

# CHRISTOLOGICAL CONCEPTIONS AND EXPRESSIONS OF THE EARLY SYRIAC AUTHORS AND WRITINGS

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The history of the Church witnesses a rich plurality in the understanding of the mystery of Christ. Different ecclesial traditions had their own Christology. East and West have different images of Christ. Lack of appreciation of the different approaches have accounted for the Christological controversies in the history of the Church. Today, however, there is a great openness from the part of the Church towards the different expressions of the Christological languages.<sup>1</sup> This paper attempts to bring to light the less known and researched, yet valid and important Christological conceptions and expressions of the Early Syriac authors and writings for the benefit of the Christological discussions today.

## **1. Christological Conceptions in the Syriac Christian Writings**

Within its Semitic background, the early Syriac writings and authors present the person and mission of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the World. The four early Syriac documents: *The Odes of Solomon*, *The Acts of Judas Thomas*, *The Teachings of Addai* and *The Syriac Didascalia of the Holy Apostles* can be considered as representatives of early Syriac

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<sup>1</sup>John Thoppil, "Christology in the East Syriac Tradition," *East Syriac Theology, Theology*, Paul Maniyattu(ed.), Satna: St Ephrem's Publications, 2007, 154.

writings, among which the first three having a kerygmatic interest and the fourth one having a pastoral interest.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. 1. *The Odes of Solomon*

*Odes of Solomon* is probably the oldest surviving Christian writing, of the Syriac origin.<sup>2</sup> It consists of 42 short lyric poems. It represents the earliest surviving Christian Syriac text.<sup>3</sup> The author presents meditations on the sufferings of the Saviour, which form a part of the kerygma on His earthly life, and it may perhaps be said that in so doing, the author, as a teacher, had a kerygmatic purpose. Moreover this kerygmatic emphasis brings out specific themes such as the conception of Jesus by the blessed Virgin, His Incarnation, passion and resurrection.<sup>4</sup> It is our task to supply a systematic theological language so as to bring out the meaning of the author's thought.

For the early Christians Jesus Christ was everything, and so kerygma (Acts 2: 14-36), faith (Acts 2: 37-42), worship (Phil 2: 5-11), possessions (Acts 5: 1-11) and everything else could be seen only in relation to His person. In a thorough reading and analysis of the *Odes* one may note that it is strange that the name 'Jesus' never occurs in the *Odes*. It can be understood as a precaution against persecution of the early Christians by the Emperors. *The Odes* use, in fact a number of specific titles for Jesus such as 'Saviour' (*paroqa*), 'Grace' (*taybuta*), 'Word,' (*melta*), etc. In using the title 'Saviour,' the author brings out two dimensions of the saviour's mission, as the one who takes us to salvation and as the one who gives life.<sup>5</sup>

*The Odes* present an elaborate and detailed meditation on the passion of the saviour. This raises a fundamental question: was the Lord's suffering redemptive? Even though *The Odes* refer to the idea of redemption, there is no much evidence of the redemptive value of the passion.<sup>6</sup> In *The Odes* there is no suggestion that the Saviour saves through his death. The understanding of the redemptive value of Christ's suffering is expressed only in terms of an instruction of the people and not of forgiveness of sins. Even though *The Odes* are rich in imageries from the Old Testament, they do not have a

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<sup>1</sup>Antony Kollampampil, *From Symbol to Truth, From Symbol to Truth: A Syriac Understanding of the Paschal Mystery*, Rome: Centro Liturgico Vincenziano, 2000, 46.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, 24-25.

<sup>3</sup>Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 25.

<sup>4</sup>Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 1, *The Beginning of Patristic Literature*, Brussels: Spectrum Publishers, 1950, 160-168.

<sup>5</sup>A. Kollampampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 51.

<sup>6</sup>Brian McNeil & William Horbury, ed., *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 136-142.

comprehensive theological vision of the Gospels, which of course, cannot be expected, from such a document originating in the first century, when Christian theology was still in an embryonic stage.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. 2. *The Acts of Judas Thomas, the Apostle*

*The Acts of Judas Thomas* is an apocryphal writing that gives an account of St Thomas' ministry as a missionary and of his apostolate in India.<sup>2</sup> *The Acts*, in its content and development of themes, represents early Syriac theology.<sup>3</sup> *The Acts* presents the entire salvific action of the Messiah in a comprehensive manner.<sup>4</sup>

The doctrinal content of *The Acts*, is encapsulated in a number of characteristic series of symbolic and divine titles applied to Christ, of which among Syriac writings *The Acts* is a particularly rich source.<sup>5</sup> The titles are grouped in lists, a close study of which will shed light on the theme of the salvific suffering of Jesus. Apart from some individual references in other chapters, most of the titles applied to Christ are found in chapters 10, 39, 47, 48, 60, 65, 80, 97, 119, 121, 129, 149 156 and 167. The title most frequently used is 'the Messiah' (*Iso Msiha*). Jesus is also the 'Life-Giver' (*mahyana*), 'God of Truth' (*alaha dasrara*), 'Son of God' (*bare(h) d'alaha*), and 'Word of God' (*Melta d'alaha*) who is the 'Disposer' (*mdabbrana*) of all created things.

*The Acts* underlines the redemptive value of the death of Jesus in phrases such as 'Lord, who died that you might give me life.'<sup>6</sup> Jesus the Good Shepherd (*ra'ya taba*) accomplished the redemption by giving His life for his flock, by overcoming the wolf and by rescuing his lambs.<sup>7</sup> Baptism is His sign (*rusme*) and the Eucharist is His table. For *The Acts*, the victory is of the incorruptible Bridegroom, the Messiah, over the corruptible, the devil.<sup>8</sup> The conquest of the devil by the Saviour, effected through His blood, is the second phase of the act of redemption in Jesus, the first being the Incarnation. The resurrection of the Messiah is seen as being in view of our own resurrection: 'Glory to your resurrection from the grave that we might have resurrection and a rising up.' The whole action of Jesus is

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<sup>1</sup>A. Kollamparampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 59.

<sup>2</sup>Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 1, 139.

<sup>3</sup>A. F. J. Klijn, *Acts of Judas Thomas*, (based on W. Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, ed., from Syriac Manuscript in the British Library), Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003, 38.

<sup>4</sup>A. Kollamparampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 66.

<sup>5</sup>Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 161.

<sup>6</sup>A. F. J. Klijn, *Acts of Judas Thomas*, 74.

<sup>7</sup>A. F. J. Klijn, *Acts of Judas Thomas*, 86.

<sup>8</sup>A. F. J. Klijn, *Acts of Judas Thomas*, 34-37.

summarized by saying that 'he came, was crucified and rose in three days.'<sup>1</sup>

### 2. 3. *The Syriac Didascalia of the Holy Apostles*

*The Syriac Didascalia of the Holy Apostles* is known as *The Catholic Teaching of the Twelve Apostles and the Holy Disciples of Our Saviour*. It is an early manual of ecclesiastical praxis and administration which introduces the tenets, life, ecclesiastical practices, cult discipline and the ethos of the Christian community of Syria. The theme of Messianic suffering is discernable in this text mainly under the titles Messiah (*msiha*), Lord (*marya*), and Saviour (*paroqa*). Eternal life is attained through the Messiah's clothing Himself in a body (*ibes maran pagra*) – the typical Syriac expression for Incarnation – and his passion (*hase damsiha*). The content of the teaching is that the kingdom of the name of Christ and his divine economy (technically called *mdabbranutha*, meaning 'dispensation') of God is realized in His passion and in His resurrection. He took upon Himself the sins of all and He is the head of those who are justified, the way to the Father, the true High Priest (*rabba kahne(h) srira*) and the king (*malka msiha*).<sup>2</sup>

The Lordship of Jesus is manifested through His teachings and through His redeeming ministry. His message is love and mercy, a message entrusted to his disciples in order that they might instruct the Jews and the Gentiles. This teaching took concrete form in His ministry. The saving ministry of the Lord is further discussed under the third important title given to Jesus, namely the Saviour (*paroqa*). Here *The Didascalia* explains the saving mission of Jesus in its double dimension of fulfilling the Law and liberating from the Legislation:

But therefore you shall not set them upon yourself; for our Saviour came for no other reason but to fulfil the Law, and to set us loose from those bounds of the Second Legislation. For He set loose those bonds and thus called those who believe in Him, and says: 'Come unto me all you that toil and are laden with heavy burdens, and I will give you rest' (Mt 11: 28).<sup>3</sup>

The first and most important title attributed to Jesus (repeated about forty times), however, is that of Messiah (*msiha*), through the use of which the unknown author tries to convince his community of the uniqueness of Jesus. Jesus is the Great God (*alaha rabba*) and the Son and the Beloved of the Almighty God (*bareh w-habbibeh d'alaha ahidkol*) the Word of God (*melteh d'alaha*) and Son of Man (*bareh d'nasa*) who

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<sup>1</sup>A. F. J. Klijn, *Acts of Judas Thomas*, 96.

<sup>2</sup>A. Kollampampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 77.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur, Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac I & II*, CSCO, syri 175, 179, Louvain, 1979, 29.

became the Nazarene (*iso msiha nasaraya*).<sup>1</sup> The text also lays stress in its teaching about Jesus as the Lord (*marya*), a title employed about fifty times. As His Lordship is manifested through His teaching and redeeming ministry, He is the Good Teacher whose message is love and mercy.

By means of the titles Messiah, Lord and Saviour, *The Didascalia* teaches the uniqueness of the person of Christ and likewise the uniqueness of His teaching on love and mercy. His redemptive act was realized both by fulfilling the Law and by granting liberation from the bonds of the Law. In the *Didascalia*, the saviour represents the fulfilment of the Old Testament. He is the Lord principally because of His salvific deed. The cross represents His victory, and for that reason it has become the symbol of the whole human race, even if the victory was rejected by both the Israel and the pagans. The detailed narrative of chapter 21 evidently, with the aim of preparing for the Easter, instructs the people to confess the paschal mystery of Christ. Here it seems that the scope of this early Church order was to orientate people to respond to the salvific deed of God actualized in the mystery of Christ. The response is manifested through faith, which is celebrated in the worship of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

#### **2. 4. The Teaching of Addai, the Apostle**

*The Teaching of Addai, the Apostle*, also known as *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle*, is an ancient Syriac document, dated generally to about 400 A. D. Besides many scattered references, the work contains three points of teaching about the entire Messianic activity, extending from the birth to the ascension of the Messiah and concentrated on the Incarnation, crucifixion and descent into Sheol.<sup>3</sup>

The Incarnation of Messiah, the first point of the teaching, is realized through his coming down (*nhat*) from heaven or by his diminishing himself (*'azer napseh*) or abasing his exalted divinity (*'slahuta mrimts*). This action of humiliation is concretized by taking (*sqal*) or by putting on the body (*lbes wa pagra*).<sup>4</sup> The descent of the Messiah into the house of the dead (*be(y)t mita*) which was without precedent, resulted in life for the dead. His manner of resurrection, unobserved by those who were watching the tomb where He was laid, is mystery, and the watchers (*ire*, meaning 'angels') became the heralds (*karoze*) and proclaimers of His resurrection. When He ascended He took many to His glorious Father.

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<sup>1</sup>Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac* 26.

<sup>2</sup>A. Kollampampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 84.

<sup>3</sup>G. Phillips, *Doctrine of Addai*, trans. & ed., London: Trubner, 1876, 9.

<sup>4</sup>G. Phillips, *Doctrine of Addai*, 18.

*The Teaching of Addai* makes it clear that the Incarnation, suffering and the death of Jesus were by His own free will, moreover through the crucifixion, the Messiah was fulfilling the will of God, the Father. This was in fulfilment of the prophecies, for the prophets had spoken of His birth, suffering, resurrection ascension to His Father and his sitting at the right hand.

The titles frequently used in *The Teaching of Addai* for Jesus are 'Messiah' (*msiha*), 'Saviour' (*paroqa*) 'Good Physician' (*asya taba*), 'Son of God' (*bare d'alaha*), and 'Son of Man' (*bareh d'nasa*). These titles elucidate the person and mission of Jesus on this Earth. *The Teaching of Addai* is clear on the motive underlying the Messianic deeds. Jesus' birth and His suffering of death are for the good end. This good end is the salvation of all people (*purqana d-kolhon*). The theme of teaching or instruction for salvation finds a literary echo in the *anaphora of the Apostles Mar Addai and Mari*, especially in the fourth *G'hanta* prayer.

He, our Lord and our God came and in His life-giving Gospel, taught us all the purity and holiness of the prophets and the apostles, martyrs and the confessors, the doctors and the bishops, priests and the deacons and all the children of the holy Catholic Church who have been signed + with the living and life-giving seal of holy baptism.<sup>1</sup>

This particular prayer in the *Anaphora* affirms that the advent of Jesus Christ on this earth was to teach humankind and the content of His instruction was the life-giving Gospel. His suffering has put an end to the power of death, and by the suffering of the Son, death which has control over all people has passed away and ceased. Salvation is promised to all those who conduct themselves according to the teaching of the Apostle and who with fear and trembling persevere in it and serve each day, until the second coming of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

*The Teaching of Addai, the Apostle*, presents a Christo-centric dimension, a fact which naturally gives a particular attention to the person of the Messiah and especially to His activities. He is the promised Saviour. He put on the body and thus diminished himself through his Incarnation. The Cosmos, on the other hand, through its positive reaction, showed fidelity to its Lord. Jesus underwent suffering by the free choice of his will, which was identical with that of God the Father. His suffering and death effected the salvation of all people. His descent into the house of the dead gave life to many and

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<sup>1</sup>The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana, 56.

<sup>2</sup>G. Phillips, *Doctrine of Addai*, 40.

thus became the symbol of victory over death. Thus, *The Teaching of Addai*, offers a comprehensive view of the messianic activity of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Christological Conceptions in the Syriac Christian Authors

#### 3. 1. Aphrahat

Aphrahat, the Persian sage is known for his twenty-three *Demonstrations* or *Expositions*. In these *Demonstrations*, the important titles used by Aphrahat for his didactic purpose are 'Lord,' 'Jesus Christ,' 'Saviour' and 'Shepherd.' Through the use of the title Messiah, Aphrahat further brings out other aspects of Jesus' life. For him, Jesus is the Son of God, who became human and was crucified in fulfilment of the prophecies. He is also the resuscitator of the world and the door of heaven. He is also the physician (*asya*) of all the sick, the intelligent and glorious physician who cures all our pains (*kibe*) by giving his Spirit as medicine.<sup>2</sup> Through the title shepherd (*raya*), Aphrahat unfolds the saving deed of Jesus, which was foretold by the prophet Zachariah (Zach 13: 7). Aphrahat also affirms that Jesus the Good Shepherd (*raya taba*) is likewise the Judge, who will call us to account on His return. The most important typology used by Aphrahat, as far as his central teaching is concerned, to explain the saving deeds of Jesus, is that of the true Lamb (*emra dasrara*). He is the true Lamb whose body and blood, the Eucharist, is for our purification and expiation.

Aphrahat speaks about the salvific mystery of Christ as realized by means of His passion, death and resurrection in at least thirteen of his *Demonstrations*. The key emphasis of Aphrahat's Christology can be understood as the suffering of the Messiah. There is in the teaching of Aphrahat an affinity with Pauline teaching on Baptism as a partaking in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ (Rom 6: 3-4; Col 2: 12).

In his *Demonstrations*, Aphrahat centres his teaching on the very person of Jesus, who is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. The salvific work of Jesus is realized by the destruction of the Evil One through death on the cross and by leading the people to heaven. Aphrahat's portrayal of these realities relies on an extensive use of the Scripture. The typological presentation of Jesus as the true lamb allows Aphrahat to bring out the redemptive role of Jesus in terms of the Jewish paschal lamb background. The moment of fulfilment is the paschal night, which includes the death on the cross and makes the birth of the sacraments. The sacrificial death of Christ

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<sup>1</sup>A. Kollamparampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 74.

<sup>2</sup>Aphrahat, *Demonstrations*, 14: 44, E.T. Kuriakose Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations II*, Changanassery: Catholic Theological Studies of India, 1999, 104.

has fulfilled the Old Testament mysteries, has conquered Sheol and has instituted the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. 2. Ephrem

Ephrem, acclaimed as the 'Harp of the Holy Spirit,' is one of the greatest of the poet-theologians of early Eastern Christianity and the best known of the Syriac Fathers in the Western world. For him salvation consists in entry into a new paradise restored in Christ, where God allows humanity to eat from the tree of life and of knowledge. The poet theologian applies symbolic theology in order to present Jesus as the Christ who is the fulfilment of all types and symbols. The title Second Adam is used by Ephrem to emphasise the redemptive act of Christ. Christ the Second Adam, by putting on the body (*lbes pagra*) affirmed that He can endure suffering. He also reversed by means of His suffering, everything that Adam did. Thus the Second Adam paid off the debt of the first Adam and through His life-giving death restored life to the first life. In short, for Ephrem the Second Adam took the pains of Adam to Himself, crowned with thorns and gave the bread of life.<sup>2</sup>

The titles Physician (*asya*) and medicine of life (*sam hayye*) are frequently used for Jesus. In fact the whole of salvation history, for Ephrem, can be presented as a process of healing 'which both extends back to the reaches of primordial time, and down to the depth of the fallen human state.'<sup>3</sup> In the writings of Ephrem the imagery of Shepherd and Lamb are interwoven. The fulfilment of the Jewish Passover in the Christian Pasch through symbols of the paschal lamb and unleavened bread prefigure the Eucharistic sacrifice. Thus the Upper room becomes the meeting place between the two lambs. Christ's sacrifice and death and the institution of the Eucharist and baptism fulfilled all the types and symbols. With Christ a new era or truth or reality is inaugurated, which is also simultaneously the time of the Church and of the mysteries of the Church. The Church and the sacraments continue to exist until the eschatological fulfilment of the kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Ephrem's key soteriological thought is that of the re-entry of all humanity into Paradise through Christ.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. 3. Cyrillona, Narsai and Cyrus of Edessa

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<sup>1</sup>A. Kollamparampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 103.

<sup>2</sup>Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 82-86.

<sup>3</sup>Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, Rome: CIIS, 1985, 19. The same title has a second edition from Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1992.

<sup>4</sup>A. Kollamparampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 113.

<sup>5</sup>A. Kollamparampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 121.



Three further important Syriac Fathers, Cyrillona, Narsai and Cyrus of Edessa, represent among them a period extending from the end of the fourth century until the middle of the sixth. The Syriac East had by this time achieved a systematic theological training, which in turn promoted more organized theological reflection. The Schools of Edessa and later that of Nisibis ranked as leading early theological universities of Christendom.

Through the very limited number of titles used by him, Cyrillona gives strong emphasis to Christ's divinity. Prompted by his particular theological vision, he insists upon Christ as the Lord and the High Priest. He presents the events in the Upper Room on the day of Pasch as the revelation of the summary of the mission of Jesus Christ. The Upper Room celebration recapitulates the entire divine economy, understood as beginning with the Fall of the first parents and extending to the redemption effected by Jesus Christ. The celebration marks the defeat of Satan and the proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus. In Cyrillona, this saving mystery of Christ acquires a liturgical dimension in Jesus the High Priest, especially as He places the paschal mystery in relation with the Church which is His bride. The ineffable love of the Heavenly Bridegroom is sealed by entrusting her with His own saving mystery for Eucharistic celebration.<sup>1</sup>

Narsai was the teacher and director of the School of Edessa and later, of that of Nisibis, and he is considered to be the most profound and original theologian of the great Church of the East.<sup>2</sup> The key title Narsai uses for Jesus is Second Adam. The Second Adam restored the disfigured image of the first Adam. He did it through His death and so he is the redeemer. Jesus the Second Adam realizes not only the 're-figuration' of the individual person, but also restores unity to the entire humanity by becoming its centre. Narsai sees the voluntary suffering and death of the Second Adam as bringing about His own exaltation and that of all humanity.

Cyrus of Edessa, a disciple of Mar Abba, was a student of the school of Nisibis and later became a teacher (*malpana*) at the school of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. In his six *Explanations*, Cyrus of Edessa presents the person of Jesus as Lord, Redeemer and Christ, and as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. He considers the crucifixion of Christ as the remainder of the sin of Adam, for, the obedient New Adam of Calvary conquers the disobedience of the Adam in Eden. The Eucharist for Cyrus is the body and blood of

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<sup>1</sup>A. Kollampampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 131.

<sup>2</sup>W. Macomber, "The Manuscripts of the Metrical Homilies of Narsai," in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 39 (1973) 275-306.

Christ, the 'symbol' of Christ himself, and hence the Church is present in a heavenly manner where the mystery of His body and blood is commemorated.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. 4. Jacob of Serugh

Jacob of Serugh stands as one of the greatest hymnographers of the Syriac tradition, perhaps second only to Ephrem.<sup>2</sup> Jacob of Serugh presents Jesus Christ as the source and medium of human salvation. According to him the divine plan of salvation in Christ is realized through Creation, Incarnation and Resurrection. He makes use of the medium of Adam/Christ Complementarity to present his Christological treatises. Jacob of Serugh uses imageries abundantly to elucidate his conception of Christ as the first Adam and salvation attained by the life and mission of Christ. We shall consider this later.

### 4. The Thematic Doctrinal Exposition of Early Syriac Christology

We have the first dogmatic formulation on any of the precepts of Christian faith, in the Council of Nicea (AD 325). Early Syriac authors had no intention to present the dogmas, but the writings are "doctrinal in the sense that they contain many fundamental doctrinal principles of Christianity."<sup>3</sup> Understanding the original notion conveyed by Early Syriac terminologies is very important and relevant for the right comprehension of Christology.<sup>4</sup> The Early Syriac Christology can be better understood with the help of the terminologies like *Kyana*- nature, *Qnoma* – hypostasis and *Parsopa* – person. These terms did not have a uniform significance among the various groups in the Syriac tradition.<sup>5</sup> These terminologies are liable to be misunderstood and misinterpreted easily.<sup>6</sup> A correct formulation may be wrongly understood, whereas an apparently wrong formulation could be taken for the right one.<sup>7</sup>

The term *Kyana* corresponds to the Greek *physis* and to the Latin *natura*. It refers to the common elements of a species. It is nature in general and abstract, in contrast to a particular and concrete nature.

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<sup>1</sup>A. Kollampampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 149.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Kollampampil, *Salvation in Christ According to Jacob of Serugh*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001, 31.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Kallarangu, "The Acts of Thomas Deserves more Theological and Ecclesiological Attention," *Christian Orient*, 17, 4 (December 1986), 197-202.

<sup>4</sup>Louis Sako. "Iso Yahb II's Syro Oriental Terminology and its Significance," *Christian Orient*, 5, 3 (October 1984), 134-141.

<sup>5</sup>Geevarghese Chediath, "The Three Crucial Terms in Syriac Theology – *Kyana*, *Qnoma* and *Parsopa*," *The Harp*, 15 (2002) 68-80.

<sup>6</sup>John Thoppil, "Christology in the East Syriac Tradition," 162.

<sup>7</sup>Geevarghese Chediath, "The Three Crucial Terms in Syriac Theology – *Kyana*, *Qnoma* and *Parsopa*," 65.

This is the most ambiguous term which was instrumental to many of the Christological controversies.<sup>1</sup> The term *Qnoma* is the most difficult and complicated of the Syriac terms related to the mystery of Christ. It corresponds to Greek *hypostatis* and to Latin *substantia*. *Qnoma* refers to a substance and a concrete reality in contrast to a general thing. It is the principle which particularizes the general nature common to all species. It is an individual that exists by itself. The *Qnoma* is the manifestation of the *Kyana*. *Qnoma* is not to be translated as a synonym of *Parsopa* because this would lead to a misunderstanding of the Syriac terminology.<sup>2</sup>

*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.<sup>3</sup> *Parsopa* originally meant appearance, face and has obtained the meaning of a person. These 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, *Kyana* can be defined as a nature in the abstract sense and *Qnoma* as a concretized nature and *Parsopa* as person.

### **5. The Christological Significance of the Mystery of Adam-Christ Complementarity**

Early Syriac Christology can be understood with the help of the mystery of Adam-Christ complementarity which will enhance the understanding of this mystery more vividly and brightly. Early Syriac Fathers make use of types and symbols, mainly taken from the Scripture to present their Christological conceptions and deliberations. Christ is the Second Adam who perfected all the deformities which were present in the first Adam. The Creation, fall, re-entry in to the paradise, etc., are presented as part of the organic development in the divine economy of salvation.

The solidarity of humanity with the first Adam and the Second Adam/Christ should be borne in mind to appreciate the discussion on the mystery of Adam-Christ complementarity. Adam was created in the model of the uncreated Only-Begotten. Aphrahat states that 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

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Plamthottam, "Christological Technical Terms," *Ephrem's Theological Journal*, 13, 2 (October 2009) 93.

<sup>2</sup>Plamthottam, "Christological Technical Terms," 101.

<sup>3</sup>Thoppil, "Christology in the East Syriac Tradition," 163.

was old in conception, came in to birth as the youngest. Hence, in the material world Adam stands as the first as well as the last.<sup>1</sup> The very 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 would reach perfection by justification through the same mercy that forms Adam a second time.<sup>2</sup>

In the vision of Jacob of Serugh Adam-Christ complementarity works mainly at two levels. On the one hand, Christ renders perfection to Adam/humanity in whatever Adam had been destined to attain, yet failed to attain due to his wrong conduct. On the other hand, the perfection conferred on humanity by Christ has a more profound and extensive nature that fulfils all divine promises in the creation of the world. This divine-human relationship through Christ, as envisaged by the early Christian writers, has both aspects of human becoming and divine transcendence. In the light of Ephrem's views Sebastian 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. Here both the primordial and eschatological paradises belong to the sacred time and space.<sup>3</sup>

### **6. Christological Perspectives in the Early Syriac Holy Qurbana and Liturgy of Hours**

Liturgy is invariably the *locus theologicus* (place of theology) of every Christian tradition. Early Syriac Christology is liturgical Christology. Christ is the heart of Christian liturgy.<sup>4</sup> The liturgical Christology looks into the core of liturgy, the aspects of the person and mission of Christ in the liturgy. Early 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 very beginning of the Holy Qurbana there is a clear allusion to the birth of Christ, "Glory to God in the highest." The saving actions of Christ are recalled, celebrated and actualized in the liturgy.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>T. Kollamparambil, *Salvation in Christ According to Jacob of Serugh*, 374.

<sup>2</sup>Ephrem, *Nisibean Hymns, Des Heiliger Ephrem des Syrerers Carmina Nisibena I*, CSCO 218/219 (Syri 92/93), Louvain 1961, and II CSCO 240/241 (Syri 102/103), ed., E. Beck, Louvain 1963.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, pp. 31-34, 100-101, 150-153 for a general pattern of this theological theme.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Kochuparambil, "The Liturgical Christology of the Syro-Malabar Church," *Thomas Christian Heritage*, 1. 1 (November 2008) 81.

<sup>5</sup>CCC, 1104.

abundance of Christological titles in the liturgy expresses the manifold dimensions of the person and mission of Christ. In the liturgy Christ is addressed or referred to in the following titles: *Iso M'siha*, *M'siha*, The Son, Son of God, Your beloved Son and Our Lord, Our Redeemer, Your Anointed, Our Lord and Our God, Lord of all, Saviour, Brightness of the Father's Glory, Giver of life, Peace, The Only Begotten, First born of all Creation, First fruit of our nature, Heavenly Bridegroom, etc. The Anaphoras in the liturgy are permeated with Christological affirmations. The Lordship and divinity of Christ are affirmed directly or indirectly in the Anaphoras.

The Liturgy of the Hours of a Church is a special celebration of its faith. In the Early Syriac tradition there are three main canonical hours for the day. They are *Ramsa*, the Evening Prayer, *Lelya*, the Night Prayer and *Sapra*, the Morning Prayer. *Ramsa*, is an office of the lighting of the lamps, which proclaimed that Christ is the light of the world. The divine nature of Christ as well as the reception of the human nature in the Incarnation is specified in the prayers. In the hymns and prayers of the liturgy of the hours, different Christological themes like Incarnation of Christ in body, person of Christ, his natures, his function, etc. are presented and to a certain extent they are explained for the purpose of catechizing the younger generation. The theology of the liturgy of hours always stresses the fact of our vocation of what we have become and are ever being in Christ.<sup>1</sup> It is our vocation to enter in to the salvific event, through the celebration of the liturgy of hours, to live that Christ-life of priestly praise and glory.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

Christological conceptions presented by the Early Syriac authors pay witness to their love for Christ and His Kingdom. The Christology and Soteriology they present are worthy tongues of the Orient in preaching Christ, the Risen Lord. In all five authors we considered – Aphrahat, Ephrem, Cyrillona, Narsai and Cyrus – we find Jesus proclaimed as Lord and Christ. Early Syriac Fathers in their thinking, writings and actions unanimously confess that Jesus Christ is true God and true human, and thereby they affirm their faith and belief in human divinization made possible through His life, ministry, passion, death and resurrection. Along with unity of thought in basic theological issues, Early Syriac Fathers present a gradual development of theology in the passage of time. The Early Syriac

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<sup>1</sup>Johnson Chittilapilly, *Mdabbranutha*, Kottayam: OIRSI, 1999, 68.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Taft, *Liturgy of the Hours*, Collegeville: The Order of St Benedict, Inc., 1986, 347.

Fathers, distinguished by their venerable antiquity, handed down from the Apostles in vivid experience, an authentic Christological and ecclesiological vision, which forms an integral part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church.<sup>1</sup>

An examination of the ancient Syriac writings shows that there are many points that they share in common with regards to the person and mission of Jesus. Out of kerygmatic and didactic interests, they present Jesus from a particular angle in which His person and mission are identified. No one gives a 'biography' of the Messiah, but rather they discuss His salvific activity as fulfilled in His life-giving passion and resurrection. With regard to the mystery of Jesus Christ and its redemptive value, ancient Syriac authors/writings share similar views. Jesus died so that the entire humankind may have life and salvation. Early Syriac Christianity developed a distinctive reflection and spirituality, centred on the person of Jesus and on His paschal mysteries. For them, Jesus Christ is the gift of salvation, the cause of liberation and rejoicing. Syriac Christianity believed in a Jesus who was victorious over the powers of Sin, Death and Sheol. Jesus Christ is therefore, the saviour of the entire universe, and His universal vision of salvation in the person of Jesus Christ gave a global perspective to the believing community.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. Kollampampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 152.

<sup>2</sup>A. Kollampampil, *From Symbol to Truth*, 84.