

# The Concept of the RAZA ܠܝܙܐ

## Its Dimensions and validity of the sacraments in the East Syriac Tradition

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### Introduction

The Assyrian Church of the East, founded by the Apostles of Christ, is one of the oldest Christian denominations. Historically this Church as sometimes has been termed “Nestorian” or “Persian.” As a consequence of the political schism between the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire, the Church of the East initially led its own life almost no influence of the Western Church of the Roman Empire. The Church has believed with great certainty that its roots traced back to the apostolic era. Moreover, its foundation lay in the Jewish-Christian mission which spanned the territory from Jerusalem to Mesopotamia. It was at this time that exiled Jewish communities settled in many cities in Mesopotamia and Western Persia. Thus we find some remnants and influences of Jewish-Semitic features within the liturgy of the Church of the East. This article will begin the discussion on term (the Sacrament) in east Syriac theology<sup>1</sup> by first outlining the biblical, idiomatic, and theological meaning—with emphasis on the term *raza* or *raze*. Following is a discussion on the validity of the sacraments, which is as follows the role of the Holy Spirit within sacraments and the power given to priests by the Holy Spirit and the last portion of this article will explore the role of the faithful individuals wishing to receive the sacrament.

### The use of Mystery within the church

Generally the word “mystery” is understood as something so hidden that it should not be understood by the average layperson. Within the religious framework, we cannot appreciate nor access mysteries, except through the revelation of Jesus Christ who brings us near the hidden Almighty God. The beauty of such “mystery” is that it simply cannot be approached nor perceived except through His divine love (*agape*) which He reveals to us in his incarnation. Therefore, the godly mystery is beyond human understanding, even if we tried, because what we see is not at all the same as what we believe. The eyes are like a window or door to deeper realities—the mystery of Christ and salvation—so we see one thing, yet believe another.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article, the term “East Syriac” is used interchangeably with the Assyrian Church of the East. The term “East Syriac” is used often by theological scholars to distinguish it from “West-Syriac,” a term often used to make reference to the Syriac Orthodox Church.

The concept of “mystery” is very common to all liturgies, but in the Eastern Liturgy the concepts and theology are especially deep and rich. In the liturgical language of the Church, “mystery” is used as a technical term conveying a variety of meanings and the many dimensions of liturgical theology. Unlike in the development of the Latin tradition, there is no comparable systematically developed doctrine of the holy Rites within the East Syriac tradition. Therefore, within the Assyrian Church of the East tradition, the focus is exclusively on liturgical action, rather than on theological (theoretical) reflection. What is rightly believed is what is rightly celebrated in the traditional liturgy. Thus, in the traditional liturgy, the theology of the mystery is rightly celebrated. Throughout the various practices and interpretations within the liturgy of the Assyrian Church of the East, it is clear that the Church developed a unique sense of tradition and custom that could not be reconciled with Latin sacramental theology.

## **THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF MYSTERY:**

### **BIBLICAL, TERMINOLOGICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL**

#### **A. THE BIBLICAL DIMENSION**

The Holy Scriptures often characterize God as one who knows all things, including that which is mysterious and unable to be fully grasped by the human mind. God is in touch with human history because the events within it correspond with His own purpose and will. God responds to humans’ innate weakness and inability to fathom that which is mysterious by revealing His purpose to His people. The Bible often refers to this revelation of God's purpose as a "mystery".

#### **1. Mystery in the Old Testament**

The word “mystery” is seldom mentioned in the Old Testament, but does occur eight times in the Book of Daniel. There the word is used in Daniel’s explanation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream by referring to a secret whose meaning can be understood only by those who are under the direction of God’s Spirit. It is understood that “mystery” overtakes human perception—which only the man of God was able to reveal. The Hebrew counterpart of “mystery” in the Old Testament was used to signify heavenly secrets. In the Septuagint, the Hebrew term in Daniel was translated into the Greek word *mysterion*, used to describe a vision of the future given to humans by God in symbols or signs that only the man of God was able to reveal.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Dan. 2: 18, 19, 27, 23, 29, 30, 47; 4:9.

## 2. Mystery in the New Testament

While the word mystery was merely touched upon in the Old Testament, it is mentioned with much greater frequency in the Gospels, Paul's letters and the Book of Revelation. In total, the word is used twenty-eight times: three in the Synoptic Gospels, twenty-one in the Epistles of St. Paul, and four in the Book of Revelation.<sup>3</sup> In the Biblical context the technical term “mystery” conveyed many meanings, such as religious truths long kept hidden but now unveiled and revealed to the Church through Christ.

### 2.1 Mystery in the Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels have used the term “mystery” when referencing the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ first uses the word *razq-e-milki* in Matthew 13:11, where it points to a revealing of the truth of God's Kingdom by Christ exclusively. This Kingdom which Jesus preached about was not a worldly realm but a spiritual kingdom which can be found through Jesus himself and within the hearts of believers. The parables about the kingdom of God reveal its secret nature which is hidden from the wise and the understanding. This means that it is revealed to the children because this divine nature of Jesus will be understood only through eyes of faith; for those outside the faith, it will always be a riddle.<sup>4</sup> Thus, by having faith in the Holy Spirit and allowing it to guide us, we can understand that the Mystery of the Kingdom is not something difficult to understand, but is something hidden and only revealed to those who are faithful and who draw near to the Lord.

### 2.2 Mystery in the Epistles of Paul

Within the Epistles, it is evident that the term “mystery” has great importance to Paul. The term is used about twenty-one times, of which nineteen are in singular form and two are in plural.<sup>5</sup> The terms *razqa* and “mystery” have various and interrelated meanings within the letters. In his letters, Paul frequently points to the unique position his readers occupy as those who have experienced the fulfillment of the mystery of God's purposes. In Pauline theology, this word primarily signifies the divine plan of salvation which is centered upon Jesus Christ. It was hidden for a long time but is

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Romans 11:25; 16:25; I Corinthians 2:1; 2:7; 4:1; 14:2; 15:51; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3; 3:4; 3:9; 5:32; 6:19; Colossians 1:26; 1:27; 2:2; 4:3; II Thessalonians 2:7; I Timothy 3:9; 3:16; Revelation 1:20; 10:7; 17:5; 17:7. (see Romans 16:25) ( I Corinthians 15:51) (see Ephesians 1:9). (Romans 16:25; Colossians 1:25-27; Ephesians 3:2ff).

<sup>4</sup> Mt. 13:11; Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:9. , Mk. 4:11. Mt. II 25., Lk. 17:21.; Mt. 13:33, 44 , Mt. 11:25; cf. Mk. 4:11, 12. Jn. 6:44, 65; 3:5-8.

<sup>5</sup> Romans; 5 in 1 Cor.; 6 in Eph.; 5 in Col.; 1 in 1 Thes.; 2 in 1 Tim- 48. The plural forms are: 1 Cor. 4:1; 14:2.

now revealed and made known to all by the apostolic preaching. Therefore, through the salvific history God has revealed Himself, His will, and His plan of salvation in various ways and according to Paul, through His Son he has revealed the mystery.<sup>6</sup>

Despite his Greek culture, Paul's use of "mystery" is not connected to the pagan customs. Rather, Paul drew only from the ancient Hebrew concepts of "mystery." Thus, in the Pauline representation, the term 'mystery' does not imply a purely cultic meaning, but draws its influence from the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>7</sup> The death and resurrection of Christ that formed the basis of '*mysterion*'; this "mystery" is the plan of salvation, together with the mission of the Holy Spirit which established the Church as body and bride of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, in accordance with his letter to the Corinthians as outlined in I Corinthians 11:26, St. Paul includes an eschatology element to the term mystery, adding different characteristics in order to emphasize the great reality of the salvific plan of God realized in the person of Jesus Christ and proclaimed by the apostles and believed, celebrated and lived by the people in the Church: when our Lord shall come from heaven to make manifest the future life, He will affect his resurrection in our bodies and our souls. Mar Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 428) in his analysis of Pauline texts holds that Christ is the true second Adam who restores the creation with the return of the original lost images and his resurrection became the truth of the future salvation of humankind.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout Paul's letters, the mystery of God includes three stages. In the first stage, God is considered the infinity—distant, holy and unapproachable to the point where no man can draw near Him. In the second stage, this all-holy God reveals Himself. He comes down to His creatures and reveals Himself to them through Jesus Christ. Lastly, in the third stage God manifests Himself to those who, through the grace of Jesus Christ, have chosen the humble and purest of hearts. In

<sup>6</sup> 1. Heb. 1:1-2; Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:9; 3:5; 5:3; R. E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament*; A. E. Harvey, *JTS* 31 (1980): 320-36.

<sup>7</sup> OBJIOLE, O., "The Background of St. Paul's Concept of the Mystery of the Gospel", *BB*, XIII (1987), 242.

<sup>8</sup> Also, East Syriac fathers considered the mystery of the incarnate Word of God, i.e., Christ, is the culmination of this revelation and the foundation of the divine dispensation (ܡܝܣܬܝܪܐܝܢܐ), which began with the mystery of incarnation, and its completion is found in the mystery of resurrection in which humankind will be raised up to the heavenly kingdom. But its accomplishment is found in the mystery of Christ's Resurrection, in which its spiritual effectiveness extends to our dead nature. For the East Syriac church, the peace and joy of resurrection permeates all its liturgies. So The Resurrection of Jesus is a pledge of the Resurrection of the faithful. Also see C. J. de Catanzaro, *The Life in Christ*, Crestwood 1974, 65.

<sup>9</sup> ULRICH, Wickert, *Studien zu den Pauluskommentaren Theodors von Mopsuestia als Beitrag zum Verständnis der antiochenischen Theologie*. (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 27), Berlin: Töpelmann, 1962, 212.

other words, God's "mystery" is a revelation made available only to the faithful and not to those of the profane world.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.3 "Mystery" in the Book of Revelations

In the book of Revelation, the term "mystery" is mentioned four times: 1:20; 10:7; 17:5, 7. although the title of the Book is "Revelation", its contents are the most incomprehensible for humans. As the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation is filled with an abundance of mysteriousness. Many truths are revealed through apocalyptic language and symbols. In Revelation 1:20 and 17:5, the term "mystery" simply refers to the secret meanings of two symbols mentioned in the apocalyptic narratives regarding the eschatological times (the end of the times). Also, much like the letters of St. Paul, the Book of Revelation uses the term *raza* with no influence from the Greek culture, but from the apocalyptic usage of Palestinian Judaism.<sup>11</sup>

Hence, throughout Scripture, it is apparent that God's action, presence, or fulfillment of His plan in history can all be a mystery. The "mystery" is known to Him alone and to those to whom He reveals it. Within the New Testament, the understanding of "mystery" can be understood as the secret will of the Father revealed through His Son, which will ultimately be manifested in its fullness for our glorification and will be fulfilled at the end of the time.

## B. THE TERMINOLOGICAL DIMENSION

### 1. Syriac Term: *Raza* (ܠܝܝܐ) and its Meaning

In the Syriac tradition, the term "mystery" is used as a translation of the Aramaic Syriac term *raza*, a technical term commonly found in the liturgical traditions. Moreover, in the Syriac tradition *raze* (plural form of *raza*) means either sacraments in general or the Eucharistic mysteries. From its very usage, *raza* seems to express a variety of meanings which are all very basic.

The historical origin of the word *raza* or ܠܝܝܐ comes from the Persian-Mesopotamian world and refers to private and secret counsels held by court officials. This is literally a derivative of a Persian term *raz*, which was very common in the Persian Pahlavi Dynasty, in modern Persian; it is

<sup>10</sup> CASEL, Odo, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, Ed. by Neunheuser, b., London, 1962, 53. 71; Bauer, Johannes B, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, Vol. II, London, 1970. 607.

<sup>11</sup> LUKE, K, "The Technical Term *Raza*", *Christian Orient*. IV (September, 1983), 318; Rev. 10:7; 17:5; cf; Dufour, X. L., *Dictionary of the Biblical Theology*, Bangalore, 1984, 377.

used to refer to “hidden” or “secret.” This term is very closely related to the Sanskrit *Rahas*, which also describes anything having a secret or mystical meaning.<sup>12</sup>

In Syriac, ܐܝܝܐ is a denominative verb, and its linguistic root is ܐܝܝܐ or ܐܝܝܐ, which means “to reveal secrets” or “to indicate mystically and declare through symbols.”<sup>13</sup> The word ܐܝܝܐ essentially is a theological expression and it is evident just how the verb *raḥ* has gained an exclusively Christian meaning —especially within the Christian framing of liturgical worship. In addition to this, the singular *raḥa* refers to a sacrament, while plural *raḥe* refers to the Eucharistic liturgy in the East Syriac tradition, much like the Greek *mysteria* refers to the liturgical Mysteries.<sup>14</sup>

As already mentioned, in the Hebrew Old testament, the word *raḥ* is used eight times in the book of Daniel, which is called Aramaic Daniel (Dan 2:4b-7:28) because it was originally written in Aramaic and refers to the future secrets, indicating the heavenly kingdom which cannot be destroyed. Also in the Qumran writings, *raḥ* is mentioned fifty-five times and is used to refer to God’s mystery counsels.<sup>15</sup> Hence, both in the Book of Daniel and the Qumran texts, *raḥ* is something eschatological and related to the salvation of God’s chosen people. In short, the basic understanding of *raḥ* in the Biblical context is revelation.

## 2. The Greek Term: Mystery (Μυστήριον )

In English, the term "mystery" is derived from the Greek word *mysterion*, a technical phrase used for worship in Greek literature.<sup>16</sup> It is basically a religious expression since its very nature is a religious truth known only through divine revelation which humanity cannot comprehend and which is beyond human knowledge. In Greek classical writings, this word is derived from the Greek verb *myein*, meaning to close the eyes or mouth.<sup>17</sup> Thus, something so secret that silence must be kept.

In both the ancient and later Hellenistic understanding, the word *mysterion* signifies the deep inward truth which is brought to completion through the rites. Also, in Christian Greek understanding, the concept of “mystery” is a divine reality, that is hidden but communicated. This

<sup>12</sup> SÖHNGEN, Gottlieb, *Symbol und Wirklichkeit im Kultmysterium*, Bonn 1940. 122.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://lishani.com/dictionary/syriac/ܐܝܝܐ>.

<sup>14</sup> SEBASTIAN, Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, St Ephrem. New York, 1998, 42.

<sup>15</sup> SABOURIN, L, the Parable of Kingdom”, BTB, IV (1976), 126; BARTH, M, Ephesians 1-3, Anchor Bible, N. Y. 1974, 19; JBC, 807.

<sup>16</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., Vol. X, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, 173.

<sup>17</sup> BAUR, J. B, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Dictionary*, Vol. 2, London, 1970, 601.

divine reality is God Himself in his own inner reality and life. Everything in the Christian plan goes back to the eternal love or (ἀγάπη, *agapē*) of God, which is God Himself in His deepest essence through unconditional love (John10.17). That unconditional love is found in Jesus, and through Jesus the *agape* of God is completely revealed to us. For Jesus Christ is uniquely related to the Father, and in his human nature, life and mission is the true perspective of God's revelation.<sup>18</sup>

The Fathers of the Church and Christian writers such as St. Justin the Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 428) have used this terminology carefully in their catechetical homilies and writings. They have looked into the depth of revelations with all the penetration of their Hellenistic intellectual practice and applied the language of the Mysteries to the completely new truths and doctrines in God's revelation.<sup>19</sup>

Many of the early Christian writings were apologies; it is evident that the great defenders of the Christian faith such as St. Justin and St. Augustine were well equipped with the knowledge of both Christian and Pagan beliefs. This means that when Christianity adopted and developed the typical terminologies, it was very careful not to identify or associate Christianity and its worship with Pagan religions and worship. In other words, Christianity never attempted to identify its worship with the Pagan "mystery" worship, but always stood for the integrity of the Christian faith and defended its uniqueness.

The scope of Greek influence extended to the Syriac world. In the theological milieu of the early church, there was a great amount of give and take between the Syrian and Greek theologies. This resulted in many things being common and even identical among them. The homilies and interpretations on Liturgy by the Fathers have similar significances in both liturgies. For example, in the liturgical homilies of Mar Narsai (c. 502), the description and interpretation are very close to that of Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.428), who was an Antiochean theologian. In the same way, similar usages of specific terminology in much of the theological reflections are mutually exchanged. Many Greek phrases are used in the Syrian Liturgy such as *κίνησις*, *ἀνάστασις*, *ἐκστασις*, *ἐκστασις*, etc. Thus, as it relates to liturgy, it is evident that the exchange between the two worlds resulted in a mutual exchange of meaning and theological understanding through the use of the Syriac term *raza* and the Greek term *mysterion*.

<sup>18</sup> BOHEN, M, the Mystery of Confirmation, London, 1966, 53.

<sup>19</sup> CASEL, the Mystery of Christian Worship, 1.

### 3. The Latin Term: *Sacramentum*

The Western Church uses the term *sacramentum*, the Latin translation of the Syriac *raza* and the Greek *mysterion*. The term *sacramentum* is the origin of the English word “sacrament.” *Sacramentum* was not originally a religious term but a secular one. In ancient Roman religion and law, the word was used to refer to an oath, vow, or a thing that was pledged as a sacred bond, and forfeited if the oath was violated.<sup>20</sup> Hence, it was a legal term concerned with Roman military regulation. In the classical period of the language, it was used primarily as a military term designated to refer to the oath of obedience taken by newly enlisted soldiers. In common usage, *sacramentum* was used when referring to an oath of obedience, something set apart for a sacred purpose, or a pledge. In addition, the term is literally derived from *sacrum* which meant to make sacred or dedicated to sacred use. The post-Apostolic church employed the term to signify any sacred rite or mysterious doctrine.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the term *sacramentum* had become a suitable expression for a thing or occasion imparting spiritual benefits to the participants. These similar ritual performances were regarded as a means of grace, a visible sign of an inward reality and a channel of invisible divine grace. A *sacramentum* was understood to have a sacred mysterious significance which indicated a spiritual capacity.

In particular, the linguistic relation of the two terms (mystery) and (sacrament) are discussed. The concept of “sacrament” which exists today is historically developed from the concept of mystery. However, the meaning of mystery points to a concrete sense of indicating an objective event in which the plan of salvation is contained. Hence, mystery refers to the works of God (divine act of salvation in a spiritual dimension) and confirms an absolute presence of divine salvation. While sacrament is used specifically in a historical or liturgical sense, in this sense it belongs to the divine salvific works.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, within the sacramental theology, *sacramentum* is the combination of the salvic truth and concrete reality. In this regard, we can say that the Christian sacraments are certainly truths and divine-human acts of salvation, and not solely historical facts. This does not happen merely through knowledge of the truth; it can only be attained by faith in Jesus as the Son of God.<sup>23</sup> It is the presence of the divine work of salvation in Christ, a symbolic presence of the divine plan of salvation, and not a historical one, that is conveyed in the ritual perspective.

<sup>20</sup> CASEL, 56; cf. V. Pathikulangara, *Mysteries of the Church (Sacraments and Sacramentals)*, Kottayam: Denha Services, 2004, 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> MACROEDIA — The New Encyclopedia Britanica, Vol. XII, XVI, Chicago, 1974.115.

<sup>22</sup> SÖHNGEN, Gottlieb, *Symbol und Wirklichkeit im Kultmysterium*, Bonn 1940. 110,114.

<sup>23</sup> CASEL, Odo, *Mysterium als Bild*, in: JMW 15 (1935), 251

### C. THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION: Typology in East Syrian Patristic Thought

The East Syrian tradition holds the sacramental theology in high esteem. As we mentioned earlier, in ordinary usage the term mystery means something that is hidden, mysterious, and revealed completely in Jesus Christ. As human beings, we need symbols in order to experience the incredible love of God. Symbols enable communication between people and are the language of religions. Symbols also bridge the past and the future. They have nothing in common with magical practices, but point to the salvific events. The sacramental reality has both a symbolic and a visual meaning. Because symbol and truth are seldom contrasted with each other, the idea that the mysteries are the symbol of a future reality is very common among the East Syrian fathers. The cornerstone of sacramental teaching is the image character of the sacrament, in which the true essence of a sacrament is to be a sign. A sacrament is no longer only an image, and certainly not a symbol that allows us to recognize the meaning of the reality behind it. In other words, it merges the hidden with the revealed. The symbols obscure the truth but at the same time, reveal it.<sup>24</sup>

The sacrament is the symbol and image of an invisible spiritual reality, or we might say, an image filled with reality. This is how we recognize that the symbol is one of the oldest statements of religion: precisely because it is a sacred sign, never a mere image, and is always filled with holy truth or reality. So the sacramental reality brought about by the sacrament, which is understood not in its bare matter, but in its full spirituality, shines in an inner and true image of Christ, which is indicated by the external symbolism of the sacrament.<sup>25</sup> In fact, in early Eastern Christianity, the Syriac tradition used *raza* often to describe symbols or Types found in Creation and in Scripture. We can call this the typology of the Christian understanding of the persons and events in the Old Testament. Typology is part of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The principle is the harmony through similarity between the types in Old Testament and the New Testament reality. We consider in this conjunction with references to the sacraments. Typology is a faithful reading of the Bible as the Word of God, which has deeper dimensions than those that appear in a surface reading of the text. The two testaments constitute the book of God and there is an actual mutual convergence between the two regarding the person and events.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> SEBASTIAN. Brock, *The Luminous Eye, the Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian*, Cistercian 1992, 27.

<sup>25</sup> CASE, Odo, Casel, *Mysterium als Bild*, in: *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*, 15 Band, Mönster in Westf. 1935, 232-269.

<sup>26</sup> ANTON, Grabner-Haider, *praktische Bibellexikon*, Freiburg 1969. 1111.

This biblical concept of 'raz' passed through to the Syriac literature, especially in the literary works of Mar Aphrahat (345) and Mar Ephrem the Syrian (373) who employed it with a wide variety of connotations. Typology is an important part in the work of Aphrahat and Ephrem, of which a few aspects have been explained. Principles of biblical typology are the unity of Testaments: the New Testament is like a collecting tank of the Old Testament. This process from type to reality happens on the path of humanity from Eden to Paradise, and everything is enclosed with the Lord, through Christ, and the types became reality in his life and even more so in his death. The Types of the Old Testament are waiting to be completed in the reality of the New Testament. That means the symbols and the types of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ, as he himself sealed: everything is accomplished. The types associated with time are historical; reality follows them, and the final fulfillment is in heaven. Christ is the center of the types, they depend on him and they prepare for his coming. They are comparable to shadows that are somewhat visible *ܠܗܝܠܝܢ* in contrast to the New Testament inwardness of the sacrament.

Aphrahat-Ephrem's vision depends on the belief that the entire Old Testament points to Christ. This typological exegesis is based on the continuity of the saving action of God in the Old and New Covenants, which in turn continues through the sacraments in the Church. Mar Aphrahat (c.345) followed the Christian-Jewish thinking previously found in the writings of the second and third centuries. He is one of the footnotes of the Semitic writers, because his works were written outside the Greek cultural milieu and without influencing the theology of the Nicene Council, since he wrote about 15 years after the meeting of the Council. He saw that the history of salvation continues from beginning to the end, but the Old Testament has become a symbol of the new truth in the Church. Christ is the truth and the Old Testament is the symbol (*ܠܡܝܬܐ*). Christ is the continuation of the Old Testament and reveals the true image of the hidden shadow in the Old Testament. Mar Aphrahat, much like Mar Ephrem (c.373) found the mysterious proclamation of Christ's symbol not only in scripture, but also in nature, which means that both creation and scripture represent a hidden state to be revealed in Christ who is the door to deep hidden truths.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> BECK, Edmund, *Symbolum- Mysterium bei Aphraat und Aphrām*, in: *OrChr* 42 (1958), p. 19-40; Yousif, Pierre, "St. Ephrem on Symbols in Nature: Faith, the Trinity and the Cross (Hymns on Faith no. 18)", *Eastern Churches Review* 10 (1978): 52-60.

Mar Ephrem was a Syriac Christian deacon, a prolific Syriac-language hymnographer and a theologian of the fourth century. Typology was an important part of his work. For Mar Ephrem, the plural form *raze* (ܠܝܬܐ), like the Greek *mysteria*, refer to the liturgical mysteries. Ephrem uses *raza* ܠܝܬܐ to signify the sacramental character of the world and the word, both being valid pointers to Christ. The Mysteries of the Church are a privileged order (ܠܝܬܐ) of symbols through which Christ himself communicates his salvation to his members in the Mystical Body.<sup>28</sup>

In particular, Mar Ephrem saw the world positively, a place where salvic symbols are also to be found. For him, God's two witnesses are nature—through man's use of it, and scripture—through his reading of it. In his writing, Ephrem posits an inherent link between the material and spiritual worlds. Therefore, he uses types and symbols to express connections to 'reveal' something that is otherwise 'hidden'. In particular, he connects the meaning between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the early world and the heavenly, the New Testament and the sacraments, and the sacraments and the eschatological world. In typology, he sees the type of baptism as the path, the priesthood as the people and the hand of the priest, and the Eucharist as Manna. There are also symbols found in the Bible that symbolize an aspect of the Eucharist, according to Ephraim's typology. The most important are represented as type and anti-type: bread/Paschal lamb, the unleavened/the manna, etc. From symbol to Reality: this process happened on the path of humanity, and everything is enclosed with the Lord of the universe. He sees the symbols of the Old Testament being recorded as in a sea, in Christ.

Concerning of the divine mysteries, Mar Ephrem frequently uses symbolic theological expression. In the face of heavenly truths, he avoids rational-doctrinal definitions, instead approaching the mysteries and discussing them through symbols, because direct knowledge is not possible even for a person who is a believer. He rejects rational philosophical research because the examination puts the divine mysteries under the control of the arrogant and bold man. And before these hidden mysteries that surpass him, he has only the firm faith in prayer and humble symbolic speech. The symbol lies between the invisible God and earthly humankind, making it possible to meet between God and man in common language. Because of weak human perception, God reveals himself in a hidden expression, and from a human point of view, his assistance points to the truth without expressing it with rational, logical clarity. In this case, a person needs a special eye to see

<sup>28</sup> JOSE; Kochuparambil, *East Syriac Theology* edited by Pauly Maniyattu, Satna, 2007, 252.



ܬܦܣܐ – ܚܝܐ: the two terms that Ephrem most frequently uses here are Tupsa- ܬܦܣܐ and Raza-ܚܝܐ, which can be completely synonymous. Sometimes we can translate both the Aramaic and the Greek words in the sense of symbol. However, the Ephremic ܚܝܐ became much more important with its ܬܦܣܐ, because the word ܚܝܐ refers to the hidden mysteries. From this original meaning the word evolved towards a special ecclesiastical concept, ecclesiastical sacraments. For Ephrem, from this image there is only the symbolic picture, which illuminates invisible things and enables them to appear. So, it is known that the use of the phrase ܬܦܣܐ in relation to a person or event of the Old Testament, symbolizing something in the New Testament.

According to his symbolic theology, the symbol connects something hidden (ܚܝܐ) and visible (ܚܝܐ), between far (ܚܝܐ) and near (ܚܝܐ), between easy (ܚܝܐ) and difficult things (ܚܝܐ). The only Son has two sides: hidden and visible. The perspective was not hidden, nor was the invisible examined. God has appeared through symbols taken from nature and sacred books, but God did not show the invisible except through the visible son, and in the mystery of the Son the hidden mixed with perspective. The symbol obscures the truth, and at the same time reveals it. Each symbol has many meanings and different directions, for example: the symbol of the sun indicates God, Christ, and faith. Ferment symbolizes Christ, or the Eucharist, the path to Christ and the teaching of the Bible. But the central focus of all symbolism is to explain the mystery of Christ and the salvation that He brought to us. The symbol is related to history.

In his view of the past, Mar Ephrem repeatedly speaks through symbols, as if symbols hasten from the past towards their completion at the coming of Christ. Shortly, we find his symbolical theology in this Triple Division: The Old Testament (ܚܝܐ), Christ (ܬܦܣܐ-ܚܝܐ), Church or sometimes the Kingdom (ܬܦܣܐ ܚܝܐ). So His goal in using symbols in various dimensions is to express the history of salvation.<sup>30</sup> The process from the *Typoi* to reality accompanies the path of humanity from Eden to Paradise. Through the Christ and in him the *Typoi* have become reality. According to Mar Ephrem, there are two important criteria to recognize and identify the types in the Bible and the similarity between the typos and the reality. The following are some examples of the symbol and the truth:

<sup>30</sup> EDMUND, Beck, Symbolum Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephräm, in: OC 41, 1958, 19-40; Zur Terminologie von Ephräms Bildtheologie, in: M. Schmidt & C.F. Geyer, Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihre Parallelen im Mittelalter, Eichstätt, 1981, 239-277; E.BECK, Das Bild von Spiegel bei Ephräm, OCP (1953); 5-24.

The first example of this process is the Eucharist and paradise/Eden: Adam is Anti-typus Christi; in paradise Adam ate the fruit without calling and thanking God, while the Lord blessed and broke the bread in the last supper. And the Eucharist has returned Adam's desire. Eucharist is the anti-typus of Adam's fruit, offered so that we can have eternal life. What we have lost through Eva we have found abundantly through the Eucharist and Mary, through the cross and then in the supper. Mary gave us the bread of life instead of the bread of fatigue that Eva gave.

The second example is Abel, Abraham and Melchizedek:

Abel is the type of Christ as lamb and shepherd because both lambs have been sacrificed: Abel's lambs<sup>31</sup> and himself, and Christ himself.

Abraham: Isaac is a sign of Jesus and his image; he also symbolizes Christ as a lamb. The sacrifice of Abraham (Lamb) is a Type of Christi.

Melchizedek: Mar Ephrem said He said that the ancient priesthood could not cleanse sin or sacrifice Christ the Lamb of God; Christ sacrificed himself and accepted the Melchizedek priesthood with the signs of his sacrifice: Bread and Wine. Melchizedek, with his priesthood and sacrifice, is the image that Christ fulfilled. Christ broke the bread with his own hands symbolically for the sacrifice of his body. He mixed the chalice with his own hands symbolically for the sacrifice of his blood. He sacrificed and offered himself, the priest of our atonement. He dressed the priesthood of Melchizedek of his type, who did not make offering, rather gave bread and wine. Christ abolished the priesthood that endeavored to make offerings.

Another example is the Old Testament Passover meal and the Eucharist: it depicts the Passover meal of Jesus, his crucifixion and the Eucharist of the church. The most important of these types are the paschal lamb and unleavened bread. The Passover meal was instituted by Jesus himself, who taught Moses how to perform the rituals. The two lambs are the same and they are different. Ephrem sees them in connection with the exodus: both freed, but one from Egypt, the other from death. Regarding the Eucharist he said that the symbol was in Egypt, the reality is in the church. Through the true lamb, the sacrificial Paschal lamb is canceled in its fulfillment. Also the last supper hall is the space for the meeting of the lambs; with the end of the Passover lamb it becomes *typos*.

<sup>31</sup> When both Cain and Abel give an offering, we see God received from Abel and not from Cain. Which was interpreted his acceptance of Abel because he offered blood as if Abel understood God's message that he wanted blood to symbolize the coming Christ, while he did not accept Cain because he did not offer blood. *"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks."* (Hebrews 11: 4).

The unleavened bread: the newly baked unleavened bread is a symbol of Christ's novelty and renewal through the Eucharist. The unleavened is removed as *typos*. The Eucharist, bread of life, takes its place. So, the unleavened is a symbol of the bread of life. Christ and his body gave instead of the unleavened. He slaughtered the paschal lamb and ate and broke his body. He removed the shadow and gave the truth. He ate the unleavened bread in the unleavened festival; His body became for us what was unleavened.

The Typos in Exodus: the divinity of Christ is present in the Eucharist as on Mount Sinai; the tabernacle is a symbol of the church where Holy of Holies dwells. The Eucharistic bread is like a dress for Christ, as are the priestly clothes. Also, the showbread is compared to the Eucharist. We also find other Typos such as Manna, a heavenly food, but it could not convert the people. It was good but ineffective, so Christ did not give it to us again, but he grants the Eucharist. As well, the brazen serpent (Num 21:9) is *typos* of the cross, and the body on the cross is the Eucharist, which can give life as did the serpent of Moses. The rock (Ex 17:6) is also a symbol of the Eucharist: it is a source of life. Joseph's bones (Num 19:16) are a symbol of the Eucharist in the church, where the death of Christ is celebrated. In addition, Ephrem sees the Eucharist as Isaiah's coal (ܩܠܝܐ) and the coal fire symbol (the divinity of Christ) also is contained within the Eucharist that the believers receive. Eucharist is stronger than Elijah's bread; it lets the people fly to paradise. Elijah's bread was a symbol of the Eucharist. If the symbol of his bread let fly in this way (Elijah), how will it let the peoples fly to Eden! All these symbols found in the Bible represent aspect of the Eucharist according to the Ephremic Typology.<sup>32</sup>

In sum, types, symbols are all essential elements of the theology of revelation. Ephrem and Aphrahat use type and symbol to express the reality of God in Creation. They also use the term “mystery” for any religious symbols (especially Old Testament “types”), sacramental rites, and (as the plural) for the Eucharist. Therefore they saw in the Old Testament not merely records of Israel's past experience of God and expectation of the future, but mysteries of God's purposes, now revealed to the eye of enlightened faith and in the sacraments. The idea of mystery symbolizes the hidden way that will be completely manifested at the end of time (eschatological dimension).

<sup>32</sup> YOUSIF, Pierre , " Typologie und Eucharistie bei Ephräm dem Syrer und Thomas von Aquin", in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter. Internationales Kolloquium, Eichstätt 1981*. Edited by Schmidt, Margot and Geyer, Carl Friedrich . Eichstätt Beiträge 4. Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1982, 75-107.

According to Theodore of Mopsuestia, Christ is the firstborn of the resurrection, who opened the new stage, the stage of non-corruption based on his resurrection and ascension. But the events and facts of all of Christ's life are still present in the Church with symbols and mysteries, and they continue to be active in them as a vision and hope, which foreshadow the heavenly fulfillment. Theodore usually uses RAZA ܠܝܬܐ as a term for them; sometimes he also speaks of ܠܝܬܐ ܐܝܢܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ and ܠܝܬܐܐܢܐ. For him, Sacraments are Signs-ܠܝܬܐܢܐ that must be interpreted, symbols of invisible and unspeakable things. The invisible and unspeakable, which depict both the sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist, is Christ's economy (more specifically, their focus is on Christ's death and resurrection) and our communion with Christ and the benefits of his economy. As a sign, the sacraments point both back to the past and also to the future.

He distinguishes between the Old Testament (period of the shadow), the New Testament (period of the truth and future). Therefore the ecclesiastical sacraments refer to the truth, thus the faithful participate in the truth by means of symbols that contain and include future truths. In Theodore's first homily regarding the Eucharist, he differentiates between the Old Testament Jewish rites, which are mere shadows ܠܝܬܐܢܐ, Symbols ܠܝܬܐܢܐ that do not reveal, but only indicate that there is something which casts the shadow, and the sacraments, which depict and show it. On the basis of the distinction between the provisional shadow in the Old Testament and the reality image in the sacrament, it is unlikely that the sacraments for him only stand in relation to what they indicate. Through his sermons explaining ecclesiastical mysteries, he added to typological interpretation, the Mystagogical interpretation<sup>33</sup> as an expression of the theology of attending salvation in the mysteries. This type complements the typological kind, and avoids metaphoric interpretation.

In some excerpts, Theodore shows the word "typos" to distinguish between the two phases, the historical and secret stage, and the present fixed stage. When he refers to the ecclesiastical sacraments, he uses two words ܠܝܬܐܢܐ and ܠܝܬܐܢܐ, a reference to the salvific Biblical reality (*Typos*) and then to the symbolic ceremonial celebration (*Anti-Typos*). The symbol indicates the external side, and the sacrament indicates the deep inner truth or the rite in its comprehensiveness. Here we find a theological relationship between the past historical event and the mystery that emanates from it.

<sup>33</sup> Mystagogy is not primarily intended to explain visible rituals, but rather to explain the mystery theology and its profound truth. It is more than talking about theology. It is the experience of theology, which draws the believer toward the source of salvation hidden in the sacraments in order that he subscribe and live by it, and to lead a morally and spiritually upright life. It is the theology of life.

We have the term ܠܡܥܠܐ again; and ܠܡܥܬܐ to characterize the relationship between the sacramental image and the coming truth, which include the real Participation in what is to come. He also used it to determine the general relationship between the promised future and the present, and then to distinguish the sacrament from its shadowy predecessor in the Old Testament. Therefore, for Theodore, the sacraments as a sign are merely indications of the past and especially the coming; and whether salvation is therefore purely futuristic, or whether the benefits to come in the sacraments are already really present here. For example, the new birth that takes place in baptism is the (Tupos) symbol, but the real birth is what we expect on the Day of Resurrection (Anti-Tupos). From this text it appears that the ecclesiastical celebration of the present time is the symbol, and the completion in the hereafter is the truth. He used term (Tupos, Anti -Tupos) to refer to several levels, as follows: the Old Testament/ the New Testament, the past event/ the ecclesiastical rite, the ecclesiastical liturgy/ the heavenly completion. So for him to speak of the symbol that contains the truth, that symbolizes and shares it, he repeatedly uses the word ܠܡܥܬܐ, a reference to this cooperation between the two phases.

Therefore, the mystery ܡܝܫܬܐ is a sign of symbols (ܡܝܫܬܐ ܠܡܥܬܐ ܠܡܥܠܐ) of invisible things beyond expression. Here he distinguishes three concepts: the invisible celestial truth of the power of salvation is already contained within the mystery, but under the cover of the visible symbols. Ecclesiastical symbols cover the truth, and at the same time express its presence. Therefore, the sacraments are not a sign without a share in the reality of what they depict; what is to come is already present in them, as in faith and in the new way of life.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, Theodore deals extensively with the symbolism of baptism and the Eucharist, in both he sees a symbol of Christ's death and resurrection. Theodore refers to these biblical verses (Rom 6:3; 1 Cor. 11:26) and draws from them the conclusions that is clear to us, according to the apostle Paul's words, that when we celebrate baptism or the Eucharist, we do so in memory of the death and resurrection of Christ. In this symbolism of baptism and the Eucharist, historically past salvific works are present in the sacred sign and are here and now accessible to us. Therefore, above all, the sacrament is a memorial of death and resurrection, and indeed, though veiled, the reality is present in its objective memory. Man must experience Christ and death in him, which means to live

<sup>34</sup> SIMON, Gerber, Theodor von Mopsuestia und das Nicänum, Studien zu den katechetischen Homilien, Brill 2000, 262-266.

them in the sacrament, so that he can gain the hope and right to the future life. That God gives the grace of the sacrament does not contradict this explanation of the reality of the sacraments. This Theodore's concept was advocated by Nestorius (c.450) and later by Abdisho bar Brikha (c.1318), who described in older terminology the consecrated elements as the type of the body and blood of Christ but also at same time emphasize the real presence of Christ.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Mar Narsai from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century is another theologian of the East Syrian fathers who wrote on sacraments of the church. In his theological method, he depends on Mar Theodore's concept of the earthly and heavenly kingdoms. Thus any ministry here on this earth is a mirror reflection of the liturgy in heaven. According to him, the visible thing is the symbol that proclaims the divine power. But also through outward things the Lord confers the affirmation of his words perfected in sacraments (especially in baptism, Eucharist and priesthood).<sup>36</sup>

Concerning the relationship of symbol and truth, type and reality, in the limited texts available, Johannan Bar Zobi (13<sup>th</sup> Century) twice clearly contrasts type and reality: with the fiery charcoal the angel who cleaned the lips of the Prophet was a type of the body of Christ, but in the Eucharist, we have reality. He also states that the Eucharistic figures are a type or symbol until the *Epiclesis*, but afterwards they are in reality the body and blood of Christ. In bread and wine, Christ gave us an image of his body and blood. The Church is a type in consecrating the mysteries, where our Lord gives us his body and blood. Just as Christ delivered his body in bread and wine, this is how the church presents a Type of bread and wine, and celebrating the holy Eucharist symbolizes the whole plan of salvation, including the birth, baptism, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord. The Holy Church remembers all of these things in their mysteries in types. This means that the Eucharist is the mystical re-presentation of the sacrifice of the cross. However, without doubt bread and wine are not simply images of the body and blood of the Lord, which means until the descent of the Holy Spirit, they were a type; after descending they actually became the body of the Lord. Likewise he clarifies: whenever believers take the body of our Lord Jesus, they should understand that they themselves embrace and kiss Christ. We mingle his body with our bodies in faith, and we actually mix his blood with our blood. But he continues; they do not become the

<sup>35</sup> FRIEDRICH, Heiler, *Urkirche und Ostkirche*, München.1937, 251.

<sup>36</sup> His important liturgical works are Homily XVII (An Exposition of the Mysteries), Homily XXI (On the Mysteries of the Church and on Baptism) and Homily XXXII (On the Church and on Priesthood); see: Mar EshaiShimun XXIII (ed.), *Homilies of Mar Narsai*, vol. I (San Francisco 1970) iii-lii. : Edmund Bishop, "Observations on the Liturgy of Narsai," in: *Ibid*, 85-163.

natural body and living blood, but do so in love, faith and reality. The bread remains bread, but it is connected to the body in heaven, like the man Christ with the Eternal Word. Since the connection of man with the Eternal word in the theology of the East Syriac fathers is an external one, the same will be assumed from the union between bread and the body. As well, Baptism represents a type of the resurrection of the body and the renewal of the soul in the life without end. Bar Zobi shares the belief of the Church as a whole that we really enjoy the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist; his opinion on this matter is common among the East Syriac fathers.<sup>37</sup>

It is possible to summarize that the East Syriac fathers use *Raṣa* as follows. It is the great drama of the revelation of God in Christ, in particular the whole Old Testament story of salvation conceived as a single parable finding its key and explanation in Christ; and it is Christ's acts, particularly his death on the Cross. In addition it is the Church, and within the Church that the sacraments are embodied in the faith. In this theological view, *raṣa* is a visible sign of a hidden grace, especially in solemn Christian rites such as baptism or the Eucharist, which is believed to have been ordained by Christ and held to be a means of divine grace, or to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality.

## THE VALIDITY OF THE SACRAMENTS

The life of the Assyrian Church of the East is a sacramental life. When the faithful are stricken with a spiritual weakness or spiritual slumber by living in sin, they can be healed by receiving the divine medicines that are the sacraments in the holy church. This means, at its core, that the East Syrian fathers teach that God's grace and goodness are mediated through the sacraments in order to be spiritually effective for believers who need divine grace. This section of the article will discuss the necessary conditions and that must be present in order for sacraments within the church to be considered valid and how a devout Christian who is willing to receive them can do so.

### 1. The role of the Holy Spirit (The Grace) in the Sacraments

Fathers of the apostolic churches described the Holy Spirit as the "soul" and "the very heart" of the Church. It is the Holy Spirit that holds and arranges everything and makes one complete whole from the various members. Sacramentally, a believer is integrated into the church,

<sup>37</sup> WILHELM, De Vries, Die Erklärung aller göttlichen Geheimnisse des Nestorians Johanna Bar Zobi (13. Jahrh.). *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, Rome, 1940, 197-201.

the body of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, the function of the Holy Spirit is the gradual formation of the humanly imperfect body into the holy body of Christ. He is the life-giving principle in the Church. He sanctifies, deifies and leads to perfection. The task of the Holy Spirit is the union of the members with Christ, which occurs through spiritual rebirth and sanctification as divine grace descends from the life-pouring God and flows down mystically upon the church's members.

According to the East Syrian Fathers, the Holy Spirit is as the principle source of mystery in the symbolic rituals. The effectiveness of the Holy Spirit is not detached from the symbol of the mysteries but instead works in and through them. Hence, divine grace is the internal power of the Spirit that works through the material element of the sacraments and allows grace to be present for our consecration. By participating in the sacraments, we grow closer to God and receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In John 6: 63, Jesus confirms that his teaching is not understood by physical thought, but is spiritually comprehended by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit through the symbols of the sacrament. We are not to regard the elements merely as bread and a cup of wine, but as the body and the blood of Christ which were transformed by the descent of the Holy Spirit (*Epiclesis*)<sup>38</sup>. As such the two elements get transformed and faithful individuals receive the sacrament and receive His blood and body. Reflecting on the epiclesis, Theodore of Mopsuestia(428) says: “But by virtue of the sacramental actions, this is the moment appointed for Christ our Lord to rise from the dead and pour out his grace upon us all.”<sup>39</sup> Recalling the action of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s resurrection (Rom 8. 11), he says: “Just as our Lord’s body was clearly revealed as immortal when it had received the Spirit at his anointing, so too in the liturgy the bread and wine that have been offered, at the coming of the Holy Spirit receive a kind of anointing by the grace that comes upon them. From this moment we believe that, much like our Lord’s body after resurrection, they are the body and blood of Christ and are free from death, corruption, suffering and changing.

<sup>38</sup> The epiclesis is the part of the Anaphora or Eucharistic prayer by which a priest or bishop invokes the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine. During the epiclesis, the Holy Spirit comes down on the offering and changes it to the pneumatic body and blood of Christ. This signifies the resurrection of Our Lord in the Holy Qurbana or Eucharist. The whole anaphora, especially the institution narrative and the epiclesis, represents this central event of the mystery of Christ in the Holy Qurbana.

<sup>39</sup> EDWARD, Yarnold, *The Awe Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, Baptismal Homily, V. 245.246.

For Narsai <sup>40</sup>(502), the power of the Spirit descends upon the mortal man and dwells in the Bread and sanctifies it by the Spirit's power. Regarding the symbols of the sacrament of baptism Narsai states: “the oil is the symbol which proclaims the divine power, and by outward things God gives the assurance of his works completed in mystery.” Mar Narsai taught the significance of the *Epiclesis* and held that the priest summons the Spirit to descend into the baptismal water without change, as in the Eucharistic elements, and works in it. This means the power of God gives strength to the weak and tangible things.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the inscription on the famous pillar in China called the Xi'an Stele (8<sup>th</sup> Century) says that the water and spirit of religious baptism washes away false glories and makes man pure and white.<sup>42</sup>

In the same sense, an anonymous author (9<sup>th</sup> century) and Isho Bar Nun (c.828) emphasized in their explanation of baptism that the Spirit descends in baptismal water and gives it power. In addition, in his letter to Mar Isaac, Isho Bar Nun speaks of the spiritual birth to the life of incorruptibility through the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup>

On the topic of the baptismal rite, Mar Abdīšō‘ Bar Brikha (c.1318) compares the spiritual birth of baptism with a natural birth where he explains that the parents participate in natural birth, but the principal thing happens through God. With spiritual birth, the Holy Spirit is the main influencer. Elsewhere he insists that by baptism, the sons of God are begotten by the efficacy of the Spirit.<sup>44</sup> Much like Mar Narsai, Timothy II (c.1332) holds that the Holy Spirit works in the Eucharistic elements as the power of grace unites with the bread and wine and become sanctified. His spirit gives the bread and wine the power to give life, like the power of fire, naturally residing in sensible materials and affecting them, in the same way, the power of the Holy Spirit enters into the matter of the mysteries and sanctifies it.<sup>45</sup>

According to the East Syrian rite of baptism, through the visible water, the Holy Spirit renews the old state of our creation according to its pleasure, and places the deposit of immortality in us

<sup>40</sup> The famous teacher of the School of Edessa and founder of the School of the Nestorians at Nisibis begun about the year 437; his literary activity was produced less than a decade after Theodore's death.

<sup>41</sup> The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai, By Dom R. H. Connolly, Hom XXI, 7, 46.50, XXII, 41.

<sup>42</sup> GERHARD, Rosenkranz, Die älteste Christenheit in China, Berlin 1939, 51.

<sup>43</sup> Isho Bar Nun(828): Brief an Isaak von Beth Qatraye über liturgische Fragen, Borg. Syr,81,f.336v. and Anonymus(9<sup>th</sup>): Anonymi Auctoris Expositio etc. 2 Bände CSCO Ser. SY ri Series II, Rom 1913-1915 II, 44-45.

<sup>44</sup> The book of Marganita the Pearle, on the truth of Christianity, written by Mar Odisho Metropolitan, translated by Mar EshaiShimun XXIII; 51: Ebedjesu (1318): Liber Margaritea de veritatechristianaereligionis In : A. Maius,coll.X, 2, 355.

<sup>45</sup> CONNOLLY, Dom, R. H., The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai, this volume is the Syriac text of the homilies from the edition by Alphonse Mingana, Cambridge 1909,XXI; 59; Hom. XXXII., 67, Hom. XVII., 20.

through its grace.<sup>46</sup> Badger cites a passage from the office of the Epiphany, where it is said that we attracted Christ through the water and Spirit, and that we were born of the Spirit in the water.<sup>47</sup> In a song on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of ܦܠܝܬܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ it says: “with water and spirit he has sanctified me (the church) in his baptism.”<sup>48</sup> Likewise, Mar Timothy II says the mortal becomes immortal by the power of the spirit within the consecrated oil. In the liturgical celebration, the priest calls the spirit, the sky opens and it comes down and hovers over the water.<sup>49</sup> According to Ibn Al-Tayyib, bread and wine, at the blessing of Christ, or the priest, become the Body and blood of the Lord by the divine power that descends on them.<sup>50</sup>

In summary, it is apparent that for the East Syrian Fathers, the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit is so strongly emphasized that matter seems no more than a mere sign, and the thing is an instrument in the hand of the spirit which works in it and through it. The Spirit is inseparable from that inner reality and the reality of the Spirit means that the Spirit will not be superseded by the symbol of the mysteries but will instead work in and through the sacraments. It is the Spirit which determines everything and is the source of truth. In a mysterious way, the faithful receive the Holy Spirit through the sacraments. The Spirit consecrates not only the materials of the sacraments, but also works through them. The Church is sanctified by the mediation of the power of the Holy Spirit and the sacraments dispense grace through the performance of the rite itself.

## **2. The Holy Spirit working through the Priest in the Sacraments**

The origins of priesthood can be traced to the Old Testament. One of the tribes of ancient Israel, the tribe of Levi, was set apart for priestly service. The tribe's role was to stay with the Ark of the Covenant and offer the required sacrifices for the people's sins.<sup>51</sup> Later, after Solomon built the first Temple, the tribe's duties included leading the prayers, offering the sacrifices at the Temple, and interpreting the Law of the Old Covenant. This role continued into the time of Christ. For these reasons the early Church recognized that “Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, we find this system of devotion through priesthood in the early church. We

<sup>46</sup> DIETRICH, G. , Die nestorianische Tauf liturgie, Giessen 1903, 40.

<sup>47</sup> BADGER, George, Percy, The Nestorians and their Rituals. Volume II. London 1852, 165.

<sup>48</sup> ENGBERDING, Hieronymus, Die Kriche als Braut, in OCP III , 1937, 10-30.

<sup>49</sup> WILHELM De Vries I, Sakramententheologie bei den Nestorianern, Rome 1947,108.

<sup>50</sup> GEORGE, Graf, Die Eucharistielehre des nestorianers Al-Muhtar ibn Butlan (11. Jahrhunderts), in OC III. Serie XIII (1938), 51.

<sup>51</sup> See Numbers 3:5–10.

<sup>52</sup> See Hebrews 9:11.

recognize that God works always through men. As spelled out through the Old and New Testaments, from Moses to David, and from John the Baptist to the apostles to the divinely-inspired authors of the New Testament. And on to the bishops of early Church councils, who recognized the divine inspiration of the New Testament and defined our sacred theology. As well, this extension is also found in the ritual aspect of the sacraments which are mediated through priests who are instructed to represent Jesus Christ.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus was never identified as a priest. But after His Resurrection, the Apostles understood that everything the Old Testament pointed to about priesthood found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He is the “one mediator between God and humankind” (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus too acted in priesthood when he gave the broken bread and gave wine during the Last Supper, declaring that they were His Blood and Body. The function of the priest as mediator is not to limit the encounter between God and the human person, but to focus it more clearly for the sake of the person and ultimately for the sake of the faithful community. The clergy, whether bishops or priests, are the ministers without whom it is not possible to have Holy Mass, since it is they who are consecrated with a special Sacrament of the Holy Orders.

The Holy Spirit comes down at the request of the priest; but it is not because of the virtue of the priest who celebrates the mysteries, it is through the grace of the Holy Spirit. This means, the Holy Spirit comes not because of the worthiness of the priest, but because of the Mysteries which are set upon the altar. Also, the priest does not himself believe that he is worthy to hold and offer sacrament matters, but he possesses the spiritual grace according to the stature he received through priesthood, and from which he acquired the confidence to convey such things. In the East Syrian Eucharistic liturgy we can find prayers acknowledging the unworthiness of the priest. Before the Creed the celebrant makes a deep bow and says in a low voice, *“With hearts cleansed from evil thoughts, may we be made worthy to enter the holy of holies and to stand before your altar in purity and holiness, diligence and devotion, and offer you spiritual and rational sacrifices in true faith.”*<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, the priest recites in the opening prayer of the anaphora of the blessed Apostles Mar Addai and Mar Mari, *“We thank You, Lord our God, for the abundant richness of Your graces towards us, for though we are sinners and weak, because of the abundance of Your mercy, You have made us worthy to administer the holy mysteries of the body and blood of Your Christ. We implore you for your help to strengthen our souls, so that*

<sup>53</sup> The liturgy of the Church of the East printed and published by the rev. Joseph De. Kalaita, Mosul, 1921-1928, 14.

*we may with perfect love and true faith administer the gifts You have given us.”*<sup>54</sup> The priest adds the fourth *ܠܐܠܗܐ* silently while kneeling. He says, “*for my unworthiness, misery, and poverty. Yea, our Lord and our God, according to your mercies and the abundance of your kindness, deal with your people and with my misery, not according to my sins and offenses, but may we—I and these—be deemed worthy of the pardon of debts and the forgiveness of sins through this holy body which in true faith we receive through the grace which is from you.*”<sup>55</sup> In the same context of *ܠܐܠܗܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ* kneeling for the prayer of the Departed the priest says, “*I worship your grace, O my Lord, and I confess your mercifulness, for though I am not worthy because of my sins, you have brought me near to you in your compassion, and have established me a minister and mediator of these glorious and holy Mysteries .....etc, Yea, O Lord God of hosts, (repeat), may this oblation be accepted in the heights above from the hands of your sinful and offending servant...etc.*”<sup>56</sup>

From these prayers it is very clear that the priest admits his unworthiness, this weak human nature of a priest that makes him unworthy to enter the Holy of Holies and spread his hands over the Sacred Mystery, but the Holy Spirit enables him to approach the Mysteries. In addition, he needs to be more watchful in his life because when he is doing the service, a priest is exposed to much temptation.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, being aware and acknowledging his weakness and unworthiness helps the priest perform the Sacred Mysteries with a humble spirit as, aware that he could not do so on his own and depends fully on the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit to enter the holy of holies. And so, despite his weakness, he fixes the gaze of his mind on the Mysteries of the Lord. In the light of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Mar Ephrem refers to the importance of the priesthood of Christ, and then to the responsibility of the priest who represents Christ, because the foundation of the Eucharist's existence is belonging to him.<sup>58</sup>

The eminent East Syriac theologian Mar Narsai composed two homilies on priesthood under the rubrics “On Priesthood” and “On Holy Eucharist,” which stand as a source to comprehend the theology of priesthood within the East Syriac church. For him, the ordination of priests is the key to divine mercy, since God gave it the great seal of His divinity. Mar Narsai meditated mystically on the Eucharist, in which he depicts spiritually the role of priest. He said that the priest does not deserve

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Also. Mar Ephrem said that a man will never be able to become a priest because of his human weaknesses. Therefore he remained a deacon for his whole life.

<sup>58</sup> Translations of the *Hymns on Faith* are taken from St. Ephrem the Syrian, *The Hymns on Faith*, trans. Jeffrey T. Wickes, Fathers of the Church 130 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015).faith16.7.

to enter the holy of holies like the son of Amos (Isaiah) in his defilement, but the love of the Lord grants him grace to sanctify the mysteries in humbleness. Also, in explanation of the baptismal mystery, Mar Narsai confirms that at the designation with Holy Oil, the priest says: (Baptized Name) is signed with the Oil of Anointing in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit forever ... and he does not say “I designed.” Here Mar Narsai emphasizes that the reason we say this is because the seal which the priest sets is not his, but his Lord's, the Holy Spirit celebrates these things through the hands of the priest.<sup>59</sup> Thus, according to the rules of priesthood, the priest offers prayers and supplications to God in order that the Holy Spirit may descend in the mysteries.

In addition, Mar Narsai uses a number of adjectives or references to describe priests in his homilies. He calls a priest the servant of God for the service of sacred mysteries.<sup>60</sup> God entrusts priests to administer the divine mysteries here on earth and serve at the Holy of Holies. A second way in which he views priesthood is that the priest becomes the tongue of the community during the exposition of Gospel, as he explains truth and reveals the mysteries which are hidden within the mouths of priests. A third way he refers to priests is by considering the priest as a wise captain of a ship (the Church). In his articles against heresy, he says the priest drives out all the wrong teachings from the church and causes this ship to reach the port safely. During the sacrament of baptism, the priest is also deemed the good physician (ܐܬܪܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ). In addition, Narsai also has another epithet, the good shepherd (ܐܬܪܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ).<sup>61</sup>

Another important concept in Mar Narsai's liturgical theology is that the priest, as the minister of the ‘mysteries of the Church’, is a vessel utilized by the Holy Spirit, which is the ultimate ‘celebrant’ and the one who perfects these mysteries. “By the power of His (the Holy Spirit's) will, the priest distributes life in the Bread, removes iniquity, and makes the Spirit dwell among the members (of the Body). In his Exposition of the Mysteries, Narsai remarks: The priest now offers the mystery of the redemption of our life, full of awe, fear and great dread. The priest is in awe and great fear and much trembling for his own debts and the debts of all the children of the Church. The

<sup>59</sup> Connolly, The liturgical homilies of Narsai, Vol. VII, Hom. XXII, 21,22, 44, 47.

<sup>60</sup> The Syriac word ܥܒܕܐ is derived from the Syriac root verb ܥܒܕ which means to do, make, work, and serve. In the Old Testament ‘servant’ is the frequent translation of Hebrew *ebed*, the literal meaning of which is ‘slave.’ In the New Testament it translates the Greek *δουλος* *doulos*, which also has the literal meaning ‘slave.’ Saint Paul calls himself servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10, Rom. 1:1). Moses was all faithful over God's house as a servant (Heb. 3:5). Liturgical Perspectives on Servant (ܥܒܕܐ) The Syriac fathers had borrowed the imagery of servant ܥܒܕܐ from the gospel of Matthew 24:45-51 (ܥܒܕܐ ܕܡܬܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܥܠܡܐ). Who is placed over a master's household to give to them food at the proper time (Mt. 24: 45), cf. J. PAYNESMITH, A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, 395.

<sup>61</sup> DANIEL J. Harrington, S.J. (ed), The Gospel of Matthew (Sacra Pagina) (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1991), 343.

priest stands to officiate, reverent with great fear and trembling, and then, like Jacob, priest worships three times and then draws near to kiss the tomb of our lord (i.e. the altar). Jacob honored his brother Esau with kneeling, and the priest honors with kneeling Jacob's Lord. He kisses with love and affection the holy altar and trusts he will receive sanctification through his lips. He also depicts the priest as the eye of the whole ecclesiastical body; he serves as attorney and fulfills an advocacy on the church's behalf.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, Emmanuel Bar Shahare (10<sup>th</sup> Century) explains that the spirit descends on the head of the baptized and sanctifies him by means of the priesthood. So through the laying on of hands, the cleric leads the believers to angelic conduct.<sup>63</sup> Also, for East -Syrian ascetics such as Joseph Hazzaya (7<sup>th</sup> Century), priests have the authority to consecrate the sacraments, but not the angels.<sup>64</sup> Also in Canon 20 of the Synod of Mar Ezekiel (576), the gift of the great priesthood, through which people are showered with heavenly goods, and through which the Creator's plan for his creation is completed, has been given to the Church with the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>65</sup> Ishoyahb I. (581-569) juxtaposes in his letter to Jajob, Bishop of Darai, the effectiveness of the priest with that of the Holy Spirit; he says that through his hands and through the action of the Holy Spirit, children are begotten to children of God.<sup>66</sup>

Theodor Bar Koni (8<sup>th</sup> Century) writes, "but God heals us through the mediation of the priest and sets us apart so that we may be in his household."<sup>67</sup> Ishodad of Merv (9<sup>th</sup>) explains why the consecrating priest is the first to take the Holy Eucharist. Because he too needs sanctification; for even if he consecrates, this is how the spirit accomplishes his purpose; for the priest is in place of an instrument by the grace of the Spirit.<sup>68</sup> The service of the priest in Church is the work of Christ and the priest co-operates with Christ to accomplish his task. Moses Bar Kepha (813-903) would say, "The celebrant is in the place of Christ who instituted the Holy Eucharist by which he offered

<sup>62</sup> An Exposition of the mysteries by Mar Narsai, the harp of the Holy Spirit, Published by Rev. Yousip d Kailita in syriac, Mousel.1928, 22-25.

<sup>63</sup> EMMANUEL Bar Shahhare: Memra der Erklärung der Geheimnisse der Taufe. Vat. Syr.. 269.

<sup>64</sup> JOSEPH, Khazzaya: Questions. Borg. Syr. 88, 339.

<sup>65</sup> HABBI, Joseph, *مجامع كنيسة المشرق / mġām 'knysālmšrq / Synods of the Church of the East*, Beirut 1999, 337.

<sup>66</sup> CHABOT, J. B., *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*, Ishoyahb I. (581-596): Brief an Jajob, Bischof von Darai, Paris, 1902, 445.

<sup>67</sup> Theodore Bar Koni (8<sup>th</sup>): *Liber Schoiorum*, syriac texts edited by Addai Sher, Volume 2, Paris 1910-1912 (CSCO Scr. Syri, Series II, 217.

<sup>68</sup> Ishodad of Merv (9<sup>th</sup>): *The commentaries of Ishodad of Merv*, edited and translated by Margaret Dunlop Gibson. Volume 5, Cambridge 1911-1916, 105.

himself to God in advance(beforehand), and distributed his body and blood to the Apostles through the medium of bread and wine, and who now mediates before God for man.”<sup>69</sup>

The great East Syriac scholar and poet Abdišō‘ Bar Berikha (1318-Nisibis) considered priesthood the most significant of all the seven sacraments because through the ordination of a priest, all other sacraments are bestowed upon the faithful who so wish to receive them. He says in his book (Pearl-ܬܝܠܬܐ): "The priesthood is the most important and noble sacrament in the Church, through which all other sacraments of the Church are perfected; and it is the greatest gift that God gave to mankind by empowering men to forgive the sins of their fellow men."<sup>70</sup> As well, Patriarch Timothy II (c.1332) states that the mediation and blessing of the priesthood functions are considered as a seal (ܫܠܬܐ) which makes the mystery valid, and God has entrusted this seal to bishops and priests.<sup>71</sup>

Mar Timothy II (1332) and Mar Abdišō‘ (1318)<sup>72</sup> both viewed priesthood as the ministry of intercession between God and people. Much as was emphasized previously in this article, without the mediation of the priest, there would be no real sacraments in the church. Everything—whether characters or symbols found in the Church—is determined by the Holy Spirit. According to Mar Abdišō‘, The priesthood is the ministry of intercession between God and man in the forgiveness of sin, the acquisition of good things, and the alleviation of divine wrath. The efficacy of the priest is called mediation; through the power of his intercession it is fitting to believe that by placing the matter of the mystery on the altar he mediates our reconciliation. Furthermore, Timothy II explains why priests wear white garments specifically at baptism. Since the priest is about to cleanse people from their sin, this shows that he already has purity and is able to also purify those whom he baptizes. The fire of the Spirit has mingled with the bread and wine, which have been placed on the altar by his word, and by the power of the Spirit which he sends, he has sanctified them (bread and wine). As well, elsewhere, Timothy explains the priest's mediation through the power of his intercession. He is asking the question of why the priest looks eastward in all the designations, while the bishop stands towards the west at the laying on of hands. The answer to that question is that the

<sup>69</sup> G. Chediah (ed. & trans.), *Moše bar KēfāyudeQūdašabhāshyam*, Kottayam: OIRSI, 1982, 15.

<sup>70</sup> Mar Abdišō‘ of Nisibis gives the standard for the validity of sacraments in Part IV, Chapter I of his book ܬܝܠܬܐ.

<sup>71</sup> Kochuparambil, *East Syriac Theology*, 255.

<sup>72</sup> Two theologians may be described as the authoritative authorities of the Assyrian Church of the East. This is the basis of theological reflection. Timotheos, as Metropolitan of Mosul and Arbela, 1318 successor Yahballahas III. His book on *The Seven Reasons of Church Secrets* has gained special significance. It is the most elaborate sacramental theology that can be found in East Syriac literature. 'Abd shu (Ebedjesus) bar Brikh, the Metropolitan of Nisibis and Armenia (between 1285-1291), was the last great writer of East Syriac culture.

priest and the bishop are mediator in all these ordinations between God and the people and that he implores of atonement and forgiveness from him that may come upon him from the east. Therefore his face should look to the east to receive and to give, because the atonement and the gift are not from himself. With the laying on of hands, however, it is not so, since this is passed down from one to the other through the mediation of the priesthood, because the bishop is the giver and God has given him the power to give and distribute, and to those who ask and receive them Righteously handed down gifts.<sup>73</sup> As well, in the liturgical prayers, the priest appears not as the main cause of the sanctification but as a mediator of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the consecration of the mysteries is achieved through the mediation of the Holy Spirit and the hands of the priest.

On the other hand, for Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 428), the priest offers the heavenly sacrifice because Jesus Christ did not perform a priestly service according to the Mosaic Law; rather he performs the priestly service in heaven and not on earth. He achieves a real high priesthood and offers to God no other sacrifice than himself (Heb 4.14/ 6,20/8.6). As to the priests, they offer the same sacrifice always and everywhere because there is one sacrifice which has been sacrificed for humankind, and by his offering this sacrifice obtained perfection for us (Heb 10.14)(1 Cor. 11.26). At another time, he stretched on the altar to be sacrificed for us. Therefore, for Theodore, the priest is representing the image of Christ, not that he offers himself in sacrifice but because he performs the figure of the service of the indescribable sacrifice of Christ.<sup>74</sup> Also mentioned in all the ecclesiastical liturgical prayers, the priest does not himself believe that he is worthy to hold and give mysteries, but on behalf of the people he possesses the spiritual grace received in his priesthood, and from which he acquired the confidence for conveying such things. Thus the Holy Spirit has not permitted any other individual to celebrate the mysteries except the ordained priest. Although the priest is human and prone to sin and other offenses in this world, he receives the power of the Spirit by the laying on of Hands and only then can he perform all the Mysteries. Subsequently, the righteous cannot by their purity bring down the spirit, and the sinful by their sinfulness do not hinder His descent.

<sup>73</sup> De Vries, *Sakramententheologie*, 112-113.

<sup>74</sup> ALPHONSE, Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, Cambridge 1933, 83.

### 3. The Recipient of the Sacraments

The Holy Spirit works not only through matter but also through the Recipient. We grow closer to our Lord and receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit by participating in the sacraments, which not only reveal God to us, but also serve to make us receptive to God. It is known that for the East Syriac fathers, all sacraments are arranged so that the faithful are to be lifted up into the higher sphere of divine life. By partaking in the sacraments, our nature can pass through these stages and become deified. As the members of the Christian community are called to this mystical union, they reach the final purpose of life through participation in the nature of God, which is sanctification; the Holy Spirit enables the believer to partake in God's holiness. The Spirit of God who dwells in us transforms and transfigures us into the glory of Christ (Col 1. 28) (Col 12. 10) (2 Pet 1. 4). However, the impact of the mysteries is objective. So the goal of God's plan ܠܗܘܝܬܐ for humankind is our sanctification. God's plan for humanity is to get the faithful the salvation and eternal life which begins here through a personal relationship with God. This personal relation implies participation in the divine life. God communicates the fullness of his divinity to the creature who accepts it by faith.<sup>75</sup>

Early Syriac Christianity presents one prominent model for understanding liturgy as a means for the ethical formation of the congregation. Mar Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) in his hymns for the Nativity vigil addressed his congregations in ways that utilized ritual involvement in the liturgy for ethical and moral development. For him, the liturgy as a disciplined ritual activity provided the tools by which the faithful could learn, experience, and experience healing. He confirms that throughout human history God gradually reveals himself in order to allow us to participate in his spiritual nature. The true image of God not only united Christ's divinity with his humanity in the mystery of the incarnation, but also united with our humanity itself. The incarnation not only happened in Mary's miraculously conceived child, but also universally and throughout all humankind. For human nature changed when Christ became incarnate, and humanity became a fitting place for Holy Spirit to be: *'Blessed is He who made our body a Tabernacle for His Holiness. Blessed is He who with our tongue interpreted his secrets'*. He renews the tarnished image of the human being by Jesus 'life, passion, death

<sup>75</sup> E. J. Kilmartin, *Particular Liturgy of the Individual Church*, Bangalore 1987, 121.

and resurrection and allows us to participate in the very nature of God. Through the sacraments, we remember and celebrate this mystery of Christ and are able to participate in them.<sup>76</sup>

Jesus offered himself up in sacrifice by breaking his bread and mixing the cup in token of the sacrifice of his blood. The Last Supper and its table are the first church and the first altar and represent all churches and altars. It is the “living medicine” or “medicine of life”. Through receiving the sacraments, we shall have life. It is also believed that the forgiveness of sins flows directly from the Eucharist. For Mar Ephrem, Fire and Spirit are agents of Christ’s presence in the church and in the sacraments. The church invites Fire and Spirit to come into the bread and wine in order to make it the Body and Blood of Christ. By kindling the fire, the priest takes bread but gives forth the Body and he receives wine but distributes the Blood. This is when the bread and cup of wine are no longer merely those two elements but are substantiated into the Body and Blood of Christ. Mar Ephrem beautifully states, “The fire came down with anger to destroy sinners, but the fire of grace descends on the bread and settles in it. Instead of the fire that destroyed man, we have consumed the fire in the bread and have been invigorated”(Hymn De Fide 10:8-10).<sup>77</sup>

Through encountering Christ personally, one becomes renewed because no one could remain unaffected by such an experience. For Mar Ephrem, it is in the reception of the Body and Blood of the Lord that Christians are united to Christ in his Church. The Body and Blood are called “mysteries” (*raze*) because they are not what they appear to the physical eye; for to look at them, they appear to be just bread and wine. However, properly understood, they are the body and blood of Christ. Just as Jesus was seen by the physical eye as man, yet he is also God; similarly, the mysteries are seen outwardly to be bread and wine, but they are in fact the Body and Blood. Therefore the eyes should be pure since it is the eye of faith and eye of love. It is through this, that we see the relationship and connection between divine love and human faith.<sup>78</sup>

To learn how our Syriac fathers dealt with this task, we should return to their dazzling ideas by considering the hymns<sup>79</sup> (ܠܝܨܢܐ) of Mar Ephrem for the vigil service of the Nativity feast. Within these hymns, we discover some external manifestations of participation such as the vigil service at night consisting of candlelight, hymns sung by male and female choirs, and antiphonal responses by

<sup>76</sup> Ephrem, Hymns on the Nativity (hereafter HNat): the Syriac text is edited with German translation by Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, CSCO 186-187/ Scr. Syr. 82-83 (Louvain: CorpusSCO, 1959). 84.

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=8014>.

<sup>78</sup> See EDMUND, Beck, "Glaube und Gebet bei Ephräm", *Orient Christianus* 66 (1982): 15-50.

<sup>79</sup> This collection of twenty-eight doctrinal hymns (called *madrash*, in Syriac) was not composed as an integrated group.

the congregation. Through this perspective, we find the presence of all social categories within the civic community in the liturgical service. Mar Ephrem's hymns were predominately Bible based, and thus the liturgy provided biblical knowledge within the sermons. This was a beautiful gift and privilege at the time because such knowledge was not available to most people and interpreting the Word of God was a skill that few had. These practices also acted as a means of helping believers overcome any exotic ideas of heretics. In his vigil hymns, Mar Ephrem insists the believers-to-be should not only depend on their physical presence in church, but that the liturgical service could be observed with faithful devotion. He advises the faithful to continue the biblical events in their lives by sharing in ritual services. Therefore, for Ephrem, participation in the liturgical office of the sacraments allows the congregation each week to immerse them into a sacred history continuing from God's plan to their own present moment, and brings the congregation into its healed and holy state as a new creation.<sup>80</sup>

On the subject of baptism, Timothy I (c.823) held that faith is a necessary condition for the reception of adult Baptism within the baptismal liturgy. Faith is an indispensable and essential condition for the reception of baptism not just for adults but also necessary in infant baptism, which certainly was common in the East Syriac liturgy. Hence, in the case of infant baptism, we find that the role of the parents' faith and the issue of original sin play a huge role, which is coincidentally also considered the reason for the necessity of children's baptism.<sup>81</sup> This understanding was certainly already common at the time of Mar Babai the Great (c.628)<sup>82</sup>. Concerning infant baptism, Mar Babai said that children attain a deep understanding of salvation through the sacrament of baptism, which may not necessarily be recognized at the moment of baptism, but becomes apparent when the child walks through life under the moral and spiritual responsibility and care of its parents. This is akin to a seed that is sown in the earth and over time becomes a fruitful tree bearing wonderful fruit. Also Mar Babai holds that undoubted faith and zealous love are preconditions for a fruitful reception of the Eucharist when the bread is received by the faithful as the Holy Body of Christ.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity and Nativity*: trans. K. Mcvey, Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns*, Mahweh, 1989, The syriac text is edited with German translation by E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen*, Louvain 1962, 259-468.

<sup>81</sup> Mar Timothy, *Eppistulae*, 24.

<sup>82</sup> He was an early church father of the Church of the East. He set several of the foundational pillars of the Church, revived the monastic movement, and formulated its Christology in a systematic way. He served as a monastic visitor and coadjutor with Mar Aba as unofficial heads of the Church of the East.

<sup>83</sup> Babai (628): W. Frankenberg, *Euagrius Ponticus*, Berlin 1912. *Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Volume XIII*, 241. and *Liber de Unione*, 230.

When it comes to receiving the Eucharist, there is a certain preparation required of an individual. Mar Narsai explains that the preparations are repentance of sins and the forgiveness of the offenses against the neighbor.<sup>84</sup> As well, Abraham Bar Lipheh demands purity from sin as a means of preparing oneself for the receiving of such a sacrament. He states, “Whoever does not sanctify his body and receive purely the gift of secrets, his soul will go to sinners and he will not go to paradise.”<sup>85</sup> Ibn Butlan (c.1075) explains in his book concerning the question about baptism, the necessity of sobriety and maturity when receiving the Holy Communion.<sup>86</sup> Also, Isho bar Nun excludes from the reception of the Holy Communion the person who commits great sins and still wallows in them, however, minor sins do not stand in the way of receiving the Holy Eucharist.<sup>87</sup>

On the other hand, an anonymous author emphasizes that the Holy Eucharist is used to forgive sins. According to him, the holy for the holy people must not be interpreted as if it requires holiness and perfection from the recipient, but he does not say that serious sins are not excluded from reception of the Holy Eucharist.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, Johanna bar Zobi comments on the right preparation for Holy Communion as follows: *“In fear and love we want to approach the mysteries because it is appropriate for us to get the help of the spirit that is hidden in them. We do not want to approach participation in them contemptuously by wallowing in the passions of greed and anger. Let us repent of our sins by improving our missteps. In the repentance of the soul we want to approach the sacraments with fear and trembling”*.<sup>89</sup> In addition, according to him there is no doubt that bread and wine are not a mere image of the body and blood of the Lord. He asserts that we should rather look at them with the eyes of faith and in truth definitely- ܐܠܗܐ call them the Lord's body. But he continues: *they do not become natural body and living blood, but in love and faith and effectiveness the bread remains bread. It is connected to the body in heaven, like the man Christ with the eternal word. When believers take the body of our Lord Jesus, they should believe that they hug and kiss Christ himself. We mingle his body with our bodies in faith and we actually mix his blood with our blood.*<sup>90</sup> His understanding of this matter is common among the East Syriac fathers.

<sup>84</sup> Connolly, Hom XVII, 24.

<sup>85</sup> De Vries, Sakramententheologie, 114.

<sup>86</sup> Graf, Die Eucharistielehre, 188.

<sup>87</sup> Isho Bar Nun, Commentaries, V, 36-27.

<sup>88</sup> De. Vries, Sakramententheologie, 114.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>90</sup> W. De Vries, Die Erklärung aller göttlichen Geheimnisse des Nestorians Johanna Bar Zobi (13.Jahrh.). Orientalia Christiana Periodica, Rome, 1940. 200.

In general, Abdišo‘ Bar Brikha confirms that the faith and right intention which render the mysteries efficacious are a condition for receiving them, which means the faith of the recipient is what allows them to truly accept and believe that what is symbolized in the sacraments is actually given to them by the heavenly power.<sup>91</sup> For Mar Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.428), by the ritual celebration and participation of these sacraments, the faithful can enter the very heart of the mystery of Christ and, just like His Apostles, they too can become the children of Christ. Man is in dire need of God’s help because after the fall, his own inclination and orientation is towards sin. So man can not alone fight against Satan and his agents. Man cannot overcome the powers of sin unless he receives the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Despite this, divine grace would not cancel or overcome mankind’s free will.<sup>92</sup> In his commentary on the vision of Isaiah, he states: *“the Seraph did not hold the live coal with his hands but with the tongue.”* This vision clarifies the role of people in their feeling of fear and awe, which Theodore demands of us when we approach the sacraments.<sup>93</sup> Also in his homilies, he confirms an entirely different spiritual preparation and mental attitude is demanded of his listeners. He uses the expression awe-inspiring, fearful, and seeks to fill his people with fear and trembling towards the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.<sup>94</sup>

Therefore, in the context of sacramental life, Mar Theodore and Mar Narsai understood the meaning of *raṣṣa* as the encounter between gracious divine love and humanity that is plagued and wounded by sin. By partaking in this heavenly meal, the worshipper is transported to his heavenly home. Moreover, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Gabriel Qatraya also confirmed the importance of our partaking in the sacrament when he considered that our participation in the Holy Mysteries is symbol of our participation in the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>95</sup> We also find the idea of dread and fear towards the Eucharist in the east syriac liturgy. The deacon demands in liturgical hymn the people to be in awe and reverence when they draw near to the mysteries with a pure heart and true faith.<sup>96</sup> And also we

<sup>91</sup> Abdišo‘, The Book of Marganith (the Pearl): On the Truth of Christianity, MAR E. SHIMUN (Introd. & ET), Kerala 1965; reprinted, Chicago 1988, 47.

<sup>92</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, Dogmatic works, Section VI. On the Original Sin and Mortality, Book III, Vol. II, edited by H. B. Swete, Cambridge 1880, 101. Reine, F., The Eucharistic Doctrine and Liturgy of the Mystagogic Catechesis of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Washington 1942, 28.

<sup>93</sup> A. Mingana, Theodore of Mopsuestia's Commentaries, 119.

<sup>94</sup> Abid, 83-95, 102-114.

<sup>95</sup> G. Vavanikunnel, Homilies and Interpretation of holy Qurbana, Changanacherry Kerala 1977, 93, 102.

<sup>96</sup> Book of the Turgame, ܬܘܪܓܡܐ ܕܬܘܪܓܡܐ-Ktawā D'Turgameh, Baghdad, 1983, 99.

got it in the Apostolic Constitutions (the liturgy of the eighth book). The admonition is that the faithful should approach Holy Communion "with awe and fear."<sup>97</sup>

It is easy to deduce that in the ecclesiastical dimension, a mystery indicates both the concealment and the manifestation of the divine act of salvation. "Mystery" demonstrates how truth is communicated in the revelation of Christ, but even after the communication, the profound nature of the divine expression remains concealed and nearly impossible to be fully understood. It is realized merely by faith, which means "every believer should mature in Christ" (Col 1. 28) and the faithful have come to the "fullness of life in Him" (Col 12. 10). In this, the faithful will be able to participate in the divine nature (2 Pet 1. 4). Sanctification by the Holy Spirit enables the believer to partake in God's holiness; throughout the history of humankind, God has revealed himself gradually in order to enable individuals to participate in His spiritual nature. This process begins here and now while we are in this mortal body. Conclude it with a saying to the father Nicholas of Cabasilas, a 14<sup>th</sup> Century Orthodox theologian writer, mystic and saint once said that amidst all our weakness, the union with Christ belongs to those who have undergone all that the Savior has experienced.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, *RAZA* can be viewed as 'pledges' (ῥαζα) of the Kingdom of Heaven, in a liturgical context is a symbolic action, founded on the economy of salvation in Christ, which is performed by the church as a salvific action with eschatological dimensions. The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify people, to build up the Body of Christ, and to worship God. This article has articulated the role of sacraments to "nourish, strengthen, and express" faith, and lead the believer to a life of charity. It is the internal power of the Spirit working in the material aspect of the sacraments through a true priest, and life-giving grace (ἡ χάρις) is effectively communicated to a believer who receives this grace by the power of the Holy Spirit through faith and prayer. Sacraments not only reveal the presence and acts of God but also are an effective means through which God's own life is given to us to be shared with others. Thus, the mystery begun in the past will find its completion in the future. We participate in reality related to the past through the salvation story; we imitate future-related reality through faith.

<sup>97</sup> Apostolic Constitutions (Book VIII), Translated by James Donaldson. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886.) 2,12, 212. The Liturgy of the eighth book of the Apostolic Constitutions is a complete text of the Christian Divine Liturgy and found in the eighth book of the Apostolic Constitutions. It is the oldest known form that can be described as a complete liturgy and can be dated to the second half of the 4th century. It belongs to the Antiochene Rite.

<sup>98</sup> NICHOLAS, Cabasilas; CARMINO, J. De Catanzaro, The Life in Christ, St Vladimirs Seminary Pr, 1997 65.