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“Orthodoxy and Catholicity in the Syriac Tradition with Special Attention to the Theology of the Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire” 24-29 June 1994

IS THE THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH OF THE EAST NESTORIAN?

I. INTRODUCTION.

The question before us—whether the theology of the Church of the East is “Nestorian” or not—can be quickly answered if one is asking whether that church holds to the same Christological formulae as the historical figure, Nestorius. The philosophical terms employed by Nestorius to describe the incarnate Christ—two natures (φύσεις/**ܚܬܝܬܐ**), and two hypostases (υποστάσεις/**ܡܚܕܐ**), in one prosopon (προσῶπον/**ܦܕܝܐ**)—are also employed by the theologians of the Church of the East. The liturgies of the church invariably name Nestorius, with Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, in their litanies. The calendar features a “Memorial of the Greek Doctors”, a list of “western” fathers which includes—and emphasizes—the same three theologians. If the question is, “Does the Church of the East venerate Nestorius and continue to employ his theological vocabulary?” the answer is obvious. However, if the question is whether the Church of the East is “Nestorian”, the answer is not so immediately evident. Was Nestorius himself a “Nestorian” as that heresy is universally understood and described? Since many in modern times have diligently and honestly tried to come to a conclusion about this and have often answered it negatively, it is very likely that the same question applied to the Church of the East would often come up with a similar negative answer.

To deal with this question let us first examine the Persian church’s relationship to the ecumenical councils of the Byzantine Empire. Then let us consider the historical development of the Persian church’s affinity for the person of Nestorius, and the parallel development of Christological terms and their use. Finally, let us attempt to answer the question from the Church of the East’s viewpoint: “Is the Church of the East ‘Nestorian’?” In doing all this we will rely heavily on the Church’s official synodal record, the *Synhados*¹, in order to trace the development of *official* positions on the person of Nestorius and his Christological formulations.

¹ *Synodicon Orientale*, (hereinafter *SO*) ed., J. B. Chabot, Paris, 1892, (Syriac text).

II. THE PERSIAN CHURCH'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE.

A. Historical Background.

1. The Establishment of Christianity in the West and Its Effects on Christians in the East.

With the conversion of Constantine and the establishment of Christianity as the state religion in the West matters became perilous for Christians who lived in Persian territories. The ongoing hostility and intermittent state of war between the two empires of the East and West made adherence to Christianity in Persia a cause for suspicion of disloyalty to the state and possible collusion with the enemy. As long as Rome itself was hostile or indifferent to Christianity it did not materially affect the status of eastern Christians. But when the Emperor in the West embraced the faith of Christ a dark shadow fell over his fellow believers in the East. In time fierce persecution broke out against the Church. Mass executions followed the martyrdom of Mar Sēem'on bar Saba'e in AD 341, and throughout the next 70 years official persecution intermittently erupted and was devastating in its effects. According to the *Sunhados* churches were destroyed, altars torn down, and there were many who were imprisoned for their faith². For long periods of time members of the Church maintained an underground existence, fearful of public acknowledgment lest it bring upon them and others associated with them almost certain death, or at least persecution. At one point during this time the Church was without a Catholicos at its head for a period of 22 years³. This difficult situation perdured until the accession to the Persian throne of the emperor Yazdgard I and his proclamation of toleration in 410.

During the time, then, when the Synods of Nicea (325) and Constantinople I (381) took place in the Byzantine Empire the Church in Persia was effectively cut off from participation in those convocations. These synods were much more than discussions of theology and ecclesiastical affairs. They were also matters of state within the *ecumene* of the western empire. Though Constantine and Sapor II were nominally at peace with one another at the time of Nicea, the suspicion which lay heavily upon eastern Christians was that if warfare were renewed, or relations embittered, at any time, they would rally to the aid of the enemy and undermine the Persian cause—especially since the greater number of them lived in the western part of Persian territory⁴. The political realities dictated a

² SO, p.18.

³ SO., p. 48.

⁴ For a discussion of this situation see *A Short History of Syriac Christianity to the Rise of Islam*, W. Stewart McCullough, Scholars Press, Chico, CA, 1982, pp. 111-120; *History of the Assyrian Church*, W. A. Wigram, London, 1910, pp. 41-77.

prudent distancing by the Church of the East from the Church of the West, a distancing which was to remain, more or less, a constant in the experience of the easterns.

2. Temporary Peace Between East and West: Adoption of Nicea(-Constantinople) by Church of the East.

At the end of this period of harsh repression, at the beginning of the 5th century, the bishop of Antioch, Porphyrius, together with the bishops of Aleppo, Urhai (Edessa), Tella, and Amida, out of concern for the Church in Persia, sent a letter to the bishops of the East through the Byzantine imperial ambassador, Maruta, bishop of Maiparqat (Martyropolis), who was representing Theodosius II on an embassy to the court of Yazdgard⁵. The letter urged the bishops to adopt the canons and creed of the Council of Nicea, which had taken place 85 years previously, and to effect certain reforms. How much communication the “western” bishops might have had with the Persian Church in the preceding period may be gauged by the astonishing gap between the time of the Nicene synod and the introduction of its conclusions to the Persians. Of course, any communication on their part would have alerted the Persian authorities and aroused suspicions of political intrigue, and the Ecumenical Council was, as we have noted above, not just theological/ecclesiastical in significance, but also an imperial affair fraught with political overtones and consequences.⁶ The occasion prompting this action by the “western” (in relative terms) bishops was the relaxation of persecution by Yazdgard and the rehabilitation of the Church in his domains. At a synod presided over by ‘Ish‘aq, the Catholicos of the East, and Maruta, the “western” ambassador, the Persian bishops ratified the Nicene Creed and restructured their badly fractured Church.

3. The Official Silence of the Persian Bishops on Ephesus, Chalcedon, and Constantinople II.

It is a matter of some interest that the Creed adopted at ‘Ish‘aq’s synod had the older ending, not reflecting the additions of Constantinople I⁷. The latter council is not even mentioned in the synodal records of the Persian Church until the Synod of Mar Yausep, AD 554⁸. At what time in the interval the Creed of Constantinople was generally adopted by the easterns on an official basis is difficult to pinpoint. It is also noteworthy that prior to Yausep’s synod the Byzantine Councils of Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), and Constantinople II (553) had also taken place, but none of these are acknowledged by that synod. On the other hand, it is a matter of synodal record that, up to that time, none of them are officially disavowed or condemned either, and the absence

⁵ *SO*, pp. 18-19.

⁶ See *SO*, pp. 46-49, for a discussion of “western” dealings with the Church in Persia.

⁷ *SO*, pp. 22-23.

⁸ *SO*, p. 97.

of any such overt disavowal or condemnation with canonical force gives pause to the student of Syriac-speaking Christianity considering the subsequent history of that outpost of Christianity. As a case in point, the Persian Church was presented with an opportunity to officially declare itself on the issue of Ephesus. A rump synod, presided over by the controversial bishop of Nisibis, Bars\uma⁹, took place in 484, in which an explicitly anti-Ephesene mood prevailed, but the synod was subsequently repudiated in all but one of its decisions by a Patriarchal Synod¹⁰. What the reasons may have been for the official silence of the Persian hierarchy on matters of such import to the Byzantine world are a matter of conjecture, but it would be understandable, given the tumultuous history of the period in question, if they so declined. At least part of those reasons may lie in the geographic isolation and tenuous political situation of the Church of the East, and the administrative independence it was compelled by circumstances to exercise relative to the West—an independence that gave space to the bishops and time for putting off a decision on those matters, or even ignoring them.

B. The Official Independence of the Persian Church Proclaimed.

During the reign of Bahram V (420-438) persecution again broke out against Christians in the East. The short period of toleration and state protection initiated by Yazdgard came to an abrupt end, and the old suspicions were again aroused against the Church. Much turmoil around the election of Dadis'o' to the Catholicate of the East and his imprisonment through the connivance of fellow-Christians brought about a crisis, the consequences of which have had enduring effects on the character and history of the Church of the East. Though the Catholicos was eventually released from prison, he resigned his office and fled to "Markabta of the Arabs" for protection. A synod of 33 (or 35)¹¹ bishops convened at Markabta in 424 for the purpose of persuading Dadis'o' to withdraw his resignation and return to his see. In the process of presenting their case to the Catholicos the bishops produced a historical analysis of their relationship to the "western" bishops¹². The analysis concentrated on the crisis of the present situation and compared it with previous crises and their effects upon the Church in the East. Its motivation was not hostility to the western Church, but a sincere desire to resolve the ongoing difficulties occasioned by the Church's putative relationship to the West, a

⁹ For a full discussion of Bars\uma and his relations with the Catholicos-Patriarch 'Aqaq and the larger Church, see Wigram, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-166.

¹⁰ SO, pp. 61,63. One canon, concerning marriage of the clergy, was accepted by 'Aqaq's synod (486) and re-affirmed by Babai's synod (498). Another canon, touching on Theodore of Mopsuestia, seems to have been rehabilitated in Grigor's synod (605). See SO, pp. 210-211.

¹¹ See list, SO, p. 43.

¹² The bishops of the "West" were those bordering on Persian territory (see list of bishops above who intervened at the time of Maruta/'Ish\aq.) The analysis, given by the bishop of Bet Lapat\, 'Agpat\,a, may be found in SO, pp. 46-49.

situation which ultimately resulted in the drastic action taken by Dadis'o'. Beginning with the case of Papa bar Gagai, on the occasion of his establishment of the Catholicate at Seleucia-Ctesiphon in the early 4th century, and recalling the more recent cases of the Catholici 'Ish\aq and Yahbalaha, the bishops insisted that each time dissident clergy or those under penalty of some sort appealed to the "western" bishops, the "westerns" denied their appeals and supported the office of the Catholicos in its decisions, and although the confirmation of the "western" bishops was appreciated and lauded, nevertheless political conditions no longer permitted those sorts of appeals to be made¹³. By canonical decree they proclaimed the Church of the East to be administratively independent, and they enhanced the power and dignity of the Catholicos, adding to him the title "Patriarch":

" . . . we now determine by the 'Word of God' that easterners are not allowed to make an appeal—even before the western patriarchs—against their patriarch. Instead, every contention which is unresolved before him shall be reserved to the presence of the judgment seat of Christ. And we determined and confirmed this statute, which is indissoluble and irrevocable, for we have sealed it with the Holy Trinity."¹⁴

The synod of Dadis'o', which marks the beginning of the Church of the East's administrative separation *vis-a-vis* the "western" bishops is notable for its lack of a theological "cause of schism". It took place seven years prior to the Council of Ephesus, four years prior to Nestorius's appointment to the see of Constantinople, and there is no rancor or bitterness expressed toward the West. It is totally unrelated to any conciliar disputes or schisms in the West. The tone of all the speeches and conclusions is laudatory and sincerely affectionate and grateful for western help in the past. Certainly no doctrinal issue is involved. In the area of faith and practice the East remained united with the West. In the area of administration and organization, the East assumed a right, indeed a necessity, to govern itself. Final authority, without appeal, rested in the hands of the Catholicos-Patriarch¹⁵.

¹³ In fact, "political conditions" had seldom permitted such appeals. As noted above, any such appeals during times of warfare or ill relations between Byzantium and Persia would produce dire consequences for eastern Christians, whose patriotism was already suspect. The cases cited by 'Agpat\ a are, in the case of Papa bar Gagai, prior to the establishment of Christianity in the West, and, in the cases of 'Ish\aq and Yahbalaha, during the recent rapprochement between the two empires.

¹⁴ SO, p. 51. The English translation is by M. J. Birnie, as are all such translations in this paper.

¹⁵ This "absolutism" was modified somewhat in the synod of Yausep in 554 (SO, p. 101), when the Patriarch was instructed to do nothing, except in emergency

It is in the light of this independence that we must attempt to assess the actions of the Church of the East, or rather the lack of action, in regard to the Ecumenical Councils of Byzantium. The motive to independence was practical and grew out of political conditions, but was not dogmatic. The occasion was renewed persecution and a pessimistic prognosis of the political realities of the future. The outbreak of the "Nestorian" controversy in the West did not immediately demand action by the Church in the East, there was no Persian imperial pressure on the bishops to make a decision, and the bishops were on the whole apparently unwilling to do so. When reaction began to set in it was a reaction triggered by events in the West, the effects of which began to spill across the border into the East.

III. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERSIAN CHURCH'S AFFINITY FOR THE PERSON OF NESTORIUS.

A. The School of Edessa: its influence in the East.

With the brief peace brought about by Maruta's embassy to Persia, young scholars from the East flocked to the school at Edessa where they imbibed the traditional theology of the Antiochene school of thought with its strongly dyophysite Christology¹⁶. This marvelous institution, with its widely celebrated scholarship, became the training ground for an army of convinced and dedicated dyophysites who became the theological mentors of several generations of influential teachers, monks, and bishops in the Church of the East. When the school was closed by the Byzantine Emperor Zeno in 489 it was relocated in Nisibis in Persian territory under the patronage of Barsauma where it became the center of Christian intellectual life in the East. Under the influence of its patron, a zealous defender of the Antiochene positions, and of his choice to head the school, Narsai, the institution flourished and gained respect as a serious center of learning. The Antiochene partisans at Nisibis vigorously promoted their Christological position, using the terminology familiar to them, that is, with the very terminology anathematized by the Ephesine synod and by the partisans of Cyril. Among them Nestorius was venerated as a staunch defender of Antiochene orthodoxy and a martyr to the pride and arrogance of Cyril of Alexandria. The reluctance of the bishops of the Church of the East to take a definitive posture, whether positive or negative, relative to

situations, without the presence of other bishops, and his authority was partially curtailed.

¹⁶ The theology of the school at Edessa was related to the Antiochene school of thought. Some teachers at Edessa had studied at the feet of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and providing translations of Antiochene theological works and Biblical commentaries for the Syriac-speaking world was a significant by-product of the Edessene school's overall contribution to the Church in the East.

Nestorius gave these partisans the opportunity and freedom to further their cause in his defense.

B. The Countervailing Pressure of the Monophysite Minority.

At the same time, the Persian Church did not lack for champions of the Cyrillian position, both among the clergy and among the monks. Though convinced monophysites were few in number, they were vocal and even participated along with the dyophysites in administrative matters and in conciliar decisions.¹⁷ And the monophysite party was greatly augmented over time by captives of successful Persian campaigns into Byzantine territories who were resettled in the East. Among these displaced populations were many Chalcedonians as well, and a plurality of viewpoints came to exist in the Church of the East. Ultimately the monophysite party received the status of a separate Christian body after the military victories of Chosroes I had flooded the empire with hundreds of thousands of captives from battle engagements.¹⁸ But until their official status as a separate minority, the monophysites of Persia were nominally under the Patriarchate of the East, and though they had their own bishops, they were obliged to utilize the liturgies of the Church of the East and lived in uncomfortable tension with their dyophysite neighbors¹⁹.

C. Official Christological Formulations and Nestorius.

However, with the enormous advantage in numbers which the dyophysites enjoyed in the East it was inevitable that any official Christological formulation by the Church would reflect a "two natures" position. But caution seemed to be the watchword which guided conciliar deliberations in this regard. There was no *need* for the bishops to ratify or denounce either the Council of Ephesus or that of Chalcedon (though many

¹⁷ McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 131 (citing Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la dynastie sassanide [224-632]*) lists Papa of Bet Lapat\, Philoxenus of Tah\al (the later bishop of Mabbog), his brother, Addai, Barh\adbs°aba of Qardu, and Benyamin of Bet 'Aramaye as prominent monophysites among the Persians.

¹⁸ For treatment of Chosroes and the growth of monophysism in Persia, see Wigram, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-243.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243. How much or how soon the dissidents adopted the Persian services is a matter of opinion. But see *SO*, pp. 196-197, where monophysite dissidents are referred to in the synod of Mar Sabris°o: ". . . they remove the litanies and spiritual praises which were composed by the trustworthy teachers in which the duality of the natures of the Son is revealed and made known." Since the Church of the East enjoyed a special "status" in Persian domains, and the Patriarch was the recognized spokesman for all Christians at the court, all factions were nominally subject to him.

might have preferred to take a position) and there certainly was the incentive of prudence to forego ratification. The same political conditions existed to one degree or another throughout the next 150 years or so, and the passions and partisanship which so rocked the Church in Byzantium needed to be abated or contained in the East. It is of some note that the name “Nestorius” does not appear in *Sunhados* until a canonical letter from the Catholicos-Patriarch Giwargis (660-680) to the Chorepiscopus Mina in the province of Fars in which he explained the Christology of the Church, by then markedly “Nestorian” in terminology²⁰. This silence in the face of so many advocates and partisans of Nestorius and his cause in the eastern empire is striking, especially when it is compared with the little time it took the Church of the East to come to the defense of Theodore of Mopsuestia (see below).

In the earliest Christological definition by the bishops of the East in synod there is what seems to be a deliberate avoidance of inflammatory rhetoric, and an attempt to avoid complexity as well. This occurs in the synod of Mar 'Aqaq in 486:

“But our faith in the dispensation of Christ should also be in a confession of two natures of Godhead and manhood, none of us venturing to introduce mixture, commingling, or confusion into the distinctions of those two natures. Instead, while Godhead remains and is preserved in that which belongs to it, and manhood in that which belongs to it, we combine the copies²¹ of their natures in one Lordship and one worship because of the perfect and inseparable conjunction²² which the Godhead had with the manhood. If anyone thinks or teaches others that suffering and change belong to the Godhead of our Lord, not preserving—in regard to the union of the *pars\opa* of our Savior—the confession of perfect God and perfect man, the same shall be anathema.”²³

This modest affirmation of a duality of natures may be contrasted with the aggressive promotion of a duality of *hypostases* which was a feature of Antiochene polemics in the East at the time of 'Aqaq's Patriarchate, and with which he may have personally agreed²⁴.

²⁰ *SO*, p. 235, where Giwargis calls Nestorius “the blessed (one), who (is) reviled and gratuitously accused by the multitude of the unjust.”

²¹ For NohenGi2rp.

²² ܡܫܝܚܐ.

²³ *SO*, p. 55.

²⁴ See Luise Abramowski and Alan E. Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts*, Vol. II (Eng. trans.) Cambridge, 1972, p. 20, where Sāhlost of Tlarihan states that 'Aqaq and Barsauma agreed together in a synod on “the true faith of the two natures and the two hypostases.” If Sāhlost is referring to the synod of 486 he is mistaken (Barsauma did not attend the synod of 'Aqaq), at least insofar as that has come down to us through *SO*, for it plainly refers merely

How much it may or may not have been influenced by the Council of Chalcedon (451) could only be a matter of conjecture since the Byzantine council goes unmentioned in this synod.²⁵ In the synodal record of the Church of the East the word *qnoma* is reserved exclusively for discussions of the persons of the Holy Trinity in credal affirmations, and this pattern of usage continues until the canonical “Letter of Giwargis to Mina” in the late 7th century.²⁶ However much the Antiochenes may have pressed for the “two natures and two *qnome*” formula of Nestorius—and we can be very sure they pressed hard for it—the official Christology of the Church of the East continued to omit such a formula.²⁷

D. The Three Chapters Controversy and Its Effect on Persian Christianity.

Breakdowns in the unity of the Persian Church over the historical period following the synod of 'Aqaq tended to be, as they had been in the past, of a personal nature, and factions which became divisive formed in the quest for power and influence. The “duality” of the Patriarchate, for instance, which endured for a period of about 15 years²⁸ during the first half of the 6th century, was just such a struggle and was not due to Christological differences (or any other doctrinal disputes), but was due solely to parties whose interests were self-promotion. It might have been advantageous to one or another to frame the dispute in Christological terms, but neither of the factions deviated from the traditional dyophysite preference of the Persian Church.

However, at the mid-point of the century an event occurred in Byzantium which sent shock waves through the Church of the East: the condemnation of the “Three Chapters” and the total anathematization of Theodore of Mopsuestia, both of his person as

to *natures*. Sāhdest also speaks of the reticence of the Church of the East toward Chalcedon, even though the partisans of that council “exercised great pressure on the Easterns to accept the synod of Chalcedon, and made a considerable defence on behalf of the ‘one hypostasis’ that was set down in it . . .” (pp. 20-21.) It should be noted that the decisions of Chalcedon had already been superseded in the West by the “Henoticon” of Zeno. By this time, all dyophysites, including the Roman Pope and the western European bishops, were regularly labeled “Nestorians”.

²⁵ But see appendix to *SO*, pp. 545, 610, where the canons of Chalcedon are referred to as “accepted” by the Church of the East.

²⁶ *SO*, p. 234. An appendix to *SO* sets forth the debate of the year 612 wherein a vigorous defense of the dual *hypostases* is made by the “Nestorian” side.

²⁷ See the Appendix II of this paper where a reproduction of credal statements in various synods repeatedly affirms “two natures” and “one *pars\opa* in Christ while making no reference to *hypostasis*.”

²⁸ See *SO*, page 70.

well as his writings. The drastic action taken in the Second Council of Constantinople (553), which also fractured the western Church, drew a reaction from the bishops in the East which up to that time was unprecedented: for the first time they came down decidedly opposed to an ecumenical decision of the Byzantine Church (though not obliged to through imperial pressure or otherwise) in a general synod, and unequivocally condemned those who condemn Theodore.

“Therefore, we decree by the ‘Word of God’, who rules over all and holds the height and the depth, that no one from any of the ecclesiastical ranks is allowed, secretly or openly, to revile this doctor of the Church, or to reject his holy writings, or to accept another commentary which is alien to the truth, one which, as they say, interprets for a lover of humbug and a lover of polished words which are alien to the truth, in the likeness of harlots who love a luxurious ornament. One who ventures, hiddenly or openly, to stand against these things which we have said and written above shall be anathematized and a stranger from all ecclesiastical congregations until he comes to his senses and becomes a true disciple of the teachers against whom he prattles in his foolishness.”²⁹

Unlike the western dissenters from this decision, the Persian bishops were not merely concerned with the issue of posthumous excommunications of persons who died in the good graces of the Church, but they were concerned with affirming an Antiochean father whose Scriptural interpretations had been normative in the Church of the East for well over a century. When one compares this with the total lack of mention of Nestorius or his teachings in the official synodal record of the eastern Church (despite his many defenders among clergy and laity), one is compelled to conclude that the person and cause of Nestorius were not issues of ultimate moment for the Persian Church as a whole.

It is of some importance to note that the enthusiasm for Theodore of Mopsuestia did not alter the traditional approach of the eastern bishops to Christological formulae. The same synod of Is°o‘yahb which rejected the conclusions of Constantinople II includes an extensive confessional statement, and a canonical letter is appended to the synod which also includes a creed.³⁰ In these documents we note again that *qnoma*, or *hypostasis*, is used only in references to the Holy Trinity, which suggests that Chalcedonian adherents were not absent from the assembly and exercised their influence against a dual hypostasis formula, though the creeds are also silent on the term *hypostatic union*, undoubtedly in deference to Nestorius’s defenders. They affirm the propriety of the *communicatio idiomatum*:

²⁹ SO, p. 138. (Synod of Is°o‘yahb I, 587)

³⁰ See Appendix II of this paper and the full credal statements in SO, pp. 133-136, 193-196.

“The heretics, that is, in their stubbornness, venture to ascribe the properties and sufferings of the *nature* of the manhood of Christ to the *nature and qnoma* of the Godhead and Essence of the Word, which occasionally, because of the perfect union which the manhood of Christ had with his Godhead, *are ascribed to God economically*, but not naturally.”³¹ And, “God the Word accepted the insult of sufferings in the temple of his body economically, in a perfect union without separation, though in the nature of his Godhead he did not suffer. . . .”³²

They also locate the unitary subject of the Incarnation and his human experience and passions in “God over all”:

“. . . Jesus Christ the Son of God, *God over all*, born in his Godhead eternally from the Father without a mother. *The same, but not in the same, was born* in his manhood from a mother without a father in the last times, *suffered* in the flesh, *was crucified, died, and was buried* in the days of Pontius Pilate, and *rose from the dead* after three days. On the one hand, Christ, the Son of God, suffered in the flesh, while on the other hand, in the nature of his Godhead, *the same* Christ was beyond sufferings . . .”³³

The same reticence with regard to the employment of the word *qnoma* in formulaic constructions continues to be the norm into the early 7th century. What is striking, given the subsequent history of the Church of the East, is the absence of any defense of Nestorius or institutionalization of his Christological thought. What is paramount is the insistence, as per Chalcedon, upon “two natures”. What is missing is the Chalcedonian “hypostatic union”, or any other employment of the term *hypostasis*, aside from the Nicene Trinitarian use. While providing a haven for Antiochene partisans of Nestorius and affording them freedom to promote the cause of their brand of dyophysism, the eastern bishops yet maintained a certain distance from formally adopting their formulaic descriptions of the union of Godhead and manhood in Christ. Their administrative independence and the lack of political pressure from the state made such a situation possible. But the quick reaction to the “Three Chapters” controversy betrayed a certain weariness with—as well as wariness of—the seemingly interminable disputations of the Byzantines. The reaction to Constantinople II seems, in retrospect, to have provided a bridge to the later outright (and perhaps inevitable) defense of Nestorius and his Christology.

E. The Breakdown of Moderation: King and Church and Confession.

³¹ *SO*, p. 136.

³² *SO*, p. 195.

³³ *Ibid.*

The long period of accommodating various viewpoints—doubtless uncomfortable to many, if not most—came to a rapid conclusion in the year 612 when the Persian king, influenced by his Christian wife, who was in turn influenced by her personal physician, a monophysite, sought to recommend a monophysite candidate to the Church of the East to fill the vacant see of the Catholicos-Patriarch. The “one nature” party had been greatly strengthened over the years through infusions of captive populations from Byzantium, and relations between them and the dyophysites had worsened as they became bolder and more assertive in time. Meanwhile the supporters of Nestorius and his cause, always dominant in the schools and influential among the bishops, had sharpened their polemical tools as they were increasingly challenged by the dissidents. When the Church petitioned the king for the right to elect a head, the king suggested a “debate” in which the parties would prove through arguments which was the correct “Christian” point of view.³⁴ And as in the case of imperial intervention in the West, each faction viewed the occasion as an opportunity to settle the issue once and for all in its own favor through the acquisition of an imperial franchise. Official moderation gave way before the opportunity of a political “solution”. The king presented the questions in such a way as to label the easterns as “Nestorians”.³⁵ Though the dyophysites did not defend themselves *as such*, they did defend the terminology he (and they) used as being “pre-Nestorian”. Throughout the debate the dyophysite disputants mentioned the name of Nestorius only in the context of asserting that the manner in which they themselves spoke did not originate with him, but had Scriptural and paternal precedents.

We cannot overlook the fact that at this crucial moment in the history of the Church of the East both Antiochene partisans and those who were supporters of the Chalcedonian position were termed—and were considered to be—*Nestorian* by those of the monophysite party. For them the term had become a synonym for *dyophysite*. The

³⁴ Wigram, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-258. For a dissenting view on the identity of the “Severian” party, see Abramowski and Goodman, *op. cit.*, p. xlii, footnote.

³⁵ In *SO*, p. 574, one of the three questions posed to the disputants is given: “Again, an answer to what was asked: have the Nestorians or the monks turned aside from the foundation of the faith which the early teachers handed over? And until Nestorius, was there anyone who said that Christ was two natures and two qnome or not?” Who was responsible for framing the question in this manner is not definitely known. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 159, suggests Gabriel, the monophysite physician of Queen Sīirin, who was the major influence in promoting a Catholicos-Patriarch of his own party. The fact that the monophysite faction is labeled “monks” (an inoffensive designation) and the dyophysites are labeled “Nestorian” would seem to back up McCullough’s contention. See the introduction of Abramowski and Goodman, *op. cit.*, pp. xliii-xliv, where the question of the authenticity of the wording is dealt with.

extreme threat they presented forced the defenders of the “two natures” position, alarmed by the imminent possibility of being subjected to a minority faction among them, to reach for the rhetorical tools with which they were most familiar, the linguistic usages and philosophical categories traditional in the East for generations, unfiltered by the modifications or reformulations of Ephesus and Chalcedon. To them the monophysites posited the impossible: the corruption of divinity through admixture and confusion, and the abolition of man’s hope of salvation through the denial of the integrity of the Son of God’s substantive humanity. For the first time the Church of the East allowed a faction (to be sure, always a very influential faction) to speak on behalf of the entire Church *and* to employ the very controversial terminology which it had sought for 150 years or more to avoid using in synodal confessions:

“Concerning this, we believe in our hearts and confess with our lips one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose Godhead does not disappear, and whose manhood is not stolen away, but who is complete God and complete man. When we say of Christ ‘complete God’ we are not naming the Trinity, but one of the *qnome* of the Trinity, God the Word. Again, when we call Christ ‘complete man’ it is not all men we are naming, but the one *qnoma* which was specifically taken for our salvation into union with the Word.”³⁶

IV. IS THE CHURCH OF THE EAST “NESTORIAN”?

Having allowed themselves to take up the cause of Nestorius’s terminology did the dyophysites consider themselves to be promoting the cause of “Nestorianism” as it was understood by his enemies? How did their own treatment of the terms and their own view of the *subject* of the Incarnation emerge from their writings? Did they consider themselves to be dividing our Lord into two “persons” and thus presenting, not the *God/man*, but *God + a man* functioning in tandem (though ever so close)? In order to understand them we would consider their own words on these subjects.

A. Philosophical Terminology From an Eastern Perspective.

In the Church of the East there is no more credible source for understanding the Christology of the “Nestorians” than Babai the Great’s Book of the Union.³⁷ In it we get a glimpse into the mind of one of the prominent defenders of Antiochene thought in the East and one who lived at the time the Church there *officially* adopted “Nestorian” terminology. It is important to stress that this terminology was not new to the Church, but

³⁶ *SO* (appendix), p. 566.

³⁷ Published by Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Paris, 1915, A. Vaschalde, ed. (Syriac, hereinafter *LU*.)

had been the common currency of theological and Christological discourse among Syriac-speaking Christians in the East for generations. It should not be abstracted from its cultural environment, nor should the images and impressions it evoked among those who employed it (and their hearers) in its unique linguistic setting be ignored and the whole of it forced to fit exactly into a Byzantine (or modern western) mold. It is the language of a distinct Christian culture, rich in the traditions of those who brought Christianity to the Eastern empire from the “West”. To reach a “Chalcedonian” objective of one subject “person” in two uncompromised substantive “natures”, the dyophysites felt required to affirm the hypostatic integrity of each nature. Babai, being one of those who participated in the “debate” of 612, felt the term *qnoma* could not be dispensed with in addressing the threat posed by monophysism to the essential integrity of Christ’s humanity and divinity. It is instructive to know what he himself meant by this term which he employed.

In his Fourth Memra (seventeenth chapter) Babai defines his terms for us. First let us consider his definition of *qnoma/hypostasis*:

“A singular essence is called a ‘qnoma’. It stands alone, one in number, that is, one as distinct from the many. A qnoma is invariable in its natural state and is bound to a species and nature, being one [numerically] among a number of like qnome. It is distinctive among its fellow qnome [only] by reason of any unique property or characteristic which it possesses in its ‘pars\opa’. With rational creatures this [uniqueness] may consist of various [external and internal] accidents, such as excellent or evil character, or knowledge or ignorance, and with irrational creatures [as also with the rational] the combination of various contrasting features. [Through the pars\opa we distinguish that] Gabriel is not Michael, and Paul is not Peter. However, in each qnoma of any given nature the entire common nature is known, and intellectually one recognizes what that nature, which encompasses all its qnome, consists of. A qnoma does not encompass the nature as a whole [but exemplifies what is common to the nature, such as, in a human qnoma, body, soul, mind, etc.].”³⁸

Here Babai sets forth his understanding of *qnoma* as being a representative exemplar of a general species. It is the essence of a given nature in concrete, realized form. It is the essential substratum upon which a *pars\opa* is based. It is nature undifferentiated in any way from exemplary *qnome* of the same nature except for number, but differentiated both in number and essence from exemplary *qnome* of other natures. This substratum of nature is further individualized only by the addition of *accidents*, phenomena which are not of the essence of a given nature, but which make it possible to

³⁸ *LU*, pp. 159-160. The bracketed text is added by the translator to amplify and/or clarify the meaning.

distinguish one *qnoma* from another. Nature is general and descriptive: *qnoma* is specific and exemplary. When Babai speaks of Christ as “God and man”, he insists on specificity: a divine *qnoma* (not the Holy Trinity) and a human *qnoma* (not mankind in general).

On the subject of *pars\opa* Babai has this to say:

“Again, ‘*pars\opa*’ is the collective characteristics of a *qnoma* which distinguish it from other [qnoma of the same species]. The *qnoma* of Paul is not that of Peter³⁹, even though the nature and *qnoma* [of both of them] is the same⁴⁰. Each of them possesses a body and soul and is living, rational, and fleshly [that is, they are each a hypostatized nature], yet through their *pars\ope* they are distinguished from one another by that which is unique to each of them—stature, for instance, or form, or temperament, or wisdom, or authority, or fatherhood, or sonship, or masculinity, or femininity, or in whatever way. A unique characteristic distinguishes and indicates that this [man] is not that [man], and that [one] is not this [one], even if this and that are of the same nature. Because of the unique property [or *pars\opa*] which a certain *qnoma* possesses, one [qnoma] is not the other one.”⁴¹

Here that which is not of the essence of an exemplary nature but a property possessed by it which distinguishes it from others of its kind, in combination with other such characteristics, comprises the *pars\opa* of a given nature. Here Paul becomes Paul and not just “man” and is distinguished from Peter, whose *qnoma* does not otherwise differ from Paul’s except in numerical distinction. Paul not only *looks* different from Peter (hair color, height, weight, complexion, *etc.*) but *acts* differently, reflecting underlying differences in abilities, talents, interests, *etc.*—the characteristics of his *pars\opa*. Paul becomes a subject of interest on his own, not just as a specimen of “manhood”. And the integrity of his *identity* is bound up in the fact that his *pars\opa* is uniquely his and not another’s, whereas the integrity of his *qnoma* lies in its faithful reflection, in exemplary form, of the exact nature of any other ordinary man.

B. The Unified “Subject” of the Incarnation.

³⁹ *I.e.*, Paul’s *qnoma* is one, and Peter’s another. The difference is in numerical distinction.

⁴⁰ *I.e.*, Paul’s *qnoma* is an exemplary recapitulation in concrete form of the essence of human nature, as is Peter’s.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Who then for the eastern commentators is the “subject” of the *pars\opa* of Jesus Christ? Who is the *one* to whom one may refer the various *accidents* that set him apart from those who are consubstantial with him? Is he a *he* and not a *they*?

It is a consistent teaching of the Church of the East, whether before or after 612, that the manhood which was fashioned by the Holy Spirit from the material of the Virgin’s womb was for the express and only purpose of receiving the Incarnation of the Word and at no time possessed an independent existence. According to Babai, speaking of our Lord’s humanity,

“With the beginning of its fashioning was its taking [and] its anointing, *which was for the union*, and the image of the Invisible was received, and God the Word dwelt in it for ever—not as the impiety of those wicked men of old who said, ‘It came to pass and then was anointed,’ nor as those of the company of the accursed Paul⁴² who claimed that [it took place] at the baptism, nor as their colleagues who said that after the resurrection it acquired the honor of Sonship.”⁴³

Again, not allowing for any interval between the fashioning and the “taking”, he says,

“Thus it is incumbent upon us to understand that with the voice of the angel, who said, ‘The Holy Spirit shall come, and the power of the Most High shall rest upon you,’ immediately, with the sound, at that moment was the taking.”⁴⁴

The “reason for being” of the hypostatized manhood of Christ was to serve as the vehicle of God’s redemptive acts through voluntary obedience. It has no existence apart from its union with God the Word, which took place “that God the Word might be revealed in it, and fulfill all his dispensation in it, and show through it the beginning of the new age, and in it be worshipped for ever.”⁴⁵ God the Word is the *possessor* of the fashioning and the *subject* of its *qnoma*⁴⁶. It is his own flesh and blood which he took, not another’s, his own “temple”, his own “dwelling-place”, and his very own humanity. Here Babai does not stray far—if at all—from the confession of Is’o’yahb:

“. . . the Son of God, *God the Word, Light from Light*, descended and became incarnate, and became man by way of economy⁴⁷, beyond alteration

⁴² I.e., of Samosata.

⁴³ *LU*, pp. 91-92.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴⁶ See Appendix I of this paper.

⁴⁷ For **ܡܕܢܝܬܐ**.

or change. Our Lord God, Jesus Christ, who was born of the Father before all worlds in his Godhead, was born in the flesh from the ever-virgin Mary in the last times, the same [Lord God], yet not in the same [Godhead].”⁴⁸

There are not plural subjects in the mind of Babai or in those of his fellow “Nestorians”. There is one Son of God who takes his own flesh, not another’s, from the Blessed Virgin. The double consubstantiality and double birth of “the Son of God, God the Word, Light from Light,” with the Father, from whom he was begotten naturally, and with Mary, from whom he was begotten in the flesh of our humanity, is thus affirmed. Therefore Babai is able to concede the *communicatio idiomatum*, though preferring a more broadly indicative title inclusive of Godhead and manhood:

“God the Word is consubstantial with the Father, and because of the union the blessed Mary is called Mother of God and Mother of Man—Mother of Man according to her own nature, but Mother of God because of the union which he had with *his* humanity, which was his temple at the beginning of its fashioning and was begotten *in union*. Because the name ‘Christ’ is indicative of both natures in the hypostatic state of *his* [*i.e.*, God the Word’s] Godhead and *his* humanity, the Scriptures say that the blessed Mary bore ‘Christ’⁴⁹—not simply God in a disunited way, and not simply man untaken by God the Word.”⁵⁰

IV. CONCLUSION.

The legacy of Babai, his companions, and their successors has remained with the Church of the East to the present day. Nestorius is venerated and his vocabulary is employed in the service of Christological thought and expression. But the Church of the East rejects the epithet “Nestorian” because it does not accept all the implications of that name⁵¹. It confesses two natures in Christ, inseparable and unconfused, subsisting in one personal subject, whose subject, God the Word, the Son of God, God over all, is consubstantial with his Begetter in his own essential nature, and consubstantial with us in the nature which he took from the Virgin and made his own. Whether the formulae employed by this confession are adequate to express a true *metaphysical* union of the two

⁴⁸ *SO*, p. 194.

⁴⁹ The Scriptures regularly call Mary the “mother of Jesus”. But compare Mt. 1:16,18; Lk. 2:11.

⁵⁰ *LU*, pp. 264-265.

⁵¹ A secondary reason the Church of the East rejects the “Nestorian” label is that it suggests the Church began with Nestorius or with his followers. Even when this is not directly implied in the literature dealing with the Church, it is often inferred by the reader who is otherwise ignorant of the history of Christianity in the East.

disparate natures we are unable to say with any degree of certainty, for we are well aware that the “mystery” of the incarnation has eluded the powers of human thought and tongue to express to the satisfaction of all.

A. A Confession of Inadequacy.

The *intention* of all parties to this dispute has always been to construct an adequate philosophical vocabulary to describe in an orthodox fashion the union of God and man in Christ. This intention, though noble, has led us to much frustration, mutual suspicion, and discord, and the dissonance of our voices only seems to resolve into harmony—if ever so briefly—at that point when we all agree on the impenetrability of the mystery we so strive to explain. The Church of the East confesses, as do people of good will everywhere, that her tongue is too stammering, her mind too limited, and her vocabulary too inadequate to do justice to a concept so sublime. Though we have often spoken with confidence, as though all doubts had been resolved and all issues settled, in our hearts and minds we have acknowledged our own limitations and the limitations of our descriptions of the indescribable. It is with this confession of inadequacy that we stand before you seeking for understanding and reconciliation.

The humility we express is born out of the recognition of our part in the long-standing disunity of Christ’s body, and it reflects acknowledgment on our part that we have inflicted, as well as received, the wounds which that body bears. No matter how much we may attempt to justify the righteousness of our actions throughout the long history of this conflict, we ultimately conclude that all of us, to one extent or another, share the moral burden of having contributed to the present situation, a situation that is characterized by suspicion and separation among churches that have so much in common. A final analysis of the current ecclesiastical picture should prompt us to confess, each one of us, our part in the sin of division, and urge us to reach out for reconciliation. It should bring us to the point of expressing sorrow for the part we have played. For the very fact that divisions exist among our churches indicates the presence of sin, since schisms are bred in lovelessness and pride. But if there is to be forgiveness for any sin, there must first be a humble recognition of one’s own frailty, and a contrite spirit to liberate the conscience before God. Only then will we be able to convert the present situation of divisions and schisms into a future process of healing and reunion.

B. A Call for Reconciliation.

The attempt to explain the Incarnation, which was “for us men and our salvation”, has been the single most disruptive and destructive issue in Christendom. In the West the intervention of Christian Emperors consistently added fuel to the flames of discontent and disunion, frustrating the “oneness” for which our Lord prayed so fervently. In the East, the intervention of pagan Emperors made permanent the division of Christian from Christian, institutionalizing it and dooming the Church to unrelieved subjugation and humiliation. The role of the bishops in allowing this to take place, and even aiding and

abetting the process, is perhaps understandable given the then current concepts of corporate society, but from the vantage point of the twentieth century it appears to ordinary people as censurable. This description may be harsh, but it accurately reflects the reactions and feelings of those outside the Church, those to whom we must make our appeal to “repent and be baptized”, but who scorn us for our lack of love for one another. They do not *see* Nestorians, Chalcedonians, or Cyrillians, they *see* only professed *Christians*. What we aspire for them to discern in us is an image of Christ, if only “as through a glass darkly”, but this image appears to them murky because of our self-assertion.

Now we stand at the door of opportunity, with the challenge of Christian love set before us. It is ours to take hold of the opportunity that this conference affords us and to speak to one another as brothers seeking mutual understanding. It is also ours to continue the dialogue which will be necessary if we are to draw closer to mutual acceptance. Christ himself will surely be with us in this task until it is finished, for it is he who instituted his Church, poured out his unifying Spirit on his disciples and their followers, and prayed for their constant oneness. Our Lord has already blessed his Church in such a manner as that some type of unity already exists in her confession of the Nicene faith, in her common hope of the resurrection, and in the charity she strives to demonstrate in his name, as well as in the sacraments of faith she administers in Baptism and Eucharist, and in the apostolic succession which she preserves intact. There already exists an “imperfect” unity among our churches. Therefore, let us strive, through the grace of God and the guidance of his Holy Spirit, to realize an ever more “perfect” unity.

C. A Doxology of Hope For Renewal in Christ’s Body, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

And to the end that this desire might be achieved let us invoke the blessing and aid of God the Father, the Cause of our existence, and his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the head of his Church and the source of her reconciliation and unity, and his living and life-giving Spirit, who sanctifies and purifies the hearts and minds of all who yield in obedience to his persuasion. Blessed be our Triune God, for ever and ever, Amen.

Bishop Mar Bawai Soro
Chorbishop M. J. Birnie

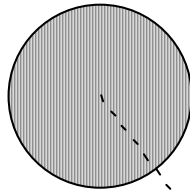
Pentecost 1994

APPENDIX # (1)

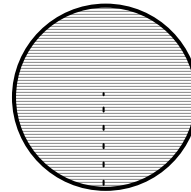
A Christological Chart ON THE UNION

24-29 June 1994
Pro Oriente Consultation • Vienna

Human Nature

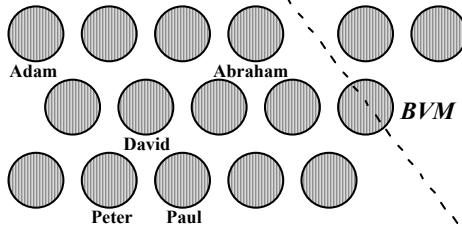


Holy Trinity

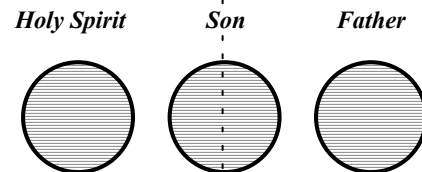


Abstract

Concrete Reality



Hypostatic Manifestation of Each Nature



Before the Incarnation

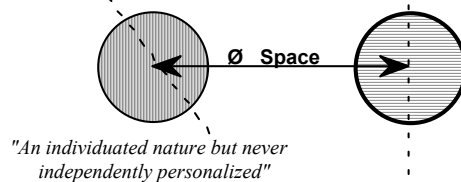
NOTES

- Jesus' human q'noma, i.e., a body assumed from the Blessed Virgin Mary and animated by a rational soul, did not exist prior to the Incarnation, and subsequent to it was indissolubly united with the Logos.
- The q'nome are united without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.
- The differences of the natures of divinity and humanity, with all their properties, faculties, and operations, are preserved.
- The union preserved the human and the divine natures but precluded the possibility of an independent human person. The divinity and humanity are united in the one Person of the same and unique Son of God and Lord Jesus Christ.

At the "Moment" of the Conception

Jesus' Human Q'noma

The Son of God



Concrete Reality

After the Incarnation

Concrete Reality

The Person
of our Lord Jesus Christ
the Son of God

APPENDIX II:

SYNODAL CHRISTOLOGICAL CONFESSIONS

SYNOD OF MAR AQAQ, AD 486

But our faith in the dispensation of Christ should also be in a confession of two natures of Godhead and manhood, none of us venturing to introduce mixture, commingling, or confusion into the distinctions of those two natures. Instead, while Godhead remains and is preserved in that which belongs to it, and manhood in that which belongs to it, we combine the copies⁵² of their natures in one Lordship and one worship because of the perfect and inseparable conjunction⁵³ which the Godhead had with the manhood. If anyone thinks or teaches others that suffering and change adhere to the Godhead of our Lord, not preserving — in regard to the union of the *pars\opa* of our Savior — the confession of perfect God and perfect man, the same shall be anathema. (Synod of Mar Aqaq, AD 486)

SYNOD OF MAR ABA, AD 544

. . . These things were made known with precision by the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, who learned from the Holy Spirit that Christ is not ordinary man, nor God stripped of the clothing of manhood in which he was revealed, but Christ is God and man, that is, manhood which is anointed with [the Godhead] which anoints it. As it is written, “Therefore God, your God, anoints you with the oil of gladness above your fellows,” the same making known his manhood. Again, “In the beginning was the Word,” this showing his Godhead, which exists eternally and for ever, which created all that is seen and all that is unseen, and exists in three qnome, without beginning, without change, without passion, and without division, which are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As our Lord said — for by him the eternal Trinity was made known — as he spoke concerning himself, “Destroy this temple,” that is, the manhood with which he clothed himself, and again said, “My Father, who [dwells] in me, performs these works,” and again concerning the Holy Spirit who is in him when he said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Because of this he has anointed me.” Behold, from the title “Christ” we learned about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we have understood his manhood from the same, and in it is the seal of the entire confession of Christianity. Anyone who does not confess in this way, let him be anathematized. Anyone who introduces a “quaternity”

⁵² For *ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ*.

⁵³ *ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ*.

into the holy and immutable Trinity, let him be anathematized. Anyone who does not confess that in the last time the Only-begotten Son of God, who is Christ our Lord, was revealed in the flesh, let him be anathematized. Anyone who does not acknowledge the suffering and death of the manhood of Christ, and the impassibility of his Godhead, let him be anathematized. Or anyone who seals a prayer with the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but numbers some other with them, or does not believe that in the name “Son” he refers to the Godhead and manhood of Christ together, or anyone who seals a prayer with the name of Christ and not as confessing the Trinity, let him be anathematized. (Synod of Mar Aba, AD 544)

SYNOD OF MAR ISHO‘YAHB , AD 587

. . . to “one Lord” they⁵⁴ added “Jesus Christ”, and revealed that which is one in common with the qnome of the Trinity . . . but they did not add “one Lord, the Son,” as in “one God, the Father.” Instead, they altered the order of their words and said “in one Lord, Jesus Christ,” not forgetting those correct matters which relate to the manhood of God the Word, magnificently explained and wisely proclaimed in one unity of the Godhead and manhood of Christ, even though those of the company of Eutyches babble and reject the manhood of the Son of God. For the title “Anointed One”⁵⁵ is indicative of his Godhead, which is from the Father, and of his manhood, which is indisputably from the mother, even though Eutyches and the offspring of his error speak foolishly and deceive, denying the taking of our manhood, or affirming the obliteration of the manhood of Christ. Indeed, the fathers consequently continued, saying, “the Only-begotten and First-born of all creatures,” as it is written.

Again, they added, “by whose hands the worlds were established and everything was created,” revealing (that) he was the Cause and Maker of all with his Father. Again, they made known concerning his Essence that he was “begotten of his Father before all ages and was not made — Light from Light, true God from true God” — Jesus Christ in his Godhead. Again, they continued, as it were, for the destruction of Arius, setting forth the word “homoousion,” that is, “connatural” and “co-essential” with the Father, by whose hand everything came to be — Jesus Christ in his Godhead. And struggling in the invincible armor of true teaching, with which they clothed themselves against the phantoms and apparitions of the worthless teachings of the Simonians and Manicheans, they said, “who for us men and for our salvation descended from Heaven and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and by the Virgin Mary and became man” — Jesus Christ, in the union of his natures, in his revelation [in the flesh, and in his incarnation — for this indicates the uniting of the natures of Godhead and manhood, in that he descended, became incarnate, and became man. It makes known the assumption of our manhood

⁵⁴ I.e., the 318 Fathers of Nicea.

⁵⁵ For **مسيح**.

indisputably, so that from every side the hallucinations of the company of Simon and Mani might be removed, who deny his incarnation, and the taking of a body, and the revelation] of God the Word, who took our manhood and dwelt in it — as it is written, “The Word became flesh and dwelt in us”⁵⁶ — and that, even more, the greatness of the lovingkindness of him who descended and dwelt in us might be revealed.

The impious Arius, because he ascribed things exalted and lowly to the nature of the Godhead of the Word, and did not know to apply them separately or conjointly, as the truth requires, for this reason was weighed (in the balances), and fell, and erred, and deceived, and was anathematized and excommunicated. But the fathers added to and completed the saying concerning the dispensation, and after the teaching concerning the divine nature of the Only-begotten, and after the teaching concerning the unity of the natures of Christ, that is, of his Godhead, which does not change and does not die, and his manhood, which is not rejected or forgotten, they added teaching concerning his manhood. As they had revealed clearly by way of exalted things concerning his Godhead, (so) they would reveal clearly concerning his manhood, which was taken for us and for our salvation and for the renewal of all creatures, saying, “He was crucified for us in the days of Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and died, and was buried, and rose after three days,” as the Holy Scriptures say — Jesus Christ in his manhood. That is — let us speak the truth — in his corporeal state he accepted the death of the cross for us, in that it is clear to all the upright in their confession that, as the nature of his Godhead does not suffer and die, so neither did his soul receive the sentence of death, for it is not possible for the soul to be subject to the limitation of death. Our Lord bore witness, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul.”⁵⁷ And the reality bore witness (to this), for after our Lord was crucified, and died, and his holy body was buried, he went in his soul to Paradise.

Again, the blessed fathers added, “And ascended to Heaven and sat down at the right hand of his father” — Jesus Christ in his manhood. For in his manhood he received exaltation and session at the right hand, not in his Godhead, which exists eternally and indestructibly with his Father. “And he is coming in glory to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom has no end” — Jesus Christ in his Godhead and in his manhood. . . .

This is the faith which does not corrupt, and this is its meaning, briefly, according to the sequence of its statements, by which the *par\opa* of Christ is proclaimed fully — and the natures of his Godhead and manhood — against those who acknowledge his Godhead but deny his manhood, and against those [who acknowledge his manhood but deny his Godhead, and against those] who deny his Godhead and confess that the manhood is ordinary or like one of the righteous. . . .

⁵⁶ Jn. 1:14.

⁵⁷ Mt. 10:28.

After they had thus richly and fully proclaimed the truth, they turned thereafter to the anathematization of Arius and the children of his error. “But to those who say that there was (a time) when he did not exist, or before he was begotten he did not exist, or he was made from nothing, or say he was from some other qnoma or essence, or reckon the Son of God changeable and mutable, such the catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.” The heretics, that is, in their stubbornness, venture to ascribe the properties and sufferings of the nature of the manhood of Christ to the nature and qnoma of the Godhead and Essence of the Word, things which occasionally, because of the perfect union which the manhood of Christ had with his Godhead, are ascribed to God economically, but not naturally. (Synod of Mar Isʿoʿyahb, AD 587)

ISHOʻYAHB I, LETTER TO YAʻQOB

The faith in all (these) things is marvelous and cannot be explained . . . which Christianity learned from the Holy Spirit through the apostles and through the prophets concerning the manifestation of God the Word, and concerning his dispensation in the body, and concerning the incarnation which was for us and for our salvation, unto the renewal and reformation of all creatures.

For because of the great love (with) which he loved us he departed from the bosom of his Father by way of good pleasure⁵⁸, not by way of removal⁵⁹, and came to the world, though he was (already) in the world, as it is written, the Hidden One revealed in the flesh. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He became, but was not changed. He who was the equal of God emptied himself and took the likeness of a servant. He took but did not increase, for in his generation as well as his taking his essence⁶⁰ remained without change and without addition. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God the Word, Light from Light, descended and became incarnate, and became man by way of economy⁶¹, beyond alteration or change. Our Lord God, Jesus Christ, who was born of the Father before all worlds in his Godhead, was born in the flesh from the ever-virgin Mary in the last times, the same, yet not in the same⁶². The Word became flesh in an inseparable union and dwelt among us. O the depth of the riches of the faith! He became but was not changed — let the Eutychians and Apollinarians lament! He took but did not add — let the Photinians and Paulinians wail! Again I say, let the faithless and the schismatic hear . . . the truth of the faith and remain within the ecclesiastical folds

⁵⁸ For ܡܠܟܘܬܐܝܗܘܢ.

⁵⁹ For ܡܠܟܘܬܐܝܗܘܢ.

⁶⁰ For ܡܠܟܘܬܐܝܗܘܢ.

⁶¹ For ܡܠܟܘܬܐܝܗܘܢ.

⁶² For 8hb ܡܠܟܘܬܐܝܗܘܢ ܡܠܟܘܬܐܝܗܘܢ ܡܠܟܘܬܐܝܗܘܢ. The antecedent of the first “same” (masculine) is “our Lord God, Jesus Christ,” and the antecedent of the second “same” (feminine) is “his Godhead.”

with the whole Church, saved by the blood of the great Shepherd of the flock, Jesus Christ the Son of God, God over all, born in his Godhead eternally from the Father without a mother. The same, but not in the same, was born in his manhood from a mother without a father in the last times, suffered in the flesh, was crucified, died, and was buried in the days of Pontius Pilate, and rose from the dead after three days. On the one hand, Christ, the Son of God, suffered in the flesh, while on the other hand, in the nature of his Godhead, the same Christ the Son of God was beyond sufferings — Jesus Christ, impassible and passible, the Creator of the worlds and the recipient of sufferings, who for us was impoverished though he was rich. God the Word accepted the insult of sufferings in the temple of his body economically, in a perfect union⁶³ without separation, though in the nature of his Godhead he did not suffer, as our Life-giver said, “Destroy this temple and after three days I will raise it up.”⁶⁴ Because the Jews in their stubbornness thought that he spoke concerning the temple of stones, the Evangelist explained the word of our Savior, saying, “But he spoke concerning the temple of his body.”⁶⁵ Our Lord explained the entrance — by way of union and not by way of mingling — into the *parasitic* union when he said, “No one has ascended to heaven except him who descended from heaven,” the Son of Man who descended from heaven, “the Son of Man who is in heaven.”⁶⁶ Indeed Christ, who descended from heaven without removal in his Godhead while not (yet) endued with a body⁶⁷, and was, in the infinitude of his Godhead, also in heaven, the same, in his manhood, was exalted to heaven while he did not lose his visible nature, according to the angelic declaration, “This Jesus who has been taken up from you to heaven will come just as you have seen him ascend to heaven.”⁶⁸ Christ, the Only-begotten and united, the Only-begotten of his Father, united and inseparable, whose Godhead is undying, incorruptible, and unalterable, and whose manhood is not taken away, or hidden, or destroyed. (Isho‘yahb I, letter to Ya‘qob)

SYNOD OF MAR SABRISHO‘, AD 596

It seemed good to his fatherhood and to all the metropolitans and bishops to write this composition of the faith . . . which accurately and plainly teaches us the confession which is in one glorious nature of the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and reveals and shows us the glorious mysteries of the dispensation of God the Word, which at the end of times he perfected and fulfilled in the nature of our humanity, the same by which the heathen are conquered who acknowledge a multitude of gods, and Judaism is

⁶³ ? for ܣܒܪܝܫܘܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ.

⁶⁴ Jn. 2:19.

⁶⁵ Jn. 2:21.

⁶⁶ Cf. Jn. 3:13.

⁶⁷ For ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ.

⁶⁸ Acts 1:11.

judged which does not acknowledge a Trinity of qnome, and all heresy is convicted and condemned which denies the Godhead and manhood of our Life-giver, Jesus Christ, accepting it with the exact meaning of the holy fathers, which the illustrious among the orthodox, the blessed Theodore the Antiochian, bishop of the city of Mopsuestia, “the Interpreter of the Divine Scriptures,” explained, with which all the orthodox in all regions have agreed and do agree, as also all the venerable fathers who have governed this apostolic and patriarchal see of our administration have held, while we anathematize and alienate from all contact with us everyone who denies the nature of the Godhead and the nature of the manhood of our Lord Jesus Christ, whether through mixture and commingling, or compounding or confusing, introducing, with regard to the union of the Son of God, either suffering, or death, or any of the mean circumstances of humanity in any way, to the glorious nature of his Godhead, or considering as a mere man the Lordly temple of God the Word, which, in an inexplicable mystery and an incomprehensible union, he joined to himself in the womb of the holy Virgin in an eternal, indestructible, and indivisible union. Again, we also reject one who introduces a quaternity into the Holy Trinity, or one who calls the one Christ, the Son of God, two sons or two Christs, or one who does not say that the Word of God fulfilled⁶⁹ the suffering of our salvation in the body of his manhood. Though he was in him, with him, and toward him in the belly, on the cross, in suffering, and for ever, inseparably, while the glorious nature of his Godhead did not participate in any sufferings, yet we strongly believe, according to the word and intent of the writings and traditions of the holy fathers, in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, who was begotten before the foundations of the world in his Godhead, spiritually, without a mother, and in the last times was born from the holy Virgin in a fleshly manner without the intercourse of a man through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is, in his eternal Godhead and in his manhood from Mary, one true Son of God, who in the nature of his manhood accepted suffering and death for us, and by the power of his Godhead raised up his uncorrupted body after three days, and promised resurrection from the dead, ascension to heaven, and a new and indestructible and abiding world for ever. (Synod of Mar Sabris'o', AD 596)

SYNOD OF GRIGOR, AD 605

. . . For the likeness of God took the likeness of a servant, according to the apostolic saying, and in it perfected and fulfilled the exalted dispensation which was for our salvation — the likeness of God in the likeness {210} of a servant, one Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom everything was made, perfect God and perfect man, perfect God in the nature of his Godhead, perfect man in the nature of his manhood, two natures of Godhead and manhood, the Godhead preserved in what belongs to it, the manhood in what belongs to it, joined in a true unity of the one pars\opa of the Son, Christ. The Godhead perfected the manhood through suffering, as it is written, though suffering,

⁶⁹ For **ܡܚܕܝܬܐ**.

change, or variation did not enter into the Godhead in any way. (Synod of Grigor, AD 605)

GIWARGIS, LETTER TO MINA

... the Savior of all appeared for our salvation in the last times, according to the predictions of prophecy. And who was sufficient to perfect our salvation if not the Word of God, he who was also our Creator? Through him our salvation was perfected, for very appropriately God the Word, by the will of his Father, for the salvation of us men and for the renewal of all creatures, and that he might turn us from error to the knowledge of his Godhead, came willingly, though not departing from the bosom of his Father, and within the womb of the holy Virgin Mary, whose descent was⁷⁰ from the seed of David and Abraham, according to the prediction of prophecy fashioned marvelously, beyond the strength of nature, a body in which there was an intelligent soul, and dwelt in it, uniting it with himself in one union of his own Sonship. For although in his perceptibility and imperceptibility he was consubstantial with us (in) body and soul, yet in the union with God the Word his Taker, who united him with himself, that through him he might reveal his hiddenness, and in him [might show forth] the greatness of the power of his Godhead for our salvation and for the renewal of all, we confess and say that he is one Son in his Godhead and in his manhood. Although he is two natures — God in nature and qnoma and man in nature and qnoma — yet we confess and glorify one Son of God, now and at his coming again and for ever. When we say “Anointed”⁷¹ — man who was anointed by Godhead, and Godhead which anointed manhood, according to the prediction of the prophecy of the blessed David, “Because of this God, your God, anoints you with the oil of gladness above your fellows”⁷² — it is not as those who were anointed with the blessed oil, for the manhood of Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, as it is well written, and although we also confess and believe that Christ is God, yet indeed, when we say “God”, it is not, by any means, “Christ” we are defining, for the Father is God but is not “Christ”, and the Holy Spirit is God but is not “Christ”, and although we see and know the man Christ, yet we also believe in and confess that he is God because of the Word of God who took him to himself and joined him with himself in an inseparable union, and made him his dwelling place for ever. (Giwargis, letter to Mina)

"SYNOD" OF AD 612

[illegible]71 **مكتبة** .

⁷² Ps. 45:7.

Because of this, our Lord Jesus Christ, who was begotten in his Godhead from his Father eternally, was born in the last times for our sake from the holy Virgin in his manhood. Though in his Godhead he remains without necessity, without passion, and without change, in his manhood, after his birth, he was also circumcised and grew up, according to the witness of Luke the Evangelist: “Jesus grew in his stature, and in wisdom and grace toward God and men.” He kept the Law and was baptized in the Jordan by John, and then began to proclaim the new covenant. While by the power of his Godhead he worked wonders — the cleansing of lepers, the opening of blind (eyes), the expulsion of demons, the raising of the dead — yet in the nature of his manhood he thirsted, hungered, ate, drank, became weary, and slept. Last of all (these) things, for our sake he delivered himself over and was crucified, suffered, and died, though his Godhead did not depart from him, nor did it suffer. His body was wrapped in a linen cloth and placed in a tomb, and after three days he rose by the power of his Godhead, as he had said beforehand to the Jews, “Destroy this temple and after three days I will raise it up.” The Evangelist interprets (this), saying, “But he spoke concerning the temple of his body.” And after he rose he went about on the earth with his disciples (for) forty days, showing them his hands and his feet, saying, “Touch me and know that a spirit has no flesh and bones as you see that I have,” that by word and by deed he might assure them concerning his resurrection, and by the trustworthiness of his resurrection he might confirm in us the hope of our resurrection. And after forty days he ascended to heaven in the sight of his disciples, while they were looking at him, and a cloud received him and he was hidden from their eyes, according to the witness of Scripture. And we confess that he is going to come from heaven with the power and glory of his angels and bring about resurrection for all the race of men, and judgment and trial for all rational (beings), as the angels said to the apostles at the moment of his ascension, “This Jesus who is taken up from you to heaven shall so come as you have seen him ascending to heaven.” By this they clearly taught us that also the *qnoma* of this manhood was taken up to heaven⁷⁵, and it was not destroyed or changed, but was preserved in an inseparable union with his Godhead in the exalted glory in which he is going to appear⁷⁶ in his final revelation from heaven, to the shame of his crucifiers, and to the rejoicing and boast of his faithful, to whom, and to whose Father, and to the Holy Spirit (belong) glory and honor for ever. (“Synod” of AD 612)

76 **مَدِينَةُ الْمَدِينَةِ.**