greek Church may have accounted for its inception in the Church of the East.¹⁶⁰ There is a reference to the anointing of the sick in the 19th canon of the synod of Catholicos Mar Joseph (AD 554) referring to it as “healing should be offered to him as though for a bodily illness with the oil of prayer which priests bless, and with the water of prayer, and with fasting...”¹⁶¹ Further the questions on baptism by Išō‘yahb IV (1010) refers to “the oil of mercy which is given to the sick.”¹⁶² Assemani mentions the existence of anointing of the sick in one of the manuscripts of the Syriac Pontifical.¹⁶³

Another practice was the applying of *hanānā*, which is made from the dust from the tomb of a martyr, mixed with water and oil and finally the dust from the tomb of St. Thomas, which is called the mercy of St. Thomas.¹⁶⁴ P. Podipara says that in Malabar there was the practice of reading out holy Scriptures on the sick.¹⁶⁵ Later by the influence of the Latin missionaries the Syro-Malabar and Chaldean Churches have adopted the Latin usages of the anointing of the sick.

3.5.6. The Service for the Dead

The service of the dead is considered one of the seven mysteries in Timothy II. The service for the dead demonstrates “the perfection (*šumalyā* ܫܘܡܠܝܐ) of those who rest (*šakeb* ܫܟܝܒ) in Christ.”¹⁶⁶ For Timothy, the departure (*šunayā* ܫܘܢܝܐ) of the faithful is different in kind that of the unfaithful, since those who believe die in godly hope (of the resurrection).¹⁶⁷ The offering of the *qurbānā* helps also the dead. The soul that has departed from the body is helped by prayers and *qurbānā*.¹⁶⁸ The *kārōzūthā* and

the prayers of the bishops and priests comprise a catechesis regarding the blessedness of those who die in Christ.¹⁶⁹

Conclusion

We have been examining certain aspects of the theology of mysteries in the East Syriac tradition. The East Syriac tradition offers unique contribution in the sacramental theology of Christian Churches, which need further comprehensive and comparative studies to elucidate its full worth. We have seen that the basic tenets of the concept of mysteries were already laid in the predominantly Semitic period of its history represented mainly by St. Ephrem. The influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia was another landmark which turned the further course of its sacramental theology in a definitive direction. His theology of the mysteries is faithfully followed by later commentators and evidenced in the respective liturgies of the mysteries. The later synthesis of Catholicos Timothy II and Mar Abdišo, although they offer different lists of the mysteries, follows the same theological line, which is consistent throughout the history of this tradition. We have dealt with all mysteries commented by these authors together with other mysteries like anointing of the sick, and absolution (total 11 mysteries). Although the last phase of East Syriac tradition before latinisation was still flexible with regard to the number of mysteries, the general theological framework is the same.

Mysteries are God's divine gift to his people through the saving actions of His Son. They are effected by the Holy Spirit. The mysteries of the Church are an extension of the saving actions of Christ into history, which are to be consummated fully in the heavenly glory. So, they are gifts and promises for future glory. We have also seen that the Mysteries are expressions of living faith, that are enacted in their appropriate liturgies. Mysteries are the living and dynamic reality empowered by their chief protagonist, Christ the Saviour. The theology of each mystery could be seen only in the context of its liturgical celebration, the *theologia prima* of this tradition. The careful balancing of the trinitarian dimension with its christological and pneumatological moorings, and ecclesial and eschatological aspects in the mysteries are positive contributions of this tradition. The participants in the

mysteries are enclosed into their divine milieu marking the whole Christian life a sacramental life.

Notes

¹ It is an 8th century collection of the canons of the first thirteen synods extending from the period 410 till 790 made by an anonymous editor. It has been edited with FT by Chabot: SO = Synodicon orientale ou recueil des synodes nestoriens, ed. & trans., J.B. Chabot, Paris 1902, 17-251/253-608. In the appendix of his edition Chabot adds the canons of the Synod of Timothy I (790) also: SO, 599-603/603-608.

² BO III, 1, 203; A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur mit Ausschluss der christlich-palästinensischen Texte*, Bonn 1922, 235. This work is edited in: Gabriel von Basra, *Die Rechtssammlung des Gabriel von Basra und ihr Verhältnis zu den anderen juristischen Sammelwerken der Nestorianer*, Syr. text & trans., H.Kaufhold (MJAG Band 21) Berlin 1976, 131-317.

³ BO III, 1, 513.

⁴ BO III, 544; Ibn-Al-Tayyib, *Fiqh Al-Nasrāniya* "Das Recht der Christenheit," eds., W. Hoenerbach & O. Spies (CSCO 161-162 Sarb = 16-17; CSCO 167-168 Sarb = 18-19) Louvain 1956, 1957, 93.

⁵ Cf. A. MAI, *Scriptorum Veterum Nova Collectio e Vaticanis Codicibus Edita*, t. 10, Rome 1838, 3-163.

⁶ W.C. Van Unnik, *Nestorian Questions on the Administration of the Eucharist by Išo'yahb IV: A Contribution to the History of the Eucharist in the Eastern Church*, ed. & trans., Haarlem 1937, 64-68 describes the various mss containing liturgical casuistries. For the list of the mss of casuistries, see also S.Y.H. Jammo, *La structure de la messe chaldéenne du début jusqu'à l'anaphore: étude historique* (OCA 207) Rome 1979, 52.

⁷ This edition with ET is made by Van Unnik basing on two mss: Vat. Syr 150; Ming. Syr 566. See Išo'yahb, *Eucharist* = Išo'yahb IV, *Administration of the Eucharist*, in Van Unnik, *Nestorian Questions*, 157-186.

⁸ Yohannan Bar Abgare, *De Altari et Eucharistia*, in BO III, I, 238-248, 238-348.

⁹ Jammo, *Messe chaldéenne*, 52.

¹⁰ See Cyruss of Edessa, *Six Explanations of the Liturgical Feasts by Cyrus of Edessa, An East Syrian Theologian of the Mid Sixth Century*, trans., W.F. Macomber (CSCO 355-356 = SS 155-156) Louvain 1974.

¹¹ Babai the Great, *Liber de Unione*, ed. & trans., Vaschlade (CSCO 79-80 = SS 34-35) Louvain 1915.

¹² *Liber Patrum*, trans, J.M. Vosté, Fonti, serie 2 fasc. 16: Caldei-Diritto Antico 3, CCO, S. Congregazione per le chiese orientali (Vatican City 1940)15-38.

¹³ Abdišo, *Marganita* = Abdišo, *The Book of Marganita (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, trans., E. Shimun, Ernakulam 1965.

¹⁴ Acts III, 14: LIV: Mansi, 35, 1198; Scariah Zachariah, *Rantu Pracheena Gadyakrithikal* (The canons of the Synod of Diamper) Changanacherry 1976, 22.

¹⁵ G.P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 2 vols., London 1852.

¹⁶ De Vries, *Sacramententheologie bei den Nestorianern* (OCA 133) Rome 1947. some of his other article also are pioneer works in this field: See De Vries., "Timotheus II (1318-32), über 'die sieben Gründe der kirchlichen Geheimnisse,'" OCP 8 (1942) 40-94; id., "La théologie sacramentaire chez les syriens orientaux," OS 4 (1959) 471-494.

¹⁷ P. Yousif, *Appunti sui sacramenti e sui riti apparentati nel rito caldeo e malabarese*, Rome 1989-1990, 1998.

¹⁸ Mar Bawai Soro, "Understanding the church of the East Sacramental Theology: the Theodorian Perspective," *Syriac Dialogue 4* (Pro- Oriente Vienna 2001) 22-52; J. Chalassery, "Sacrament of initiation in the Syro Malabar Tradition," *ibid.*, 90-106; P. Yousif, "The Sacrament of Marriage in the Tradition of the Church of the East (Assyrian, Chaldean, Malabar) *Syriac Dialogue 5* (Pro-Oriente Vienna 2003) 40-66; B. Soro, "The sacraments of the Holy leaven in the Church of the East," *ibid.*, 89-102; Yacub Daniel, "Sign of the Cross," *ibid.*, 123-131. George Alencherry, "A Reply to the Paper of K.M George," (Anointing of the Sick in Malabar): *ibid.* 73-78.

¹⁹ J. Alencherry, "The History of the General Sacramental Theology of the Church of the East," *Urha- The Way A Journal of Theology*, Vol, no. 1-2 (2006) 82-88.

²⁰ Jose Kochuparampil, *The Mystery of the Eucharist, Syriac Critical Text Trans & Studies on the Chapter "On the Mysteries of the Body and Blood" from the Book of the Seven Causes of the Mysteries of the Church by Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy II (1318-1332)*, Excerpta Disseratione ad Doctoratum, Rome 2000, 16-38.

²¹ J. Payne Smith (Mrs. Margoliouth), *A Compendious Syriac English Dictionary Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, Oxford 1903, reprint, 1985., 28. For the various forms of the term 'rāzē', see R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, ts. 1-2, Oxford 1879-1901. 2, 3872-3874.

²² K. Luke, "The Technical Term Raza," *Christian Orient 4* (1983) 115 note 22.

²³ *Ibid.* 117-118.

²⁴ Ibid. 118-119.

²⁵ Ibid. 119-121. For more about the Semitic background of "mystery," see, R.E. Brown, "Pre-Christian Semitic Concept of Mystery," *CBQ* 20 (1958) 414-443; id., *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament*, Philadelphia 1968; K. Luke, "Raza," 118 note 34.

²⁶ S.P. Brock, "Introduction," to *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns on Paradise*, intro. & trans., New York 1990, 42.

²⁷ Luke, "Raza," 122.

²⁸ Brock, "Introduction," 42; Payne Smith, *Syriac Dictionary*, 28.

²⁹ E. Beck, "Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphrahat und Ephräm," *OC* 42 (1958) 19-40, 19-26.

³⁰ *HPar* 5, 2; Brock, "Hymns on Paradise," 102.

³¹ R. Murray, "The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology," *PdO* 6-7 (1975-1976) 1-20.

³² S.P. Brock, "Introduction," 42, id., *Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (CSS 124) Kalamazoo 1992, 41.

³³ E. Beck, "Zur Terminologie von Ephräms Bildtheologie," in, M. Schmidt & C.F. Geyer, eds., *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, Regensburg 1981, 239-273.

³⁴ This is a fundamental scheme of Ephrem's thought: the (past) image precedes the sacrament, the sacrament as realisation (present), and the seal of reward in the kingdom (in the future). Cf. P. Yousif, *L'Eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem de Nisibe* (OCA 224) Rome 1984, 358.

³⁵ Mingana = A. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, ed & trans., id., (WS 6) Cambridge 1933, 17.

³⁶ Cf. S.P. Brock, *Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (CSS 124) Kalamazoo 1992, 41, 55, 113, 162, 165.

³⁷ Mingana, 17-70 (*Baptism*) 70-123 (*Eucharist*).

³⁸ Ibid. 20, 22-23, 27-28, 45, etc.

³⁹ Ibid. 53-54.

⁴⁰ Francis J Reine, *The Eucharistic Doctrine and Mystagogical Catechesis of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, Washington, D.C. 1966, 38.

⁴¹ Abdišo, *Marganita*, 45.

⁴² M. Jugie, *De Theologia Dogmatica Nestorianorum et Monophysitarum*, Paris 1930, 1935. tom 5, 280. It was the *Sententiae Divinitatis* (1147), a work from the school of Gilbert Poitiers, that made for the first time the enumeration of the seven sacraments in the Latin Church. This was followed by the *Sentences* of the 12th century theologian and bishop Peter Lombard, written in 1170, which also narrowed the number of sacraments down to seven in the Latin Church: J. Auer, *A General Doctrine of the*

Sacraments and the Mystery of the Eucharist, Dogmatic Theology, vol. 6, Washington D.C. 1995, 88. This number was accepted by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the Council of Lyons (1274), the Council of Florence (1439), and subsequently by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). For more on the origin, number and organic structure of the sacraments in the Latin Church: Auer, *Sacraments*, 83-98.

⁴³ Mar Yahballaha, a native of China, was made Patriarch of the Church of the East in 1281: Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 325-326.

⁴⁴ This is the profession of faith, prepared by the Latin theologians, required from Emperor Michael Paleologus by Pope Clement IV in 1267. Cf. Jugie, *Theologia Dogmatica* 3, 16; P. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends & Doctrinal Themes*, New York 1983, 93, 96, 192, 220.

⁴⁵ M. Jugie, *Theologia Dogmatica* t. 5, 280; De Vries, "Sieben Gründe," 55; id., "Nestorienne (l'église)," in DTC 11.1 (Paris 1931) 218-222.

⁴⁶ During the period from the Carolingian Renaissance to the 12th century, the word "sacrament" was applied to all holy signs in the Latin Church: prayers, creeds, sign of the cross, the rite of burial, etc: Auer, *Sacraments*, 27.

⁴⁷ Abdišo, Abdišo, *Marganita*, 47. Although there is reference to "leavened bread" in his treatise (*Eucharist*, 53-54) Timothy is silent about the "holy leaven." However, it is notable that only the list of Abdišo, having the Mysteries of the holy ferment and the sign of the cross, had long standing acceptance in the Church of the East. While describing the sacramental theology of the "Nestorian Church," Tisserant also is silent about the enumeration of Timothy: E. Tisserant, "Nestorienne," 310-311. The official list of the Assyrian Church is that of Abdišo: B. Soro, "Understanding The Church of the East Sacramental Theology", *Syriac Dialogue* 4, Vienna, 2001, 43-47.

⁴⁸ The table is prepared on the basis of Vat. Syr. 151; Barhebraeus, "Über das irdische Priestertum," in R. Kohlhass, ed., and trans., *Jakobitische Sakramententheologie im 13. Jh.* (Münster 1959) 17-47; Dionysius, the Ps. Areopagite, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, trans., T.L. Campbel, (New York 1981) 17-91; Abdišo, *Marganita*, 45-46.

⁴⁹ Narsai = Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, intro. & trans., R.H. Connolly, TSt 8, Cambridge 1909, 1-74.

⁵⁰ Narsai, Hom. 17, 21.

⁵¹ Vat. Syr. 150, ff. 1-93; de Vries, "Sieben Gründe," 41 note 4.

⁵² *Liber Patrum*, 7-9.

⁵³ Ibid, 30; P. Yousif, *Sacramenti*, 5.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Liber Patrum*, 30; SO, can. 19, 364; de Vries, *Sakramententheologie*, 281-283.

⁵⁵ Timothy II, *Eucharist*, = Timothy II, *The Mystery of the Eucharist*, trans. Jose Kochuparampil, (extract) Rome 2000, 40-41.

⁵⁶ In fact, Timothy's treatise in Vat. Syr. 151 contains all the Latin Sacraments except the anointing of the sick. The third anointing in baptism corresponds to the Latin confirmation. Cf. *Ibid.* III, 17, f. 79r). Confession of sins and absolution is treated in the appendix to the treatise: *ibid.* ff. 151v-154r. In comparison with the seven Latin Sacraments, one finds that Timothy presents additional sacraments, i.e., the consecration of the altar, the perfection of monks, and those who depart in Christ.

⁵⁷ In the Latin tradition the order is from baptism to Matrimony, which views the sacraments primarily from the part of the receiver, whereas Timothy's enumeration from priesthood to matrimony lays the emphasis on what is given, i.e., the existential order of the Mysteries themselves. Viewing the sacraments from the part of the receiver's life is seen also in Abdišo, *Marganita*, 445-46: Baptism = birth; Eucharist = food and drink; penitence = healing.

⁵⁸ Vat. Syr. 151, I, 1, f. 5r.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* VII, 2, f. 144r.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* I, 7, ff. 19r-20r. By "priesthood" Timothy means all three orders of priestly ministry constituted according to pattern of the three heavenly orders. Depending on Barhebraeus he explains what these ranks are. The highest rank belongs to the patriarchs, metropolitans and the bishops. The priest, deacon and subdeacon are the middle rank, and the reader, singers and the exorcist are the lowest: *ibid.* I, 5, ff. 13v-14r; Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* V, 1, 5-6, 61, 64-66; Barhebraeus, "Über das irdische Priestertum," 21-22; de Vries, "Sieben Gründe," 69. According to the *Liber Patrum*, a work from Timothy's own tradition, there are three grades of ecclesiastical ministries, following the pattern of the nine grades of the angels in heaven, and this may have also influenced Timothy: *Liber Patrum*, 16.

⁶¹ Vat Syr 151, f 2r; Timothy, *Eucharist*, 40.

⁶² Timothy II, *Eucharist*, 73-75.

⁶³ Abdišo, *Marganita*, 47.

⁶⁴ Vat Syr 151, f. 85v. Timothy, *Eucharist*, 44. Timothy depends on John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Betrayal of Judas* (*De prodicione Judae hom. 1/2*, 6): PG 49:380, 389-90 (= CPG §4336).

⁶⁵ Vat. Syr. 151, III, 13, f. 64r.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 151, V, 1, f. 124v.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* II, 3, ff. 30v-31r; II, 4, ff. 33v-34r.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* II, 5, f. 34v.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* III, 5, f. 51v.

⁷⁰ Timothy II, *Eucharist*, 43-44.

- ⁷¹ Narsai, hom 21, 51.
- ⁷² Ibid. 22.
- ⁷³ Cf. SC 2, 5-7; LG 9-12.
- ⁷⁴ Vat. Syr. 151, V, 1, 124r.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid. VII, 4, f. 147r.
- ⁷⁶ P. Yousif, *Sacramenti*, 6.
- ⁷⁷ Patriarch Timothy I, *Epistulae*, Syr. Text and trans., O. Braun (CSCO 67 = SS 2) Paris 1914-1915, 4-5; 12-13.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid. I, 2, f. 9r. The idea that priesthood leads us from the custom of animal things to angelic is from Barhebraeus, 17-18.
- ⁷⁹ Vat. Syr. 151, V, 1, V, 1, f. 124r.
- ⁸⁰ Cf. Ibid. 151, III, 16, f. 70r; Cf. SC 2, 5-7; LG 9-12.
- ⁸¹ Vat. Syr. 151, I, ff. 6, 15r-18r.
- ⁸² Ibid. I, 6, ff. 16v-17r.
- ⁸³ Ibid. I, 1, f. 7r.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid. II, 7, f. 18r.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid. I, 1, f. 6v; cf. BH, 18; de Vries, "Sieben Gründe," 68 note 6.
- ⁸⁶ Vat. Syr. 151, I, 2, f. 7r.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid. I, 4, f. 12v; de Vries, "Sieben Gründe," 70 note 2.
- ⁸⁸ Vat. Syr. 151, I, 1, ff. 4v-8r.
- ⁸⁹ Abdišo, *Marganita*, 48.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., 49.
- ⁹¹ *Chaldean Pontifical*, Rome 1957, 134-136.
- ⁹² Ibid. 158-159.
- ⁹³ Ibid. 215-217.
- ⁹⁴ Vat Syr 151, II, 1, f. 28r.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid. II, 1, ff. 28r-29v.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid. II, 3, f. 29v.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid. II, 3, f. 30r.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid. II, 4, f. 32r.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid. II, 4, ff. 33v-34r.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid. II, 4, f. 34r.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid. II, 5, ff. 35r-v.
- ¹⁰² *Chaldean Pontifical*, 26.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid. 39-40.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 40-41.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Syro Malabar Qurbana, Syriac Editio typica*, Rome 2003.
- ¹⁰⁶ S.P. Brock, "The Transition to a Post-Baptismal anointing in the Antiochene Rite," in Spinks,; *The Sacrifice of Praise: Studies in Honour of A.H. Couratin* (BELS 19 Rome 1981) 215-225; G. Winkler, "The History of the Syriac Prebaptismal Anointing in the Light of the Earliest Armenian Sources," in *SympSyr.* 1976 (OCA 205, Rome 1978) 317-324;

“The Original Meaning of the Pre-Baptismal Anointing and its Implications,” *Worship* 52 (1978) 24-45.

¹⁰⁷ Timothy II, *The Mystery of Baptism: the Chapter “On Holy Baptism” from “The Causes of the Seven Mysteries of the Church” of Timothy II Nestorian Patriarch (1318-1332)* ed. & trans., P.B. Kadicheeni, Bangalore 1980., 75; P. Yousif, *Sacramenti*, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Vat Syr. 151, I, 1, f. 6r.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. III, 6, f. 50r.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. III, 15, ff. 67r-v.

¹¹¹ Ibid. III, 17, f. 76v.

¹¹² Ibid. III, 17, ff. 75v-76r.

¹¹³ Abdišo, *Marganita*, 51-52.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 53-54.

¹¹⁵ J. Chalassery, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Initiation in the East Syrian Tradition*, Rome 1995, 93-148.

¹¹⁶ *Liturgy*, 130-131.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 149.

¹¹⁸ Timothy II, *Eucharist*, 42.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 43-44

¹²⁰ Ibid. 42.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Timothy II, *Eucharist*, 41-42.

¹²³ Ibid. 55-73.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 43.

¹²⁵ Abdišo, *Marganita*, 57; B. Spinks, *Mar Nestorius and Mar Theodore the Interpreter: Forgotten Eucharistic Prayers of East Syria*, Cambridge 1999, 33.

¹²⁶ Abdišo, *Marganita*, 58-59.

¹²⁷ B. Soro, “The Sacrament of the Holy Leaven *mālkā* in the Church of the East,” *Syriac Dialogue* 5, 89-102.

¹²⁸ Vat. Syr. 151, V, 1, f. 124r.

¹²⁹ Ibid. V, 3, f. 126v.

¹³⁰ Ibid. VII, 1, f. 139v.

¹³¹ Ibid. VII, 1, f. 140r.

¹³² Ibid. VII, 2, ff. 141v-142r.

¹³³ Ibid. VII, 3, ff. 144v-147r.

¹³⁴ *Hanānā* is a compound of oil, dust, and water mixed with the relics of the saints or with earth from the holy places, which was used for anointing the sick, for anointing at betrothals, etc: Payne Smith, *Syriac Dictionary*, 149.

¹³⁵ Vat. Syr. 151, VII, 4, ff. 147r-v.

¹³⁶ Badger, 247. On the mystery of matrimony, see L. Edakalathur, *The Theology of Marriage in the East Syrian Tradition*, Rome 1994; For a recent survey see P. Yousif, "The Sacrament of Marriage in the Tradition of the Church of the East (Assyrian, Chaldean and Malabar Syriac Dialogue 5, Vienna 2003) 40-63.

¹³⁷ Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals II*, 251.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 253.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 256-257.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 262.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 266-267.

¹⁴² Abdišo, *Marganita*, 67-68.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 67.

¹⁴⁴ Timothy II, *Eucharist*, 62

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 73-75.

¹⁴⁶ Išo'yahb, *Eucharist*, 159.

¹⁴⁷ Vat. Syr. 151, I, 12, ff. 25r-v.

¹⁴⁸ Timothy II, *Eucharist*, 73-75.

¹⁴⁹ Vat. Syr. 151, III, 14, f. 66v.

¹⁵⁰ De Vries, *Sakramentetheologie*, 265-268, 271-277.

¹⁵¹ Dem vii, PO, I: 318.

¹⁵² SO, 433-435.

¹⁵³ Abdišo, *Marganita*, 61.

¹⁵⁴ Vat Syr. 151, 150v-151v.

¹⁵⁵ J. Isaac, *Taksā D-Hūssāyā: Le Rite du Pardon dans l'Église syriacque orientale*, Rome 1989, 40 (Syr)-41 French trans).

¹⁵⁶ See section 3.1. above

¹⁵⁷ J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, ts.53 in 58 vols. Paris/Leipzig 1901-1927, 35, c. 1272.

¹⁵⁸ For a recent comprehensive study on this subject see, A. Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem*, New Jersey 2002.

¹⁵⁹ M. J. Pierre, ed., *Aphraate le Sage Persan: Les Exposé*, SCh 359, Paris 1989, 2:880-881; S. Parenti, "Anointing of the Sick During the First Four Centuries," A. J. Chupungco, ed, *Handbook for Liturgical Studies IV: Sacraments and Sacramentals*, Collegeville 2000, 157. Valavanolickal, trans., *Aphrahat Demonstrations II*, Kottayam 2005, 259 renders the same: "It (the olive tree) gives light in the darkness, enriches the feeble, offers up penitents by means of his hidden mystery."

¹⁶⁰ Cf. de Vries, *Sackramententheologie*, 281.

¹⁶¹ SO, 364.

¹⁶² Vat Syr 150, f. 55r; de Vries, *Sackramententheologie*, 282.

¹⁶³ BO III, 2, S. 276; *Chaldean Pontifical*, 158.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. de Vries, *Sackramententheologie*, 283.

¹⁶⁵ Podipara, *Nammude Ritu* (Mal) Changanacherry 1943 (reprint Mannanam, 1997) 45; see also George Alencherry, "Anointing Among St. Thomas Christians," *Syriac Dialogue* 5, 73-75.

¹⁶⁶ Vat. Syr. 151, V, 1, f. 128v.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Vat. Syr. 151, VI, 7, f. 134r.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. VI, 4, f. 131v.

12

East Syriac Theology of Eucharist

Pauly Maniyattu

Introduction

East Syriac tradition is undoubtedly the custodian of one of the most ancient theologies of Eucharist. This theology of Eucharist is remarkably biblical and it represents the views of the apostolic Church and that of the early Fathers on the Eucharist. The fact that the East Syriac tradition remained for many centuries isolated, helped it in preserving its ancient theology without much influence of the Greek thought patterns. We find a steady development of the Jewish Christian understanding of Eucharist, fostered by the Antiochene School of theology and brought to a final shape in the East Syriac Schools of Nisibis, Edessa, and Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

The most ancient phase of the East Syriac Eucharistic theology was one sharing with the West Syriac eucharistic theology. Both in the celebration and theological understanding of the celebration both these traditions had much in common. A theology specific to the Eucharist of the East Syriac tradition emerged in a clear form in the fourth century. Theodore of Mopsuestia's interpretation of the Eucharist is foundational for the Syriac tradition. His theology serves a real basis for the interpretation of the East Syriac Qurbana. Later authors follow his line of interpretation. Thus we may find Theodore's stress on the commemoration of the mystery in the commentaries of Narsai of Nisibis, Gabriel Qatraya, Abraham Bar Lipah, Anonymous Author of the Exposition of the Offices (or the Pseudo George of Arbel), Yohannan Bar Zo'bi, Abdisho, and Timothy II.

Fathers like Aphrahat and St. Ephrem had distinct ways of talking about the Eucharist. Their concern was more biblical and theological. The homily XVII on the exposition of the Mysteries,

attributed to Narsai (399-502) provides us with a distinctive and specific theology of the Eucharist in the East Syriac tradition.¹ The shift of the ecclesiastical centre towards Seleucia Ctesiphon contributed to the specificity of the East Syriac Eucharistic theology. After the rift from the West (West Syrian tradition) and the Greek and Latin Churches as a whole due to the Nestorian controversies, the East Syriac tradition chose its own path of theologizing. The East Syriac liturgy had attained distinctive characteristics at the time of Gabriel Qatraya. The development of new elements in the liturgy of the Word and preanaphoral part of the Qurbana contributed new inputs to the theology of Eucharist.

1. Celebration of the Paschal Mystery in the Sacred Space

The theology of the Eucharist is very often determined also by the space of its celebration. *Hagia Sophia* of Constantinople had considerable influence on the development of the Byzantine Eucharistic theology. There is no doubt that in the East Syriac tradition, the symbolic understanding of the sanctuary as heaven, haykla as earth, central bema as the earthly Jerusalem, and šqaqona as the way to heaven, has contributed in a substantial way to the Eucharistic theology.

1.1. Madbha

Sanctuary or *madbha* in the Syriac tradition is very important with regard to the understanding of the Eucharist. The term *madbha*² is used in Syriac to denote both the sanctuary (apse) or place of the altar and the altar itself. In the East Syriac liturgical tradition, in all its various versions with local adaptations, the sanctuary is treated as a place of awesome sacredness. The canons of Išo'yahb IV stress the sacredness of the sanctuary in relation to the altar which makes the sanctuary sacred. Any action neglecting the sacredness of altar and sanctuary is considered an injury to the altar.³ An unworthy entry into sanctuary by persons not permitted, or by persons permitted but without due preparation, desecrates the altar place and the altar. Fasting is required as preparation for the entry.⁴

The sanctuary is normally kept hidden from the other parts of the church by a stone-wall or by a curtain, in order to maintain its sacred and mystic nature. Entrance to the sanctuary is restricted to

the priests and ministers of the liturgy. Ephrem compares the function of the sanctuary veil to the hiding of the glory of the inner tabernacle of Paradise (*HParad* 3.5).⁵ In relation to the history of salvation, Narsai sees the sanctuary as the ‘garden of Joseph’ (*HomMyst* 4),⁶ the place where Jesus was buried, the same place from where he rose. Pseudo-George of Arbel clearly speaks of sanctuary as heaven. He emphasises the movements in the liturgy from the earthly space represented by the haykla, to the heavenly space represented by *madbha*. According to the Anonymous Author, the drawing of the veils of the sanctuary symbolizes the opening of heaven.⁷ The author of *Liber Patrum* sees the veil as the figure of the firmament separating us from heaven.⁸

1.2. Altar

The commentary of Gabriel Qatraya emphasises the position of altar as the place of burial. The altar, being the sepulchre of Christ, is also the place of his resurrection. Qatraya, Abraham Bar Lipah, Bar Zo‘bi and Abdišo, following Narsai, speak of the veil over the mysteries as the tombstone.⁹ Emphasising the altar as the place of resurrection, Qatraya says: “The deacons who stand on this side and on that side are the mystery of the angels who were seen in the sepulchre, one at His head and one at His feet.”¹⁰ A similar idea is found in Abraham and Bar Zo‘bi.¹¹

On a different level of symbolism, the altar is the throne of God.¹² In the Qurbana the diaconal proclamation after the third g’hanta of the anaphora of Addai and Mari refers to the altar as the glorious throne of Christ.¹³ Theodore calls the altar the ‘holy communion-table’.¹⁴ It is the table that brings man into communion with God. Išo‘yahb I, in the letter to Jacob, the bishop of Darai, speaks of the altar as the ‘table of life’.¹⁵

1.3. Haykla

According to the Anonymous Author of the Exposition of the Offices, haykla, the place of the faithful,¹⁶ is the symbol of the whole earth.¹⁷ Bar Zo‘bi finds the root of this earth-symbolism in the OT tabernacle of the covenant, of which the exterior tent symbolized this world.¹⁸ However, Bar Zo‘bi specifies that when he says ‘this world’, he does not mean the world as such, but the Church which is

in this world.¹⁹ Thomas of Marga considers the haykla (church) as the symbol of the earthly Jerusalem which is upon earth.²⁰

1.4. Bema

The East Syriac bema, an elevated platform in the haykla for the Liturgy of the Word, is a remarkable architectural element of the Christian liturgical space.²¹ Some sort of bema or ambo is found in all Christian liturgical traditions.²² However, the structure of the East Syriac bema with its episcopal throne, seats for the archdeacon and priests, and the altar for the gospel and cross, and the low-walled pathway known as šqaqona²³ makes it different from the ambo of all other Christian traditions.

The Anonymous Author, while speaking of any movement between bema and sanctuary, always considers the bema as Jerusalem, the place of the accomplishment of the dispensation of Christ.²⁴ For example, the procession to the bema is depicted as the coming of the Lord to Jerusalem²⁵; the procession of the cross and the gospel back to the sanctuary is the symbol of the ascension.²⁶ Another significant characteristic of the bema, according to the Anonymous Author, is its centre symbolism. Jerusalem is the centre of earth according to the ancient tradition.²⁷ The bema, being the symbol of Jerusalem, becomes the centre of the earth.²⁸ The centre of the earth is considered in the history of religions as the symbolic space of communication. Jerusalem, being the symbolic centre of world, is the place of divine communication. Jerusalem was historically the venue of the divine communication par excellence, through Jesus. Therefore, the centre symbolism of bema in relation to Jerusalem suits well to the liturgical function of communication. Another element which favours the centre-symbolism of the bema is Golgotha. The Anonymous Author considers the altar which is in the middle of the bema as Golgotha.²⁹ The early Christian tradition speaks of Golgotha as the centre of the world.³⁰ According to the West Syriac commentator, Yahya Ibn Jarir, the bema is the symbol of Golgotha, the place of our Lord's crucifixion.³¹

The theological significance of the central bema lies in the fact that the Word of God accomplished his 'leitourgia' or ministry among the people. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1.14). Hence bema among the people, is quite meaningful for the celebration of the ministry of the Word.

1.5. Šqaqona

According to the Anonymous Author, šqaqona the passage between bema and sanctuary, is the way leading from Jerusalem to Paradise and from Paradise to heaven.³² Here the Paradise is symbolized by qestroma.

The šqaqona is the space for the many movements in the liturgy. It serves as the intermediary between the heavenly and earthly spaces represented by sanctuary and haykla respectively. The Anonymous Author attaches great importance to the symbolism of šqaqona. He calls it the way of truth, the way along which every one walks into heaven.³³ The doors in this passage enable the entry into the holy way which leads from Jerusalem to the Paradise and from Paradise to the heaven.³⁴ Thus the šqaqona is the way of salvation. Anonymous Author sees this way also as the way trodden by the prophets. He compares it to the ladder which Jacob saw.³⁵ Thomas of Marga defines it as the symbol of the narrow path which goes up to heaven.³⁶ Bar Zo'bi considers this way (space) as the symbol of the small door, the entrance of which is narrow.³⁷

1.6. Liturgical Space is Meeting of Heaven and Earth

If liturgy has the central concern of the communion of the earthly and heavenly persons for the glorification of God, liturgical space prepares the ground for such a communion. The liturgical space becomes the meeting place of heaven and earth. Therefore, the liturgical space symbolizes heaven and earth. This symbolic understanding is true of all Christian liturgies. However, it is made explicit and very significant in the alignment and interpretation of the liturgical space in the East Syriac tradition. Syriac Fathers like St. Ephrem viewed liturgical space as the very presence of Christ himself in space (*HCruc* 3.10).³⁸ It is in fact the presence of Christ which makes possible the real encounter between heaven and earth in the liturgical space.

2. Eucharist as Celebration of Movements between Heaven and Earth

East Syriac liturgy has symbolic actions which help us considerably in understanding the theology of the Eucharist in this tradition. The important processions in the East Syriac liturgy

between sanctuary and bema, are celebration of the salvific movements between heaven and earth.

2.1. Procession from Sanctuary to Bema

The initial procession is of much significance with regard to the theology of Eucharist. The liturgy begins with a solemn procession of the celebrant and the ministers from the sanctuary to the bema for the liturgy of the Word. Historically this procession was instituted for the practical purpose of the entry of the bishop. Gabriel Qatraya speaks of a solemn procession to the bema with the cross, two candles and incense.³⁹ Bar Zo'bi and Abdišo have a similar reference to the procession.⁴⁰ The Anonymous Author of the Exposition of the Offices says that Išo'yahb III established a solemn order for this procession: The clergy in the sanctuary line up; the subdeacons wait on the qestroma. The archdeacon gives a signal, and the veil is open. The two officiating deacons (Michael and Gabriel) walk in the front, and then the two subdeacons, who carry the lamps and candles, and other subdeacons. They are followed by the deacons carrying the cross and the gospel, and finally the priests and the bishop with the archdeacon on his left.⁴¹

The entry of the bishop marked the official beginning of the liturgy.⁴² The most ancient practice was to begin the Qurbana with the procession to the bema preceded by the greeting and followed by readings.⁴³ Waiting for the bishop, the congregation spent the time praying the psalms. According to the Anonymous Author, the marmitha has the simple function of filling the time until the bishop's arrival in the sanctuary.⁴⁴ Today Syro-Malabar Qurbana has the entrance procession at the very beginning, whereas the Chaldean tradition has two practices with regard to the entrance procession: one is similar to the Syro-Malabar, at the very beginning. According to another custom, the celebrant remains in the sanctuary up to the Lakhu Mara and then comes out of the sanctuary for the liturgy of the Word, without the solemn procession.⁴⁵

The procession to the bema is the first important movement in the East Syriac liturgy. If we are to take into consideration the symbolism of the sanctuary and the bema, it is clear that the movement from the sanctuary to the bema is a movement from heaven to the world. It represents the mystery of the incarnation.⁴⁶ The Anonymous Author says that the procession is from heaven to

Jerusalem. "And thus from heaven, along the way trodden by the prophets, the ladder which Jacob saw, he descends and comes to Jerusalem. Indeed they proceed from the sanctuary - heaven - and come to the bema - Jerusalem."⁴⁷ The general view of the commentators is that the procession to the bema represents the incarnation and the manifestation of the Lord. There is at the same time an allusion to the eschatological coming of the Lord as well.⁴⁸ Incarnation marks the historical foundation of Eucharist. The Eucharist becomes incomprehensible without viewing it against the background of God the Father sending his only Son into the world (Jn 3.16) for its salvation. For the salvation the first initiative is from God himself. The Eucharist, therefore, is celebration of God the Father's salvific love. The eucharistic prayer is indeed elaborated commemoration of the love of God the Father.

According to the East Syriac understanding, Eucharist is not just the past reality of the paschal mystery made present. The liturgical act is at the same time anticipation of the eschatological reality. Thus the procession is a realization of the past, present and future merging in the liturgical celebration.

2.3. *Accessus ad altare*

In all liturgies *accessus ad altare* was of great theological significance. In the Syriac tradition the very title of the celebration of Eucharist is related to the movement towards the sanctuary. The West Syriac tradition has *Qurobo* as one of the preferred titles of the eucharistic celebration.⁴⁹ The Syriac word *Qurobo* (ܩܘܪܘܒܘܐ) comes from the root *Qreb* (ܩܪܒ) meaning to 'come near' or 'draw nigh'. The word *Qurbana* in the sense of offering comes from *Qareb*, which is the pa'el form of the root *Qreb*. Thus both titles, *Qurobo* and *Qurbana* have their origin in the word *Qreb* meaning approaching or coming near. Approaching the altar was given great symbolic meaning in the Eastern traditions since the sanctuary was understood as the symbol of heaven, and the altar as the heavenly throne. Going into the sanctuary had the simple symbolic meaning of ascent to heaven.

The East Syriac *Qurbana* has a very important place given to the procession to the altar. This procession has a complex structure with various rites related to it. The different elements of this rite contribute to the material and spiritual preparation for the access to

the altar for the celebration of the mysteries. The rites like dismissal of the unworthy, the prostrations on the bema, salutations by the deacons, the washing of hand by the celebrant, procession to the door of the sanctuary, entrance prayer, creed, procession of entry with the prayer and three times bowing down and venerating the altar, *kározutha* by the deacon during the entry of the celebrant contribute to the proper meaning of the rite of the procession to the altar from the bema.

The celebration of the entry into the sanctuary is the anticipation of the eschatological entry into heaven. Entry into heaven is of immense significance in the East Syriac theology of Eucharist. The *kušapa* before the first *g'hanta* ('be made worthy to sing your praises with the hosts of angels', *Raza*, 34),⁵⁰ epiclesis ('new life in the kingdom of heaven', *Raza*, 45), prayer after the fraction of the mysteries ("for the new life in the kingdom of heaven", *Raza*, 49), silent prayer of the celebrant during the litany of fraternal charity (*Raza*, 51), words said by the celebrant while the assembly is receiving communion (*Raza*, 56), the prayers of ablution (*Raza*, 57), *tešbohta* after the communion (*Raza*, 57-58), thanksgiving prayer of the celebrant after communion (*Raza*, 59), and the *huttamma* prayers (*Raza*, 60-62) emphasise the entry into heaven as the true purpose of the celebration of the Eucharist.

3. Eucharist is the *Leitourgia* of the Word

East Syriac tradition attributes great theological significance to the liturgy of the Word. Liturgy of the Word is not merely an occasion of the communication of the Word of God, having a predominant pedagogic function. As the title of the part of the liturgy says, it is the *leitourgia*, that is, service or ministry, by the Word of God. It is, nothing but the ministry of salvation accomplished by Christ, the Word of God. East Syriac Commentators like Gabriel Qatraya, Abraham Bar Lipah, the Anonymous Author, Bar Zo'bi and Abdišo point to the gospel procession and reading as the culmination of the liturgy of the Word. The procession of the gospel with the cross gives the reading of the gospel an interpretation which goes beyond the purpose of instruction through the Word. Qatraya views this second procession as a preparation for the passion. It is the solemn entry into Jerusalem:

The going out of the gospel and the cross with it is the mystery of the humanity of our Lord which was with body and soul. The cross is the mystery of the body which was crucified and the gospel is the mystery of the soul in which there is reasonableness. The gospel goes out with the solemnity of the deacons in the mystery of the solemnity with which our Lord entered Jerusalem riding on an ass.⁵¹

The same interpretation is found in Abraham and Bar Zo'bi.⁵² The reference to the solemn entry into Jerusalem and the symbolism of the cross as the crucified body indicate that this procession symbolises the preparation for the passion. The reading is presented as the culmination of the entry into Jerusalem.⁵³ It is the mystery of all the words which our Lord said to the Jews before he suffered.⁵⁴

The Anonymous Author finds in this procession the symbolism of the advent of the Lord from heaven into Jerusalem.⁵⁵ But for him the descent of the gospel from the place of the lectors and its placing on the altar of the bema symbolises the crucifixion.⁵⁶ According to Qatraya, the return of the gospel to the sanctuary, symbolizes the passion procession. Qatraya gives a detailed account of this passion procession. The removal of the cross with the gospel from the throne signifies the mystery of the arrest of Jesus and the journey to the place of the crucifixion. The priest carrying the gospel stands for John the Evangelist. The deacon who carries the cross represents Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross for Jesus. The erection of the cross at the sanctuary door is the mystery of the crucifixion. The separation of the gospel from the cross and its replacement on the other side is the mystery of the separation of Christ's soul from his body and its entry into Paradise.⁵⁷ According to the Anonymous Author, the procession of the gospel and cross back to the sanctuary symbolizes the ascension, the solemn entry of the Lord into heaven.⁵⁸ The gospel processions between the sanctuary and the bema, together with the rites in connection with the reading, celebrate the central mysteries of the Christ-event, the incarnation, the earthly ministry, the teaching of the Lord, the passion, death, resurrection and ascension. The gospel processions re-enact in space-time the movements of God toward man accomplished in the salvific work of Christ.

The attribution of the passion symbolism to the liturgy of the bema seems to be inconsistent with the early Syriac commentaries like that of Theodore and Narsai, who interpret the transfer of gifts as a commemoration of the passion. But if the bema symbolizes Jerusalem, then it necessarily includes passion also, because passion is the culmination of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. Therefore, the attribution of the passion to the bema liturgy by Qatraya and those who closely follow him cannot be regarded as something artificial and anachronistic. The important role of the cross in the liturgy of the Word supports this interpretation. The liturgy of the Word is not just a continuation of the synagogal liturgy. With the commemoration of the passion of Christ the liturgy of the Word transcends a mere didactic purpose. It is a primary level commemoration of the paschal mystery of Christ, serving as a meaningful preparation for the commemoration in the Quddasha. Liturgy of Word prepares the ground for a meaningful eucharistia for the sake of the ministry of salvation accomplished by Christ.

3.1. Eucharistic Celebration as the Karozutha of Paschal Mystery

The East Syrian liturgy commemorates the paschal mystery through the karozutha or proclamation. Even though the whole liturgy is proclamation of the mystery of salvation, certain elements in liturgy are specially called proclamation (karozutha). The Liturgy of the Word is the most important occasion of the karozutha. We may observe five levels of karozuthas in the East Syriac Qurbana: 1. Karozutha of the Old Testament (Readings of Law and Prophets who proclaim the mystery of Christ through figures and symbols. 2. Karozutha of the Apostle (Epistle especially of Apostle Paul) 3. Karozutha of the evangelist (eg. *karozutha d Mathai* ܡܬܝܐ ܕܡܬܘܠܝܐ). 4. Karozutha made by the priest (homily 5. The Karozutha of the faithful and deacon. Besides these karozuthas of the Liturgy of the Word the deacon has other karozuthas too in the Qurbana.

All the karozuthas in the liturgy have one and the same content, that is the paschal mystery of Christ. That has been always the content of the Apostolic preaching. Even during the liturgy of the Word, the East Syrian tradition is particular to proclaim the entire paschal mystery. Thus the liturgy of the Word becomes the commemoration of the life, teachings, saving deeds, passion, death,

and resurrection of the Lord. The commentators all stress this aspect. The karo-zutha of the priest has to present a specific portion of the Word of God in its relation to the entire paschal mystery. The karo-zuthas of the deacon, which are already fixed by the liturgical traditions, proclaim the paschal mystery, however, seeing it as the means of our sanctification.

Proclamation of the paschal mystery in the form of the symbol of faith is very significant in the East Syrian Qurbana. Every eucharistic celebration demands the solemn proclamation of faith just before the anaphora. The proclamations become offering of praise and thanksgiving (tešbohta ܩܘܒܚܐ and tawditha ܩܘܒܘܬܐ) in the g'hanta prayers (prayers of inclination) of the East Syrian anaphoras. God's work of creation, redemption and ongoing sanctification is proclaimed along with praise and thanksgiving during the g'hantas.

4. Eucharist as the 'Uhdana of the Raza of God and Dukhrana of the Raza of the Church

The Eucharistic celebration in the East Syriac tradition is also called 'raza (ܩܘܒܐ).⁵⁹ The term 'raza refers to underline the fact that the Eucharist is the celebration of the mystery of Christ. According to St. Ephrem, in Eucharist we partake in the entire historical and eternal reality of Christ. Eucharist is nothing less than the entire eschatological mystery of Christ taking place here and now in history.⁶⁰ Since the term 'raza is concerned about the celebration or commemoration of the mystery, it is closely associated with the term 'anamnesis' (commemoration or memorial). The Syriac terms for memorial are 'uhdana (ܩܘܒܐܢܐ) and dukhrana (ܩܘܒܐܢܐ).⁶¹ 'Uhdana of the paschal mystery is the central concern of the liturgy. The commentators too share the same concern.

The liturgical texts and the commentaries explain the mysteries commemorated: the mysteries of the death and resurrection of our Lord. "...rejoicing and glorifying, commemorating and celebrating this great awesome, holy, vivifying and divine mystery of the passion, the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."⁶² According to Theodore, we celebrate the death of our Lord through the awe-inspiring service of the mysteries.⁶³ This commemoration has its foundation in the command of the Lord. The phrase in the anaphora "as we have been

commanded”⁶⁴ confirms this. In Theodore’s vision the commemoration of the death of Christ⁶⁵ and the communion of his body and blood constitute the core of the Eucharist as instructed by Christ. Narsai points to this commemoration when he speaks of the celebration of the mysteries.⁶⁶ The Church commemorates the Lord’s death and resurrection by the mysteries (*HomMyst 2*). She depicts the glorious mysteries mystically (*HomMyst 1*). According to Qatraya, the time of the celebration of the mysteries is the type of that hour in which our Lord gave this mystery to the disciples.⁶⁷ He says: “Now the priest approaches to figure the type of resurrection through the recital of the holy words with his mouth and by the signing (blessing) of the cross in his hand.”⁶⁸ The Quddaša with the three bows and recitation of the holy words of oblation is the mystery of the three days during which the humanity of our Lord was under the power of death.⁶⁹

The Institution Narrative in the anaphoras forms part of this commemoration of the passion, death and resurrection.⁷⁰ In the narration of the commemoration it is natural that Theodore and Narsai also inserted the Institution Narrative.⁷¹ Narsai has it in such a lengthy narration of the economy that much is said about the public ministry of Jesus.⁷² Nevertheless, none of them speaks of Institution Narrative as an inevitable element of the commemoration. Similar to this is the strange situation in the commentaries of Qatraya and Bar Zo‘bi.⁷³ Both of them attribute a consecratory function to the narration of the words of Jesus, equal to that of epiclesis. However, such an attribution occurs while commenting on the rite of the access to the sanctuary and altar. In the commentary on the anaphora, no special mention is made of the IN, while there is an explicit comment on the epiclesis.

The whole eucharistic celebration may be seen as a series of repeated commemorations of the paschal mystery of Christ. Such a concern seems to be prominent in the commentaries too. Therefore, while commenting on the epiclesis, which according to the Eastern liturgies, is a significant prayer with regard to the change of the mysteries, commentators like Narsai, Gabriel Qatraya and Yohannan Bar Zo‘bi enthusiastically talk about the commemoration of the mystery of resurrection.⁷⁴

The reality of the repeated commemoration of the paschal mystery is the characteristic of the Christian liturgy. St. Paul speaks

about this repeated commemoration: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Cor 11.26). Within a celebration of the East Syriac Eucharist we may see consecutive repetitions of the memorial of the paschal mystery. In fact the 'Glory to God in the highest' at the very beginning of the celebration⁷⁵ may be considered as a summary expression for the entire Christ event. It is very often considered the commemoration of the nativity of Christ, especially because of the angelic hymn. However, for the East Syrian celebration the rite of introduction has a steady pattern of commemoration. It includes the commemoration of the Old Testament waiting for the coming of the Messiah and also the coming of the Messiah. In the earlier tradition the descent of Christ symbolized by the procession from sanctuary to bema was at the time of the *onitha d' qanke*. The *marmitha* (set of three psalms) recited before the *onitha d' qanke* represents the mystery of the OT phase of the waiting for the Lord.⁷⁶ Therefore, it may not be easy to think of the 'Glory to God' before the *marmitha* as just commemorating the nativity of Christ.

As we have seen above the whole liturgy of the Word may be seen as commemorating the entire mystery of the passion, death and resurrection. Thus the rite of introduction and the liturgy of Word together commemorate the entire mystery of Christ.

The preparation for the *Quddaša* (anaphora) has a full commemoration of the paschal mystery. According to the commentators, the preparation of the mysteries on the *beth gazzas* and their transfer to the altar along with the *onitha d' raze*, placing on the altar and covering with veil (*šošapa*) and finally removing the veil, symbolize the passion, death and resurrection.⁷⁷ Then the *Quddaša* (anaphora) has a full commemoration of the paschal mystery. Thus *epiclesis*, the culmination of the *Quddaša* commemorates the resurrection.⁷⁸ Again the rite of fraction and consignation repeats the commemoration of the passion, death and resurrection.⁷⁹ Once again the whole paschal mystery is commemorated. According to Narsai, receiving Communion in hands (in the form of the Cross) symbolizes participation the death and resurrection of the Lord.⁸⁰

The commemoration of the paschal mystery being the primary concern, the East Syriac liturgy as a whole is not much

concerned about the when and how of the change of the mysteries, a question extremely significant to the scholastic theologians.

An important feature of the liturgical commemoration is that it is the commemoration of the entire mystical body, and hence of the head and the members. Christ and his paschal mystery are commemorated along with the church, his body, now formed in the eucharistic celebration. Here members of the earthly and heavenly Church are remembered. The priest, therefore, makes special remembrance of the “this people who look for and await your mercies” and “all the departed and who have been severed and have gone forth from among us”.⁸¹ The liturgy has various occasions making the ‘dukhrana’ of the living and departed members of the Church.⁸² The dyptics⁸³ containing such a detailed dukhrana, therefore, has a significant place within the anaphora where the paschal mystery of the Lord is commemorated. The dukhrana of the Mother of Christ, and other saints are all such a way inevitable in the liturgy. The commemoration (*dukhrana*) of the Fathers and the Just, seen in the fourth g’hanta, and the commemoration of the hierarchy and all categories of the members of the Church in the kušapa before the fourth g’hanta,⁸⁴ therefore, very well agree with the commemoration (*’uhdana*) of the paschal mystery of the Lord. The *’raza* of the Lord is nothing but our *’raza*. Here we are reminded of the beautiful words of St. Augustine: “So if you yourselves be the body of Christ and his members, then on the eucharistic table lies your own mystery.”⁸⁵ The *’uhdana* of the paschal mystery involves the *dukhrana* of the mystery of the entire body of Christ.

The intercessions in the eucharistic liturgy are to be understood in the context of the memorial of the paschal mystery.⁸⁶ The intercessions have an important place in the eucharistic prayers of the Church. Even though it is not found in the primitive prayers, later all the anaphoras began to give a remarkable place to it. We find intercession in the liturgies commented on by Theodore and Narsai. Theodore does not give the content of the intercession in detail. He simply stated that the priest offers supplication on behalf of all those, for whom by regulation mention is always to be made in the Church, and also for the dead.⁸⁷ In Narsai there is a lengthy commemoration of the members of the Church, living and dead, just and the sinners, and even of the “heathens, gainsayers, and those in

error".⁸⁸ This commemoration is found in close relation with the commemoration of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection.⁸⁹ In AM (Mar Ešaya text), too, a similar commemoration, and intercession for peace and for all the Church are found in relation to the commemoration of the mystery of Christ.⁹⁰ AM and AT have the intercession in the kušapa before the fourth g'hanta and in the fourth g'hanta.⁹¹ The intercessions are found in AN in the fifth kušapa and the fifth g'hanta.

Now there is a growing tendency of including intercessory prayers of strictly personal nature. As Alexander Schmemmann remarks, such prayers will be the cause for "an utterly individualistic and utilitarian understanding of Church worship".⁹² The individuals of the Church are to be seen in the body of the Church and their lives with all joys and worries are to be seen in the mystery of Christ. The appellation Raza tells us that the eucharistic celebration is an invitation to place ourselves in the body of Christ and see our lives as part of the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord.

5. Eucharist as the Quddaša of God and Quddaša of man

One of the most preferred titles of the Eucharist in the East Syriac tradition is Quddaša (ܩܘܕܕܝܫܐ).⁹³ The Syriac term Quddaša⁹⁴ means sanctification, consecration, or hallowing. This term is used to denote the eucharistic celebration as a whole, the anaphora of the Eucharist, sacraments and even some sacramentals like the consecration of the church and altar.⁹⁵ East Syriac commentators like Narsai,⁹⁶ and Gabriel Qatraya⁹⁷ prefer to use the term Quddaša emphasising the aspect of the eucharistic prayer as an action. The term Quddaša as it is employed in the East Syriac liturgy has both the anabatic (ascending) and katabatic (descending) dimensions. In the anabatic dimension this term is much similar to the term *eucharistia*. It means the sanctification or hallowing of God. Therefore, it is mainly praise (tešbohta) and thanksgiving (tawditha).

5.1. Quddaša of God (Eucharistia)

The earliest form of the anaphora of the Church is praise and thanksgiving to God the creator and the redeemer. Justin sees the content of the *eucharistia* as thanksgiving for creation and redemption.⁹⁸ This could have been the normal content of the

eucharistic prayer in the second century.⁹⁹ As Jungmann says, the eucharistic prayer was the thanksgiving prayer, the *eucharistia* over the gifts of bread and wine. Emphasising the thanksgiving aspect, the apologists of the second century spoke of the Eucharist as though it were solely a matter of prayer.¹⁰⁰ The third century East Syriac document the *Acts of Thomas* witnesses to such a simple Eucharist. It is practically a eucharistic prayer in which praises and thanksgivings are found in the primitive form.¹⁰¹

The East Syriac anaphoras frequently use terms like *šabbah* (ܫܒܒܗ = to praise), *tešbohta* (ܛܫܒܘܚܗ = praise, glorification),¹⁰² *awdi* (ܐܘܕܝ = to confess), *tawditha* (ܛܘܕܝܗ = thanksgiving).¹⁰³ The frequent occurrence of these terms points to the general character of the anaphoras as prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Having analysed the primitive structure of AM, E.C. Ratcliff says that it is a pure and simple *eucharistia*.¹⁰⁴ We find an address of praise to the name of the creator and redeemer, a thanksgiving for what has been done for man, and finally praise and thanksgiving for the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁰⁵ However, this final thanksgiving is characterized by the commemoration of the Lord's death and resurrection. This commemoration is accomplished not only in words, but also in act, imitating Christ's own actions. Thanksgiving prayer is said over bread and wine, and the bread and wine thus blessed are eaten and drunk.¹⁰⁶ The other two East Syriac anaphoras, those of Theodore and Nestorius, also place thanksgiving at the heart of the eucharistic action.¹⁰⁷

Theodore emphasises the aspect of thanksgiving in his commentary on Eucharist. The anaphora contains praise and glorification of the visible creatures and invisible hosts. There is commemoration of the economy accomplished in Christ. Thanks are rendered on account of this economy.¹⁰⁸ Narsai, too, underlines the importance of the praise and glorification of the Divinity. According to him, the important elements of Eucharist are seen in the action of Christ at the Last Supper, namely thanksgiving and blessing over the bread and wine. Claiming to be citing the tradition from Theodore, Narsai puts in the mouth of Jesus such a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.¹⁰⁹ The importance attached to the thanksgiving for redemption is clear from the long narration of the ministry of Christ.¹¹⁰

The Quddaša as eucharistia is seen all throughout the East Syriac eucharistic liturgy. In all instances the eucharistia is one joined with the praises of the heavenly choir. The liturgy begins with the sanctification of God along with the angelic choir. The praise “Glory to God in the highest” is repeated thrice,¹¹¹ the repetition being a symbol of the unceasing praise of the heavenly liturgy. The Lord’s Prayer has a special form in which a sanctification, called qanona, is added in the beginning and end. It serves as an extension of the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer, that is, “hallowed be your name.”¹¹² The prayer before Lakhu Mara and the Lakhu Mara are classical formulation of the praise and thanksgiving. The prayer before Lakhu Mara is as follows:

“For every help and grace that you have given us, for which we can never repay you enough, may we thank you and glorify you unceasingly in your Church, crowned like a spouse and full of all help and blessing, for you are the Lord and Creator of all, for ever.”¹¹³

In the hymn Lakhu Mara, the glorification is indeed a profound confession of faith. “Lord of All, we praise you; Jesus Christ, we glorify you; for you are the quickener of our bodies and the gracious saviour of our souls.”¹¹⁴ Jesus Christ is praised as the source of our resurrection. He is the one who shall transform us all and the entire cosmos, the one who shall be our Lord in the heavenly life too.

Trisagion¹¹⁵ is again praises added to the praises of the heavenly hosts as in the vision of Is 6.3. A similar concern for the sanctification of God is seen in the Onitha d’ raze of the first Sunday of Annunciation.¹¹⁶ Here this praise is against the background of the commemoration of the passion and death of the Lord. The second g’hanta, sanctus, and the third kušapa are all intense forms eucharistia, joined with the heavenly hosts. Deacon’s karožutha after the third g’hanta and the onitha during fraction and consignation contain prayers of praise and thanksgiving on account of the divine mysteries. The tešbohta after the rite of communion expresses a strong hope of the liturgical assembly praising and thanking God in the kingdom of heaven.¹¹⁷ Thus it becomes an anticipation of the eucharistia in the heavenly liturgy.

In the East Syriac liturgy the eucharistia (Quddaša) has the following characteristics:

It is an eucharistia in the model of the Jewish Berakah. According to Sarhad Jammo, the anaphora of the Addai and Mari (AM) contains the eucharistia which reflects the same basic structure of Birkat Ha-Mazon in its paschal context.¹¹⁸ Therefore, the praise and thanksgiving in the anaphora has the similar function of the praise and thanksgiving during the Jewish paschal meal. In order to understand the true characteristic of the Christian eucharistia we have to view it in the context of the biblical memorial.

If the eucharistia in AM is closely related to the Birkat Ha-Mazon, then a similar experience of the salvation is envisaged of the one praying that eucharistia. It is an eucharistia by a community which already experiences the salvation. The true ground for the thanksgiving is not some great deed of God in the past, but his saving work in the present. In fact this characteristic makes the eucharistia a real leitourgia of God. In the liturgy the people are indeed participating in the salvific work of God.¹¹⁹ Their glorification of God is nothing but “the making present of salvation in the sacramental form”.¹²⁰

The Jewish Berakah also had an eschatological dimension. The past experience was the guarantee and assurance for the present experience which was in fact the anticipation of a final future experience of salvation. No Israelite could recite the Berakah during the Passover meal without being assured of an eschatological messianic work of salvation. Thus the eucharistia becomes a meeting point of the past, present and future.

The Christian eucharistia has the same theological pattern of the Jewish Berakah. The convergence of the past, present and future is very significant in the East Syriac liturgy. The eschatological emphasis is evident in the epiclesis of the East Syriac anaphoras. In the epiclesis of AM, for example, it is said that the sanctification of the mysteries is intended for the “great hope of resurrection from the dead and new life in the kingdom of heaven with all those who have found favour in your presence.”¹²¹

The East Syriac Quddaša is the eucharistia rendered by the Church experiencing salvation here and now, anticipating the eschatological fulfilment of that salvation and joining the heavenly hosts in the eternal praise of God.

5.2. Quddaša of the Mysteries and of the Assembly

The term Quddaša, in the katabatic dimension means sanctification or consecration, of the mysteries and of the assembly. This sanctification primarily refers to the change of bread and wine into body and blood of Christ. Then it means the sanctification of the assembly. The sanctification is attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit.¹²² In the Syriac tradition, the Holy Spirit is the *Ruha d-Qudša* ܪܘܚܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ or the Spirit of sanctity. Thus the Spirit is specially remembered as the one who causes the sanctification. To understand the relevance of the sanctification in the East Syrian Qurbana it is enough to see the epiclesis of the anaphoras, and the commentaries on them.

The epiclesis is one of the most ancient elements of the eucharistic prayers in the East Syriac tradition. A good example may be cited from the *Acts of Thomas*:

And he began to say: "Come gift of the Exalted; come, perfect mercy; come Holy Spirit;...come and communicate with us in this Eucharist which we celebrate, and in this offering that we offer, and in this commemoration which we make." And he made the sign of the Cross upon the bread, and began to give (it).

¹²³

Even though this resembles the classical epicletic prayers of the Church, no invocation is made for the change the offering. Rather, the Holy Spirit is invoked to communicate with the assembly in the offering. The reference to communication brings this epiclesis close to the epiclesis of AM (Anaphora of Addai and Mari). The epiclesis of AM seems to be an explanation and expansion of the formula of the *Acts*. Epiclesis of AM is the following:

O my Lord, may your Holy Spirit come down...and dwell in this Qurbana of your servants and bless it and sanctify it that it may be to us, O My Lord, unto the pardon of debts, remission of sins and the great hope of resurrection from the dead and new life in the kingdom of heaven with all those who have found favour in your presence.¹²⁴

The *Acts* mark the contrast between our action and the action of the Spirit. The communication of the Spirit gives new dimension to our thanksgiving, offering and commemoration. By the invocation of

the Holy Spirit they attain a divine dimension. The *Acts* see the eucharistic liturgy as an encounter of persons involved in different actions: On the part of the assembly the liturgical action is to celebrate the Eucharist through praise and thanksgiving, offer the sacrifice and make commemoration of salvation events accomplished in Jesus Christ. On the part of God it is to communicate through Christ and Holy Spirit.¹²⁵ This divine communication is effected in Communion.

In AM there is clear mention of the sanctification of the offering. However, the sanctification of the offering is oriented to the sanctification of the assembly. It envisages a participation in the divine dispensation. The ultimate goal is the resurrection and life in the kingdom of heaven. This is to be realized by the remission of sins. The epiclesis in the Anaphora of Theodore (AT)¹²⁶ elaborates and clarifies the theme as in AM. However, the invocation is made first for the assembly. Thus the sanctification of the assembly is more emphasised than in AM. In AM there is no explicit mention of the change of the bread and wine into the body and blood. AM puts all these in the expression of “the sanctification of the offering”. As regards the sanctification of the offering and that of the assembly, the epiclesis of the Anaphora of Nestorius (AN) is similar to that of AT.¹²⁷ But AN adds a new factor in the sanctification of the assembly, namely the aspect of becoming one in love and peace; one body and one spirit, as envisaged by the Christian vocation.

These two types of the sanctification are explained in the commentaries. According to Theodore the priest prays to the Holy Spirit to come upon the bread and wine so that they may become the body and blood; and to come upon all those present so that they may be knit into one body by Communion.¹²⁸ As in AN, Theodore stresses the unity of the liturgical assembly. According to Theodore, receiving a kind of anointing by the Holy Spirit, the elements of bread and wine become immortal, incorruptible, impassible, and immutable by nature, as the body of our Lord was after resurrection.¹²⁹ By the Quddaša, the offering passes into a new state of existence, transcending the space-time. In Theodore’s view the body and blood are realities in space-time, but with the properties of non-space-time. Comparing the body and blood after the epiclesis to the resurrected body of our Lord, he states that the epiclesis is the celebration of the resurrection. For those who partake of this

sanctified body and blood, they acquire the power of spiritual and immortal nourishment.¹³⁰

Narsai also speaks of the sanctification of both the offering and the assembly. Like Theodore, he gives only a second place to the sanctification of the assembly. The goal of the coming of the Spirit upon the congregation is preparation for the Communion.¹³¹ He sees the epiclesis as the celebration of the resurrection.¹³² What is particular to Narsai in his commentary is his stress on the two types of celebrants: the priest and the Holy Spirit. The priest indeed consecrates. "...the dread Mysteries, lo, are being consecrated by the hands of the priest..." (*HomMyst* 10). The sign of the cross made over the mysteries by the priest shows his important role in the consecration (*HomMyst* 18). However, he is only a medium of the consecration. The real celebrant is the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit comes down at the request of the priest, be he never so great a sinner, and celebrates the mysteries by the mediation of the priest whom he has consecrated" (*HomMyst* 21). "To this effect the priest gives thanks before God, and he raises his voice at the end of his prayer to make it audible to the people. He makes his voice heard, and with his hand he signs the Mysteries that are set (on the altar)."¹³³

While speaking of the sanctification of the offering, Gabriel Qatraya does not speak of the sanctification of the assembly.¹³⁴ He emphasises the celebration of the resurrection in the epiclesis. According to Qatraya and Yohannan Bar Zo'bi, the whole anaphora, namely the eucharistic action is a celebration of the resurrection.¹³⁵ According to them the cross, the gospel and the icon of our Lord which stand in the place of the person of our Lord are necessary for the consecration of the mysteries.¹³⁶

Quddaša, both in the ascending and descending dimensions have gestures along with the words. In the anaphoras, we find the signing (rušma ܪܘܫܡܐ) of the mysteries. Narsai speaks about these blessings (*HomMyst* 22). The first one is with the Pauline blessing.¹³⁷ Išo'yahb IV mentions this signing. He forbids adding new paghra (body, here meaning bread) to those already on the paten after the first signing during the Pauline blessing.¹³⁸ Narsai sees it as a blessing of the people (*HomMyst* 11). The second signing is after the anamnesis.¹³⁹ The third signing is after epiclesis.¹⁴⁰ AM in its present version has signings of the mysteries during the Institution

Narrative (IN) also.¹⁴¹ Through the blessing, the praise and thanksgiving is sealed by the sign of the cross. The consecratory role of the sign of the cross is based on its importance in emphasising the act of glorifying and thanksgiving for the mysteries of the economy in which the cross is of great importance.¹⁴²

The fact that there is an inseparable relation between the anabatic and katabatic dimensions of Quddaša is evident in the qanonas of the g'hanta prayers. During the qanona of the first g'hanta of AM, the priest blesses himself while reciting the doxology.¹⁴³ Priest has to bless himself (make a sign of cross over himself) such a way that it becomes a blessing for the people too.¹⁴⁴ A similar blessing is made while reciting a doxology in the embolism of Lord's Prayer before Communion.¹⁴⁵ In the qanona of the third g'hanta and the qanona of the epiclesis the mysteries are blessed during the doxology.¹⁴⁶ The blessing of the mysteries is in view of the sanctification of the people. Thus indirectly this gesture of blessing becomes a sign of the blessing of the people. The blessing of the persons and the mysteries during the sanctification of God thus makes it clear that the anabatic Quddaša cannot be thought of as distinct from the katabatic Quddaša.

The emphasis on the sanctification of the assembly is remarkable in the East Syriac liturgy.¹⁴⁷ The eucharistic celebration, according to the East Syriac tradition, ought to be a Quddaša for the Christian assembly. Quddaša as eucharistia finds its true meaning in the Quddaša of the assembly. The sanctification of the assembly as the goal of the celebration is all the more strong in the epiclesis of AM. This epiclesis is recognized as a communion epiclesis.¹⁴⁸ The stress is on the change of the assembly. The sanctification of the mysteries is presented as a means for the sanctification of the assembly. Perhaps, due to the influence of the Latin theology, the Malayalam translation for the Syro-Malabar Church has reduced the primary importance given to the sanctification of the assembly. According to the Malayalam text, the invocation of the Spirit is made for two things. First for the sanctification of the mysteries, then for the sanctification of the assembly, both having equal importance. The original text means that the sanctification of the mysteries should become the means for the sanctification of the assembly. Such an intrinsic relation

between these two types of sanctification is ignored in the Malayalam translation.

According to St. Ephrem, Eucharist transforms man and enables him to reach Paradise. Man is enabled to fly over the clouds and reach Paradise.¹⁴⁹ “Whoever eats of the bread of the Heavenly One will become heavenly without doubt.”¹⁵⁰

In the Western traditions the eucharistia or the Quddaša is often isolated from the sanctification of the assembly. There is a tendency to reduce the liturgical community to a cultic community, praising and thanking the Lord, however, not much concerned about the personal sanctification. Believers are happy about the eucharistia, which they are ready to continue even outside the eucharistic celebration itself.

From the Middle Ages onwards there has been an exaggerated emphasis on the change of the mysteries. With the encouragement of the scholastic theologians the change of the mysteries became the central point of attraction. Great theologians of the Middle Ages tried to explain the mystery of the Eucharist in terms of the Aristotelian philosophy. The question of the real presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament became so vital that for many believers this real presence was the goal of the entire eucharistic celebration. According to them, the priest through his words of divine guarantee works out the miracle of bringing down the Lord of the universe to the simple and humble table of the church! Thus the eucharistic celebration becomes an invitation to the assembly to witness the greatest miracle possible on earth.

One should not ignore the tremendous amount of work done by the scholastic theologians to convince ‘scientifically’ the Christian believers in the Middle Ages of the real change occurring in the bread and wine. However, amidst the over enthusiasm to emphasise the change of bread and wine into Body and Blood, the question of the change of the human persons was rather ignored.

5.2.1. Celebration of Forgiveness from God

The East Syriac celebration of the Qurbana emphatically declares the power of the Eucharist to forgive sins. There are numerous prayers in the Qurbana for the forgiveness of sins.¹⁵¹ The prayer of epiclesis makes it clear that the Eucharist aims at the remission of sins. (*Raza*, 45). The Holy Spirit is invoked to sanctify

the offering “that it may be to us unto pardon of debts, remission of sins and the great hope of resurrection from the dead and new life in the kingdom.”¹⁵² The altar is considered the propitiatory altar (*Raza*, 8, 62), the mysteries are for the remission of sins,¹⁵³ the incense is for the forgiveness of sins (*Raza*, 10,17), the Eucharist is given for communion with the acclamation that it is for the forgiveness of sins (*Raza*, 57). The Qurbana contains a rite of the absolution of sins, called the rite of hussaya (ܚܘܨܝܐ). According to traditional understanding, venial sins are forgiven during this rite within the Qurbana. There is a special rite of hussaya for the penitents who have committed grave sins. Absolution is given for such sins during the special rite of hussaya within the Qurbana.¹⁵⁴ The separation of the rite of reconciliation from the Eucharist has done much damage to the notion of forgiveness of sins within Qurbana.

5.2.2. ‘Medicine of Life’ for the Remission of Sins

An important characteristic of Communion is reconciliation and the remission of sins.¹⁵⁵ The East Syriac Qurbana emphasises this effect of the reception of Communion. The epiclesis (*Raza*,45), the prayer of elevation (*Raza*, 47), the formula of receiving Communion by the priest, the deacons and the faithful (*Raza*, 54-56), the *tešbohta* on ferial days (*Raza*, 58), the thanksgiving prayer of the celebrant (*Raza*, 59-60), and the *huttama* (*Raza*, 61) give clear expression to the notion of the forgiveness of sins through Communion. The *Acts of Thomas* has the formula of giving Communion which stresses the aspect of the remission of sins. “Let it be unto thee for the remission of transgressions and sins and for the everlasting resurrection.”¹⁵⁶ Theodore says:

The Communion of the holy Sacrament will, without doubt, grant us the remission of trespasses of this kind, since our Lord plainly said: “This is my body which is broken for you for the remission of sins, and this is my blood which is shed for you for the remission of sins (Mt 26.26-28; I Cor 11.24-26)...”¹⁵⁷

The Syriac Fathers spoke of the eucharistic bread as the medicine of life (*Sam hayye* ܫܡ ܗܝܝܐ). According to Ephrem, by Lord’s blessing the bread became the medicine of life during the Last

Supper.¹⁵⁸ It is because of His hidden presence in the eucharistic body that the Eucharist becomes the Medicine of life. And therefore, Eucharist also becomes a treasury of healings as His physical body.¹⁵⁹ The invisible power (Fire and Spirit) that dwells in His physical and eucharistic body is the source of this healing. Ephrem sees the Holy Spirit hidden in the Eucharist.¹⁶⁰ Through the life-giving presence of Christ, Eucharistic offering cleanses the participants from all stains of sin and gives life to the mortals.¹⁶¹

Stressing the aspect of reconciliation Narsai calls Communion the banquet of the 'returning son'.¹⁶² It is the banquet offered by the Father at the return of his children through baptism. Narsai also compares it to the banquet prepared by the father of the prodigal son, at the return of the son. The Fathers and commentators depict Eucharist as the medicine of life stressing the aspect of reconciliation. Sin is the most important factor that stands in the way of immortal life. Once sins are removed, the immortality of life is ensured. The Eucharist is the medicine of life in the sense that it ensures immortal life, curing man of sin which hinders the attainment of immortal life. The idea of the Eucharist as the medicine of life is commonplace in Fathers. Narsai presents the healing through this medicine as that which purifies from the debts, and forgives the debts and offences.¹⁶³ The expression 'medicine of life' denoting the Eucharist and Christ alike is a favourite of Ephrem. We can find several examples for this expression denoting the Eucharist in Ephrem's writings.¹⁶⁴

5.2.3. Sanctification leading to Šawtaputha

The sanctification of the assembly effected by the Holy Spirit in fact leads to šawtaputha (ܫܘܬܘܬܘܬܐ = communion). Qurbana lays great stress on the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the šawtaputha. Repeated exhortations on the need of fraternal communion reveal the concern for the horizontal dimension of šawtaputha. This horizontal šawtaputha is one extended to the entire cosmos. Establishment of the šawtaputha in the model of the Trinitarian šawtaputha is the important goal of the East Syriac Qurbana. The whole eucharistic liturgy is oriented towards the Communion.

Being a personal encounter with the risen Lord¹⁶⁵ in the liturgy, Communion is a profoundly meaningful action of liturgy.

Gabriel Qatraya describes the eucharistic communion in the following words: “Whenever we take them in our hands, we ought to think as that we embrace and kiss our Saviour and that we mix His body with our body and mingle His blood with our blood.”¹⁶⁶ According to him, Communion in the mysteries indicates the communion which we will have with Christ in the coming world.¹⁶⁷

6. Eucharist as Qurbana

It is characteristic of the Syriac traditions to speak about the eucharistic celebration as Qurbana (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ = offering). The East Syriac liturgy has many prayers clearly speaking of the Eucharist as offering. The emphasis on this aspect accounts for the common appellation ‘Qurbana’¹⁶⁸ for the eucharistic celebration as a whole. There are many instances in the anaphora where the notion of eucharistic offering is evident. The prefatory dialogue clearly expresses the idea of offering.¹⁶⁹ The g’hantas, the kušapa of intercession, the prayer request of the celebrant and the response, and the epiclesis of AM and AT contains explicit reference to Eucharist as Qurbana.¹⁷⁰

Theodore comments on the offering of the Eucharist:

He offers a sacrifice for the community, and a reverential fear, which embraces both himself and us all, is cast upon him on account of what has happened, namely that our Lord suffered for us all a death, the remembrance of which is about to be performed in the present sacrifice.¹⁷¹

The main object of the sacrifice or the offering is the mystery of the passion and death of Christ.¹⁷² The important characteristic of the eucharistic celebration, according to Theodore, is explicit from the following words:

...we commemorate the death of our Lord through this awe-inspiring service, and receive the immortal and spiritual food of the body and blood of our Lord, for the sake of which, when our Lord was about to draw nigh unto His passion, He instructed His disciples that all of us who believe in Christ had to receive them and perform them through these (elements), and in this way to commemorate by stages the death of Christ our Lord, and to obtain therefrom an ineffable nourishment.¹⁷³

The commemoration prepares the setting of the sacrifice of the death of Christ. Theodore shows here the real purpose of the Qurbana. "It is indeed offered so that by the coming of the Holy Spirit it should become that which it is said to be: the body and the blood of Christ."¹⁷⁴

In the XVII homily, Narsai treats well the idea of Eucharist as Qurbana. His views on the eucharistic offering are clear from the expressions used to describe the eucharistic action. "Mysteries are offered (*HomMyst* 2,3,7)"; "The priest now offers the mystery of the redemption of our life, full of awe and covered with fear and great dread" (*HomMyst* 7); The people pray after the diptychs: "...receive Lord, this oblation which Thy servant has offered" (*HomMyst* 10); "The acceptable and pure oblation is offered to the Lord..." (*HomMyst* 12); "the living sacrifice that is being offered..." (*HomMyst* 18); "On behalf of all is the living sacrifice sacrificed..." (*HomMyst* 20). The offering is nothing but the mystery of redemption. In this respect Narsai, too, thinks with Theodore that the offering is the sacrifice of death of Christ. On the IN, Qatraya says that they are the holy words of the oblation of the offering.¹⁷⁵ Thus Qatraya also sees a necessary connection between the offering and the commemoration of death and resurrection.

The appellation 'Qurbana' is understood in various levels of meaning. It has anabatic and katabatic dimensions. Katabatic dimension refers to the Qurbana or offering made by God towards us. The eucharistic celebration begins with a katabatic Qurbana, that is the Qurbana of the Father. The initial procession from sanctuary to bema symbolizes the sending of the Son by the Father. Thus it commemorates the mystery of incarnation. In fact it is the commemoration of the offering of the Son made by the Father. During the Gospel procession from sanctuary to bema the katabatic offering of the Son by the Father is again commemorated. The Communion procession is the culmination of the katabatic offering in the liturgy. The Father offers his only Son to us in the mysteries of the body and blood.

In the anabatic dimension there are different types of Qurbana. The offering of the mysteries, the body and blood of Christ, is the central offering in the eucharistic celebration. Along with this offering there is also the offering of the mystery of passion and death. The offering of the mystery of Christ is accomplished

through the offering of the mysteries, the body and blood.¹⁷⁶ Since our own mystery is made one with the mystery of Christ in the Qurbana, we too become objects of offering along with the body and blood of Christ. There is also the offering of the eucharistia in the Qurbana. In the pattern of the Old Testament tradition of the sacrifice of praise (Todah),¹⁷⁷ the East Syriac anaphora is also a sacrifice of praise.

7. Eucharist as the Heavenly Banquet Anticipated

Eucharistic liturgy is a celebration of the earthly choir together with the heavenly choir. The earthly and heavenly Churches come together in praising and thanking God. There are numerous elements in the liturgy showing us that liturgy is truly the meeting of the earthly and the heavenly. The initial ‘Glory to God in the highest’, the qanona of the Lord’s prayer, the *trisagion*, ‘onitha d’ raze, sanctus, the diaconal admonition before the fourth kušapa in AM, and ‘onitha of fraction, are all examples of liturgical elements illustrating the joining of the earthly choir with the heavenly hosts (Is 6.3) in praising God. Praise and thanksgiving in the anaphoras are joined to that of the heavenly assembly. It is clear in the expression: “And with these heavenly hosts we give you thanks, O Lord, and we bless God the Word.”¹⁷⁸ Ephrem in his *Commentary on Diatessaron* explains: “We have eaten Christ’s body in place of the fruit of the Tree of Paradise, and his altar has taken the place of the Garden of Eden for us; the curse has been washed away by his innocent blood and in the hope of the resurrection we await the life that is to come, and indeed we already walk in this new life, in that we already have a pledge of it”

While rendering praise to God, the Church is anticipating her joy in the heavenly marriage feast. The tenth century Anonymous Author of the *Exposition of the Offices* interprets the *sanctus* as the praise of the earthly Church joining the heavenly Church:

“...but in that manner today we, angels and men, become a single holy Church, and in Christ we have been made one flock; as the heavenly apostle says, he wished that we too may be brought together in harmony, and thus like the watchers [angels] we may praise him with their praises.”¹⁷⁹

...This means, heaven and earth have been already made one Church; neither heaven is heaven nor earth is earth because the time and space composite have been dissolved; for heaven is the heaven of earth and earth is the earth of heaven. Certainly, unless there was (might be) a heaven above, there might not be an earth below, and unless there was an earth below, there might not be a heaven above. Now that those above and those below are brought into a single Church, there is neither 'above' nor 'below'. And yet, God appeared on earth, and our nature ascended into heaven; and when God descended to us, earth became heaven; and when the Son of our race was elevated, heaven became earth. Wherefore heaven and earth have become one, and there is neither heaven nor earth; and we were already constituted with the spiritual ones. It is their predication itself- 'holy', that we recite as being perfected through resurrection.¹⁸⁰

Eucharistic Communion is the pledge of eternal life.¹⁸¹ There are numerous prayers in the Qurbana stressing the effect of Communion as immortality. The epiclesis (*Raza*, 45), the 'onitha during the fraction and consignation (*Raza*, 47-48), the prayers accompanying the consignation (*Raza*, 48-49), the karo-zutha of fraternal charity (*Raza*, 50-51), the formula of receiving Communion (*Raza*, 54,56), the tešbohta, the thanksgiving prayers and the huttama (*Raza*, 57-62) show Eucharist as the food of immortality.

The eucharistic Communion is the symbolic food of the immortal life initiated by baptism. According to Theodore, the symbolic birth in baptism necessitates the symbolic nourishment through eucharistic Communion.¹⁸² Ephrem in his *Commentary on Diatessaron* explains: "We have eaten Christ's body in place of the fruit of the Tree of Paradise, and his altar has taken the place of the Garden of Eden for us; the curse has been washed away by his innocent blood and in the hope of the resurrection we await the life that is to come, and indeed we already walk in this new life, in that we already have a pledge of it."¹⁸³ Narsai observes: "His mystical birth takes place in a manner spiritual; and according to his birth is the nourishment also that is prepared for him."¹⁸⁴ The grace of Holy Spirit feeds us through the holy sacrament.¹⁸⁵ Theodore discusses at length the theme of the Eucharist as the food of immortality.¹⁸⁶ The

expression 'bread of life'¹⁸⁷ stresses this aspect of the eucharistic Communion. It enables us to transcend the space-time and attain the immortal and imperishable existence, by hope.¹⁸⁸ Ephrem says: "Whoever eats of the bread of the Heavenly One will become heavenly without doubt."¹⁸⁹ Qatraya speaks of Communion as the guarantee of our future immortality.¹⁹⁰ Communion in the holy sacrament is the pledge of eternal life. It is the symbol of the eternal communion after resurrection,¹⁹¹ the foretaste of the heavenly happiness.¹⁹² In Narsai's vision, Communion for the baptized is the imitation of the heavenly life.¹⁹³ The *karozutha* which precedes Communion points to the new state of existence that we attain through Communion.¹⁹⁴

Eucharistic Communion helps us to transcend the earthly space-time and enables us to participate in the heavenly space-time.¹⁹⁵ Participation in the eucharistic banquet is a symbolical participation in the heavenly banquet of the Kingdom- *pathura d-malkutha* ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ.¹⁹⁶ Ephrem thinks that one receiving Communion is like an eagle, which flies to meet the Lord in the very clouds. Eating of the living bread, one is able to transcend the limitations of space-time and reach as far as Paradise.¹⁹⁷ The Anonymous Author, too, thinks that with the Communion the faithful enter into the new space-time of the Kingdom. The joy and thankfulness on account of this are evident in the proclamation of the deacon following Communion.¹⁹⁸

Conclusion

The East Syriac tradition has its theology of Eucharist based on the entire space-time of the Qurbana. Thus the space, time, persons, objects, words and actions of the celebration of the Qurbana contribute to the theological understanding of Eucharist. The commentaries of the Fathers are centred on the liturgical space-time of the Eucharist. The liturgical space is seen as the meeting of heaven and earth; the processions between the sanctuary and bema are understood as the movements between heaven and earth, namely the incarnation and the ascent to heaven.

East Syriac Qurbana insists on the commemoration of the paschal mystery of Christ. The entire space-time of liturgy becomes the medium of this commemoration. The commemoration of the mystery of God is made along with the commemoration of

the mystery of man. Thus Eucharist is seen as the remembrance (*‘uhdana*) of the raza of God and the remembrance (*dukhrana*) of the raza of the Church. This twofold commemoration is done in view of a twofold sanctification: the sanctification of God and the sanctification of man. The prayers, actions and the objects in the liturgy serve as authentic means for the sanctification of God and for our own sanctification. Thus the East Syriac theology of Eucharist stresses the transformation of man through the sanctification of God.

East Syriac Eucharist stresses the essential consequences of the sanctification. It is a sanctification leading to vertical and horizontal communion (*šawtaputha*). This sanctification includes forgiveness (*hussaya*) from God and reconciliation with God and fellow beings. Eucharist is rightly depicted by the Fathers as the ‘Medicine of Life.’

The East Syriac eucharistic celebration is understood as Qurbana (offering) of various dimensions. In the katabatic dimension it refers to the offering made by God towards us, the offering of his only Son. In the anabatic dimension it is the offering made by Christ, as the head of the Church towards the Father. The offering of the mysteries of the body and blood of Christ, the offering of the mystery of Christ along with our mystery, and the offering of the eucharistia, the praise and thanksgiving constitute the anabatic dimension of Qurbana.

Another important aspect of the eucharistic theology of the East Syriac tradition is that the celebration in space-time is viewed as an anticipation in the heavenly banquet. The Eucharist enables us to transcend the limits of time and participate in the heavenly liturgy, while we are still on earth. There is a meeting of the heavenly and earthly choirs in the liturgy. The celebration makes the participants worthy of eternal life. The Eucharist is therefore called the food of immortality. Thus the Eucharist in the East Syriac tradition is that which gives us “the pardon of debts, remission of sins and the great hope of resurrection from the dead and new life in the kingdom of heaven with all those who have found favour in your presence.”¹⁹⁹

Notes

¹ There are authors who would not attribute the authorship of the Homily XVII to Narsai. According to Sebastian Brock, Homily XVII is almost certainly not by Narsai himself, but must date from the sixth century. S. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, Moran Etho 9, Kottayam 1997, 36.

² The Syriac term *madbha* ܡܕܒܗܐ comes from the root *dbh* ܕܒܗ which means to sacrifice. Cf. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, tom.1-2, Oxford 1879-1901, 807. *Madbha* denotes the place where sacrifice is made.

³ An example of such an action is the sacristan drinking in the sanctuary the water used for the ablution of chalice. Cf. W.C. Van Unnik, ed. & trans., *Nestorian Questions on the Administration of the Eucharist by Išo'yahb IV: A Contribution to the History of the Eucharist in the Eastern Church*, Haarlem 1937 (= Išo'yahb, *Eucharist*), 168, q.34.

⁴ Cf. Išo'yahb, *Eucharist*, qq. 8,9,27,28,29,30,39,45.

⁵ *HParad* = Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen de Paradiso und contra Julianum, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 174/175; syri 78/79, Louvain 1957.

⁶ "Homily (XVII): An Exposition of the Mysteries", in *Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, R.H. Connolly, trans., TSt VIII, Cambridge 1909 (= *HomMyst*).

⁷ Cf. *Anonymi auctoris expositio officiorum ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta. Accedit Abrahae Bar Lipheh interpretatio officiorum*, R.H. Connolly, ed. & trans., CSCO, series secunda, syri 91-92, Roma 1913-1915 (= *Expositio I, II*) *Expositio* 10. *Acts of Thomas* refers to the sanctuary curtain which the priest raises and enters in. A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, ET, Intr. & Commentary, Leiden 1962 (*Acts of Thomas*), 67.

⁸ *Liber Patrum*, J.M. VOSTÉ, ed. & trans., Fonti, serie II, fasc. XVI: Caldei-Diritto antico III, Vaticano 1940, 37.

⁹ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation of the Offices", P. Podipara, trans., in G. Vavanikunnel, ed., *Homilies and Interpretations on the Holy Qurbana*, Changanacherry 1977, 95; Abraham bar Lipah, "Abrahae Bar Lipheh Qatarensis interpretatio officiorum" in *Anonymi auctoris expositio officiorum ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta*, R.H. Connolly, ed. & trans., CSCO syri, series secunda, tom.92, Roma 1915, 161; Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation of the Divine Mysteries*, T.Mannoorampampil, trans., OIRSI, Kottayam 1992, 35; Abdišo, *Ordo iudiciorum ecclesiasticorum: Collectus, dispositus, ordinatus et compositus a Mar Abdišo metropolita Nisibis et Armeniae*, J.M. Vosté, ed. & trans., Fonti, serie II, fasc. XV: Caldei-Diritto antico II, S.Congregazione per la Chiesa Orientale, Vaticano 1940, 96.

¹⁰ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 95.

- ¹¹ Abraham bar Lipah, "Interpretatio", 161; Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 35.
- ¹² "The adorable altar thereof is a symbol of that throne of the Great and Glorious, upon which He will be seen by watchers and men in the day of His revelation". *HomMyst*, 5.
- ¹³ Raza = *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana: The Order of Raza*, SMBC, Trivandrum 1986; Revised version *ad experimentum* 1989 (= Raza) 42.
- ¹⁴ Theodore, *Eucharist = Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, A. Mingana, ed. & trans., WS 6, Cambridge 1933, 112.
- ¹⁵ Can. 5, J.B. Chabot, ed. & trans., *Synodicon orientale ou recueil des synodes nestoriens*, Paris 1902, 433.
- ¹⁶ Cf. *Ordo*, No.1; "General Instructions", No. 5, *Raza*, ix.
- ¹⁷ *Expositio I*, 92. Cf. P. Yousif, "The Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Assyro-Chaldean Church", in J. Madey, ed., *The Eucharistic Liturgy in the Christian East*, Kottayam-Paderborn 1982, 189. We find a similar idea in Maximus Confessor. Cf. Maximus Confessor, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, G.C. Berthold, trans., New York 1985, 189.
- ¹⁸ Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 76.
- ¹⁹ Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 78.
- ²⁰ Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors = The Book of Governors: The Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Marga A.D.840*, E.A.W. Budge, ed., Edited from Syr. MSS in the Brit. Mus. (Lib.) and other Libraries, Vol. II: ET, London 1893, 543.
- ²¹ Cf. J. Lassus & G. Tchalenko, "Ambons syriens", *Cahiers archéologiques* 5 (1951) 81. For a detailed study on the liturgical bema see E. Renhart, *Das liturgische Bema: Untersuchungen zum Mittelschiffbema nord syrischer Kirchen des 4. bis 6. Jahrhunderts*, UDD, Karl-Franzens-Universität, Graz 1991.
- ²² Some attribute a Jewish origin to the bema, though this is challenged by authors like T.F. Mathews. Cf. T.F. Mathews, "P. Bouyer on Sacred Space", *The Downside Review*, 82 (1964) 113-116. Cf. L. Bouyer, *Liturgy and Architecture*, Notre Dame 1967, 15-16; J. Dauvillier, "L'ambon ou bêmâ dans les textes de l'église chaldéenne et de l'église syrienne au moyen âge", *Cahiers archéologiques* 6 (1952) 11; Renhart, *Liturgisches Bema*, 109-110.
- ²³ *Expositio I*, 91-92.
- ²⁴ See *Expositio I*, 91-92; Syr. text, 114-115.
- ²⁵ *Expositio II*, 10.
- ²⁶ *Expositio II*, 29.
- ²⁷ Cf. The ancient tradition, basing on Ez 5.5, considered Jerusalem as the navel of earth. Cf. J.M. Fiey, *Mossoul chrétienne. Essai sur l'histoire*,

l'archéologie et l'état actuel des monuments chrétiens de la ville de Mossoul, Beyrouth 1959, 76, note 2.

²⁸ Cf. *Expositio I*, 91. Cf. M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, W.R. Trask, trans., New York 1961, 40.

²⁹ *Expositio I*, 91.

³⁰ Cf. Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 38.

³¹ Cf. Yahya Ibn Jarir, "Le livre du Guide de Yahya Ibn Jarir", trans., G. Khouri-Sarkis, OS 12 (1967), 325.

³² *Expositio I*, 92.

³³ *Expositio I*, 91.

³⁴ Cf. *Expositio I*, 91-92.

³⁵ *Expositio II*, 10. Cf. Gen 28.12.

³⁶ Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, Vol. II, 543.

³⁷ Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 78. Cf. Lk 13.24.

³⁸ *HCruc* = "Hymnen de Crucifixione", in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers paschahymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 248/249; syri 108/109, Louvain 1964, 42-78; 34-62.

³⁹ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 90.

⁴⁰ Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 24-26; Abdišo, *Ordo iudiciorum*, 94.

⁴¹ *Expositio II*, 9-10.

⁴² Cf. S.H. Jammo, *La structure de la messe chaldéenne du début jusqu'à l'anaphore*, OCA 207, Roma 1979, 75.

⁴³ Yousif, "Divine Liturgy", 197.

⁴⁴ *Expositio II*, 9. Cf. Jammo, *Messe chaldéenne*, 69.

⁴⁵ Yousif, "Divine Liturgy", 200.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Expositio II*, 9.

⁴⁷ *Expositio II*, 10; Syr. text, 7.

⁴⁸ P. Maniyattu, *Heaven on Earth: The Theology of Liturgical Spacetime in the East Syrian Qurbana*, Rome 1995, 219.

⁴⁹ Dionysius Bar Salibi, *Commentary on the Eucharist*, trans., Baby Varghese, Moran Etho 10, Kottayam 1998, 5.

⁵⁰ *Raza* = *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana: The Order of Raza*, SMBC, Trivandrum 1986; Revised version *ad experimentum* 1989.

⁵¹ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 92.

⁵² Abraham bar Lipah, "Interpretatio", 159; Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 29.

⁵³ Cf. Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 92-93; Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 29; Abdišo, *Ordo iudiciorum*, 95.

⁵⁴ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 92-93.

⁵⁵ *Expositio II*, 25

⁵⁶ *Expositio II*, 27-28.

⁵⁷ Cf. Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 93-94; Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 32-33; Abraham bar Lipah, "Interpretatio", 160; Abdišo, *Ordo iudiciorum*, 95-96.

⁵⁸ *Expositio II*, 29.

⁵⁹ Raza (mystery) or Raze is an important appellation of the East Syrian eucharistic liturgy. The Chaldeans use the plural form of the word raza, meaning mysteries.

⁶⁰ E. Beck, "Die Eucharistie bei Ephräm", *OC* 38 (1954) 54.

⁶¹ There are two Syriac terms corresponding to the English word commemoration: *uhdana* and *dukhrana*. The word *uhdana* is used for the memorial of events. The memorial of the Passover event in the Old Testament is *uhdana*. In the Church the commemoration of the paschal mystery of Christ is a similar *uhdana*. The word *dukhrana* is used for the cultic commemoration of persons. Liturgy celebrates the *dukhrana* of the mother of Christ, saints, departed brethren, and the living ones. The East Syriac Taksa insists on the use of the term *uhdana* while referring to the remembrance of the mystery of Christ, and *dukhrana* while referring to the remembrance of the members of the Church. *Ordo Mysteriorum: Cum Prima Sanctificatione Id est Sanctificatio Beatorum Apostolorum Mar (Domini) Addai et Mar (Domini) Mari Praeceptorum Orientis. Iuxta Usum Ecclesiae Syrorum Orientalium Malabaribus*, Editio Typica, Rome 2003, pp.29, 30, 31,37,39,40.

⁶² Fourth G'hanta, AM (*Raza*, 44). Cf. the third g'hanta of AT (J. Vadakkel, *The East Syrian Anaphora of Mar Theodore of Mopsuestia*, OIRSI, Kottayam 1989, 87); the fourth g'hanta of AN (S. Naduthadam, *L'anaphore de Mar Nestorius: Edition critique et étude*, UDD, Institut Catholique de Paris, Paris 1992, 250).

⁶³ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 103.

⁶⁴ Third g'hanta of AM. *Raza*, 42. Cf. also fourth g'hanta of AM (*Raza*, 44); third g'hanta of AT (Vadakkel, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 87); fourth and fifth g'hantas of AN (Naduthadam, *Anaphore de Nestorius*, 250,255).

⁶⁵ Even though Theodore speaks in this context only of the commemoration of the death, it is to be presumed that he means also the resurrection linked to the death. It is evident when he elsewhere says that according to the teaching of the Lord the remembrance of the death and the resurrection has been completed. Cf. Theodore, *Eucharist*, 107.

⁶⁶ Cf. *HomMyst* 1,2,8,9,10.

⁶⁷ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 95.

⁶⁸ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 97.

⁶⁹ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 98.

⁷⁰ There has been endless discussion on the question of the presence of IN in AM. However, the modern scholarship seems to have reached the

conclusion that the original version of AM did not have IN. See A. Raes, "Les paroles de la consécration dans les anphores syriennes", *Orientalia christiana periodica* 3 (1937), 67-102; W. De Vries, *Sakramententheologie bei den Nestorianern*, *Orientalia christiana analecta* 133, Roma 1947, 225-233; T. Mannoorampampil, *Anaphora and Post-Anaphora of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, OIRSI, Kottayam 1984, 67-102; Yousif, "Divine Liturgy", 222; C. Giraud, "Addai e Mari, l'anfora della chiesa d'Oriente: "ortodossa" anche senza le parole istituzionali", *Rivista Liturgica* 89 (2002) 205-215. Recently the Holy See recognized the validity of AM even without the IN. Pontificio Consiglio per la Promozione dell'Unità dei Cristiani, "orientamenti per l'ammissione all'Eucaristia fra la Chiesa caldea e la Chiesa Assira dell'Oriente", *Osservatore Romano*, 26 Ottobre 2001, p.7.

⁷¹ Cf. Theodore, *Eucharist*, 103-104; *HomMyst* 16. Theodore does not give clearly the narrative of Lord's Supper. On the importance of Institution Narrative in Theodore see F.J. Reine, *The Eucharistic Doctrine and Liturgy of the Mystagogical Catecheses of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, The Catholic University of Washington, D.C. 1942, 134-137; Vadakkal, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 241-242.

⁷² Cf. *HomMyst* 14-15.

⁷³ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 97; Yohannan Bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 41.

⁷⁴ *HomMyst* 20. Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 97; Yohannan Bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 40-41.

⁷⁵ *Raza*, 1.

⁷⁶ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 89-90.

⁷⁷ Maniyattu, *Heaven on Earth*, 232-238. When the preparation of the mysteries is seen as the commemoration of the passion and death, there is no difficulty in understanding the expressions like body and blood occurring during the preparation. *Raza*, 23-24. For many persons such a proleptic language is meaningless. However, in the commemoration of the mystery of passion and death the bread and wine symbolize the body and blood and such a way they may be called body and blood.

⁷⁸ Maniyattu, *Heaven on Earth*, 246-254.

⁷⁹ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 105; *HomMyst* 23; Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 99.

⁸⁰ *HomMyst* 28.

⁸¹ *Raza*, 42.

⁸² While commenting on the Byzantine proskomidē and the commemoration during it, something parallel to the East Syriac dyptics, Alexander Schmemmann says: "The fundamental meaning of this commemoration, however, lies precisely in its sacrificial character, in

referring all of us together and each of us individually to the sacrifice of Christ, in the gathering and formation of the new creation around the Lamb of God. In this is the power and the joy of this commemoration, that in it is overcome the partition between the living and the dead, between the earthly and the heavenly Church, for all of us—both living and fallen asleep—“have died and our lives are hid with Christ in God,” for the whole Church, with the Mother of God and all the saints at her head, is gathered on the diskos, for all are united in this offering by Christ of his glorified and deified humanity to God the Father.” Alexander Schmemmann, *Eucharist*, New York 1988, 111.

⁸³ Raza, 36.

⁸⁴ Raza, 42-44.

⁸⁵ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 272 (PL 38.1217).

⁸⁶ The East Syriac tradition insists on celebrating the dukhrana of the saints, the glorified members of the Church, along with the mystery of Christ. Thus the East Syriac liturgical calendar does not have a separate sanctoral cycle. The special commemoration of the saints and the departed ones in the season of Denha, the season commemorating the manifestation of the Lord is much significant in this sense. The saints and the departed ones are commemorated as the ones who were instrumental in manifesting the mystery of Christ.

⁸⁷ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 105.

⁸⁸ *HomMyst* 18-20.

⁸⁹ *HomMyst* 20.

⁹⁰ B.D. Spinks, *Prayers from the East*, Washington DC, 1993, 5.

⁹¹ Cf. Vadakkal, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 87-90.

⁹² Alexander Schmemmann, *Eucharist*, 111.

⁹³ The title of the order of the eucharistic celebration is *Taksa d' Quddaša*. The book containing the rubrics and calendar is called *Ordo celebrationis Quddaša*.

⁹⁴ R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, tom. 1-2, Oxford 1879-1901, 3500-3503.

⁹⁵ The East Syriac anaphoras are titled as Quddaša. Cf. J. Vadakkal *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 41; S. Naduthadam, *L'anaphore de Mar Nestorius*, 158. The Malayalam text of Raza (1989) gives both the terms Quddaša and Anaphora. Raza, 77. The Chaldean Taksa names the anaphoras as *First Quddaša (Anaphora of Addai and Mari)*, *Second Quddaša (Anaphora of Theodore)*, and *Third Quddaša (Anaphora of Nestorius)*.

⁹⁶ Cf. *HomMyst* 10, 27.

⁹⁷ Cf. Gabriel Qatraya, “Interpretation of the Offices”, 95.

⁹⁸ Cf. Justin, *Apologia* I. 5

- ⁹⁹ Cf. D.H. Tripp, "The Thanksgiving: An Essay by Arthur Couratin", in B.D. Spinks, ed., *The Sacrifice of Praise. Studies on the Themes of Thanksgiving and Redemption in the Central Prayers of the Eucharistic and Baptismal Liturgies in Honour of Arthur Hubert Couratin*, Rome 1981, 59-60.
- ¹⁰⁰ Cf. J.A. Jungmann, *The Mass: An Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Survey*, J. Fernandes, trans., Collegeville 1976, 156.
- ¹⁰¹ Cf. *Acts of Thomas*, 90.
- ¹⁰² Payne Smith, *Thesaurus*, 4023-4025.
- ¹⁰³ Payne Smith, *Thesaurus*, 1550-1553. Cf. Vadakkel, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 133-134.
- ¹⁰⁴ E.C. Ratcliff, "The Original Form of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari: A Suggestion", *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1928-1929), 30.
- ¹⁰⁵ See the thanksgiving in the g'hanta prayers of Addai and Mari. For the ET of Mar Ešaya text of AM see B.D. Spinks, *Prayers from the East*, 4. Cf. also K.A. Paul & G. Mookken, trans., *The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles Addai and Mari together with the Liturgies of Mar Theodorus and Mar Nestorius and the Order of Baptism*, Trichur 1967, 31-34; *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana: The Order of Raza*, SMBC, Trivandrum 1986; Revised version *ad experimentum* 1989, 37-42.
- ¹⁰⁶ Cf. Ratcliff, "Original Form", 29-30.
- ¹⁰⁷ Cf. Vadakkel, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 83-87; Naduthadam, *Anaphore de Nestorius*, 243-252. In AN the praise and thanksgiving occur in the third and fourth g'hantas.
- ¹⁰⁸ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 99-103.
- ¹⁰⁹ *HomMyst* 16-17.
- ¹¹⁰ Cf. *HomMyst* 13-18.
- ¹¹¹ *Raza*, 1.
- ¹¹² *Raza*, 2.
- ¹¹³ Prayer on Dukhrana and ferial days. *Raza*, 11.
- ¹¹⁴ *Raza*, 11.
- ¹¹⁵ *Raza*, 12.
- ¹¹⁶ *Raza*, 29.
- ¹¹⁷ *Raza*, 57-58.
- ¹¹⁸ S. Jammo, "The Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari: A Study of Structure and Historical Background", *Orientalia christiana periodica* 68 (2002) 35.
- ¹¹⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1995, # 1069.
- ¹²⁰ W. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 186.
- ¹²¹ *Raza*, 45.
- ¹²² P. Yousif, "Divine Liturgy", 224.
- ¹²³ *Acts of Thomas*, 91.

¹²⁴ Raza, 44-45. Cf. Paul & Mookken, *Liturgy*, 39.

¹²⁵ *Acts of Thomas*, 91.

¹²⁶ Vadakkal, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 90-91.

¹²⁷ Naduthadam, *Anaphore de Nestorius*, 269. Cf. also Paul & Mookken, *Liturgy*, 108.

¹²⁸ Cf. Theodore, *Eucharist*, 104.

¹²⁹ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 104. Cf. also Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 97.

¹³⁰ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 118-119.

¹³¹ *HomMyst* 20.

¹³² Cf. *HomMyst* 20.

¹³³ *HomMyst* 18.

¹³⁴ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 99. Cf. Yohannan Bar Zo`bi, *Explanation*, 49.

¹³⁵ Cf. Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 97; Yohannan Bar Zo`bi, *Explanation*, 40-41.

¹³⁶ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 95; Yohannan Bar Zo`bi, *Explanation*, 37.

¹³⁷ AM. Raza, 37. AT. Vadakkal, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 82; AN. Naduthadam, *Anaphore de Nestorius*, 238. In AN it is not clear whether the signing is on the mysteries or not.

¹³⁸ Išo`yahb, *Eucharist*, Q. 76, p.175.

¹³⁹ AM. Raza, 42; LEW, 285; AT. Vadakkal, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 87; AN (after the fourth g'hanta). Naduthadam, *Anaphore de Nestorius*, 252. Cf. *HomMyst* 18; Išo`yahb, *Eucharist*, Q. 88, p.177.

¹⁴⁰ AM. Raza, 45; AT. Vadakkal, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 91; AN. Naduthadam, *Anaphore de Nestorius*, 270. Cf. *HomMyst* 22; Išo`yahb, *Eucharist*, Q. 88, p.177. Qatraya and Bar Zo`bi are of the view that there is no signing after epiclesis because the mystery is already perfected. Cf. Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 99; Yohannan Bar Zo`bi, *Explanation*, 49-50. However, Narsai gives just another explanation for the signing. He says: "He signs now, not because the mysteries have need of the signing, but to teach by the last sign that they are accomplished." *HomMyst* 22.

¹⁴¹ Raza, 40; F.E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, Oxford 1896 (=LEW), 285.

¹⁴² Cf. C. Payngot, *The Cross: Its Place in the Hudra and its Sign in Baptism and Eucharist*, UDD, PIO, Rome 1971, 114-124.

¹⁴³ Raza, 35.

¹⁴⁴ While making the sign of the cross on himself, the priest raises his right hand just above the head. General Instructions. 14. Raza x.

¹⁴⁵ Raza, 53.

¹⁴⁶ Raza, 42, 45.

¹⁴⁷ See P. Maniyattu, “The Eucharist in the East Syriac Tradition: Celebration of Man’s Consecration”, in K. Kunnumpuram, ed., *The Eucharist and Life: Indian Christian Reflections on the Lord’s Supper*, Mumbai 2007, 153-174.

¹⁴⁸ Jozef Lamberts, “ ‘May Your Holy Spirit, Lord, Come..’.Some Reflections on the Epiclesis”, ETJ 2 (1998) 112-113.

¹⁴⁹ “Hymnen de Azymis” (*HAzy*), in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers paschahymnen (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, Syr. text and GT, E. BECK, CSCO 248/249; syri 108/109, Louvain 1964, 17, 8-9.

¹⁵⁰ “Hymnen de Nativitate” (*HNat*), 4,103, in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 186/187; syri 82/83, Louvain 1959, 1-143; 1-130; ET, McVey, K., trans., *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, Classics of Western Spirituality, New York 1989, 61-217; cf. also 3,16; 5,21. For details refer P. Maniyattu, *Heaven on Earth*, Roma 1995, 262-263.

¹⁵¹ *Raza*, 4,8,10,13,17,23,25,28,29, 33, 34, 39, 40, 45, 46,47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62.

¹⁵² *Raza*, 45.

¹⁵³ There are expressions like “propitiatory Body and Blood”, “those who receive it are saved by it and pardoned by it”, “May they be to us...for the forgiveness of sins”. *Raza* 47,49.

¹⁵⁴ M. Anikuzhikattil, *Ecclesial Response to the Negativity in Human Life*, Kottayam 1996, 29-33.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. M. Kumpuckal, *The Post-Anaphoral Part of the Chaldean and Syro-Malabar Qurbana: Critical Edition, English Translation and Study*, UDD, PIO, Rome 1993, 261-266; T. Parayady, *A Communion Service in the East Syrian Church: Liturgical Study*, UDD, PIO, Rome 1980, 190.

¹⁵⁶ *Acts of Thomas*, 91.

¹⁵⁷ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 117-118.

¹⁵⁸ *HAzy* 14,16.

¹⁵⁹ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem*, Placid Lectures, Rome 1985, 77-91.

¹⁶⁰ *HFid* = *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen de Fide*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 154/155; syri 73/74, Louvain 1955, 10,17.

¹⁶¹ Cf. *HEccl* = *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers Hymnen de Ecclesia*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 198/199; syri 84/85, Louvain 1960, 13,18.

¹⁶² Cf. *ChBapt* = “Homily (XXI) on the Mysteries of the Church and on Baptism”, in *Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, R.H. Connolly, trans., TSt VIII, Cambridge 1909,53.

¹⁶³ *HomMyst* 29.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *HNat* 1. 13, 52; 3. 15; 4. 24, 33; 13. 2; 19. 16; 24. 7, 17; 26. 9; *HParad* 6. 8; *CNis* = *Des Heiligen Ephraem des syrsers Carmina*

Nisibena, Syr. text and GT, E. BECK, I CSCO 218/219; syri 92/93, Louvain 1961; II CSCO 240/241; syri 102/103, Louvain 1963, 46. 8; *HFid* 85. 8; *HVirg* = *Des Heiligen Ephraem des syrers Hymnen de Virginitate*, Syr. text and GT, E. Beck, CSCO 223/224; syri 94/95, Louvain 1962; ET, McVey, *Hymns*, 31. 3. Cf. also Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 77-91; R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, London 1977 120; P. Yousif, *L'eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem de Nisibe*, OCA 224, Rome 1984, 317-319.

¹⁶⁵ "...He also rose from the holy Communion-table as from the dead, according to the symbol that has been performed; and He draws nigh unto us by His apparition, and announces resurrection to us through our communion with Him." Theodore, *Eucharist*, 112.

¹⁶⁶ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 100.

¹⁶⁷ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 104. Cf. Yohannan bar Zo'bi, *Explanation*, 59.

¹⁶⁸ Payne Smith, *Thesaurus*, 3725.

¹⁶⁹ See Paul & Mookken, *Liturgy*, 30; *Raza*, 37 for the occurrence in AM. In AT and AN there is additional description in the dialogue showing what the Qurbana is. Cf. Vadakkal, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 82; Naduthadam, *Anaphore de Nestorius*, 241.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. the prayer request and response of people, the kušapa of intercession, the fourth g'hanta and epiclesis of AM (*Raza*, 39,42,44); the fourth and fifth g'hantas and epiclesis of AN (Naduthadam, *Anaphore de Nestorius*, 250, 258,269); kušapa of intercession, fourth g'hanta, and epiclesis of AT (Vadakkal, *Anaphora of Mar Theodore*, 87,88,90).

¹⁷¹ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 99-100.

¹⁷² See the third g'hanta of AM. *Raza*, 39.

¹⁷³ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 103.

¹⁷⁴ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 111.

¹⁷⁵ Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 98.

¹⁷⁶ Fourth g'hanta of AM. *Raza*, 44.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Ps 50: 14,23; 116:17;119:108. Cf. also Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 184.

¹⁷⁸ *Raza*, 39. Cf. the Ešaya text ET: Spinks, *Prayers from the East*, 4. Cf. also Paul & Mookken, *Liturgy*, 33.

¹⁷⁹ *Expositio II*, 54; Syr. text, 57.

¹⁸⁰ *Expositio II*, 55; Syr. text, 58.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Kumpuckal, *Post-Anaphoral Part*, 256-261.

¹⁸² Cf. Theodore, *Eucharist*, 73-74.

¹⁸³ S. Brock, "Mary and the Eucharist", *Sobornost* 1/2 (1979) 54.

¹⁸⁴ *ChBapt* 52.

¹⁸⁵ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 110.

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- ¹⁸⁶ Cf. Theodore, *Eucharist*, 74,82,103,108,109,112,117,119.
- ¹⁸⁷ Cf. *HVirg* 31.14; 35.12; *HAzy* 17.13.
- ¹⁸⁸ Cf. Theodore, *Eucharist*, 112.
- ¹⁸⁹ *HNat* 4.103. Cf. also *HNat* 3.16; 5.21.
- ¹⁹⁰ Cf. Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 102. Cf. also Abraham bar Lipah, "Interpretatio", 165.
- ¹⁹¹ Theodore, *Eucharist*, 98.
- ¹⁹² Theodore, *Eucharist*, 107.
- ¹⁹³ Cf. *ChBapt* 54,58.
- ¹⁹⁴ Cf. *Expositio II*, 64-65.
- ¹⁹⁵ Cf. Gabriel Qatraya, "Interpretation", 102.
- ¹⁹⁶ Cf. *HParad* 2.5.
- ¹⁹⁷ Cf. *HAzy* 17. 9-12.
- ¹⁹⁸ Cf. *Expositio II*, 81.
- ¹⁹⁹ *Raza*, 44-45. Cf. Paul & Mookken, *Liturgy*, 39.

Mariology in the Syriac Traditions

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Introduction

The attitude of the Syriac Churches towards Mary is biblical in nature and liturgical in devotion. The Syriac Churches have a loving affection and great devotion towards Mary as the mother of the Son of God and as their own mother. The apocryphal writings, the writings of the Fathers and the liturgical texts which date back to the early centuries of Christianity bring out well their esteem, appreciation and devotion to Mary. The Syriac liturgical texts and the Syriac patristic writings would enable us to bring out the current Mariological understanding of the Syriac Churches. The Mariology of the Syriac tradition is more an attitude of faith, marvel and experience than a systematic treatise of logical arguments and dogmatic formulae. The Syriac authors expressed their views on Mary mainly through poetic language in which they employed a lot of symbolism, imagery and types. The poetic approach leaves room for the dynamic presentation of the reality and it leads the speaker and the audience to mystical experience. In this humble attempt to understand the Mariology of the Syriac tradition we may focus our attention on the writings of St. Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh.

In the writings of Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh we come across a profusion of images, types, symbols and parallelisms which is almost consistently repeated. These literary techniques, as S. Brock writes, are not to be seen as proof texts, rather “they are invitations, offering the possibility of acquiring some knowledge of divine reality.”¹ S. Brock elucidates that although human understanding of types and symbols is variable, they point to an objective reality which lends them an inner objective significance which is different from the outer reality which the scientific observer would call objective.² The rhetoric of St. Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh is not logical but poetic. Jacob of Serugh is a true disciple of the Syriac tradition which follows the typological and

spiritual interpretation of the Scripture, a method introduced by Aphrahat and Ephrem.

The different aspects of Mariology do not pertain to the realm of verifiable science, but to the realm of faith, whose objectivity is not verifiable. Hence they apply symbolic-poetic methodology which is very effective, as the listener is invited to enter into the very mystery that is under discussion.

The goal of the symbolic-poetic approach is not to “investigate” (ܐܩܒܐ *‘aqeb*) or “pry into” something but, rather to “wonder at” (ܝܡܢܗ *tehar*) the mystery that took place. This mystery is rooted in the Old Testament revelation and is fulfilled in the Incarnation and in the salvific actions of Christ. Therefore, the emphasis was not to acquire some new knowledge, but “to be filled with awe.” When we study the Mariological homilies of the Syriac Fathers, we should not look for any dogmatic affirmation, but rather “admire” their symbolic-poetic depiction of Mary as the most holy, beautiful and faithful daughter of David, in whom the Son of God resided (ܟܝܝܫܪܐ *šrā*).

In the multifaceted writings of Mar Jacob of Serugh, his compositions on the most Blessed and ever Virgin Mary, remain unique and unparalleled. Before beginning his compositions, he admitted to the fact that although “the rays of the sphere can be captured in pigments”, “tale concerning her is not completely told by those who preach.”³ This great Marian devotee found that the mixing of the ordinary colours was insufficient for depicting Mary’s image in pigments. Hence, mixing the fluid of his poetic language with the “extraordinary colours” of biblical symbols, Mar Jacob portrays a very beautiful icon of the Virgin Mother of the Son of God.

The Syriac tradition gives emphasis on themes such as the divine motherhood of Mary, her perpetual virginity, Mary as the “hope of humanity”, Mary’s participation in Christ’s redemption, her Assumption into heaven, Marian feasts and her intercession. We try to elucidate these themes for understanding the thought of the Syriac Fathers. Before entering into the depth of the themes, we would concentrate on how this tradition dwells upon the scene of Annunciation.

1. The Scene of Annunciation

For the Syriac Fathers, the scene of the Annunciation (Lk 1.26-38) was the most favourite topic of erudition on Mary. In presenting Mary before Gabriel, the messenger of God, they presented Mary's characteristics as a model to humanity, and her consent to co-operate with God as marking the beginning of redemption from sin. The Syriac Fathers are hesitant to make logical arguments about the event, but they express their understanding symbolically. They compare the aspects related to Mary with the magnificent and extraordinary events in the Scripture which enable their readers to ponder over the mystery. For example St. Ephrem, while speaking about the Annunciation, delves into the scene of Annunciation with an attitude of wonder, and looks upon it as causative in restoring human beings to their original state.⁴ In the symbolic and poetic expressions, he makes use of paradoxes and comparisons. He looks upon Gabriel's annunciation to Mary in terms of restoration. In the commentary on Tatian's *Diatessaron*, he writes that "it was fitting that the Architect of the works [of creation] should come and raise up the house that had fallen, and the hovering Spirit should sanctify the buildings that were unclean."⁵ While interpreting this passage he manifests his belief that the creation and the restoration of humanity takes place in and through Christ. He compares the virginal conception of Mary to the OT scene of the burning bush (Ex 3.2-3) which Moses saw, and takes the audience to the biblical event and leads them to meditatively wonder at the event. The paradoxical expression of Exodus is seen with an eye of faith, and so he writes: "The flame which Moses saw was moistening the bush and the distilling fat lest it be inflamed."⁶ Mary's pure character is unparalleled and is extolled as she is compared to the refined gold. "The likeness of refined gold could be seen in the bush, entering into the fire but without being consumed."⁷ St. Ephrem looks at the burning bush as a type or prefigure of Mary's virginal conception: "This happened so that it might make known that living fire which was to come at the end, watering and moistening the womb of the virgin and clothing it like the fire that [enveloped] the bush."⁸

According to the Syriac Fathers, investigation is not a sign of faith. Listening and accepting are the characteristics of true

faith. Mary's attitude in the scene of Annunciation is characterized by listening and accepting, without investigating. St. Ephrem presents Mary as a model because she accepted the divine plan without any investigation.

Indeed you were able to say how much and how
and where the Great One, Who became small, dwelt in you.
Blessed is your mouth that gave thanks but did not inquire
and your tongue that praised but did not investigate.

...

Let every tongue be warned that our investigation is stubble
and our scrutiny [is] fire.⁹

Mar Jacob portrayed the Incarnation as the fulfillment of the promise made in the Old Testament (Gen 3.15) and Mary as the worthy mother of the Son of God about whom the prophets prophesied. Mary's role in bringing back humanity to God the Father is extolled by him. In the homily on the Virgin he writes:

Blessed of women, by whom the curse of the land was
eradicated,
and the sentence henceforth has come to an end.¹⁰

Mar Jacob does not treat Mary as a passive recipient of the message brought by Gabriel, but presents her as actively involved in a dialogue to understand the message as divine and the messenger as the angel of God. Considering Mary's consent to the divine message, Mar Jacob called her the "mouth of the Church."¹¹ She expresses her consent to Gabriel after understanding that her co-operation is needed for the redemption of the fallen humanity.

One woman and the prince of all the hosts
had made an agreement for the reconciliation of the whole
world.

The two had sat between heavenly beings and earthly ones;
they spoke, attended to and made peace for those who were
worth.

Maiden and Watcher met each other and conversed in
argument on the matter
until they abolished the conflict between the Lord and Adam.¹²

In short, the Syriac Fathers present the Annunciation as the beginning of the redemption of humanity. Imbibing the message of the Annunciation, the universal Church celebrates the feast of Annunciation on 25th March, nine months before our Lord's

Nativity on 25th December. The feast of Annunciation is of prime importance in the West Syriac tradition. Concerning this feast, the compiler of a Syriac Orthodox calendar copied in North Iraq in 1689, commented: “As for the Feast of the Annunciation, the Church celebrates it on whichever day of the week the 25th falls: even if it falls on Good Friday, we still celebrate the Liturgy, since the Annunciation is the beginning and source of all other feasts.”¹³ The Fathers through their writings wanted to make it clear that Mary led a pure and holy life and that God the Father considered her worthy of becoming the Mother of the Son of God.

2. Divine Motherhood of Mary

The Syriac Churches extol Mary as she was fortunate to conceive and give birth to *Išo' mšiho*, the divine child who came down for our salvation. It is Elizabeth who first utters the faith in the divine motherhood of Mary, as she addressed her as the “mother of my Lord” (Lk 1.43). The Syriac theologians would say that she received the Son of God first in her heart and then in her womb. They admit the fact that it is impossible to describe the mystery of Mary’s divine motherhood because, to be a virgin and a mother is paradoxical in human language. As we read in one of the prayers: “O daughter of David, how can I address you? If I call you ‘virgin’, I see you breast-feeding your baby, if I call you ‘mother’, I understand that you are a virgin. Therefore, I call you mother of God.”¹⁴ Mary’s motherhood is a matter of wonder for everyone who meditates on the mystery of Mary.

The Council of Ephesus (AD 431) called Mary *Theotokos*, the “Mother of God.” The Church of the East which followed the Christology of Nestorius, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Diodor was not happy with the expression *Theotokos* (Mother of God, *Yoldāth alaha* ܝܘܠܕܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ). Instead, the East Syriac tradition preferred the term *Christotokos* (Mother of Christ, *emeh damšiha* ܐܡܗܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ). They thought that the term Mother of God would mean mother of the Trinity or the Word, the second person of the Trinity who has no beginning. The term *Christotokos* would refer to the mystery of Incarnation, because Christ is the name of the son born from Mary. They emphasised that Mary did not contribute anything to the divine nature of Christ. Elilas of Jerusalem (and Damascus) of the ninth century says:

“That the Nestorians deny Mary ought to be called “Mother of God” is not denying the Divinity of Christ, nor the descent of the Divine Word who is the same as the King of ages, into the holy Mother of Christ. The Nestorians refuse Mary to be called the Mother of God, because the exalted and glorious name God signifies the Trinity of persons, the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. Hence if we call Mary the Mother of God we may appear as attributing generation to and birth to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. If on the other hand we call Mary Mother of Christ who is God of ages, we affirm the Son alone to have been born of her: to affirm this is not of course to deny Christ is God.”

We find still in the East Syriac tradition the expression ‘Mother of God’. Certain passages from the Lelya for the feast of Christmas: “Hail Mother of the Child that does not grow old”

Here the allusion is to the eternity of the child of Mary i.e. this child is God and so Mary is the Mother God the Child eternal.

“Praise be to the child whose Father (is) in heaven, and whose mother (is) on earth (and who) is incomparable.” The sense is clear Mary is the Mother of the Son of God the Father.

“Blessed be the one who is born twice: eternally and in the human manner: eternally before the worlds and today (Christmas day) in time” Hence Mary is the Mother of God the Son which is the same as the Theotokos of Ephesus.¹⁵

The West Syrians, who followed the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria very happily called her *Yoldāth āloho*, Mother of God. In fact, what both the traditions meant was the same. When the West Syrians called Mary *Yoldāth aloho*, they did not mean that she gave birth to the divine nature of Christ nor to the Holy Trinity.

The Syriac Fathers and the liturgical tradition understand Mary’s divine maternity like this: the Son of God has two births; the eternal birth from the Father and second birth from Mary. Incarnation, for the Syriac tradition is Christ, putting on the garment of his mother. The garment that he put on is the human nature that Mary gave to her Son. A passage from Ephrem’s *Hymn on the Nativity* expresses his concept of Christ putting on the garment of Mary:

Son of the Most High who came and dwelt in me,
 [in] another birth, He bore me also
 [in] a second birth. I put on the glory of Him
 Who put on the body, the garment of His mother.¹⁶

In another *Hymn on Nativity*, Ephrem speaks of an exchange of garment:

In her virginity Eve put on
 leaves of shame. Your mother put on,
 in her virginity, the garment of glory
 that suffices for all, I gave
 the small mantle of the body of the One who covers all.¹⁷

The topics related to Mary's divine motherhood revolve around the fact that when the Son of God became man he took abode in Mary,¹⁸ received her human nature and was brought up as her Son. Many symbols such as "the ark of the covenant", "the second heaven", "the shining castle", "the pure temple", "the celestial chariot", "the new well", "the tabernacle", and "the cloud of Mount Sinai" are employed to deal with the divine motherhood of Mary.

The symbolism of "the ark of the covenant" pictures Mary's character as uniquely pure. Just as the stainless and pure gold, Mary's character was pure and excellent. She was found to be the worthiest person in the whole of humanity, that is why the Son of God came to dwell in her.

The Mother, Virgin and blessed, was even more beautiful than the ark full of mysteries of the house of God.¹⁹

We see a connection between Mary and the objects used for the construction of the ark, in which God was present. The acacia tree which was used in the construction of the ark of the covenant, grows even in the desert and resists moths and other destructive elements. Similarly, Mary who stands firm in her commitment to God, overcomes a lot of trials and tribulations, such as Joseph's doubt about Mary's conception and the calumny of people. God was present in the ark which was meticulously constructed according to God's instructions. Just as the ark of the covenant was amidst the Israelites, Mary stands amidst humanity.

Mary became a worthy abode for God at the Incarnation. Further illustrations about the Ark of the covenant and presence of God in Mary would enable us to wonder at the way Syriac authors present Christ's presence in her. With her humility and faithfulness

to God, she made herself an ark and became “the habitation of God.” There is a prayer on the feast of the assumption which recollects her as the dwelling place of God. “Therefore we also today with the companies of the prophets cry and say to her, “You are God’s Dwelling-place. You are the Strong City, the Spiritual Mountain of Sinai, the Divine Mother.”²⁰ At the Incarnation, when God became man and dwelt in Mary, John, who was a babe in the womb of his mother danced out of joy (Lk 1.41), just as David danced before the Lord (2 Sam 6.1-23). In the instance of King David’s dance before the Ark and John’s dance before Mary, what is evident is, the joy of David and John who realized the presence of God. Let us quote here Mar Jacob’s words regarding the dance of King David and the baby:

The Lord of mysteries had dwelt within her and because of this,

the babe had danced for joy like that king filled with exploits.²¹

St.Ephrem, realizing Mary’s divine motherhood also uses the symbolism of the ark to speak about the presence of God in her. The following text from his *Hymn on Nativity* explains how the presence of God is celebrated in the Ark and at the Incarnation:

Woman serves in the presence of man,
 Who is her head. Joseph rose
 to serve in the presence of his Lord
 Who was within Mary. The priest serves
 in the presence of Your Ark because of Your holiness.
 Moses bore the tablet of stone
 that His Lord had written. And Joseph escorted
 the pure tablet in whom was dwelling
 the Son of the Creator. The tablets were left behind
 since the world was filled with Your teaching.²²

Another appellation for Mary is “the new heaven” or “the second heaven.” They refer to Mary’s greatness by making a contrast between heaven which is insufficient to contain God and the “small womb” of Mary in which “He wished to dwell.” As the Son of God dwelt in Mary, she became the “holy dwelling-place of the Most High.” That is why she is addressed as the second heaven. On the feast of the assumption of Mary, referring to her as the second heaven, the Church prays like this: “You are the second heaven and the chariot of flesh, as you carried on your knees the

Lord of the Winged Creatures whom Ezekiel described. The angels and archangels tremble at the loftiness of your beauty when it pleased God that you should be carried as it were on a throne of crystal.”²³ Even if the comparison is beautiful, the Syriac Fathers would say that Mary’s relationship to Christ is different from that of heaven, for she excels heaven. This is how Mar Jacob presents his understanding:

Heaven is his throne and Mary his Mother and behold they are not equal,
for the throne does not resemble the Mother because the Mother is greater.

Heaven and Mary, singly He chose both of them,
He made one of them a throne and the other a Mother.²⁴

Ephrem would also say that heaven is too small for him:

Mary’s lap astonishes me that it sufficed for You, my Lord,
and embraced You.

The entire creation was [too] small to hide Your majesty
Earth and heaven were [too] narrow to be like laps
to hide Your divinity. [Too] small for You is the earth’s lap,
but large [enough] for You is Mary’s lap. He dwelt in a lap,
and He healed by the hem [of His garment].²⁵

St. Ephrem states that heaven is the throne of God, and Mary is greater than heaven for she is His mother. He, in calling Mary “the new heaven” pictures how God is praised because of the presence of God in her.

The earth became for him a new heaven
in which the Watchers came down and praised.
The sons of the height gathered around your dwelling
because of the King’s Son Who dwelt in you.
Your earthly habitation became like heaven above
by their vigil.²⁶

With the symbol of “the shining castle”, Mar Jacob depicted both her motherhood and virginity. The excellence of her character is extolled by calling her “the castle of holy things and full of virtues.” He spoke about her as the most humble, pure, limpid and without blemish. In reflecting on her personality, Mar Jacob came to the conclusion that there was nobody other than Mary who was worthy to become the mother of the Son of God. St. Ephrem also compares her to the castle in a beautiful way.

Blessed are you, O castle, castle of the King,
whose gate is greater than mortal beings.

The glorious King dwelt within you.

Let His love be a bulwark for your beauty.²⁷

Through the symbol, “pure temple”, he tried to prove that Mary’s life was more pleasing to God than the temple of Solomon. According to Mar Jacob, the Holy Spirit “sanctified her, purified her and made her blessed among women.”²⁸ He presents how she was made a temple.

Blessed is she who received the Holy Spirit; He purified and polished her,
and He made her a temple, and the Lord Most High dwelt in her abode.²⁹

Since she made herself a sanctuary with purity, the transcendent God came to dwell in her. In the *Hymns on Virginity* St. Ephrem refers to Mary as the Temple and Christ as the King:

With awe and tenderness the youth honoured
the Temple in which You dwelt, to teach us
that today the King’s Son dwells
in holy virgins.

The discerning person who perceives she is a temple
is terrified of dishonouring Your betrothed.

Oh, how grievous to dare

to dishonour the King in His Temple!³⁰

In order to wonder at the presence of God in the Incarnation and to help us understand the continuity between God’s revelation to Israel and His presence in Mary, Mar Jacob used the symbol of the “chariot.”

Joseph took her and brought her, filled with holiness, into his house

while looking on her as the heavenly chariot.³¹

The reference to Mary as the “celestial chariot” occurred when Mar Jacob spoke of her relationship to Joseph to whom she was engaged to be married. Even when God appeared to Ezekiel, He remained a mystery far beyond Ezekiel’s comprehension; parallel to that here, although legally Mary became Joseph’s wife, Joseph and Mary did not engage in marital relation, but they remained chaste.³² He utilized the symbol “new well” to show how Mary became the channel of grace to humanity by giving birth to

the Son of God who redeemed it from sin. With this symbol Mar Jacob referred to her role in giving Christ, the “Living Water” to the world.

Mary, as God’s habitation is called the “tabernacle.” The beauty of this symbol consists in the comparison between the tabernacle which Moses anointed and Mary, the “tabernacle” which the Holy Spirit sanctified, purified and made holy. On the feast of Mary’s Assumption, Mary is addressed in one of the prayers as the Tabernacle: “You, the Tabernacle of the God of Jacob, are today buried in the hollow of the earth like the rest of the dead!”³³ In the tabernacle God’s presence was witnessed by the cloud, whereas in Mary, God was present in human form. St. Ephrem compares Mary with the Tabernacle in which the Emmanuel dwelt:

Joseph and also John honoured
Your mother’s womb as a symbol
It is the symbol of the Tabernacle, the temporal Tabernacle,
In which Emmanuel was dwelling.
Both of them persist in admonishing us
not to belittle God in His temples.³⁴

The symbol of the “cloud” is another imagery that Mar Jacob utilized to describe the divine maternity of Mary. In the context of God’s theophany on Mount Sinai, in seeing the cloud, the Israelites were reminded of God’s presence, His glory and His protective power. This is how he compares Mary to the cloud.

He [Joseph] was regarding her like the cloud over Mt. Sinai,
because within her the Power of the Godhead was dwelling.³⁵

The important aspect of Mary’s divine maternity is that the almighty God dwelt in her. The symbols that we have mentioned above point to some aspect of this reality. And Mary’s mystery is indescribable which Jacob presents like this:

The rock which brought forth streams cannot be compared to
you,
because living waters go forth from you to the whole world.
Your portion is greater than the glorious chariot of vision,
because that one whom you carry, behold He grows in you, yet
enriches you.³⁶

In the East Syriac tradition, the hymns of the Liturgy of Hours in honour of Blessed Virgin Mary proclaim the divine origin

of Jesus Christ from Mary. While praising Mary as the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father, hymns are keen to insist on the divine Paternity of the child. The hymns which present Mary as the Mother of Jesus Christ are mainly those of the season of *Annunciation-Nativity*. There are similar hymns found in the seasons of *Denha*, *Sleeha*, *Kaita* and *Qudash Etta*. We may see the relevant texts of such hymns.³⁷

Mary really gave birth to the Divine Son.

Isaiah saw by his interior eyes the child born of a virgin in this world.³⁸

By faith we know that the Son is born from the Father; He is born of a woman on earth but not from a man. This has been revealed by the angel.³⁹

The Word of God received body not from any angel, he was born in the tribe of Abraham (Heb 2.16).⁴⁰

Without natural relation the virgin became the mother of Christ the Emmanuel. The sacred body was formed in her by the manly power of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

The moment the mother gave her consent, to the divine person was joined the human nature.⁴²

On earth Mary became the Mother of the incarnate love. Not seeing the grace of God in her, men defamed her. But the first man found joy in her Son.⁴³

Through this short exposition we have been trying to make it clear that the Syriac tradition understands Mary as the Mother of God, the Mother of Christ. The understanding of the Church regarding her divine motherhood implies that at the time of the Incarnation, the Son of God dwelt in Mary and received human nature from her.

3. The Perpetual Virginity of Mary

The Annunciation narrative deals with the fulfilment of the prophecy “a virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Is 7.14). Theologians described the nativity of the Son of God as a miracle and said that Mary remained a virgin while conceiving and giving birth to her Son. Based on Ezekiel’s vision of the “closed door” (Ez 44.1-3) the Fathers later taught that she remained a virgin also after giving birth to Christ. They believed that since she was the temple of God, she remained pure for ever and did not have any marital relation. Thus Mary is ever virgin; before, in and after the

birth of Christ. In the liturgical prayers, she is often called ever virgin.

For the Syrians, Mary is *ēma b^ethulthâ* (ܐܡܐ ܒܬܘܠܬܗ virgin mother) and her Son is *brā d'b^ethulthâ* (ܒܪܐ ܕܒܬܘܠܬܗ Son of the Virgin). The Syriac Fathers are of the opinion that, Mary's virginal conception was the essential condition for understanding Christ's eternal priesthood. Christ's priesthood was not according to bodily descent, but *by the power of an indestructible life* (Heb 7.15-16). That Mary conceived her Son by the power of the Most High, as revealed in the message of the Annunciation is the proof of Christ's descent *by the power of an indestructible life*. Mar Jacob's stance is clear: if one admitted that Mary remained a virgin even while giving birth, it is a sign of one's conviction that her Son is the Son of God. However, in dealing with the virginal conception and the virginal parturition which are outside the laws of nature, he was differentiating between God, the perfect being who is not subject to the laws of "becoming" and man, who instead is subject to such laws.

The Syriac Fathers through their illustrations express their conviction about Mary's virginal conception. In the *homily on the Virgin*, Mar Jacob has this expression:

That purity which was in Adam, Mary also acquired,
by the Spirit who came and she gave birth without impulse of
lust.

Without marital union, Adam had generated the mother of life;
he prefigured the birth of the One who indeed is the fountain of
life, our Lord.⁴⁴

The Syriac tradition employs different symbols to describe the perpetual virginity of Mary. The prominent ones are: "closed door", "sealed letter", "unploughed land", "unpruned vine", "thirsty land" and "Gideon's fleece." The "closed door" in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 44.1-3) was interpreted by Mar Jacob as the symbol of virginity in, during and after giving birth. Just as an open door was not necessary for the Risen Lord to come to the disciples gathered in the Upper Room (Jn 20.19,26), so also it was not necessary that the virgin mother be deprived of her virginal state in order to give birth to her Son. Through the symbol of the "sealed letter", Mar Jacob showed how Mary, as the "sealed letter" reversed the content of the "sealed letters" mentioned in the Old

Testament. The purpose of the sealed letters in the story of David was to take away the life of Uriah (2 Sam 11.15), and the purpose of the sealed letter of Jezebel was to kill Naboth and take away his property (1 Kings 21.10). But in calling Mary, the “sealed letter” which carried the “message of peace”, Mar Jacob depicted both Mary’s virginity and the restoration of corrupted humankind.

St.Ephrem and the Syriac tradition look at virginity as “Pearl without stain”

My pearl, placed in Your treasury,
has not perished for You have put it on.
“May all evidences of virginity of Your brides
be preserved by You. They are the purple [robes]
and no one may touch them
except our King. For virginity
is like a vestment for You, the High Priest.”⁴⁵

The principle that lies behind Mary’s virginal conception is that what was impossible for man became possible because of God’s mercy (ܚܢܘܢ *hānōna*), intervention and love. Mar Jacob described Mary’s impossibility of conceiving a child without a marital relationship as follows: the Great One dwelt in the “small” and “barren womb”⁴⁶ of Mary. The symbol “unploughed land” that produced corn refers to the accomplishment of God’s plan of salvation. Mary showered this gift of salvation on man by making possible what would otherwise have been impossible. The symbol “unpruned vine” implied the state of unproductivity. Here Mar Jacob teaches us that just as Mary’s virginal state was unproductive, humanity with its sinful condition was also unproductive. And just as the divine intervention in Mary’s life resulted in virginal conception, so also God’s intervention through the person of Christ, gave man hope of the fruits of salvation. In the expression, the “thirsty land”, another symbol of Mary’s virginity, Mar Jacob described man’s long expectation for God. He wrote that a plant which was not sown or planted had sprung up from that “thirsty earth, Mary.”⁴⁷

Mary’s virginal conception is a wonder. God Himself allowed His all-pervading presence to be manifested in a small place and in a small object. This was depicted in the symbol “Gideon’s Fleece” on which dew was showered (Judg. 6.11-40). This symbol was understood as a figure of Mary’s virginity. Just

as Gideon who valued himself as the least of his clan, became a “mighty man of valour” (v.12), Mary, in her virginity became the mother of God. Through the employment of these symbols, Mar Jacob emphasized that her virginal conception was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy. By employing this symbol, he presented Mary as the most faithful woman.

The Liturgy of Hours in the East Syriac tradition confess the perpetual virginity of Mary. We pray in the Lelya of the feast of Christmas: “The Holy Spirit descended into her mansion, the place *sealed and humble*, and in it the Son of the Most High dwelt, and the *seal of her Virginity* attests (this).” “The Son who is born eternally from the Father was incarnate without change in *the womb sealed with virginity*”⁴⁸

The Sapra of the feast of Blessed Virgin Mary after Christmas has the following prayer: “You the great eternal light and hidden the splendor of the spherical (i. e. unlimited) Sun who were born from the rational sphere (i.e. limited creature) the *second Heaven*, the *ever virgin*. You who shone forth from the womb sealed with virginity. Another prayer “(O) Christ who made us worthy to celebrate the commemoration of your mother who carried you in her womb nine months and *brought you forth in virginity*, have mercy on us.”⁴⁹ The Ramsa of the same feast has the prayer: “Like the rode of Aaron which sprouted, the Virgin conceived. That rod without being planted and without drink (without being watered), did sprout; Mary without a man and without a seed conceived.”⁵⁰ In the Lelya of this feast we pray as follows: “O womb which no man has known, nor did any man approach it in his day, and which the Most High did seal by his hand setting it apart and making it a temple for His Son.” These passages are clear in themselves. The word to seal points to the corporal virginal integrity. Mary is *Ever Virgin, before, in and after the birth of Christ.*”⁵¹

4. Mary: the Hope of Humanity

In the context of the Incarnation and human redemption, Mary is looked upon as having given hope to the humanity. St.Ephrem, in his *Nativity Hymns*, gives attention to Mary’s role in bringing humanity back to the state before Adam and Eve had fallen.

Man imposed corruption on woman when she came forth from him;
 today she has repaid him - she who bore for him the Savior
 He gave birth to the Mother, Eve – he, the man who never was born;
 how worthy of faith is the daughter of Eve, who without a man bore a child!⁵²

Mar Jacob's presentation of Mary as the "hope of humanity" is evident in his metric homilies. The restoration of humanity to its original state was realized in Mary. The history of salvation can be characterized as the story of the "fall" and "rise" of the elected people; Christ, the Saviour of the world came to human birth at the forty second generation in the genealogy. Mar Jacob, in presenting Mary's role in bringing forth hope to humanity wonders at her response to the angel and her co-operation in the divine plan, and presents it in using different symbols such as: "the powerful city", "the second Eve", "the ship of treasure", and "the new pitcher of Elisha." In the employment of the symbol of the "powerful city", Mary is presented as the most faithful covenant partner. In calling her the "powerful city", Mar Jacob considered that in her the realization of the "virgin Israel" took place. Mary's words that "all generations shall call me blessed" (Lk 1.48) reflect that in her all the hopes and aspirations of the humanity are fulfilled. Because of her positive response to God, we can say that the whole people of Israel is personified in her. She is not reflecting the "bloody city", upon which God makes judgement (Ez 22.1-3), but rather the city of God which "is the joy of all the earth" (Ps 48.2).⁵³

The symbolism of the "Second Eve" truly depicts the theme of restoration. In dwelling upon Eve's encounter with the serpent and Mary's encounter with the angel, Mar Jacob presented Eve as "reprehensible", "despicable" and "foolish".⁵⁴ Mary is "glorious" and "wise", and had "repaid" the debt that Eve had incurred. If Eve, through her disobedience became the cause of the fall of humanity, Mary paved the way for the "resurrection of all our race."⁵⁵ According to Mar Jacob, when Adam called Eve: "the mother of all living", he was prophesying about Mary who would give birth to Christ, the "Living One." Briefly, in this symbol, Mar Jacob depicts Mary's consent at the Annunciation as the cause of the "resurrection" of the "fallen humanity."

The “ship of treasures” is another symbol for depicting Mary as the hope of humanity. As the Mother of the Son of God, Mary was compared to a ship that bore great treasures. In expressing the hope of humanity through Mary, Mar Jacob stated that “treasures and blessings” came to the needy world so that “it might live from Him.”⁵⁶ In applying this symbolism to Faith and the Sacraments, we see that today the faithful can be enriched by the “treasure”, of the Eucharist.

In the symbol of the “New Pitcher of Elisha” (2 Kings 2.9-21), Mary is compared to the bowl and Christ to the salt that gave taste to the water. This is connected with the prophetic life of Elisha. When the prophet put salt that was placed in the bowl into the spring, the bad water became wholesome and the land became fruitful. Mar Jacob points out that in the restoration of humanity, it is Mary, the “New Pitcher” that presented Christ, the salt that gave “taste” to the humanity.⁵⁷ The symbols which stand for Mary as the hope of humanity are good examples for showing that Christology and Mariology are interconnected.

5. Mary - All Holy

The Syriac Churches believe that Mary was in God’s plan of salvation from the time of the fall of Adam and Eve. The Syriac liturgical tradition would allude to different events in the Bible such as the “burning bush” and consider them as prefigures of the Virgin Mary who conceived the Child and yet remained a virgin. They believe that she was all holy without any stain of sin. This is brought out through the imagery of the “flawless pearl without stain” (ܡܪܝܢܝܘܬܗ ܕܠܘ ܡܘܡܐ *margonitho d’lo mumo*). In the West Syriac Divine Office, we pray on Monday morning like this: “Mary shines forth just like the ‘pure pearl’ that is upon the crown of the king.”⁵⁸ In the Gospel according to Luke, the archangel addresses Mary as “Hail, o favoured one” or as “full of grace” (Lk 1.28). Mary’s purity and sanctity are repeatedly reflected in the liturgical prayers of the Syriac Church. On the feast of Mary’s nativity we pray like this:

Child of miracle clothed with all grace and beauty,
 Pearl of purity, Mother-pearl of the deep seas,
 who did not take even a drop of sea water,
 on the day of your birth the whole Creation greets you.⁵⁹

The Syriac Fathers have a lot of expressions, referring to her holiness. God saw her as the purest among the daughters of Adam and deemed her worthy of becoming the mother of His Son. Mary is the most beautiful, the humblest and the purest human being whom God the Son made His abode. St. Ephrem praises God singing “You [Christ] alone and your Mother are good [or beautiful] in every way; for there is no blemish in thee, my Lord, and no stain in thy Mother.”⁶⁰ The belief of the Church that she was always free from the stain of sin would mean that she was sinless in her birth also. This is the faith expressed in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of 1854.

6. Mary’s Participation in Human Redemption

Mary’s participation in human redemption is not a separate theme. It is in the context of Christ’s redemption that Mary’s role in it is dealt with. There is a prayer in the festal celebration of the nativity of Mary which refers to her role in our salvation: “Today our race has drawn near to the first joy, in that it was through mother Eve that we were led to our fall, but with Mary we found our way to the Garden from which we had been driven out.”⁶¹ Being rooted in the Semitic background, Mar Jacob describes redemption in terms of the “descent” and the “ascent” of Christ. Christ in His “descent” to man, united man to God by accomplishing the true human destiny from which man had turned away. In His “ascent” to heaven, He helped humanity also to ascend. The key expression pertaining to this theme was that in order to redeem man, Christ, “the fashioner of babes” fashioned for Himself a body in the womb of Mary. The two Syriac words *paroqa* (ܦܪܘܩܐ Redeemer) and *mahyana* (ܡܚܝܢܐ Saviour) refer to Christ, the Redeemer, who “bought us with His blood and restored us to life.”

In connecting the primeval curse of Genesis 3:3 and how Christ retrieved this situation, the Syriac authors employed the symbol of the “tree of life.” Mar Jacob’s treatment of the topic helps us to understand that Mary made accessible to us the “tree of life” that was guarded by the “sword” (Gen 3.24). Mary gave us the fruit of the “tree of life”, the Eucharist, which is Christ’s body given to the children of the Church for nourishment.

When we consider Mary's participation in Christ's work of redemption, it is her voluntary co-operation in the Incarnation that is highlighted by the Syriac authors. Mary's role in the Incarnation of the Word was very crucial in redemption. Just like Abraham who inaugurated the Old Covenant and acted according to faith, Mary, by responding to God in a relational way (1 Cor 3.9), became "a blessing" for the "New Israel." In dealing with Mary's visit to Elizabeth, Mar Jacob presented her as having imparted the Holy Spirit to others. Jacob describes how Mary's response to the angel became advantageous to human salvation:

With her the Father sent us tidings full of good things,
and through her, forgiveness to all condemned for their bonds
of sin.

By her, emancipation was sent to Adam who had been
enslaved;

he became an heir and came in among the sons, as he had been.

...

Because of her, the way to Eden which had been blocked was
opened;

The serpent fled and men passed along it to God.

Because of her, the Cherub had removed his lance that he
might no longer guard

the Tree of Life which offered itself to those who ate it.

She gave us a sweet fruit, full of life,

that we might eat from it and live forever with God.⁶²

Mary remained ever faithful to her commitment. She suffered with Christ as He endured the agony of the Cross and died. Just as she shared in the Incarnation of the Word, so also she shared in the mystery of Christ's redeeming death, which Mar Jacob dealt with in his homily *On the death and Burial of Mary*.

Your Mother endured many sufferings for your sake;

every grief encompassed her at your Crucifixion.

How much sighing and sorrowful tears did her eyes shed,

when they enshrouded You and brought You to rest within the
tomb.⁶³

Mary's share in the reconciliation and sanctification of humanity is a corollary to her divine maternity. Mar Jacob's description of Mary's glorious entry into heaven is the apex of his depiction of Mary. The concept of Mary's glorious entry into

heaven is founded on the Resurrection and the Ascension of our Lord. Her glorious entry into heaven is a prefigure of our future glory. She is the mother of all Christians and this brings us closer to her and makes us confident to ask for her intercessions.

7. Mary: Assumed into Heaven

The Syriac Churches started celebrating the feast of Mary's assumption into heaven from the 5th century. This feast is known under different names: *dormition* (falling asleep) of Mary, *šunoyo*, and *transitus*. The Syriac word *šunoyo* means transference, meaning that Mary has been taken up to heaven. She was the dwelling place of the Most High. And in her personal commitment, she received the word of God with faith and kept it. After her death and burial she was taken up to heaven. Her glorification in heaven revealed the glory destined to the Church and to the whole creation. Being the first Syriac Father in the West Syriac Church to speak about Mary's glorious entry into heaven, Mar Jacob might have given the green light to the introduction of the feast of Mary's Assumption on the 15th of August. We presume that he stands in the transitional stage between the Apocryphal Writings on Mary's Assumption and the liturgical celebration of this feast. Hence, Mar Jacob is important in a dogmatic study on this topic.⁶⁴ This is the content of the dogma of Assumption proclaimed by Pope Pius XII. We quote here an excerpt from the prayer of the feast of the Assumption: "In the bodily and spiritual glory which You possess in heaven, O Mother of Jesus, you continue to bring light and life to your people and your fragrance permeates the whole creation, for you are the image and the first flowering of the Church as she is to be perfected in the world to come."⁶⁵ This is the basis for us to ask for Mary's prayers.

8. Mary's Intercession

Christ is the only Mediator between God and human beings. Mary's intercession does not in anyway supersede Christ's uniqueness. Christ has approved Mary's mediation during his public ministry. When she notified to her Son the scarcity of wine in the feast of Cana, he intervened and performed the first miracle. While dying on the Cross, Christ gave Mary as the mother to John the Apostle, who represents every believer in him. Thus she was

made mother of the Church. Ever since then she was present in the life of the Church, helping and encouraging the Children of God in their earthly pilgrimage. The Church teaches that Mary who is assumed into heaven is closer to God and intercedes for us.

In the East Syriac tradition, the Liturgy of Hours⁶⁶ views Mary as one who is constantly interceding for us, and especially for our salvation. Mary's prayer is our refuge.⁶⁷ Mary intercedes for the entire humanity.⁶⁸ She prays for the peace of the world, protection to the Church, and grace to be saved from the snares of Satan.

At Cana when Mary informed her beloved Son that wine has run short and that there is no more wine to be served to the guests, Christ turned water into wine and cooled down the burning heart of the host. Lord, let us also drink from the fountain of your grace (Jn 2.1f).⁶⁹

You are a place of refuge to the humanity like a port to the ship that has lost its way in the vast ocean.⁷⁰

The first hymn of the evening prayer of *Elia, Sleeva, Cross* confesses that the faithful are in the right path to heaven when Mary guides them.

O Mother, I always take refuge under the lovely shade of the wings of your prayer (Ps 5:11). When you guide us under the beautiful wings in the right path we enter heaven.⁷¹

In general the prayers addressed to Mary during the seasons of Eliah, Sleeva, Mose entreat to Mary to stand on the side of the believers and intercede to her Son.

On the day of judgement, let your prayer be our refuge.

O Mother, be pleased with us, that your beloved Son may reside in us....⁷²

O Lord, the head of human race, by the prayer of Mary the Mother, grand peace to this world. Protect the Church, which honours the name of Mary.

O Mother, blessed by the gift of the Holy Spirit, pray for us that the Lord may grand us the grace with which we may be saved the snares of Satan.⁷³

The West Syriac Church gives so much importance to her intercession that in the *quqlion* of Mary, there is a prayer that goes like this: "because of the Cross of *Morānišo* (Jesus our Lord) and

the prayers of his mother, God will forgive our sins and have mercy on us.”

Conclusion

The Syriac tradition, through the Marian feasts and prayers in honour of Mary, wonders at Mary's heroic decision to consent to the plan of God. Mary's relationship to God and her co-operation in the work of salvation are unique. The Syrians consider Mary as having uniquely reached the perfection possible for a human being. Mar Jacob in his homily *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, presents this theme in a special way while narrating her glorious entry into heaven. The beautiful depiction of Mary combined with the biblical symbols and poetic imagery is an overflow of a deep and genuine devotion of the Syrians to Mary. The faith and devotion of the Syrians do not leave a Marian devotee simply in the Mariological level, but lead the faithful to Christ, the Redeemer.

Notes

¹ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 37.

² Cf. S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 39.

³ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 20.

⁴ St. Ephrem's approach to Christology also is not dogmatic or logical, but a meditation on Christ from the perspective of the redemptive ministry of Christ. For example, he would say that the very name Jesus would refer to his salvific work, and not to his nature as God. This is the citation from Ephrem's commentary on Luke 1:31: "This shows that this name is of the economy which is through the Body, since Jesus in Hebrew means Saviour. For [the angel] said, *You shall call his name Jesus*, that is Saviour, *for he shall save his people from sins*. This name therefore refers not to his nature but to his deeds." Ephrem, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, ed. Carmel McCarthy, Manchester 1993, 52.

⁵ Ephrem, *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, 53.

⁶ Ephrem, *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, 53.

⁷ Ephrem, *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, 53.

⁸ Ephrem, *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, 53.

⁹ Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity 25:14-15*, ET by K. McVey, 203.

¹⁰ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 18.

¹¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 38.

¹² Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 29.

¹³ S. Brock, "Introduction", to *Jacob of Serugh: On the Mother of God*, ET M. Hansbury, 3.

¹⁴ *Sihmo Namaskaram*, translation from the Malayalam version, (First Night Vigil of Monday, Meneolam Part), Tiruvalla 1982, 18-19.

¹⁵ Placid Podipara, 20.

¹⁶ Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity* 16:11, ET by K.McVey, 150.

¹⁷ Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity* 17:4, ET by K.McVey, 154.

¹⁸ In order to refer to the Incarnation, the Syrians prefer to use the expression "clothing with body." Here is one reference from Jacob of Serugh:

Lest the body with which He clothed Himself according to nature be sullied,

He purified the Virgin by the Holy Spirit and then dwelt in her.

Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 35.

¹⁹ Jacob of Serugh, , *On the Mother of God*, ET by M. Hansbury, 74.

²⁰ *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit*, Vol.IV, ET by Francis Acharya, Kottayam 1986, 606.

²¹ Jacob of Serugh, , *On the Mother of God*, ET by M. Hansbury 74.

²² Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity* 16:16-17, ET by K.McVey, 151-152.

²³ *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit*, Vol.IV, ET by Francis Acharya, Kottayam 1986, 603.

²⁴ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Visitation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 69.

²⁵ Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity* 23:11, ET by K.McVey, 189.

²⁶ Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity* 25:17, ET by K..McVey, 204.

²⁷ Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginit*y 24:11, ET by K..McVey, 368.

²⁸ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 34.

²⁹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 41.

³⁰ Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginit*y 25:10, ET by K.McVey, 373.

³¹ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 59.

³² Cf. James Puthuparampil, *The Mariological Thoughts of Mar Jacob of Serugh (451-521)*, SEERI, Kottayam 2005.

³³ *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit*, Vol.IV, ET by Francis Acharya, Kottayam, 1986, 603.

³⁴ Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginit*y 25:11, ET by K..McVey, 373.

³⁵ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Annunciation*, ET by M. Hansbury, 59.

³⁶ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, ET by M. Hansbury, 80.

³⁷ The hymns given in this study are from the Text of the Liturgy of Hours now used in the Syro-Malabar Church. The Syro-Malabar text is an adapted and simplified version of the Chaldean text of the Liturgy of Hours published by Badjan. The English translation of the hymns given here is made by the author of this article.

³⁸ Annunciation-Nativity, Sunday, *Lelya, Tešbohta*, str. 2.

- ³⁹ Annunciation-Nativity, Sunday, *Ramša, Onitha d Qdam*, str. 2.
- ⁴⁰ Annunciation-Nativity, Sunday, *Ramša, Onitha d Qdam*, str.1.
- ⁴¹ Annunciation-Nativity, Sunday, *Lelya, Tešbohta*, str.3.
- ⁴² Annunciation-Nativity, Sunday, *Lelya, Tešbohta*, str.6.
- ⁴³ Annunciation-Nativity, Wednesday, *Sapra, Onitha d Sapra*, str. 2. (De Nat 6/4).
- ⁴⁴ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 36.
- ⁴⁵ Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity* 16:12-13, ET by K.McVey, 150.
- ⁴⁶ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 41.
- ⁴⁷ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 120.
- ⁴⁸ Podipara, P.J., *Mariology of the Church of the East*, OIRSI, Kottayam 1980, 22.
- ⁴⁹ Podipara, P.J., *Mariology of the Church of the East*, 22.
- ⁵⁰ Podipara, P.J., *Mariology of the Church of the East*, OIRSI, Kottayam 1980, 23.
- ⁵¹ Podipara, P.J., *Mariology of the Church of the East*, OIRSI, Kottayam 1980, 23.
- ⁵² Ephrem, *Hymns on Nativity* 14-15, ET by K.McVey, 65.
- ⁵³ Cf. James Puthuparampil, *The Mariological Thoughts of Mar Jacob of Serugh (451-521)*, 249.
- ⁵⁴ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 33.
- ⁵⁵ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 33.
- ⁵⁶ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin*, ET by M. Hansbury, 19.
- ⁵⁷ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Nativity of Our Lord*, ET by T. Kollampampil, 115.
- ⁵⁸ *Sihmo Namaskaram*, translation from the Malayalam version, (Monday morning, Meneolam Part), Tiruvalla 1982, 34.
- ⁵⁹ *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit*, Vol.IV, ET by Francis Acharya, Kottayam, 1986, 662.
- ⁶⁰ Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns* 27: 8 as cited by Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 1994, 57.
- ⁶¹ *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit*, Vol.IV, ET by Francis Acharya, Kottayam, 1986, 663.
- ⁶² Jacob of Serugh, *On the Mother of God*, ET by M. Hansbury 40- 41.
- ⁶³ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of Mary*, ET by M. Hansbury, 90.
- ⁶⁴ Here, we thought of commenting that the topic on “Die Vollerlöste-Mariens Aufnahme in den Himmel und ihre Verherrlichung” in *Maria in der Heilsgeschichte* by L. Scheffczyk and A. Ziegenaus is incomplete, without the mention of Mar Jacob’s description about Mary’s Assumption into heaven, referred to in the homily. In this volume there are 22 pages

which deal with Mary's Assumption and her glory in heaven. Concerning this matter, there is mention from the time of Epiphanius (+ 403) who did not give any information about Mary's death to the Papal Bulla "Munificentissimus Deus", but no reference is made to Mar Jacob who spoke about Mary's glorious entry into heaven. Cf. L. Scheffczyk & A. Ziegenaus, *Maria in der Heilsgeschichte: Katholische Dogmatik*, Vol. V, Aachen 1998, 309-331.

⁶⁵ *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit*, Vol.IV, ET by Francis Acharya, Kottayam 1986, 597.

⁶⁶ On the Mariology based on the Liturgy of Hours in the East Syriac tradition see M. Mullassery, "Mary, the Blessed Virgin Mother, in the East Syriac Liturgy of Hours", *Ephrem's Theological Journal*, 8 (2004) 151-167.

⁶⁷ See Elia, Sleeve, Mose, *Lelya, Onitha d Mautwa*, str.3,4.

⁶⁸ Sauma Rabba, *Wednesday, Sapra, Onitha d Sapra*, str. 2.

⁶⁹ Denha, *Wednesday, Lelya, Onitha d Mautwa* str. 1.

⁷⁰ Denha, *Wednesday, Lelya, Tešbohta*.

⁷¹ *Elijah, Sleeve Mose, Wednesday, Ramša, Onitha d-Qdam*, str.1.

⁷² *Elijah, Sleeve Mose, Wednesday, Lelya, Tešbohta*

⁷³ *Elijah, Sleeve Mose, Wednesday, Ramša, Onitha d-Qdam*, str.1

Catholic Moral Theology from the Eastern and East Syriac Perspectives: Some Preliminary Considerations

Dominic Vechoor

Introduction

Pope John Paul II, promulgating the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* wrote: “The Church by God’s providence, gathered in the one Spirit, breathes as though with two lungs, of the East and of the West, and burns with the love of Christ in one heart, having two ventricles”.¹ This was a historic magisterial recognition of the ecclesial reality of the Eastern and Western traditions in the Catholic communion of Churches, re-iterating the need for a pluralistic approach to theology as against a monolithic approach of cultural universalism and liturgical uniformity. It is an ardent desire of the Church that this Catholic character shall be expressed at all levels of her life and teachings.

In this article, we try to analyse some preliminary considerations with regard to the possible relevance of Eastern and East Syriac moral reflections in Catholic moral theology. If Catholic moral theology is to be genuinely Catholic, it must take into consideration the ecclesial reality of the communion of Churches and the plurality of human cultures. It is right to say that the Christian East contributed much to the theological developments of the early dogmas of faith, liturgy, anthropology, ecclesiology, Church discipline, monasticism, mysticism, spirituality, Mariology, iconography, etc. Therefore it is natural that they would also have their own specific moral thinking. However, the possibility of an Eastern approach to moral theology is a fairly recent theological awareness in the Catholic circle. Among the Catholic moral theologians, it is B. Petrà, who for the first time, has spoken extensively of an Eastern dimension in moral theology.² It is a very positive sign that there is a renewed interest among the scholars of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches to bring out more of the Eastern and Syriac moral perspectives.³ Since an Eastern moral approach is a relatively new

area of study in Catholic moral theology, we may not always find sufficient supporting literature from Catholic authors. We will also be making use of the contributions of well-known theologians of Orthodox Christianity, a rich tradition that is often overlooked by Catholic moralists.

In this study, after making a very brief analysis of the theological possibility of an Eastern approach to Catholic moral theology, we may make an attempt to outline some important general characteristics of the Eastern moral theological reflections. Then we shall concentrate specifically on the East Syriac tradition and its understanding of moral life as contributing to Catholic moral theology.

1. Possibility of an Eastern Approach to Catholic Moral Theology

An Eastern approach to Catholic moral theology is a recent theological development in the post-conciliar period. Referring to the need for a balanced re-integration of Eastern and Western perspectives in moral theology, B. Häring observes: “(In the development of moral theology) after the great schism in the 11th century, the West went its own way and the East remained foreign to the three main influences that shaped modern Catholicism, namely scholasticism, the reformation and sixteenth and eighteenth century rationalism”.⁴ We firmly believe that a better acquaintance with the theological riches of each other will help us to have a holistic appreciation of Catholic moral theology.

1.1. The Theological Basis for an Eastern Moral Approach

The theological considerations that we have so far made lead us naturally to the relevance and urgency of the need to learn from the East in moral theology as well.

1.1.1. Why an Eastern Approach?

The Easterners have their own ‘Christian ways of life’, the ‘ordering of Christian life’ and ‘spiritual patrimony’, as clearly stated in the conciliar and post-conciliar documents.⁵ Canon 28 of the Eastern Code states: “A rite is the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstance of the history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living

the faith is manifested in each Church *sui iuris*". Each individual Church with her own apostolic Christ experience is a particular incarnation of the Church of Christ in a socio-cultural context. Every Church *sui iuris* is born of an encounter between the specificity of the culture and its enrichment, brought by the announcement of the Gospel through a determinate tradition in a particular time and space.⁶

Since Churches *sui iuris* are the expressions of the universal Church in a given socio-cultural context, the ethos⁷ of a particular culture has its theological significance for the ethos of that Church.⁸ Each individual Church lives with the ethos of a specific culture and consequently she will have her 'own manner of living the faith' and specific understanding of the Christian moral life. Since the cultural situation in the East was varied and complex, we may not see a single monolithic form of Christian life among the Eastern Churches. There developed different patterns of ecclesiastical organisation and disciplines in the East (OL 7). If the Church of Christ is a communion of various ecclesial traditions, it is natural that her deposit of faith and morals is to be explained in the light of her different faith traditions and socio-cultural backgrounds.

It is in such a theological background that B. Petrà prophetically speaks of the possibility of an 'ethical' dimension of the Church *sui iuris*.⁹ As he explains, the different cultures have given and are continually giving themselves Christian forms and expressiveness, without losing their own identity but always growing towards a greater humanity and truth. This broadened understanding of 'rite', naturally paves the way for a particular *modus proprius fidei vivendi* or ethos of a Christian community. Commenting on the possibility of pluralistic approaches in moral theology, substantiated by cultural and ecclesial diversities, S. Majorano speaks along these lines in a pertinent way. He says:

The multiplicity and variety of factors, indispensable for a correctness of moral theological reflections and proposals are much emphasised in these years. This has influenced, in a particular manner, the context of moral theological reflections that make it impossible today to speak of a single model of moral theology. The inculturation of faith in diverse human groups brings out the different ecclesial

emphases and specific perspectives within the communion of the universal Church.¹⁰

The observation of B. Häring is also noteworthy. He says: “The Church would be unfaithful to her main mission, if she were to give any one culture, a kind of monopoly in her life, her institutions and moral teachings. She must not even dream of a ‘universal culture’, understood in terms of uniformity, where one culture would swallow up others or impose on others its language, thought patterns, symbols and so on. This would be tantamount to an abominable cultural colonialism”.¹¹ Thus it is clear that there is the possibility of a specific moral vision according to the ethos of each Church *sui iuris*, using the language of its own faith tradition and culture.

1.1.2. Contemporary Understanding

In contemporary theological understanding, there is an opinion that moral theology as a specific branch of theology would be a Latin characteristic and not properly Oriental. Ethics as an independent theological discipline has not been cultivated very much in the East but is seen as an integral part of a holistic theological reflection.¹² Oriental moral theology has not assumed the same systematisation as we see in the Latin tradition. B. Petrà comments on this:

That which could be more properly said is that Oriental moral theology has assumed neither the same systematisation nor the amplitude that it has had in the Latin tradition owing to a different conception of the relationship between the Church and the world, a different penitential praxis, a different role of theology and the magisterium of the Church and finally due to the formidable influence exerted on the form of Occidental knowledge by the idea of science.¹³

Also the different religious and devotional attitudes of the East and the West might have contributed to this. As R. Taft observes:

The Westerner tends to emphasise the moral aspects of the sacramental and spiritual life, the strength received to aid him in his pilgrimage towards the final beatitude. Grace is seen as a principle of meritorious action, restoring to man the capacity for salutary works. The Oriental, however,

sees man more as an imperfect similitude of God, which grace perfects. His life in Christ is a progressive transfiguration into the likeness of God. Less is said of merit, satisfaction, and beatitude than of divinization, transfiguration and the gradual transformation of man into the image of God.¹⁴

The distinctive mark of the Eastern Churches compared to the Western Churches is the substantial difference in the organisation of theological disciplines and the lack of a distinct form of sufficiently organised moral reflection.¹⁵ As E. Farrugia says, ethics in Eastern theology is never a matter of moralisation, isolated from the faith context provided by dogma in the overall context of liturgy.¹⁶ B. Griffith observes: “The Eastern Church has preserved a way of life and thought, which finds expression in its liturgy, which is quite different from the traditions of the West. It knows nothing of scholastic philosophy and theology or of moral theology and casuistry. But it is steeped in the tradition of the Bible, Fathers and the symbolic mode of thought”.¹⁷

1.2. Some General Outlines of the Moral Reflections in the East

We have just analysed the theological possibility of an Eastern approach to moral theology. It is natural that this approach will have some fundamental orientations as well.¹⁸ The moral theological characteristics that we present below are some of the possible deductions that we draw from the general characteristics of the Eastern theological approach.

1.2.1. The Eastern Moral Theology as Theology of the Fathers

Eastern moral reflections are mainly said to be the continuation of the moral thinking of the Fathers. It needs a minimum familiarity with their theological visions, for, the Fathers accompany and penetrate into the whole life of the faithful in the East.¹⁹ The Eastern Churches have jealously guarded the extraordinary riches of the teachings of the Fathers. R. Taft observes: “the East has always retained a unique loyalty to the Fathers, whose vital spirit animates the Eastern piety”.²⁰ As students of moral theology, if we search for a systematic moral thinking among the Fathers, we may sometimes be frustrated. When we study the spiritual and moral concepts of the Fathers, we may not

find in them a systematic moral theological reflection as we understand it today.²¹

Moreover, it was something impossible for them to think of theology in watertight compartments. The Fathers were unaware of the distinction between morality and spirituality that became customary in later periods. They saw divine revelation as a unified whole. Theirs was a synthetic and integral theology. They never separated moral theology from theology proper.²² A healthy integration of the various streams of theology, biblical, liturgical, catechetical, sacramental, dogmatic, moral, canonical, ascetical, spiritual, monastic, etc. are seen in their theology. The Fathers always saw *bios christianos* as a unified entity of which Christ was the centre.²³ S. Pinkaers calls the patristic period ‘the golden age of moral theology’ and proposes the moral teachings of the Fathers, after the scripture, as a primary source for Christian ethics.²⁴ He points out three characteristic features of the moral teaching of the Fathers: the primacy of scripture, interaction with the Greco-Roman culture and a lived-in-spirituality with its thorough ascetic ideals as the high point of Christian ethics.²⁵

1.2.2. The Identity of Moral Life as Life in Christ

The Eastern Churches view Christian moral life as ‘life in Christ’, a life animated by the *Logos*, a life which originates, grows and fulfils itself in the Christification of man, *bios kata ton Logon*.²⁶ The Eastern moral approach presents itself as an organic explication of the moral contents of the different aspects of this ‘life in Christ’.²⁷ It is a mode of being and acting according to the *ethos en Christoi kai kata Christon*. This life in Christ grows through the assimilation of man into Christ and to his gospel ethos, which is the basis of all Christian moral norms. Such a life in Christ is nurtured by the sacraments of the Church, especially by the Eucharist, and manifests itself as a progressive deification of the faithful in the Church by the action of the Holy Spirit.²⁸ It is a life in the Holy Spirit through Christ to the Father. Christian life is always a question of the gradual building up of the *bios* in the *Logos*, that is to say, living according to Christ. Since the moral life of Christians is essentially a life in Christ, Christian ethics is a branch of knowledge whose proper object is ‘life in Christ’.²⁹

Contemporary literature in moral theology, both Catholic and Orthodox, speaks extensively widely of a ‘theology of Christian living’ as a life centred in Christ. This ‘life in Christ’ necessarily includes also its trinitarian and pneumatological dimensions. We should also not forget that this life in Christ has its ecclesial dimensions as well. The Christian moral life is not merely an ‘individualistic ethics’ but an ‘ecclesial experience of the life of faith’.³⁰

1.2.3. A Unified Vision of the Sources of Moral Theology

A unified vision of theology is primarily an Eastern characteristic, while compartmentalisation is that of the West. J. Meyendorff observes: “a tendency to compartmentalise, to establish borders between knowledge and spiritual experience, between doctrine and mystical vision, is seen in the Western world, in spite of all its genius”.³¹ Eastern theology, developed by the Greek and Syriac Fathers, in general is committed to preserving the whole of tradition as guided by the Holy Spirit, recorded in the Bible, taught especially by the general councils and celebrated in worship and icons.³²

Since the Christian life is a ‘life in Christ’, moral considerations emerge from all contexts and forms of Christian experience and expressions of faith: from the commentaries of Sacred Scripture, collections or anthologies of patristic texts, from the canons of councils and synods, from theological and apologetical works, apothegmas of the spiritual masters of the desert, monastic rules, the spiritual writings of the Fathers, from the icons, hagiographic narrations as well as from the liturgical texts.³³ Moral considerations are found in the entire living tradition of the Church, in which Scripture is also lived and interpreted, in the faith and life of the Fathers of the Church and in the liturgical life of the whole church.³⁴

Such a unified vision of the sources of moral reflections is especially seen in Orthodox moral theology.³⁵ Commenting on Byzantine theology, J. Meyendorff says:

Actually one can hardly find in the entire religious literature of Byzantium, any systematic treatment of Christian Ethics or behaviour but rather innumerable examples of moral exegesis of scripture and ascetical

treatises on prayer and spirituality. This implies that Byzantine ethics were eminently 'theological ethics'. The basic affirmation that every man, whether Christian or not, is created according to the image of God and therefore called to divine communion and deification was of course recognised but no attempt was ever made to build a secular (rational) ethics for man in general.³⁶

A unified vision of the sources of moral theology is gaining importance in Catholic circles as well. In theological studies, Vatican II calls for a unified vision of the sources of theology (OT, 16; GS, 5, 46, 62). In the words of B. Häring, 'the reintegration of dogmatic theology and moral theology' or 'the oneness of theology' would be one of the best means for our own integration and for the reintegration of the different parts of Christianity in the one Church.³⁷

This unified vision of moral theology, we hope, is also in full conformity with the Indian thought. The Sanskrit rendering of ethics is interesting and illuminative.³⁸ There are two terms generally employed to mean ethics. They are *dharmasâstras* and *nitisâstras*. The term *dharma* comes from the Sanskrit root *dhr* meaning 'that which holds together' or 'that which supports'. The word *niti* comes from the root word in Sanskrit *ni* meaning 'to lead'. *Sâstra* means 'science'. Therefore ethics is that science which holds people together and that which leads people to their destination. We firmly believe that only a holistic approach to God, man and cosmos paves the right way for an authentic moral theology in its full sense.

1.2.4. The Liturgico-Sacramental Character of the Moral Life

The liturgico-sacramental character of the moral life is also an essential characteristic of the Eastern tradition.³⁹ The profound unity that exists between sacraments and moral life is now generally accepted by all. The Christian moral life, namely, life in Christ, is born of and nurtured by the mysteries (sacraments) of the Church especially by the divine liturgy, in which 'life in Christ' manifests itself as a progressive 'deification' of the faithful by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the East, liturgy is perceived as the most important means for the realisation of this divinisation. Being sanctified by the sacraments and prayer, in the liturgical

celebrations of the Church, the faithful celebrates his Christian faith and moral life.⁴⁰ In other words, liturgy is the expression and celebration of Christian moral living in the concrete context of day-to-day life, which is the fountain and summit of the Church's activities and Christian life (SC, 9-10; VS, 21; CCC, 2031).

Besides, each liturgical celebration of the Church is also a 'moral catechesis' to the life of faith for the faithful. It has also a pedagogical value in forming the moral conscience of the faithful through its signs and symbols. Vatican II very strongly reminds us of the educative and pastoral nature of the liturgical celebrations (SC, 33-35). The Christian moral life is understood more explicitly in the context of the Christian community and in its liturgy with its formative narratives of salvation history.⁴¹ Worship and the moral life are not two distinct realities but are closely interrelated.

Hence there is a liturgical foundation for the Christian moral life and there exists a 'sacramental ethos', a Christian responsibility to the salvific initiative of God. As says B. Petrà, "the truths of moral life is ultimately a cultural and liturgical truth: man fulfils the full sense of his vocation when he does the priestly action through which every thing, every space, every time is led again to the form and truth of the kingdom of God, which is an eternal celebration of the glories of God the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".⁴² Liturgy is the paradigm of Christian identity and commitment. It is in such a context that C. Aerath speaks of liturgy as the post-figurative, pre-figurative and co-figurative ethos of the people of God.⁴³ The Christian tradition has long expressed the profound relationship between prayer/liturgy and belief/theology in terms of the normative principle *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: the law of prayer establishes the law of faith and vice versa. Hence we can say that liturgy is the fulcrum around which the whole Christian moral life moves. Thus the traditional principle of theology could also be further expanded to include the *lex vivendi*; thus we can say *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*.

1.2.5. The Anthropological Basis of Moral Notions

Eastern moral theology strives to identify itself with the ontology of salvation and the personalisation of man into Christ and therefore naturally endeavours to converge decisively with anthropology as well. Its moral theological reflections present

various dogmatic and anthropological presuppositions of life in Christ, the central idea of which is the concept of man as ‘icon of the Icon’ (OL, 15), as created in the image of Christ, who is the perfect image of God.⁴⁴ Eastern theology understands moral life in terms of the image of God. Being moral means to be conformed to the image and likeness of God.⁴⁵

An holistic and medicinal approach to man and his salvation is also a dominant theme in Eastern anthropology and moral theology.⁴⁶ The history of salvation is understood as a gradual process of healing, an ongoing act of divinisation. It is a progressive therapeutic process, a restorative action realised by Christ, the divine physician of body and soul.⁴⁷ It is a gradual becoming aware of the dignity of our own human existence as the living image of God, a gradual spiritualization of both body and soul. Salvation is the integral reconstruction of man into the harmony of being.⁴⁸ Thus, for the Eastern way of thinking, the process of salvation is a gradual therapeutic and divinising process, animated and guided by the Holy Spirit in the ecclesial and liturgical context.

The deification of man (*theosis*) is also a key concept in Eastern anthropology and moral theology.⁴⁹ It is the purpose of life in Christ. Each and every human being is called by God to a life in Christ, to a life of communion with the Triune God and to a participation in the divine life. Man as the moral subject of the call of God, responds personally and freely to this call in the very context of his life. Already created in the image and likeness of God, we are called by grace to share in the divine life, to become God-like. *Theosis* is participation in the divine life by the action of the Holy Spirit, making us similar to him. In other words, he deifies us. God makes us partners in his very life. *Theosis* is living the image of God, by avoiding evil and doing good. Here man becomes transformed in God.⁵⁰

1.2.6. Ecclesiastical Economy (oikonomia) as a Moral Attitude of the Eastern Mind

This is also an important notion in Eastern theology, especially in the moral, canonical and pastoral praxis. Etymologically, it is derived from the Greek term, *oikonomia*, which means ‘house law’ or ‘house management’.⁵¹ This term in

general denotes the sum total of God's saving plan for humankind, revealed through creation and above all through the redemption, effected in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (Eph 1. 10; 3. 9). In Eastern theology, it also denotes the concessions to human weaknesses made by the Church, which in particular cases dispenses the faithful from the strict observance of the canonical prescriptions.⁵²

The attitude of *oikonomia* is not something exceptional or extraordinary in nature but an attitude which regulates the conduct of Church members and ministers. In view of the greater good of the faithful and without increasing the evil, the pastor is called to look at the moral norms and human frailties. B. Petrà explains ecclesiastical economy as 'a virtuous habit, that attitude of prudence and measure, which shrinks from excess, namely from the oblivion of reality and from the forgetfulness of truth, as well as tending to come close to the ideal, as far as possible within the limits of a reality, marked by sin'.⁵³ He relates the origin of this term to classical Greek and to the Greek Fathers and especially to the Byzantine culture. He speaks of two possible meanings of the term *oikonomia*: i. theological: the whole salvific plan of God, fulfilled in Christ ii. ecclesiastical: the canonical approach of condescendence and mercy which is different from that of *akribeia* that denotes precision and rigour in the application of punishments.⁵⁴ E. Farrugia calls this *oikonomia* 'a practico-pastoral sense of Christian balance and a model for resolving ethical issues'.⁵⁵ M. Arranz defines *oikonomia* as an 'application of the canons together with a pastoral prudence'.⁵⁶

Far from an arbitrary application of the law, *oikonomia* seeks to imitate the concrete and condescending love of God for man.⁵⁷ The Greek terms *akribeia* and *oikonomia* summarise the spirit of Eastern Canon Law and pastoral praxis. Speaking about the ethical relevance of ecclesiastical economy, B. Petrà argues for a healthy balance between *akribeia* and *oikonomia*.⁵⁸ It is a difficult task to measure rightly the concrete reality and the ideal vision, the real possibility and the ideal norm, the wounded man and the ideal of perfect health. However it is an art of mercy and of divine condescendence. It is only in such a theological and anthropological background that ecclesiastical economy has any ethical significance.⁵⁹ S. Harakas points out the profound sense of

the fallen nature of man and the compassion and love of God as important characteristics of the Oriental ethos.⁶⁰ The healing dimension of the sacrament of repentance, seen clearly in the Eastern traditions, constitutes a particular application of Oriental ecclesiastical economy.⁶¹ Therefore it is true to say that the ethical reflections in the East are more familial than juridical or legal in character. Hence we see in the East a love based ethics rather than a law based morality and this, we understand, is more faithful to the spirit of the Sacred Scripture.

2. The Moral Vision of the East Syriac Tradition: A Paradigm for an Eastern Approach to Catholic Moral Theology

After having made a general presentation of the relevance and characteristic features of Eastern moral thinking, we now concentrate on the East Syriac tradition proper. Here we discuss some pertinent features of its moral theological reflections. As was common in the early Christian tradition, so also among the Syriac Christians there was hardly any possibility of having developed concepts of morality as we think of them today. They were in a different cultural and theological milieu. However we see several moral instructions and counsels, linked to biblical exegesis and liturgical commentaries. More moral theological terms can be found in the later Syriac writers like Philoxenos of Mabbug (+523), Bar Salibi (12th century), Bar Hebraeus (+1286), ‘Abdišo‘ (+1318), Timothy II (+1332), etc. owing to the gradual influence of Greek thinking and scholastic theology upon Syriac theology.⁶²

2.1. The East Syriac Understanding of the Christian Moral Life

Syriac Christianity was born and brought up in a community that placed great values on religious life and morality. The religious background of the Semitic and Mesopotamian worlds might have paved the way for the high religious values, seen in Syriac Christianity. P. Harb speaks of a gradual development of moral notions in the Syriac tradition.⁶³ The early Syriac Churches also saw the Christian life as a unified whole, as is common in other Eastern traditions. There was less classification and compartmentalisation. The dogmatic, spiritual, ascetical, canonical, moral or liturgical aspects of the Christian life are all interwoven in the one reality of life in Christ, Christ being its centre. Besides the

general characteristics of the Eastern moral approaches that we have already seen briefly, we now speak of some of the characteristic features of Christian life in the Syriac tradition.

2.1.1. Imageries of Christian Baptismal Life

Syriac Churches have a rich theology of baptism. Syriac Fathers usually combine both the Johannine vision of baptism as a rebirth and its Pauline symbolism of death and resurrection, thus providing a very rich understanding of the meaning of baptism. In the earliest texts, more prominence was given to the Johannine perspective and it is only from the late fourth century onwards that the Pauline perspective was given greater emphasis.⁶⁴ Expressions like baptism ‘washes away man’s sins and transgressions’, ‘remits the sins’, ‘heals man’s wounds’, ‘conveys the Holy Spirit’, ‘rejuvenates humankind’, ‘renews the lost image’, ‘makes us spiritual’, ‘heals our inner disease’, etc. could frequently be seen in the early Syriac writings.⁶⁵

The Syriac tradition sees Christian baptismal life as a holy life, a life of betrothal to Christ. Aphrahat calls baptism ‘a true interior circumcision’ and a ‘betrothal to Christ, the heavenly bridegroom’.⁶⁶ St. Ephrem sees baptism as a ‘re-entry into or recovery of the lost Paradise’ and as a ‘betrothal to Christ’.⁶⁷ In Christian baptism, the Christian himself goes down into the Jordan waters and from there he picks up and puts on the robe of glory,⁶⁸ which Christ regained for us through his descent into the ‘womb of the Jordan’.⁶⁹ The robe of glory is regained in potential but not yet fully in reality, for, this will occur at the end of time, in the resurrection. This final reality can, to some extent, be anticipated in this life by the saints, who preserve their baptismal robe unspotted (Mt, 22: 1-14).⁷⁰ At baptism, each Christian is betrothed to Christ, the heavenly bridegroom, the soul becoming the bride of Christ and the body, the bridal chamber.⁷¹

Christian baptismal life is understood as a pure and holy life.⁷² The notion of holiness in the East Syriac tradition includes the aspects of a ‘union’ and a separation, union being man’s nearness to or intimacy with God and separation, man’s disposition of getting away from unholy life.⁷³ The baptismal state of life is compared to life in Paradise, the life of the angels (*bios angelikos*) and to the resurrection life.⁷⁴ Among the Syriac writers, we also see

plentifully the imagery of the Church as ‘the new Israel’, ‘the holy nation’, ‘the holy people of God’, ‘new people of God’, ‘new wine trees planted in the vineyard of God’.⁷⁵ Christian life is also seen, as a spiritual battle, a common imagery seen in the Syriac tradition.⁷⁶ This idea is mostly seen in the *Demonstrations* of Aphrahat, in the context of the ‘sons and daughters of the covenant’.⁷⁷

Also the East Syriac tradition understands Christian life as a life in Christ. It is very interesting to note Aphrahat’s description of faith, seen in his *Demonstration on Faith*. Inspired by 1Cor, 3: 11, he compares Christian faith to an edifice or building, which is being built up into perfection through various pieces of good works, while its foundation is placed on the firm rock, which is Christ. Christ is not only the foundation but also the indweller of the building. A person who becomes a dwelling place for Christ must see to what is fitting to the service of Christ. Aphrahat gives a long list of deeds of faith such as charity, purity, fasting, prayer, humility, moderation, patience, alms, penance, etc. which will please the dweller. He enumerates also the deeds that are contrary to the faith such as observance of hours, consultation of oracles, astrology and magic, fornication, vain doctrines, blasphemy, adultery, false witness, etc. Accordingly Aphrahat understands sin as a denial of faith.⁷⁸

2.1.2. Purity of Heart as the Basic Virtue

The heart in Semitic thought is the principle of human integration. It sustains the energy of all the forces of body and soul. It is the source of human acts.⁷⁹ The Syriac tradition inherited this biblical understanding of the heart as the spiritual centre of the human person. It is the focal point of the intellect, will as well as of the feelings. Accordingly there is no dichotomy between heart and mind as we often find in other Christian traditions.⁸⁰

The imagery of the heart as the ‘bridal chamber’ is frequently seen in the Syriac tradition.⁸¹ St. Ephrem speaks of a ‘circumcised heart’ and a ‘bridal chamber of the heart’. Ephrem says, “With a circumcised heart, uncircumcision becomes holy; in the bridal chamber of such a person’s heart, the creator resides”.⁸² Each Christian is a bride of Christ. At baptism each individual soul is betrothed to Christ the bridegroom (Jn 3. 29; Mt 9. 15; Mt 22. 1-

14; Mt 25. 1-13), his heart being the bridal chamber and each celebration of the Qurbana, a wedding feast. St. Ephrem writes: “The soul is your bride, the body your bridal chamber. Your guests are the senses and thoughts. And if a single body is a wedding feast for you, how great is your banquet for the whole Church”.⁸³

The Syriac Churches greatly emphasise ‘purity of the heart’ (ܟܠ ܕܠܒܒܐ *šapiût lebbâ*) with a broad shade of meanings such as limpidity, lucidity, luminosity, clarity, purity, cleanness, straightness, transparency, serenity, or sincerity of heart.⁸⁴ The *Odes of Solomon* qualifies purity of heart as a basic Christian virtue.⁸⁵ In the *Acts of Thomas*, purity of heart is described as the only recompense for miracles of healing.⁸⁶ Aphrahat recalls to mind that purity of heart is prayer and it is necessary so that fasting is accepted.⁸⁷ Purity of heart is one of the attributes of the paradisiacal state and so its attainment is part of the continual quest in the life of the Christian to effect the reality of re-entry into Paradise, granted in potential at baptism.⁸⁸ The expressions ‘purity of heart’, ‘pure heart’, ‘pure thoughts’, etc. are seen several times in the liturgical prayers of the Syriac Churches.⁸⁹

The interior liturgical role of the heart is also emphasised in Syriac literature. Some of the Syriac writings speak of an ‘inner altar’ of the ‘hidden Church of the heart’. For example, *Liber Graduum*, a late 4th century or early 5th century anonymous Syriac work, in its chapter XII discusses the three altars of the ‘Church visible, hidden and heavenly’. The interior altar needs to function in harmony with the visible altar of the visible Church and with the heavenly altar of the heavenly Church. The heart is the hidden altar, inside the sanctuary, constituted of the body and on this altar, the interior offering of prayer is being continuously made.⁹⁰

Syriac tradition also speaks of ‘interior virginity’, the virginity of the free will, as important as or even more important than physical virginity. The spiritual value of the exterior aspect of virginity, morally neutral in itself, depends on the interior aspect of chastity of heart and on the aspect of virginity as a state of betrothal to Christ the heavenly bridegroom.⁹¹ The possibility of betrothal to Christ is not confined to religious alone, even though the imagery could be exploited to its fullest with them. As we have already seen, every Christian is a bride of Christ, the bridegroom,

betrothed to him at baptism and his body and heart, the bridal chamber.

2.1.3. Ascetical Life Style

Early Syriac Christianity in all its manifestations was based on strong ascetical tendencies, known especially for its enthusiasm for virginity.⁹² Asceticism was a dominant feature of Christian life in the Syriac tradition and was a powerhouse for the flourishing of the ecclesial life.⁹³ Research studies copiously done on this dimension of the Syriac tradition unanimously confirm this fact.⁹⁴ As R. Murray says, no other characteristics are likely to strike a modern reader more immediately than its asceticism, moderate or extreme, dominating or at least colouring almost all the literature.⁹⁵ After having made a detailed study of the various forces and structures in the development of early Syriac theology, H. J. W. Drijvers observes: “They have one thing in common: a strong emphasis on asceticism, the command of the body and its passions in order to create room for the divine spirit, truth and wisdom.”⁹⁶

As we have just seen, the early Syriac tradition has inherited a more genuine Semitic thinking. Hence some of the characteristics of the Semitic mind could naturally be seen in Syriac theology. One important aspect among them is the ascetical life style, which is widely seen in Semitic culture and in Judeo-Christian theology. The early Christians of the Syriac world were probably familiar with the various ascetical trends seen in later Judaism and among different groups like the Essene communities of Qumran, the Manicheans, Gnostics, Encratites, etc. Here the observation of K. McVey is worth mentioning. She says:

Certainly one fact agreed upon by scholars is that early Syriac Christianity in all its manifestations, seems to have been based on strong ascetical tendencies. It was this same asceticism that underlies the Encratism of Tatian, the asceticism of Mani and the absolute sexual renunciation demanded by the *Acts of Thomas*. This ascetic tendency affected not only the fringe sects but also exerted a strong influence on the mainline community. It is in this nebulous period at the beginning of the fourth century that the figure of St. Ephrem appears.⁹⁷

An ascetical life style is always suggested as the means for a holy life. The free will of man is a strong theme in the Syriac theology.⁹⁸ Syriac theologians very often speak of the need of discipline of the body and heart, self-control, modesty and temperance. This is very clear in Ephrem when he speaks about the power of human freedom in correcting the perverted will,⁹⁹ in dominating the lust of sensual pleasures¹⁰⁰ and in overcoming Satan, evil and destiny.¹⁰¹ The regaining of the original state of harmony through the right use of mind and will and through various ascetical practices is frequently seen in Syriac literature. H. J. W. Drijvers testifies, “The doctrine of the free will of man which can control all his passions and guide his body is an essential part of all forms of theology in the Syrian area, however different these may be”.¹⁰²

Speaking about the spirituality of Syriac speaking Christians, R. C. Bondi points to a kind of strong individualism and primitive asceticism of the Early Syriac period.¹⁰³ However this individualism did not always have to do with mere personal religious experience but was to assume a special responsibility for society.¹⁰⁴ So also the rude and severe asceticism of the early period later turned to a moderate practice to bring it in line with the Christian affirmation of the goodness of creation. Syriac asceticism was not merely negative but positive. S. Brock observes:

Far from being the outcome of a dualistic worldview and a negative attitude to the body, these ascetic ideals in fact imply a very biblical and positive attitude towards the human person as body cum soul, with great value attached to the sanctity of the body and emphasis laid on the interpenetration of the physical and spiritual worlds... Marriage was equally seen as a state whose truly sacred character was something which wife and husband should constantly strive to establish. Moreover it is important to remember that those who chose the life of virginity here on earth were by no means rejecting marriage as something inferior but only postponing it to the eschaton when the wedding feast with Christ the bridegroom would take place, for at baptism the soul had been betrothed to Christ.¹⁰⁵

Thus Ephrem was far removed from the dualistic tendencies that sought to denigrate the value of the human body. The starting point for his own positive attitude was the fact that the body is part of God's creation and should not be despised. There is nothing unclean or unworthy about the human body because it is the temple of the Triune God; besides, God 'puts on our body' and allows his own body and blood (the Holy Eucharist) to be consumed by human bodies. For him, body and soul are equally important and the body provides the bridal chamber, where the bride, the soul, meets Christ, the heavenly bridegroom.¹⁰⁶

It is true that Aphrahat and Ephrem praised and appreciated marriage but since their enthusiasm was for ascetical celibacy and renunciation of marital sexual relation, we see in them generally a preference for virginity over marriage.¹⁰⁷ Both Aphrahat and Ephrem speak very highly of 'virginity' (ܒܬܘܠܘܬܐ *btuluta*) and 'holiness' (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ *qadišutâ*). This has led some modern scholars to suppose that they held a very low view of sexuality and marriage. S. Brock argues that this interpretation is extremely misguided and finds no support in what Aphrahat and Ephrem actually say. For them, the ideals of virginity and holiness were 'periods of preparation' (Ex, 19: 9-15; Gen, 7-8) and this provides a pointer to one of the main motivating forces which led people to undertake these ascetic views at baptism, namely, the concept of Christ as the heavenly bridegroom. This ideal of virginity was seen as a concomitant of betrothal to the heavenly bridegroom to serve him with 'single mindedness' of life.¹⁰⁸

As R. Murray says the ascetical life style of the Syriac Churches reflects the eschatological character of the Christian life, the passionate longing for the 'heavenly bridegroom and heavenly bridal chamber' that had characterised most of the Judeo-Christian literature. The Church looks for fulfilment in the eschatological kingdom or Paradise.¹⁰⁹ This eschatological and paschal orientation is especially clear in the Oriental tradition.¹¹⁰ The very outlook of a Christian is eschatological, looking forward to the second coming of Jesus. The eastern and the early Christian tradition of praying facing the East and the liturgical posture of standing that manifests the pilgrim character of the people of God, show the eschatological orientation of Christian life.

2.1.4. Sacramental Character of the Created World

Syriac theology expresses a profound awareness of the sacramental character of the created world and of the potential of everything in it to act as witnesses and pointers to the creator. In the *Hymns on Paradise*, Ephrem speaks of the natural world as standing side by side with scripture as a witness to God (5. 2; 6. 1). In the *Hymns on Virginity*, he says that the music of the revelation of Christ is played on three harps; the OT, the NT and nature (27-30). Nature and the Bible testify to God by means of the symbols and types, which they contain (HVirg 20. 12).

Nothing in the universe stands in isolation. St. Ephrem considers the universe as a *totum* and *continuum*. By demonstrating the inherent interconnectedness within the humanity, within the creation and between the material and spiritual worlds, St. Ephrem is different from those Christian writers who, usually under neo-platonic influence, tend to denigrate the value of the material world. According to him, it is moral evil, which is the misuse of free will on man's part that disturbs cosmic order and harmony. On the other hand, the exercise of human justice through right choices of free will and through the right use of creation brings harmony and order to creation and to society.

Thus man's attitude to and use of the natural world, which are to be governed by the right exercise of free will, is of fundamental importance for St. Ephrem. For him, the right attitude and response to nature and its resources are essentially one of wonder, admiration, adoration, love, respect and gratitude, whereas the wrong response will be one of greed, lust, contempt and arrogance. The right response, moreover, will always be coupled with the awareness of the divine that is inherent in the natural world as in scripture, so that the inner eye of faith can use it as a vehicle for a deeper understanding of the spiritual realities. The sacramental vision of Syriac theology on the cosmos proposes a sound theology on ecology, which is a widely discussed theme in contemporary moral theology.¹¹¹ Besides, the aesthetic dimension has become one of the characteristic features of post-modern culture.

2.1.5. Healing Imageries Related to the Christian life

In the early East Syriac tradition, we see a beautiful galaxy of rich biblical and theological imageries. Most important among them is that of healing.¹¹² The Syriac Fathers speak of the healing imagery in a multifarious sense, relating it to the various aspects of salvation history and Christian life such as revelation, faith, scripture, nature, baptism, the Holy Eucharist, prayer, moral laws and commandments, repentance, penitential acts like fasting and alms-giving, practice of virtues like purity of heart, humility, etc.¹¹³

Amidst the various healing imageries, the healing imagery of repentance and forgiveness of sins is very particular in the Syriac tradition. In the Syriac patristic view, we see a thoroughly biblical view of sin and forgiveness. Instead of a juridical conceptual model, which tends to dominate the Western tradition, the Syriac writers prefer to use a medical conceptual model, where sin is seen more as a wound or a state of sickness that is in need of healing; the medicine which can effect this healing is repentance and penitence. Christ the good physician of souls has transmitted the healing power of forgiveness in the Church to his apostles and to the priests after them. This healing is experienced in a special way in the sacrament of repentance. The emphasis on Christ as the healer is of particular significance for the early Syriac understanding of penance.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

We have been trying to bring out the possible theological relevance of the Eastern and East Syriac approaches to Catholic moral theology. Since the Church of Christ manifests herself equally in her Eastern and Western traditions, we need to appreciate the theological genius and wisdom of both East and West. Such a theological attitude leaves space for an Eastern approach to moral theology as well. Just as the East has made unique contributions to the various areas of theology, we see that it has a unique moral approach and thinking as well. This is an area in which more theological studies are to come forward. We have analysed some of the important characteristics of the Eastern moral approach. Then we have concentrated on the East Syriac tradition, one of the three streams of theology in the Christian tradition. We have seen some of its pertinent characteristics and unique concepts

of the Christian moral life. The hidden pearls of the East Syriac moral theological reflections are to be re-discovered still further.

The Semitic roots and Hellenistic growth of Christianity are undeniable facts. Together with the Greek and Latin traditions, the Syriac Orient also shares the Hellenistic aspect. However the Semitic dimension is a unique prerogative of the early Syriac period. It does not mean that the Syriac, Greek and Latin traditions are rivals, each contending for primacy; rather we should understand each tradition as complementing the others. All too often in the past, one tradition has tried to dominate the others, thus creating a serious imbalance and impoverishment of the Christian tradition. Each tradition needs to recognise the value of other traditions and thus be enriched by them. Needless to say, the coming together of Western and Eastern traditions should result in the enrichment of both traditions, rather than the dominion of the one at the expense of the other.

Notes

¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones*, 18 October 1990, AAS 82 (1990), 1033-1044. For details see, B. Petrà, "Church with 'Two Lungs': Adventures of a Metaphor", *Ephrem's Theological Journal* 6 (2002), 111-127.

² He has provided a considerably wide theological literature in support of his argument. For details, see B. Petrà, *Tra cielo e terra: Introduzione alla teologia morale ortodossa contemporanea*, Bologna 1992; "La teologia morale ortodossa oggi", *Ostkirchliche Studien* 42 (1993), 188-197; "L'Etica cristiana nella prospettiva della teologia ortodossa", *Rivista di Teologia Morale* 26 (1994), 239-246; "Ethik in den Ostkirchen", *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche* III, ed. W. Kasper, Freiburg 1995, 932-934; "Church *sui iuris*, Ethos and Moral Theology" in *Church and Its Most Basic Element*, ed. P. Pallath, Rome 1995, 161-178; "Moral Theology in the Orthodox Tradition", *Ephrem's Theological Journal* 2 (1998), 12-24; *La Chiesa dei padri: Breve introduzione all'ortodossia*, Bologna 1998; "Teologia morale", "Teologia morale: identità, fonti e principi", *Teologia morale: problemi odierni* in *Dizionario Enciclopedico dell'Oriente Cristiano*, ed. E. Farrugia, Roma 2000, 752-755.

³ Cf. S. Kanniyakonil, "The Ethical Perspectives of the Eastern Churches", *Christian Orient* 21 (2000), 103-115; S. Kanniyakonil, ed. *Ethical Perspectives of the Eastern Churches*, Changanachery 2004.

⁴ B. Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ* II, Sydney 1980, 318.

⁵ LG, 23; OE, 1-3, 6; UR, 14-17; *Oriente Lumen*, 5-6.

⁶ B. Petrà, “Church *sui iuris*, Ethos and Moral Theology”, 164-165.

⁷ For a good understanding of the different meanings of ethos see C. Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos: A Study Based on Malankara Liturgy of Marriage*, Rome 1995, 8-52.

⁸ Cf. M. Kadavil, “Cultural Foundations of Eastern Ethics” in *Ethical Perspectives of the Eastern Churches*, ed. S. Kanniyakonil, Changanachery 2004, 105-118.

⁹ B. Petrà, “Church *sui iuris*, Ethos and Moral Theology”, 161-178.

¹⁰ S. Majorano, “Il teologo moralista oggi”, *Studia Moralia* 33 (1995), 21-22.

¹¹ B. Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ III*, Sydney 1981, 221.

¹² B. Petrà, “Church *sui iuris*, Ethos and Moral Theology”, 175.

¹³ B. Petrà, “Church *Sui Iuris*, Ethos and Moral Theology”, 176.

¹⁴ R. Taft, *Eastern Rite Catholicism: Its Heritage and Vocation*, New York 1963, 13.

¹⁵ B. Petrà, “Moral Theology in the Orthodox Tradition”, 12-21.

¹⁶ E. Farrugia, “Christianity as a Society of Mourners: Introducing Eastern Theology” in *Catholic Eastern Churches. Heritage and Identity*, ed. P. Pallath, Rome 1994, 72. See also S. Harakas, *Health and Medicine in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, Minneapolis 1996, 12-21.

¹⁷ B. Griffiths, *Christ in India: Essays towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, Bangalore 1986, 53.

¹⁸ See also S. Kanniyakonil, “Towards an Eastern Christian Ethics” in *Ethical Perspectives of the Eastern Churches*, ed. S. Kanniyakonil, Changanachery 2004, 20-32.

¹⁹ B. Petrà, *La Chiesa dei padri*, 23-47.

²⁰ R. Taft, *Eastern Rite Catholicism: Its Heritage and Vocation*, 15.

²¹ T. O’connell, *Principles of Catholic Morality*, New York 1990, 12.

²² D. Bohr, *Catholic Moral Tradition*, Indiana 1999, 58-59; T. Koonammackal, “Patristic Foundations of Eastern Ethics” in *Ethical Perspectives of the Eastern Churches*, ed. S. Kanniyakonil, Changanachery 2004, 54-75.

²³ S. Pinkaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Edinburgh 1995, 206. See also, S. Raponi, *Alla scuola dei padri: Tra Cristologia, antropologia e comportamento morale*, Roma 1998, 9-67, 257-279.

²⁴ S. Pinkaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 207-208.

²⁵ S. Pinkaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 199-207.

²⁶ B. Petrà, “Moral Theology in the Orthodox Tradition”, 13.

- ²⁷ B. Petrà, “Teologia morale: identità, fonti e principi”, 753.
- ²⁸ B. Petrà, “Teologia morale e scienze liturgiche”, in *Liturgia: Itinerari di ricerca, scienza liturgica e discipline teologiche in dialogo*, Roma 1997, 363. B. Häring also refers to this Eastern orientation in his *Free and Faithful in Christ II*, 318-319.
- ²⁹ B. Petrà, “Moral Theology in the Orthodox Tradition”, 18.
- ³⁰ K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, New York 2000, 389-431; S. De Guidi, “Per una fondazione ecclesiologica dell’etica” in *Corso di Morale IV*, ed. T. Goffi & G. Piana, Brescia 1994, 407-674; R. R. Gaillardetz. “The Church as Sacrament: Towards an Ecclesial Spirituality”, *The Way Supplement* 94 (1995), 22-34.
- ³¹ J. Meyendorff, “*Theosis* in the Eastern Tradition” in *Christian Spirituality III: Post Reformation and Modern*, ed. L. Dupré & D. E. Saliers, New York 1989, 470.
- ³² G. O’collins & E. Farrugia, eds. *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, Edinburgh 1997, 61.
- ³³ B. Petrà, “Moral theology in the Orthodox Tradition”, 14-15.
- ³⁴ B. Petrà, “Teologia morale: identità, fonti e principi”, 754.
- ³⁵ For a detailed study and bibliography see, B. Petrà, *Tra cielo e la terra*, 36-42, 49-66, 263-280.
- ³⁶ J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, London 1983, 226. See also B. Petrà, “L’Etica nella teologia bizantina, tentativo di una sintesi” in *Orientalium dignitas: Atti del simposio commemorativo della lettera apostolica di Papa Leone XIII*, 2-4 Novembre, 1994, ed. Lazio Orosz (1995), 75-81.
- ³⁷ B. Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ II*, 317-318.
- ³⁸ M. Monier Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Delhi 1970, 510-513, 565; P. Kochappilly, “Christ-centred Ethics and the Celebration of the Divine Liturgy”, *Ephrem’s Theological Journal* 3 (1999), 99-125.
- ³⁹ B. Petrà, “Teologia morale e scienze liturgiche”, 366.
- ⁴⁰ For details see C. Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 53-100.
- ⁴¹ M. O’keefe, *Becoming Good and Becoming Holy: On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality*, New York 1995, 16.
- ⁴² B. Petrà, “Teologia morale e scienze liturgiche”, 366.
- ⁴³ C. Aerath, *Liturgy and Ethos*, 77-100.
- ⁴⁴ B. Petrà, “Teologia morale: identità, fonti e principi”, 753; *La Chiesa dei padri*, 49-54.

- ⁴⁵ S. Harakas, *Towards a Transfigured Life: The Theoria of Eastern Orthodox Ethics*, Minneapolis 1983, 179-211.
- ⁴⁶ B. Petrà, “Le Chiese d’Oriente e la salute globale dell’uomo” in *Medicina e spiritualità, un rapporto antico e moderno per la cura della persona*, ed. G. Cinà, Torino 1998, 113-124.
- ⁴⁷ B. Petrà, “Le Chiese d’Oriente e la salute globale dell’uomo”, 114.
- ⁴⁸ B. Petrà, “Le Chiese d’Oriente e la salute globale dell’uomo”, 118.
- ⁴⁹ B. Petra, *La Chiesa dei padri*, 49-66.
- ⁵⁰ S. Harakas, *Towards a Transfigured Life*, 229-271.
- ⁵¹ Its Syriac equivalent would be *m’dabrânûtâ*. For a detailed theological analysis of the Syriac word see J. Chittilappilly, *M’dabrânûtâ, The Divine Dispensation of Our Lord in the Holy Qurbana of the East Syrian Tradition: A Liturgico-Theological Study*, Kottayam 1999.
- ⁵² G. O’Collins & E. Faruggia, eds. *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, Edinburgh 1997, 63.
- ⁵³ B. Petrà, “Moral theology in the Orthodox Tradition”, 22-23.
- ⁵⁴ For a detailed study see his *Tra cielo e la terra*, 105-135, 271-274.
- ⁵⁵ E. Farrugia, “Christianity as a Society of Mourners: Introducing Eastern Theology”, 73.
- ⁵⁶ M. Arranz, *Penitenza bizantina*, PIO, Roma 1999, 15.
- ⁵⁷ E. Farrugia, *Inroduzione alla teologia Orientale: Sussidio per la scuola*, Roma 1997, 23; J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Theological Themes*, 111.
- ⁵⁸ B. Petrà, *Tra cielo e la terra*, 131.
- ⁵⁹ B. Petrà, *Tra cielo e la terra*, 132-134.
- ⁶⁰ S. Harakas, *Health and Medicine in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, 15-18.
- ⁶¹ B. Petrà, “La prassi penitenziale nelle chiese Orientali”, *Credere Oggi* 16 (1996), 77.
- ⁶² S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, Kottayam 1989, 16-17, 36.
- ⁶³ P. Harb, “Le rôle exercé par Philoxène de Mabbug sur l’évolution de la morale dans l’Église Syrienne”, *Parole de L’Orient* 1 (1970), 27-48. As he says, the early periods might be characterised by severe ascetical ideals, especially with regard to the human body, sexuality and marriage. However we see a progressive evolution of a positive approach to them, appreciating their role in the creative plan of God. See also F. C. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*, London 1904, 118-154.
- ⁶⁴ S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 60-77.

⁶⁵ For some random examples, see *Odes of Solomon*, 25: 8; *Acts of Thomas*, 49-50; *Demonstration*, 4: 19; 6:14; HParad, 6: 9; 11: 12; HVirg, 4-7, 15, 31. For a detailed discussion and bibliography on the Syriac theology of baptism, see M. Kizhakearanjaniyil, *East Syrian Baptismal Theology: A Judeo-Christian Analysis*, Kottayam 2001.

⁶⁶ Dem, 12: 9; Dem, 6.

⁶⁷ S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 38-41; S. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, Hampshire 1992, XI, 11-13; *Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem*, Rome 1985, 65-76, 92-106.

⁶⁸ This is a very popular theme in the early Syriac poets such as Ephrem, Jacob of Sarug, Narsai, etc. It symbolises the grace-filled state of the first parents. The 'robe of glory' or the 'robe of light' served as the original raiment of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden before the fall; at the fall they were stripped of this robe but it was regained by Christ through his incarnation and paschal mysteries and it is regarded as having been put on again by Christians through their baptism and other sacraments. For an appreciation of this Syriac imagery see, S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 25, 65-76; S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise: Introduction and Translation*, Crestwood 1990, 66-72; S. 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. M. Schmidt, Eichstadt 1982, 11-40; A. Kowalski, "Rivestiti di gloria: Adamo ed Eva nel commento di S. Efrema a Gen, 2: 25", *Cristianesimo nella storia* 3 (1982), 41-60, 41-60; S. J. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, London 1983, 18-19, 44-45, 108-109; S. Brock, "The Robe of Glory: A Biblical Image in the Syriac tradition", *The Way* 39: 3 (1999), 247-259.

⁶⁹ St. Ephrem speaks of four wombs in his hymns: the womb of the eternal Father, the womb of Mary, the womb of the Jordan and the womb of sheol.

⁷⁰ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 65-76.

⁷¹ This bridal imagery, used variously to refer to baptised Christians, the human heart, the Church and heavenly paradise, is very frequent in the Syriac tradition. S. Brock, *Syriac Fathers on Prayer and Spiritual Life*, Kalamazoo 1987, xxi-xxxiv; *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 40-41, 49-59. For details of the bridal imagery of baptism see, M. Kizahkearanjaniyil, *East Syrian Baptismal Theology: A Judeo-Christian Analysis*, 153-173.

⁷² S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 56-59.

⁷³ For details, see A. Vanchipura, *The Notion of Holiness (Qaddisûta) in the East Syrian Writings up to the Seventh Century* (Unpublished Dissertation, PGU Rome, 1993).

⁷⁴ This may be one of the reasons that led people to undertake ascetic vows at baptism. For the fathers, Adam and Eve lived a life of virginity in paradise and it was only after the expulsion that they had sexual intercourse. One of the features of the life of angels and of resurrected life, according to the Gospels, is the marriage less state. Accordingly it is easy to see why those who sought to live the baptismal life to the full, chose for themselves virginity. In the early Syriac tradition, baptism was a vital moment in the life of a person. It remained as an occasion to opt for virginity and holiness (Dem, 7: 20). Hence baptism was always postponed to a later period for fear of falling from the ideal of chastity held up to them. In the early periods of Syriac Christianity, baptism was not a common seal of every Christian faithful but a privilege reserved for those who embraced ascetic vows. Such a view is seen especially in the writings of Aphrahat. See F. C. Burkitt, *Early Christianity outside the Roman Empire*, Cambridge 1899, 46-57; R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, Cambridge 1975, 11-18.

⁷⁵ R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* 41-68, 95-130.

⁷⁶ P. Harb, "Le rôle exercé par Philoxène de Mabbug sur l'évolution de la morale dans l'Église Syrienne", 32.

⁷⁷ For example the 7th Demonstration of Aphrahat is a call to discipleship and spiritual warfare against the evil. See also Dem, 6.

⁷⁸ Cf. Dem, 1.

⁷⁹ T. Špidlík, *Spirituality of the Christian East: A Systematic Handbook*, Kalamazoo 1986, 103-107.

⁸⁰ S. Brock, "The Prayer of the Heart in Syriac Tradition", *Sobornost* 4:2 (1982), 131-142.

⁸¹ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 92-106.

⁸² HVirg 44. 20. See also 49. 1.

⁸³ HFid 14. 15.

⁸⁴ S. Brock, *Syriac Fathers on Prayer and Spiritual life*, xv-xxi; *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 44-46; S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 54-58.

⁸⁵ OS, 20: 4.

⁸⁶ AT VI, IX, XI.

⁸⁷ Dem, 4 *On Prayer*; Dem, 3 *On Fasting*.

⁸⁸ S. Brock, *Syriac Fathers on Prayer and Spiritual Life*, xxx.

⁸⁹ For example, in the Holy Qurbana of the Syro-Malabar Church, in the prayer that comes before the psalms, the priest prays: "...that they may diligently render you priestly ministry with hearts and minds, free from all

stain and evil thoughts...”; just before the Anaphora at the entrance to the altar, the priest prays, “with our hearts, washed clean from all evil thoughts, may we be made worthy to enter the holy of holies and to stand before your altar in purity, devotion, diligence, and offer you spiritual and rational sacrifices in true faith.”; before the Communion, the priest again prays, “make us worthy, O, Lord our God, to stand before you always without blemish, with pure hearts...”. This notion is clear also in the *marmîta* (Ps. 15, 150, 116)) of ordinary days, the *kârôzûtâ* of repentance before the communion. Cf. *Order of the Solemn Raza of the Syro-Malabar Church*, Trivandrum 1986.

⁹⁰ S. Brock, *Syriac Fathers on Prayer and Spiritual Life*, xvi; *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 22-23, 46-48, 96-98. See also R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 262-274.

⁹¹ S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 89-93.

⁹² K. McVey, ed. *Ephrem the Syrian, The Selected Prose Works*, Washington D. C. 1994, 11. We see many writings and authors in the East Syriac tradition that sing the glories of fasting and the ascetical life. For example, various narrations in the *Acts of Thomas*, Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* 3 (On Fasting), 4 (On Prayer), 5 (On Wars), 6 (On the Sons of the Covenant), Ephrem's *Hymns on Fasting*, Abdišo's *Liber Marganita* (Chapter 5 On Fasting, Prayer and Almsgiving), etc. deal elaborately with the theology and spirituality of fasting.

⁹³ R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 11, 154-157; P. Harb, “Le rôle exercé par Philoxène de Mabbug sur l'évolution de la morale dans l'Église Syrienne”, 27.

⁹⁴ The ascetical character of Syrian Christianity is well studied by scholars like A. Vööbus, S. Brock, R. Murray, S. H. Griffith, etc. For details see A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*; S. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, London 1984; S. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*; A. Baker, “Early Syrian Asceticism”, *The Downside Review* 88 (1970), 393-409; S. Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism”, *Numen* 20 (1973), 11-22; R. Murray, “The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism” in *Christian spirituality: Essays in Honour of E. G. Rupp*, London 1975, 65-77; S. H. Griffith, “Asceticism in the Church of Syria” in *Asceticism*, eds. V. L. Wimbush & J. Valantasis, New York 1995, 220-248.

⁹⁵ R. Murray, “The Characteristics of the Early Syriac Christianity”, 6.

⁹⁶ H. J. W. Drijvers, *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity*, London 1984, I, 18.

⁹⁷ K. McVey, ed. *Ephrem the Syrian: Prose Works*, 11-12.

⁹⁸ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 20-22.

⁹⁹ HParad 6. 13, 14, 15; HVirg 48. 1-21.

¹⁰⁰ HNis, 49.7. This idea is repeatedly seen in the *Hymns on Virginity*. For example, see HVirg, 1. 9, 3. 8.

¹⁰¹ CHaer, 18.1, 11. 3.

¹⁰² H. J. W. Drijvers, *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity*, VI, 170.

¹⁰³ R. C. Bondi, "The Spirituality of the Syriac Speaking Christians" in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. B. McGinn & J. Meyendorff, London 1986, 153-157.

¹⁰⁴ R. C. Bondi, "The Spirituality of the Syriac Speaking Christians", 154, 159; H. J. W. Drijvers, *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity*, IV, 31.

¹⁰⁵ S. Brock, *Syriac Fathers on Prayer and Spiritual Life*, xxv.

¹⁰⁶ S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 22-24.

¹⁰⁷ R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 11.

¹⁰⁸ S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 54.

¹⁰⁹ R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 343-346.

¹¹⁰ J. Kallarangatt, "Dimensions and Perspectives of Oriental Theology" in *Eastern Theological Reflections*, ed. X. Koodapuzha, Kottayam 1999, 103-104; R. Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, Rome 1997, 158-159.

¹¹¹ The Fathers were deeply aware of the inherent goodness, unity and beauty of the created world, the divine providence in the cosmos, its progressive deification through the cosmic vocation and mission of man, etc. It has also its unique relevance in the most mechanised and industrialised modern world, in the context of global warming. For a good discussion of the cosmological visions of the Syriac Fathers, see S. Brock, "World and Sacrament in the Writings of the Syrian Fathers", *Sobornost* 6: 10 (1974), 685-696; S. Brock, "Humanity and the Natural World in the Syriac Tradition", *Sobornost* 12 (1990), 131-142; R. Murray, "L'Homme et la création", *Patrimoine Syriaque* IV (1997), 92-99; S. A. Harvey, "St. Ephrem on the Scent of Salvation", *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998), 109-128; J. Karukaparampil, "The Spiritual World View of St. Ephrem Compared to Vêdânta", *OCA* 256 (1998), 243-248; R. Murray, "The Image of God: Delegated and Responsible Authority", *Priests and People* 14 (2000), 49-54; M. Kadavil, "World as Sacrament: Ethical and Liturgical Response to Creation in Saint Ephrem", *Questions Liturgiques* 84 (2003), 5-22. Eastern theologians speak of an 'eucharistic use (a constant thanksgiving to God) of the world'. See, A. Schmemmann, *Il mondo come sacramento*, Brescia 1969; P. Evdokimov, *Teologia della*

bellezza: L'arte dell'icona, Roma 1984; J. Zizioulas, *Il creato come Eucaristia: Approccio teologico al problema dell'ecologia*, Magnano 1994; T. Špidlík, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, 125-150; C. Yannaras, *La libertà dell'ethos*, 73-107, 139-178, 241-277. This theme is seen also among the Western theologians. For example B. Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ II*, 101-152, 167-208; H. U. von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Eine Theologie der Estetik*, Tübingen 1961; I. Sanna, *L'Antropologia Cristiana tra modernità e postmodernità*, Brescia 2001, 217-230. See also John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 17 April 2003, nos. 6-8, 53-58.

¹¹² S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 41-42.

¹¹³ For a detailed study of the theology of healing in the early Syriac tradition, see A. Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem*, New Jersey 2002.

¹¹⁴ S. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 41.

Masih Mandala

The Illustration on the Cover

Masih Mandala, the sacred space of Messiah, is a Christian adaptation of the basic structure of the Hindu or Buddhist *Mandala*. The Hindu *Mandala*, a symbolic diagram also known as *yantra*, is basically a representation of the universe, a consecrated area that serves as a receptacle for the Divine and as a collection point of the universal forces. Man, mentally entering the *Mandala* and proceeding toward its center, is by analogy guided through the cosmic process of disintegration and reintegration.

Masih Mandala, placed on the eastern wall of the church of St. Ephrem's Theological College, Satna, India, has three parts. The outer layer with a border of squares and circles represents the cosmos or the space-time. The second layer or the middle circle represents the sacred space-time. It contains objects from the nature - betel leaves, plantain leaves, coco-nuts, and a vase with the image of a praying man - which according to the Hindu tradition, are vehicles of divine favour and offering to the Divine.

The innermost circle is the *moksha*, the heavenly space of divinization, towards which man is proceeding along the cosmic and sacred layers. According to the East Syriac theology this is the heavenly space of divinization, where man reaches communion with God and acquires the robe of glory. This is the heavenly Church of eternal worship. The glorified Cross in the divine center is the symbol of Messiah, who journeyed towards the heavenly center by means of his self-denial (disintegration) and glorification (re-integration). Man in the cosmos is on his journey towards the heavenly center (SC 8), a journey of disintegration and re-integration (Mk 8:34-35). The glorified Cross also represents the Spirit of God who sanctifies and glorifies.

Masih Mandala is the depiction of the paschal mystery of Messiah, a journey of the self-denial and glorification; it represents a similar journey by the follower of Messiah; it also symbolizes the journey of the cosmos (space-time) into the space-time of Messiah.

Pauly Maniyattu



East Syriac Theology

An Introduction

Edited by

Pauly Maniyattu

- An introductory study on the theology of the East Syriac tradition by scholars who have done research in respective areas of theology.
 - Characteristic features of the East Syriac theology.
 - A coherent look at the various contributions made in the realm of East Syriac theology in recent years.
 - An attempt to highlight the potentiality of the East Syriac tradition to contribute to the theological progress of Church today.
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