

Typology of Mary in the Writings of East Syriac Fathers

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Introduction

Mary is to Christ as the moon is to the sun; she is the reflection of Christ. You can only stare at the sun for half a second, but you may gaze at the moon for the whole night; this analogy also applies to the intensity of Christ. He is overwhelming, but in His reflection, we can see, reflect, and meditate on Mary. All the Marian doctrine and titles are Christological in purpose. They were meant to draw our attention to Christ. This is the privilege of Mary as derived from her special relationship to Christ as a mother. She conceived Him by the power of the Holy Spirit and gave birth to him; hence, his flesh is from her flesh. I shall attempt to reflect on Mary's biblical role in the history of salvation by providing biblical types and titles of Mary found in the literary works of four Syriac fathers: Ephrem (4th century), Narsai (5th century), Gewargis Warda¹ (13th century) and Elia III² (12th century).

Liturgical Veneration of the Blessed Virgin

The Assyrian Church of the East holds Mary in esteemed honor amid the saints and venerates her remarkability through her devotions and memorials; however, she is never worshiped as some Christians have claimed. The Church has set three liturgical commemorative days of the Blessed Virgin in the liturgical year: **1)** The *Second Friday of Nativity* is the first sanctoral commemoration cycle in the liturgical year. It is connected with the "Nativity of Jesus" cycle of feasts. It was most likely incorporated in the liturgical calendar of the Church of the East in the 5th century after officially adopting the Feast of Nativity. The first evidence of adopting the Feast of Nativity that we have is found in Canon 13 of the Synod of Mar Isaac in the year 410.³ This holiday is celebrated in honoring Mary for giving birth to Jesus Christ our Lord and God. **2)** May 15th is also referred to as "Protectress of the Harvest;" it was most likely designated for rural areas in which the Church invoked the intercession of Mary to ask the Lord for a blessed harvest since it is associated with the blessings of the harvest and crops. **3)** August 15th is the *Dormition of Mary*; the commemoration of Mary's falling asleep is preceded with two weeks of fasting. The fasting period is done to ask for her intercessions. It begins on Aug 1st and ends August 15 on the day of her liturgical commemoration (Aug 15th). In every liturgical celebration, whether in the Divine offices or Holy Eucharist, a special hymn or prayer is designated to her; hence, her name is repeated in Church prayers of the day and of the night. As a liturgical rule, Wednesdays are dedicated to the Blessed Virgin in all offices of the hours of the day. The liturgical season of Annunciation and Nativity clearly express devotional and exalted prayers for her biblical role in the salvation story. In the liturgy, the Church venerates her as

¹ The quotations of Gewargis Warda are taken mainly from the extended hymn for "šabah" (glory) which are credited to him and found in the night office of the commemoration of the Blessed Virgin. He is an East Syrian poet of 13th century who mastered types of the literary genre of hymns. He is considered a Marian poet of the Church of the East for his various chants recited on her feast days that honor the Virgin Mary. He was a contemporary of Khames bar Qardahe, who was also a poet and priest in Erbil.

² Elia III's quotations are taken from the prayers before the office of matins of Mary's feast day. He was a patriarch (1176-1190), also known as "Abu Halim." His prayers had a great impact on the divine office, especially Sundays and feast days' opening prayers of matins.

³ J.B. Chabot (ed. & Fren. Trans.), *Synodicon orientale ou recueil des synods nestoriens*, Paris 1902.

"Mother of Christ," "Mother of the Son of God," "Handmaid of the Divinity and Mother of Humanity," "Temple of the Holy Spirit" and many other terms which we cannot delve into due to the limited nature of this paper.

Image of Mary in Syriac Tradition

The Marian doctrine and devotions have flourished from the patristic era of the 2nd century. However, the Mariology of the Church of the East correlates with the theology of the dispensation of Christ. Hence, East Syriac Mariology is perceived as Christology, Soteriology, Anthropology Ecclesiology, and Pneumatology. The Syriac fathers did not express their theology by using a dogmatic formula or systematic theology as found in the Latin tradition. Instead they use what St. Ephrem calls "faith adoring the mystery," spreading faith through the attitude of wonder, surroundings, contemplation, and silent adoration in silence. As a result, they adopted a poetic and sometimes prosaic literary medium, making use of symbols and typology to express the Truth in which some of their writings were incorporated in the liturgy. In regards to the Blessed Virgin, the Syriac fathers have elaborate poetic compositions, rich in great tenderness and beauty, even though much is highly imaginative and dramatic.

The main method of studying theology in the Syriac tradition was a typological approach to interpret the Sacred Scripture. Types and antitypes were not only methods of pointing to the reality of salvation but they were also used to perceive and to deduce how salvation can be received. What is typology? Typology (*tupsa*) is an interpretive principle; it is the study of types. Type is a divine analogy of the new covenant found in the old covenant. Analogy is something that we use in comparison since it comprises profound similarities and dissimilarities. Type is itself a historical reality, but it is also representative of something greater. Moses prefigured Christ, though Moses himself was a man. The manna prefigured the Eucharist, though the manna itself was a miracle. In the New Testament, fulfillment was far greater than the sum of the Old Testament types. Fulfillment was the abiding presence of God Himself: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us" (John 1:14). In the Church, the study and prayerful consideration of biblical types is called *typology*. For example, Adam – Jesus's typology to Adam can be found within St. Paul's First Letter to Corinthians (15:45-49) and Romans (5:14.) Early Christians understood that the Old Testament was full of types or pictures that were fulfilled or realized in the New Testament.

Similarities:

| <u>Adam</u> | <u>Jesus</u> |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| - First born | - First born |
| - He was made in the image of God | - He is the image of the Invisible God (col 1:15) |
| - He was the Head of Creation | - He is the king of creation |
| - He was sinless before the Fall | - Jesus was sinless |
| <u>Dissimilarities:</u> | |
| - He sinned. | - Jesus never sinned |
| - He brought death | - Jesus gave life. |
| - He was removed from Paradise | - Jesus sits in glory at the right hand of the Father. |

A typology examination is found in Ephrem when he states: "the type was in Egypt, the reality in the Church; the sealing of the reward [will be] in the kingdom." The symbolic force for Ephrem is progressive. The Syriac Fathers also use the skillful expression of contrast and paradox through the use of contrasting word pairs and phrases to display the mystery and the

incomprehensibility of the economy of Lord's salvation. For instance, they contrasted Mary not only with Eve but with other facets of the created world, Adam, trees and earth.

1. Ever Virgin (*bthulath 'almeen*):

Ever Virgin is the central claim of apostolic churches in reference to Mary. It primarily refers to the conception and birth of Jesus. In the Professions of Faith, the Church professes that "Jesus Christ was conceived and born by the power of the Holy Spirit" which alludes to the idea of conception without the intervention of human seed. Being a vessel for Christ our Lord and God becomes grounds to consecrate her body and life to God.

For Ephrem, Mary's virginity was a particular privilege of her person since there are many prophecies and symbolisms that shed light on this concept. He says: "The womb and Sheol shouted with joy and cried out about Your resurrection. The womb that was sealed, conceived Your Sheol that was secured, brought You forth. Against nature the womb conceived and Sheol yielded. Sealed was the grave which they entrusted with keeping the dead man. Virginal was the womb that no man knew. The virginal womb and the sealed grave like trumpets for a deaf people, shouted in its ear."⁴ He adds: "A man (Adam) who himself knew no birth, bore Eve the mother: How much more should Eve's daughter (Mary) be believed to have given birth without the aid of a man."⁵

Gewargis Warda draws symbols of Mary's virginity from Old Testament figures. Alluding to Ezekiel's prophecy, he considers the "*gate of the temple*" as a type of Mary's virginity: "She (Mary) is the gate of the Lord [as] prophet Ezekiel spoke, the corporeal ones will not tread and through it the Lord will enter and go out."⁶ He symbolizes Mary's virginity to the east gate of the temple through which the Lord entered: "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it "(Ezekiel 44:2).

He further symbolizes Mary's virginity to "the unbroken rock from which a spring [of water] came forth."⁷ In reference to an important episode in the story of Moses, the Israelites, who were thirsty and weary from the long journey of wandering through the desert, had unleashed their frustrations on their leader, who shared his complaints with God. He commanded Moses to take the rod that had parted the Red Sea during the fight out of Egypt and used it to bring water out from a rock (Ex. 17: 6 & Num 20:11). Although the rock was not cracked or deformed, it became a spring of water in a most profound way in which Mary similarly gave birth to the fountain of life. Whoever drinks from "it will never be thirsty and it will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14). Gewargis Warda contrasts virgin Mary with the title of woman: "This is the woman, unmarried. For no married woman [is] named virgin. [Though] this woman is called a woman but in truth she is [a] virgin."⁸ Elia III calls Mary the 'ever virgin' and the 'second heaven' in his prayer before the office of matins for Mary's feast after Christmas: "You the great eternal light and hidden splendor of the unspherical (unlimited) Sun who was born from the rational sphere (limited creature), the 'Second Heaven', the 'Ever-Virgin.' You who shone forth from the womb sealed with virginity."⁹

⁴ *Hymns on Nativity* = "Hymnen de Nativitate," in E. BECK (ed. & GT), *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers: Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)* (CSCO 186-187 = SS 82-83) Louvain 1959 [GT 1-143; Syr. Text 1-130]; McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian Hymns*, (trans & intro), *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, 10: 7-8, New York, 1989, p. 130.

⁵ *Hymns on Nativity*, 1:14-15; p. 187; McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, p. 65.

⁶ Hudra I, T. Darmo (ed.), Trichur 1060-1962, p. 594.

⁷ Hudra I, 593

⁸ Hudra I, 594.

⁹ Hudra I, 600.

Syriac fathers described the virginal conception of Mary through various symbols:

a) Rod of Aaron -Mary Typology

Ephrem sees the connection between Mary and the sprouted rod of Aaron (Num 17-23). "The staff of Aaron sprouted, and the dry wood brought forth; his symbol has been explained today, it is the virgin womb that gave birth."¹⁰

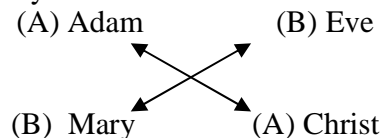
b) Fleece of Gideon - Mary Typology

Gewargis Warda portrays Mary's conception of Jesus as the wool fleece of Gideon and the dew upon it (Judg 6:37-38). He states: "All the ground was dry and it wrung dew [from] the fleece (Judges 6:37-38). This is Mary and she is more excellent than it. Like the fleece became dry likewise Mary became pure. And the desire did not weave for her, and she was not sacked by sin. As [the fleece] had the rain (covered with dew) while the ground was dry, similarly the Spirit overshadowed Mary and sanctified [her] entirely."¹¹ The fleece of Gideon is a type of Mary and its dryness reflects her purity, while the 'dew upon the fleece' symbolizes the Son of God.

c) Earth-Mary Typology

In Syriac tradition, Mary is depicted as an icon of creation. She is compared not only to Eve, but compared to the virgin earth which gave birth to Adam: "The virgin earth of old gave birth to the Adam who is lord of the earth, but today another virgin has given birth to the Adam who is Lord of heaven."¹² Mary is compared to earth, because Eve did not give birth to Adam but he gave birth to her: "A man (Adam) who himself knew no birth, bore Eve the mother: How much more should Eve's daughter (Mary) be believed to have given birth without the aid of man."¹³ Hence, Mary is the second Eve but she is also a second earth, who in a sense gave birth to Christ just as earth gave birth to Adam without intercourse. Here, virginity is compared to the earth, the virgin soil which God employed to give birth to Adam.

In Ephrem's writing, we find a chiasmic approach which is a writing style that uses a unique repetition pattern for clarification and or emphasis in "ABBA" strophic pattern, taking the shape of [X]: "Adam to Eve as Mary to Christ:"¹⁴



2. Eve - Mary (Second Eve) Typology

We are familiar with St. Paul's comparison of the first Adam and the second Adam, Christ. However, our tradition provides us with feminine comparisons of Eve and Mary. The role of Mary in the dispensation of Christ can be seen as Eve's counterpart. Eve was made out of Adam as a helper, so Jesus is the New Adam (I Cor 15:45) and Mary is the New Eve, mother of the Lord. The first Eve disobeyed God and followed the words of a fallen angel (serpent) and gave the *fruit* to Adam by which he fell and brought sin into the world. However, Mary, the New Eve, heard and believed the words of the angel at the annunciation and gave the New Adam *'the fruit of her womb'* (cf. Lk 1:42) through which He (Jesus, the New Adam) comes to undo the fall of the first Adam through his Pascal mystery. Eve abandoned Paradise when she

¹⁰ *Hymns on Nativity*, 1: 17; McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, p. 65.

¹¹ *Hudra I* 594.

¹² *Hymns on Nativity*, 1:16.

¹³ *Hymns on Nativity*, 1:14-15.

¹⁴ P.D. Fulhner, *Mary at the Foot of the Cross - VI: Marian coredeemption in the Eucharistic Mystery*, Acts of the International Symposium on Marian Coredeemption, Academy of Immaculate, New Bedfore, MA 2007, p. 110

attempted to cling to godliness. She (Eve) arrogated to herself the determination of good and evil when she said figuratively 'I am the Lord of my own life and I'll become like God knowing good and evil.' In the biblical telling, this was the origin of the Fall. It passed on in a million different forms to all of her decadence.

Syriac fathers contrasted Mary and Eve in their biblical interpretation. Ephrem abounds in the Mary-Eve parallel and contrasts them based on the foundation of the robe of glory and stain, light and darkness, death and life, the triumph of good over evil, and the role of the woman alongside the man.

On robe of glory & stain imagery: "Adam had been naked and fair, but his diligent wife/ labored and made for him a garment covered with stains/ The Garden, seeing him thus vile, drove him forth./ Through Mary Adam had another robe which adorned the thief; and when he became resplendent at Christ's promise/ The Garden, looking on, embraced him in Adam's place."¹⁵ **On light-dark imagery:** "Behold the world! To it were given two eyes/ Eve was the left eye, the blind eye; the right eye the luminous eye is Mary./ Because of the eye that grew dark, the whole world became dark./ Then men, groping in the shadows/ will consider every stone on which they stumble to be a god. **On death-life imagery:** They have called lies the truth/ But when the world once more begins to shine, by the other eye and the light of heaven taking up a dwelling in the cavity of this eye,/ then men will rediscover unity, perceiving that what they had found/ was the downfall of their lives."¹⁶ Ephrem illustrates the spiritual beauty and holiness of Mary.

In the Gospel of *Diatessaron*, Ephrem gives similar and contrasting imagery: "Mary gave birth without having relations with a man. As in the beginning Eve was born from Adam without a carnal relationship, so it happened for Joseph and Mary, his wife. Eve brought to the world the murdering Cain; Mary brought forth the Life giver. One brought into the world him who spilled the blood of his brother (cf. Gen 4:1-16); the other, him whose blood was poured out for the sake of brothers. One brought into the world him who fled, trembling because of the curse of the earth; the other brought forth him who, having taken the curse upon himself, was nailed to the Cross (cf. Col 2: 14)."¹⁷

In addition to the Eve-Mary typology, Ephrem contrasts Mary with Adam when he says: "Adam brought forth travail upon the woman who sprang from him, but today she (Mary), who bore him a Savior, has redeemed that travail."¹⁸

Narsai uses the Eve-Mary typology as a contrast between the Fall-Restoration: "Peace to Mary, the kinswoman of Eve the mother of death, since the fruit which will come forth from you (Mary) will loosen the bonds of mortality."¹⁹ In one of the hymns dedicated to Mary found in the anthems of succor (*qale d'udrane*),²⁰ published in *Hudra*,²¹ it states: "By the cause of Eve, our mankind was made guilty in the land of Eden through the transgression of commandment,

¹⁵ S. Brock (intro. & ET), *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns on Paradise*, New York 1990, p. 5.

¹⁶ *Hymns on the Church = Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers: Hymnen de Ecclesia*, E. BECK (ed. & GT), 37, 5-7 (CSCO 199 = SS 85) Louvain 1960.

¹⁷ *Commentary on Diatessaron = Ephrem de Nisibe: Commentaire de l'Evangile Concordant ou Diatessaron*, L. LELOIR (ed. & LT), (CBM 8) Dublin 1963, 2: 2; FT of Syr. Armenian: L. LELOIR (SC 121) Paris 1966. ET in McCARTHY, *Ephrem's Commentary on Diatessaron*, p 66.

¹⁸ *Hymns on the Nativity*, 1, 16; p. 186.

¹⁹ NARSAI, *Metrical Homilies on Nativity = Metrical Homilies on the Nativity, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension*, F.G. McLEOD (ed. & ET), in F. GRAFFIN (ed.), (PO 40, Brepols 1979) 36-193, p. 111-112.

²⁰ The anthology of anthems that are annexed to the *Hudra*.

²¹ It is the main liturgical formulary of the Assyrian Church of the East.

and again by the cause of the daughter of Eve, he freed us from the curse of evil and death that ruled over us."²²

The juxtaposition of the obedience of Mary and disobedience of Eve provides two views of Mary. In the first view, Mary, the new Eve, is portrayed as the state of Eve before the Fall. While in the second view, Mary, the new Eve, is depicted as being able to bring mankind back to paradise through incarnation. Sebastian Brock calls the latter one the "dynamic view."²³

The scene of the Annunciation recalls the difference between Mary and Eve's reply to God's grace. Hearing the word of the Annunciation by the angel Gabriel, Mary said, let it be done unto me according to your word. Whereas Eve, in Genesis, attempted to grasp at godliness versus obeying God's decree. Eve, the 'mother of the dead,' as Narsai described her, tried to make herself into God. Mary in the annunciation scene tried to reverse what Eve had done by reversing the momentum of the First Sin. In Mary's acquiescence to the grace of God, she accepted the mission of her creator and she allowed God to plant His words deep within her. In the moment when Mary agrees and becomes acquiescent, she becomes pregnant with Christ the Son of God. In a related way, all of us, members of the Church of Christ, acquiesce to God's words when we say, "Yes let it be done unto me," thus God's life takes root in us. Eve's grasping at godliness blocked the flow of Divine life while Mary via acquiescence and acceptance allowed that life to flow into the world of salvation. There is a medieval commentary, which states that the *Ave Maria* (Hail Mary) is the reversal of *Eva* (Eve). Mary is the New Eve who enables the divine life to rush into the world.

3. Tree of Life - Mary Typology

Ephrem contrasts Mary with the Tree of Life, symbolizing her as the one who gave the world Jesus under the species of the Eucharist: "In place of that bitter fruit that Eve plucked from the tree, Mary gave mankind sweet fruit. And behold, the whole world enjoys the fruit of Mary. The virginal vine has borne a grape whose sweet wine has given comfort to those who mourn."²⁴ Gewargis Warda depicted Mary as the Tree of Life, stating: "This is (Mary) the wonder Tree that bears the amazing fruit and all the creation astonished by it and makes its inhabitants wondrous."²⁵

4. The Temple of the Spirit, the Handmaid of Divinity and Mother of Humanity

Patriarch Elia III calls Mary "the temple of the Spirit, the handmaid of divinity and mother of humanity."²⁶ In reference to the 'temple of the [Holy] Spirit,' no place in Jewish life was more central than the temple. It combined every aspect of an Israelite's life: economically, politically, religiously, and culturally. The Holy of Holies was the most sacred place in the temple because that was where the Ark of the Covenant resided, resembling the dwelling place of God. In his First Letter to Corinthians, Paul calls every baptized Christian the temple of the Holy Spirit: "do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you" (I Cor 6: 19). In the annunciation of Mary by Gabriel, (Luke 1: 30-35, 38) Mary became the bearer of the "Temple God's the Word"²⁷ as expressed in Wednesday's Office of Vespers.

The term "Handmaid of Divinity and Mother of Humanity," is a Christological doctrine in which there are two natures of Jesus Christ, the divine nature of God and the human nature of man. In relation to the Divine, nature is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son, who is the

²² *Hudra* I, p. 178.

²³ S. Brock, "Introduction," in *Jacob of Serug: On the Mother of God, Mary's Hansbury*, p. 9.

²⁴ Ephrem the Syrian, *Inni su Santa Maria, Inno 1, 10.14: Monumenta Eucharistica*, I, p. 340.

²⁵ *Hudra* I, 593.

²⁶ *Hudra* I, 601.

²⁷ *Hudra*, I, 21.

Eternal Word, with the Father and the Holy Spirit always was, is, and will be. We read “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). Jesus Christ had the nature of man--body, and soul--which made him a true man. However, Jesus Christ was not always man. He became man in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. We call the mystery of God becoming Man, “**the Incarnation,**” which means that God the Son took on flesh and became man, a human being like us, in all things except sin. “The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The Church of the East calls Mary the Mother of Christ, our Lord and God, echoing what St. Thomas proclaims without any doubt or reservations: "My Lord and God" (Jn 20:28).

In addition to its christological undertones, the term employed by Elia “Handmaid of the Divinity” perpetuates Luke's account of Mary's reply to Gabriel, "I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1:38) where she expresses total and absolute submission to God's Will. Even before Jesus was conceived, she was faced with the decision of obeying in order to make way for this King or declining to avoid difficulty and pain? Her response of faith is what our response must be. Mary subjectively experiences her obedience as constant and living, resulting in her discovery therein, “more far-reaching consequences and more energetic and inexhaustible life that she suspected.” The Virgin Mother actively realizes herself in and through her mission. She does not fulfill her mission by simply becoming the Son's vessel.

5. Bride -Mary Typology.

Ephrem calls Mary a bride of Christ in his hymn on Nativity: "For I am [Your] sister from the House of David, who is a second father. Again, I am mother because of your conception, and bride am I because of your chastity. Handmaiden and daughter of blood and water [am I] whom You redeemed and baptized."²⁸ In the the *madraša* for the Commemoration of the Blessed Virgin, Ephrem calls Mary the betrothal of Christ:

For she is Your mother - she alone- and Your sister with all. She was to You mother; she was to You sister; moreover, she is Your betrothed with the chaste woman. In everything, behold, You adorned her, Beauty of Your mother. For she was betrothed according to nature before You came; yet she conceived outside of nature after You came. She was virgin although she gave birth to You chastely. Mary acquired by you all the attributes of married woman: conception with her without sexual union, milk in her breasts not in the usual way. You have suddenly made the parched earth into a source of milk. If she carried You, Your great mountain lightened its burden.²⁹

Ephrem evokes the reality that Mary has a double type. She is the antitype of the Faithful-Israel, God's bride (Ezek 16: 8-14; Hos 3: 1-3; Isa 62: 4-5; Jer 31:31), and, at the same time, is a type of the redeemed Church, Christ's bride (Eph 5: 25-27) by giving His life for her, “the greatest possible demonstration of love.” The living sentiments of love and devotion incorporated by Ephrem reflects his inner admiration and devotion to Mary.

Mary is in her person the summation and the recapitulation of the whole of the people of Israel. Mary is the Faithful Israel, daughter of David, in the face of evil, injustice, stupidity, and all that ruined beautiful creation and caused sin. God resolved to form a people and to shape them according to His own heart so that they would become a vehicle of His presence to the world, and from this people would come a kind Messiah. Israel considers Mary in totality as designed to give birth to the Messiah. Ephrem indicates that the daughter of David gave birth to the Life of the World: "Awake, my harp, your songs, in praise of the Virgin Mary! Lift up your

²⁸ *Hymns on Nativity*, 16: 10; McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, p. 150.

²⁹ *Hudra I*, 596; McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 131-132.

voice and sing, the wonderful history. Of the Virgin, the daughter of David, who gave birth to the Life of the World"³⁰

Thus Mary in herself fulfills, recapitulates, and sums up this story of Israel, the story of her long pregnancy and preparing for the coming of Christ. In Mary, we can read the whole of the Old Testament. What is the story of Israel? It is the story of God's study, in which the relentless and faithful attempt to reverse the momentum of the Fall. God tried from the beginning to form His people as His friends for those who accept His law and life as a gift, so they could flourish under His influence.

6. Second Heaven-Mary Typology

Heaven is the dwelling place of God and God's throne where he sees and judges (cf. Ps. 113:4-9) beyond space and time. In the Lord's Prayer, we recite "Our Father, who art in heaven," hence it is the abode of God Himself. In the fullness of time, the Word of God, came down from heaven and became incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit in assuming from the holy Virgin Mary a body animated by a rational soul. The only begotten Son of God dwelt in the womb of Mary and took it as His dwelling place; henceforth, she was given the extolled title of the "Second Heaven" by the Church of the East. Warda venerates her with these words: "Within her soul the Spirit brooded, and [Mary] became, all in all, a heaven. Do not reproach me, O reader, because I have designated [Mary] a 'heaven.' And, as I think, [Mary is] more excellent, sublime, and exalted than heaven."³¹ The Patriarch Elia III calls her a Second heaven: "You, the living Sun of righteousness, who are born from the Father eternally, and in time from the Second Heaven, the Ever Virgin, [He] was born for our salvation."³² He also states: "You the great eternal light and hidden splendor of the unspherical (illimited) Sun who were born from the rational sphere (limited creature), the 'Second Heaven', the 'Ever-Virgin.' You who shone forth from the womb sealed with virginity."³³

Metaphorically speaking, heaven is what we mean when we refer to the dwelling place of God. Heaven along with earth are part of the universe that God created."In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). We ought not to identify God with heaven nor assume He is contained by it: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built" (1 Kgs 8:27). Hence, heaven is the dwelling place of the living God that will be joined by saints and righteous people since Heaven becomes a state or an image of life in God, as Jesus mentions the "reward in heaven," (Matt 5:12) and it is a place to put one's treasure (cf. Matt 6:30; 19:21). The New Testament underlines the idea of Heaven in relationship to the mystery of Christ. Jesus Christ "passed through the heavens... and entered not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself (Heb 4:14; 9:24). The righteous will be raised with Christ and will be made inhabitants of Heaven. St. Paul says: "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2: 4-7).

³⁰ *Hymns on Nativity*, 1,1; W.A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. 1, Minnesota 1970, p. 312.

³¹ *Hudra* I, 593.

³² *Hudra* I, 608.

³³ *Hudra* I, 600.

7. Burning Bush-Mary Typology

Mary is comparable to the burning bush out of which God's voice addresses Moses in the beautiful scene in the third chapter of the book of Exodus. The bush dwelt in fire yet was not consumed, and from that bush came the voice of God, which is a type of Christ, also depicted as the burning fire, whom Mary carried for nine months without being consumed. Gewargis Warda states: "This is a wonder bush that was dwelt in fire [similarly] the burning fire dwelt in her for three and six months."³⁴ Elia gives the rational bush Mary's typology: "the rational bush broke out in fire and didn't burn her."³⁵ Fire is therefore the symbol of divinity that dwelt in Mary but did not consume or overtake her.

A passage from the Second Homily on the Nativity, according to S. Brock, which was wrongly attributed to Ephrem, was a typology of the burning bush: "It is a source of great amazement, how a womb of flesh was able to carry flaming Fire, and how a Flame dwelt, in a moist womb which did not get burnt up. Just as the bush on the mount of Horeb (Ex 3:2) bore God in the flame, so did Mary bear Christ in her virginity"³⁶

Thus, how did God relate himself to the World? God revealed not invasively, not imperatively, and not overwhelmingly; in fact, the closer God becomes to us, the more we become closer to God ourselves. The glory of God is when we are fully alive as indicated by Irenaeus. We are not consumed by God's presence, but we are illuminated and elevated by it.

8. The Tabernacle & the Ark of the Covenant - Mary Typology

Mary is portrayed as the new tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. Mary is seen as the first and most beautiful tabernacle. Ephrem says: "Joseph and also John [The Evangelist] honored your mother's womb as a symbol. It is the symbol of the Tabernacle the temporal Tabernacle in which Emmanuel was dwelling." Warda puts it beautifully by saying: "In her womb she bore fire; in her body she carried the Shekinah."³⁷ He adds: "She became a tabernacle to the Lord, a palace to the Son of the Most High, [and] a castle to the Son of Creator; who resembles her in this inhabitant."³⁸ In these passages, we find that Mary is the receptacle of divine light.

God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle surrounded by heavy curtains (cf. Ex 25-27). Within the tabernacle Moses placed an ark, a chest made of acacia wood, plated with gold that was about four feet two inches long and 30"x30". The box was covered by a slab of gold upon which two cherubim were carved as one piece on the cover. God commanded Moses to put the following items inside: 1) a golden jar of manna; 2) Aaron's staff that had budded; 3) the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written (Hebrew 4:9). When the ark was completed, the glory cloud of the Lord (the *Shekinah* Glory) covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35; Nm 9:18, 22). The verb for "to cover" or "to overshadow" and the metaphor of a cloud are used in the Bible to represent the presence and glory of God. The ark was a symbol of the presence and power of the Lord. It represents God's residence among the Israelites and became a place from which He communicated with and manifested Himself to His people. The psalmist refers to God as the "Shepherd [King] of Israel" who sits "enthroned between the cherubim" (Ps. 80:1).

At the Annunciation, the angel said to Mary: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you" (Lk 1: 35). There is a parallel between the

³⁴ *Hudra* I, 593.

³⁵ *Hudra* I, 600.

³⁶ S. Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit: Poems of St. Ephrem the Syrian*, Cambridge 2013, no. 12.

³⁷ *Hudra* I, 593.

³⁸ *Hudra* I, 595.

Holy Spirit overshadowing the ark and the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary, the Ark of the Old Covenant as the dwelling place of God and Mary as the new and living dwelling place of the Word of God. Mary is seen as the New Ark of the Covenant and most beautiful tabernacle as Ephrem describes her.

Since the Ark of the Covenant is portrayed as a type of Mary, a parallel and contrast is found between the Ark and Mary's womb: 1) in the Ark of the Covenant is the law of God written on two stones and given only to Israel; in Mary's womb is the Word of God incarnate, planted in the mind and heart of all mankind; 2) in the Ark of the Covenant is a golden jar holding the manna, in Mary's womb is the Bread of Life descended from Heaven for our salvation; 3) in the Ark of the Covenant is the rod of Aaron, the proof of true priesthood; in Mary's womb is the high and true priesthood.

9. Temple & Holy of Holies - Mary Typology.

The temple of Jerusalem with the Holy of Holies was a place where God was pleased to dwell and where people commune with Him. Mary is now with the Christ child in her womb becoming the holy of holies, the divine temple. Elia III elaborates: "... and [God] made her full of blessedness which from her the rational eastern sky, the sun of righteousness shone upon us. From her (Mary), the heavenly shepherd (Jesus) humbled Himself and put on the fleece of sheep (humanity). The tabernacle, the holy of holies, the owner of all *shekinahs*...the temple, the divine temple which the most high dwelt in it willfully."³⁹ She is herself the new temple. She dedicated herself to the temple and sowed the veil over the holy of holies because she is the new temple.

10. Ark of Noah-Mary Typology

Gewargis Warda compares Mary with Noah's Ark and compares Jesus with Noah: "This is the Ark of flesh in which the true Noah rested and gave liberation to our nature from the multitude of adversary."⁴⁰ Genesis chapters 5 through 9, during a time of moral and spiritual chaos, depicts the story of Noah's Ark and the devastating flood that destroyed the world and all living creatures except for a just man named Noah, his family, and the pairs of living creatures that he brought on board with him before the rain fell for 40 days and 40 nights. The Creator sent a rescue mission, a great boat on which a microcosm of God's good order would be preserved. In the fullness of time, God sent his only Son of God begotten of the Father to save the world from sin and death where He was conceived in the womb of his mother Mary through the Holy Spirit, without the agency of a human father and born while Mary was yet a virgin (cf. Matt 1:18-25 & Lk 1:26-38). The Ark of Noah is the type of Mary's womb, therefore Warda calls her 'the Ark of flesh.'

11. Mary - Church Typology

Ephrem makes an analogy between Mary and the Church where he explicitly considers Mary as the symbol of the Church: "The Virgin Mary is a symbol of the Church, when she receives the first announcement of the gospel. And, it is in the name of the Church that Mary sees the risen Jesus. Blessed be God, who filled Mary and the Church with joy. We call the Church by the name of Mary, for she deserves a double name."⁴¹ In addition, the Church and Mary have delivered the bread of life, the Eucharist: "The Church gave us the living bread, in

³⁹ Hudra I, 600. *Shekinah* is the glory of the divine presence in the Hebrew concept which is used also in Syriac writings.

⁴⁰ Hudra I, 593.

⁴¹ Quoted from Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, New York 1999; T. Lamy, *Sermon ad Noc Resurr II*, vol. I: 534.

place of the unleavened bread the Egypt had given. Mary gave us the refreshing bread, in place of the fatiguing bread that Eve had procured for us."⁴²

Mary has two modes of relationship to the Church. First, Mary is a part of the Church and is redeemed by Christ as Ephrem describes it: "For I am [Your] sister from the House of David, who is a second father... Handmaiden and daughter of blood and water [am I] whom You redeemed and baptized."⁴³ However, Mary is also the mother of the Church. St. Paul describes the Church as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27); on the other hand, she is the mother of Christ therefore, Mary is mystically the mother of all Christ's members in the mystical body.

Conclusion

The Syriac Fathers, in a beautiful poetic expression, rich with imagery and depth of symbolism, reveal a deep admiration and awe for the Blessed Virgin and her virtues. While venerating her with the highest mark of respect, they manage to pay a somewhat affectionate compliment to her Son. He, the Son, who dwells in her is the root cause of her spiritual beauty and holiness.

In attempting to comprehend Mary's role in God's providence, they employed biblical types and images through typological and parallel-contrast approaches. The great majority of these biblical types: Ever-Virgin, the New Eve, the Second Heaven, the Burning Bush, the New Tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant, etc. share the fact that they contain something holier than themselves.⁴⁴ Through her virginity and acquiescence to God's grace, she takes away the shame of Eve. Mary is the fulfillment of Old Testament's symbols and types of the Church.

⁴² *Hymn for the Unleavened Bread* 6: 6-7 = "Hymnen de Azymis," in E. BECK (ed. & GT), *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrsers: Paschahymnen: de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione* (CSCO 249 = SS 108-109) Louvain 1964 [GT 1-41; Syr. Text 1-33].

⁴³ *Hymns on Nativity* 16: 10; McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, p. 150.

⁴⁴ Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit*, vol. 1, p. 34.