

The Attributes of the Church in the Biblical Commentaries of the Syriac fathers
By
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The attributes of the Church are many however, the Fathers of the Church in the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, guided by the Holy Spirit, summarized them in the ninth article of the Nicene Creed into four attributes. It is written: "We believe . . . in *one, holy, Catholic and apostolic* Church." These four attributes of the Church, which are derived from the nature of the Christian Church, indicate the unity, holiness, apostolicity and the Catholicity of the Church of Christ.

Introduction:

Isho'dad on his commentary on the Syriac meaning of the word church 'Aadta (ܐܕܬܐ) says: our Lord Jesus Christ established one Church not many. He said to peter: "You are the Rock and upon this Rock I will build my Church" (Matthew 16). Regarding the root of the word Church Isho'dad says: it is derived from the word Feast which signifies a congregation of believers, full of rejoicing, united in one faith and worship. Others believe the word Aadta (Church) is a Hebrew word which is translated synagogue in Syriac, that is to say assemble or come, but the synonymous word in Greek translated into Syriac signifies not only the literal meaning of the Church but also the Catholicity of the Church (Those who are called "from all people and tribes" and are gathered together in one faith and worship.) As Isho'dad of Merve says:

"He calls Cepha (ܥܦܐ) (a rock), not the person of Simon, but the confession and the right faith that were in him, which the Father had caused to flow into his mouth, which (Confession) is incorruptible and immoveable forever. Some say that 'Aadta (ܐܕܬܐ), the name (of the Church) is taken, according to the Syrian usage from 'Aada (ܐܕܐ)(a feast); and it is clear from this , that there is in the ancient scriptures the name of 'Adta (ܐܕܬܐ), written with two Alifs, as also the name 'Aada (ܐܕܐ), the difference being only that is called 'Adta (ܐܕܬܐ) in the feminine, and Aada (ܐܕܐ) in the masculine; like Mar (ܡܪ) and Martha (ܡܪܬܐ), and king (ܡܠܟܐ) and queen (ܡܠܝܚܐ); and Elder (ܦܬܪܐ) and Elderess (ܦܬܪܝܬܐ); and this name of 'Aada (ܐܕܐ) signifies a 'congregation, full of rejoicing" ; it is not the case that every Aada (ܐܕܐ) was known as a congregation, and every congregation is understood as an 'Aada (ܐܕܐ) ; because there are occasions when people congregate for a work, whatever it be, whether good or bad, and that congregation of theirs is not called an 'Aada (ܐܕܐ), never-the less he calls congregations of believers equal in faith and in works ' Adta (ܐܕܬܐ) (Church) ; types of the congregation and church that are in heaven. Others say that the word 'Adta (ܐܕܬܐ) is Hebrew, which is translated synagogue in Syriac, that is to say, Assemble, come; but in Greek,..... , which is translated into Syriac,, as those who are called

“from all people and tribes” and are gathered together, and it is likely the church and the synagogue are called thus from the fact; and every one of them is composed of two, ‘Adta (ܐܕܬܐ) from Aada (ܐܘܕܐ) and assembly, and synagogue from bringing and assembling. We do not call the Church, nor the synagogue the house of stone and wood, but the congregation of people who are gathered to it.”¹

I. The Unity of the Church

The Christian Church is one. This oneness of the Church, is one of the major marks of the Church which is included in the ninth article of faith. That is to say: “We believe in one Holy and Apostolic Catholic Church.”² The fathers of the Church believe that, the unity of the Church depends on the unity of the only begotten Son of God “the incarnated Word” our Lord Jesus Christ who established one Church. (Matthew 16:18). Saint Paul says: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11).

The Church is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13-32, Ephesians 1: 22-23). Jesus Christ has only one human body which cannot be divided into many parts. Thus the Holy Church, the mystical body of Christ is one body and cannot be divided into many parts. Even though a human body has many members, yet all the members compose one united body, governed by one head, after the same manner the universal Church is made of many different members “local churches, community of believers” yet by the grace of the Holy Spirit all these different members are united in one Catholic Church under one headship of Jesus Christ merely by believing in one God, one Jesus Christ, one Holy Spirit, one Bible, one Baptism, one Eucharist, one faith, and one Apostolic mission (Galatians 3:26-28) (1 Corinthians 8:6) (1 Corinthians 10:16-17) (Ephesians 4:3-6). Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

*“Baptism is also appropriately and with good reason called a birth because in this symbolic action performed upon us we immediately are born into a life that is eternal and imperishable through resurrection. Thus we are all referred to as a **single body of Christ**, and the head of us all is Christ. Through him we receive our affinity with God the Word and thus are joined to the father. And the blessed apostle demonstrates this clearly when he says, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” (1 Cor. 12:12) Here he calls the Church and the Congregation of the faithful” the body made of many members,” which is indicated by the name of Christ. Just as, indeed, “man” is called Adam, and each and every one of us is connected in this name, so also those who are like the body of Christ*

¹ *The Commentaries of Isho dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c.850 A.D.) in Syriac and English*, ed. and tr. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, intro. James Rendel Harris (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1911), 66.

² *The Liturgy of the Church of the East*. Printed and published by the Reverend Joseph E.Y De Kelaita, 1928, PP. 15-16.

through spiritual birth are appropriately designated by the term body. "For in the one spirit we were all baptized into one body." (1 Cor. 12:13)³

Again Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

*"And the phrase, and you are in me, means that you will receive communion with me through your faith in me and love through the gift of the spirit. And I in you is said with reference to what the union will cause, when, after being regenerated by the power of the spirit, **you are with me in the body and I am with you in the head**, as it is written, "We must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is from God."⁴*

Isho'dad of Merv Bishop of Hadatha of Assyria says:

"So also is Christ. He calls (Christ) here the whole assembly of believers, because from Him we have received the communion of the Spirit about the hope of the Resurrection; and He is our head, and we are all members of Him. Now by the broad illustration of various members of one body, some of whom are smaller, and some more honorable, he showed and taught, and admonished, that although there are among you those whose gifts are superior, that they should not despise those whose gifts are small; because ye also need the use of the gifts that these have, even if they are thought to be small."⁵

Saint Paul related the original unity of the Church of the Apostles to the Church's common Eucharistic bread: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). Saint Luke in the Acts of the Holy Apostles writes about the early Church which was united in one faith, breaking of the bread "Eucharist" and in complete believing in the teachings of the Holy Apostles. (Acts 2:42-46). Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

*"The term one means agreement, similarity and many other things. When, for instance, we read, "now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, it is clear that one refers to the unanimous agreement of souls (Acts 4:32). And again, when we read, **"For in one spirit we were all baptized into one body** (1 Cor. 12:13), one indicates the similarity of one common nature, because we are all transformed into one another through one spiritual regeneration, and each of us is made a member of Christ as we are all gathered into one body. We are all one body according to nature. Adam is the head of us because he was the beginning of our nature. Therefore we are also called the one body of Christ because we were born through the spirit to an incorruptible life. We*

³ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Marco Conti, ed. Joel E. Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 148.

⁴ Ibid., 126.

⁵ Isho'dad of Merv, 250.

*declare in the symbol of the Resurrection that our head is Christ because he was the first to rise from the dead. It is well known that baptism is a symbol of death and Resurrection. The blessed Paul clearly asserts this when he writes, "therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4)."*⁶

Jesus Christ in His priestly prayer prayed for the unity of the Church "there would be one flock, one shepherd" (John 17:21). (John 10:16). Isho'dad of Merv says:

*"Now this, that they all may be one, as thou, My Father, art in Me, and I in thou, that is to say, He says, Give to them all that they receive union with us by means of the Spirit of adoption; just as the Word is united to God, that is to say as, I am in union with God the Word, Thou hast one Son, O Father, and from this cause I have affinity with thee; just as I call Thee My Father, so do also to believers, that they may be with the one body and one person and one individuality; for the common individuality can bear afflictions and exaltation, and not a person alone; but solidarity (qualities) of persons do not confuse unity, etc. I being to them as a head, they shall also be to me as members; and they shall share with me this name of sonship."*⁷

The authority of the Church is one simply because it springs from one Son of God Jesus Christ. Jesus commissioned the Holy Church to confess, defend and proclaim the gospel of Salvation to all the nations of the world, briefly to continue His mission on earth. (Matthew 28:16-20, John 20:21-23, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Isho'dad of Merv Bishop of Hadatha of Assyria says:

*"And to him that is above all, He gave Him to be head and the fullness of Him, etc. for he says that just as in one body the chief part is the head, from which all the power of life flows to the whole body, so in this world we men are all one body, because we are one nature and the head is Adam: but in the world to come in which we shall rise and be immortal, we shall be one body, and the head is Christ. Now He calls the Church the assembly of all Believers. This, He fills all in all; the Greek, instead of fills, say is fulfilled; and it is truer, because He does not fill all things, that is to say, He is wholly in all, and all of Him in every man because of the infinitude of Nature; He not being cut into parts, but being wholly in every one of us; either by nature, or by energy, or by authority or by power, etc.; and in short (Paul) says Christ is our head, He in whom the Divine nature dwells, who is infinitely in all."*⁸

⁶ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 98.

⁷ Isho'dad of Merv, 275.

⁸ Isho'dad of Merv, "On Ephesians 1:22-23," 66.

The unity of the Church is following the model of the Holy Trinity “unity within diversity”. Therefore the base of the unity of the Church is the one triune God, “One divine nature in three persons.” Isho -yahb 111 Catholicos patriarch of the church of the east says “as there is but one God, so it cannot be but one Church.”⁹

There are many biblical references which confirm the **oneness** of the Church for example: one shepherd, one flock, and one bride.

In regards that the Church is the flock and Christ is the Shepherd: Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

*“After demonstrating that he was not a thief like some or a hired hand like others, but that he was a **shepherd who would never leave his flock** but always serves as their leader and shepherd through his union with God the Word, he now predicts something that was still unknown before the event but would later be revealed by the facts themselves. He says, (John 10:16) I have other sheep that do not belong to the fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. This sentence alludes to those among the Gentiles who would come to faith because many among the pagans as well as many among the Jews were destined to gather together into a single church and to acknowledge one shepherd and one lord who is the Christ. And this actually happened.”¹⁰*

In regards that the Church is a **vine with** and many branches. (John 15:1) Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

*“As he says, “the vine planted in the soil has its own life, which it received at one time from the soil, while the branches that it produces give fruit as long as they remain in it but cease from living and giving fruit when they are cut off, **consider me in this same light as your vine because I received all the grace of the spirit first. You are like my branches** because you received union with me through spiritual regeneration. Just as the branches produce fruit as long as they are in the vine, but after being cut off become useless because they immediately wither and are abandoned to a dry and unproductive existence, so you too, as long as you remain in my love, will necessarily produce an abundant yield of virtue by producing spiritual blessings with overflowing abundance. However, if you depart from my love, you will undoubtedly be deprived of any virtue whatsoever.”¹¹*

⁹ Sr. Sophy Rose C.M.C. The Church as Mystery and Communion, Oriental Institution of religious studies India, Vadavathoor, Kotayam -680010, Kerala, India. 1998, p.164. (Letters of Isho Yahb III, Letters, R Duval (ED. & TR.), csc II, 642, (Louvain: 1904) 93)

¹⁰ Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Gospel of John 93- 94.

¹¹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 129-130.

Saint Paul also shows the unity of the Church by using the symbolisms of the **Bride** of Christ the groom, (Ephesians 5: 25-27). Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

*"Since the Church of the faithful has through regeneration been made **the bride of Christ** in the flesh, and through him it has received a relationship with God the word. The Baptist says in our present passage, (John 3:29) He who has the bride is the bridegroom, that is, "this role of bridegroom is not mine but his." For there is a divine nature in him in whom we first believed, and then, through regeneration it is as if a natural relationship has now been established toward the man who was assumed. And thus we too receive an ineffable union with God."*¹²

Isho'dad of Merv says:

*"He calls himself the **bridegroom and His Church the bride**; He calls wise, those who with their works have also mercy, but foolish, those who have works, but are wanting in Mercy. He calls the tarrying of the Bridegroom the time from His Ascension to his last manifestation. "*¹³

II. The Holiness of the Church

The second mark of the church is holiness. The Christian Church is the only Holy organization ever established on earth. The source of the Holiness of the Church is Jesus Christ, the founder. The Church of Christ is holy in her nature. The Church being the mystical body of Christ, necessarily Jesus Christ is her head and the Holy Spirit dwells in her as the soul in the body. Isho'dad of Merv Bishop of Hadatha of Assyria says:

*"And that ye may be filled with all the fullness of God; as also ye may be seen to be a part of the common body, in which God dwells more than in anything else, which is the body of the Christ, with which the whole world is chained and girded; which is the fullness of the works of God, hidden and visible."*¹⁴

Our Lord Jesus Christ by His actions namely: Baptism, miracles, prayer, fasting, preaching the gospel, Sacraments, sufferings, death on the Cross, resurrection from among the dead, Ascension into heaven and sending the Holy Spirit upon the holy Apostles has ones and for all sanctified the Church. Saint Paul in his epistle to Ephesians says: "... Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

¹² Ibid. 38.

¹³ Isho'dad of Merv, 97.

¹⁴ Ibid. 68.

“And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in the truth. Therefore, he says, “I allowed myself to undergo suffering so that when they acquire these things through me, they might gain true holiness, that is, the grace of the Spirit. And they will preach the truth, believing in the hope of the resurrection and expecting the delights of the heavenly Kingdom.” Since all these things were by the Holy Spirit, and our Lord through His passion and Resurrection prepared the grace of the Spirit for them, it was only right that he said, for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also they may be sanctified in the truth.”¹⁵

Saint Ephraim says:

“The virgin gave birth to her first born, but the signs of her virginity remained. He begot us too through baptism and made us first born (children) by his gift. For there is neither older nor younger in the womb of baptism, since we are all first - born in faith. For it is about us that (scripture) is fulfilled, every first- born that opens the womb is holy unto the Lord. While we are (still) corrupt in (our) sins baptism conceives us, and when we are sanctified from evil it gives birth to us from its inner depths.”¹⁶

III. The Catholicity of the Church:

The fathers of the Church in the Ecumenical council of Nicaea unanimously confirmed the Catholicity of the Church. As a result Catholicity becomes the third mark of the Church. The Church was Catholic from the very beginning even though it was composed of few people and confined in a very restricted place. Jesus called his Church a "Little flock" (Luke 12:32) the catholicity of the Church does not depend on the number and diversity of people belong to it nor on the expansion of its Geographical region but rather on the faith and universal message of the Church. Therefore the Church is Catholic because it has been designed by the Lord to embraces all peoples of the world regardless to their color, language and ethnicity. (Matthew 28:19-20). Saint Paul writing to the Colossians says: "the word of truth . . . in the whole world . . . is bearing fruit and growing" (Col. 1:5-6). Isho'dad of Merv says:

“This Simeon tarried in the city of Joppa days not a few; this happened providentially, that is to say, for the sake of the instruction of Cornelius’s household; because if he had been at Jerusalem at that time, and the messengers of Cornelius had come to him, although he might have wished to go with them, there would have been a great vexation there and tumult, because Jerusalem was full at that time with those of the Circumcision who believed, those that were so much alienated from the Gentiles, that from this also they brought Simeon into troubles on account of his going there; and for this reason by the grace of the Spirit he remained at Joppa; for the cause of the revelation that came to

¹⁵ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 147.

¹⁶ Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron: an English translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709, ed. Carmel McCarthy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 64.8.

Peter was this; for because Simeon had forgotten that voice, Go and make disciples of all nations in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, etc. He was well reminded by means of this revelation, not only of the former things, but also that the Gentiles were clean, and that God was not of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles."¹⁷

It is worth mentioning that on the day of Pentecost there were devout people from the four corners of the world in Jerusalem. "There were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). It was on this day that the Holy Spirit in the form of the tongues of fire came down from heaven, according to the promise of the Lord, and rested upon the Holy Apostles (Acts 2). Thus the holy Apostles as soon as they received the power of the Holy Spirit were able to preach the gospel of Salvation to all these people of different nationality in their own languages. This was a miraculous sign that that the Church is designed to preach the gospel of Salvation to all nations of the world. A great number of people of different nationality who were in Jerusalem on that day believed and were baptized in the name of the most glorified Trinity. These newly born Christians carried the faith of the Catholic Church back to where they had come from "the four corners of the earth". Saint Ephrem the Syriac says:

*"Again, it is like a net which is cast into the sea and gathers together (fish) of every kind. When he said, of every kind, understand (this) as "of every language." Again, after this choosing (of fish) from the sea, that is, from the world, there is another choosing of them, which is frightening. When they had drawn (the net) onto the shore of the sea, they took the fish which were good, and cast out those that were inferior. The fish which enter into his net are people who are (drawing near) to faith in him. The good (fish) represent those who have set about becoming perfect in his gospel, while the inferior ones are those whom the Church has rejected from its midst, on account of their apostasy."*¹⁸

The Catholicity of the Church springs from the Person, mission and work of Jesus Christ in the world. The Holy Apostles, their successors and the fathers of the Church strongly confessed and preached the Catholicity of the Church. Saint Ephraim says:

*"But now, you will no longer see this sight, O Jew, because you have (already) seen your city destroyed and demolished. Learn from your demolished city who he is who has planted the Church. Because the sons of Jerusalem are dispersed and scattered among all the nations of the Gentiles, learn who he is who has reunited and gathered all the nations of the Gentiles into the Church."*¹⁹

¹⁷ Isho'dad of Merv, 20.

¹⁸ Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron, 185.22.

¹⁹ Saint Ephraim's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron, 308.29.

IV. The Apostolicity of the Church

Jesus Christ in the beginning of His earthly ministry chose twelve men whom He called the Apostles it is written: "Did I not choose you, the twelve? He asked them." (John 6:70). For over three years Jesus Christ by both, words and deeds "miracles" trained and prepared them for the work of Apostolicity. Then He gave them the power of the Holy Spirit from on high and send them into the world to preach the gospel of salvation to all the nations of the world (Matthew 28:19:20). The holy apostles being obedient to the great commission as faithful heralds of the Lord went out to all the nations of the world gathering people in, sanctifying them by baptizing them and leading them towards salvation. Thus the Church which was born from the great commission of Christ to the holy Apostles is indeed an apostolic Church. Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

*"When this happens to them, they will indeed be apart from the world and will be thinking about having another mother, the heavenly Jerusalem. And he says what the result of this will be: (John 17:18). As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. The participation in the Spirit will not only give them the power to be freed from evil but will make them so strong that they may walk throughout the world and proclaim the message about the fear of God just as I also made such proclamation."*²⁰

Therefore the church is apostolic because the holy apostles received the authority to establish the Church directly from Jesus Christ. These Holy men lived their life for the Lord in other words they allowed the Lord to live in them. Saint Paul says: "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). By the virtue of being the disciples of the Lord, The holy Apostles have received their divine knowledge directly from their teacher, Jesus Christ. They in their turn handed down everything they have received from the Lord namely the doctrine, Sacraments and the apostolic authority to their successors (bishops) through the apostolic laying on of hands (Titus 1:5-9). Thus our lord Jesus Christ who has lived and ministered in the Holy Apostles is continuously living and ministering in the Church through the holy fathers. Saint Paul says: "He who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). In the same manner the holy Apostles are living and ministering on earth through their successors the Holy fathers. This is what makes the Church of all ages the one and the same apostolic Church.

The Holy apostles always tried diligently to maintain the Apostolicity of the Church. Saint Luke in the acts of the holy apostles has clearly recorded the replacement of Judas the betrayal. Acts 1:24-25 which states, "And they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place.'" The main reason for the replacement of Judas was the maintenance of the

²⁰ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 147.

Apostolicity of the Church and the continuation of the apostolic ministry. Saint Paul says the Church is built upon the: “foundation of the apostles and prophets.” (Ephesians 2:20) Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

“While the doors were closed because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus suddenly came in and greeted his disciples. Since their minds were troubled by this astonishing sight, he calmed them with the word peace (John 20:21). And, in order to resolve their doubts because they thought they were seeing a ghost, He showed them his hands and his side. They could sufficiently recognize from the wounds that the nails had inflicted in his body that he as the one who had been crucified, who died and had risen again, since their touch so confirmed the sight and testified that a real body had appeared to them and was present. On the basis of all these things, the disciples firmly and certainly believed that Christ had risen and that he was the one who was speaking with them, and so they rejoiced in seeing this new and extraordinary miracle. He then employed his words to confirm them in faith and joy, adding (20:21) as the father has sent me, so I send you, meaning, “You are the witnesses of my resurrection because you did not learn about it from someone else, but you saw with your own eyes and touched with your own hands. Therefore I tell you: Just as I did everything before you as witnesses in order to benefit the salvation of the human race, even to the extent, at the end, of accepting suffering on their behalf and destroying the kingdom of death with my resurrection, as you have seen, so it is also necessary for you, whom I have sent with good will and with constancy, to traverse the world, announcing all these blessings to everyone. Be confident because, even if afflictions come upon you from your enemies, you will rise too because you have sustained these things for me.”²¹

The oneness of the Church:

Isho’dad, regarding the oneness of the Church says:

“This, I and my father are one, He said about the equality of natures; the father and the Son. This word, we are one, is said in two manners; one about conjunction, and the, other about similarity; about conjunction, on the one hand; like this, the multitude of people were of one soul and one mind; about similarity on the other hand, like this, we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body;”²²

The Church is the body of Christ:

Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

“As the one in whom all things were created, He is described here as the head of the Church, which is made into His body through spiritual rebirth and which has the form of the future

²¹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 163-164.

²² Isho’dad of Merv, 250.

resurrection, which we hope to share with Him as partaker of immortality when we are baptized."²³

Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

"Therefore, the congregation of the faithful is also called the body of Christ, and each one of us is a member of his, and he is the head of us all because through the power of the spirit we will receive, as it were, a natural conjunction with, as the apostle also says, "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."²⁴

Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

*"Therefore, just as he (Adam) is one, and we all are called a single man (Adam) because each of us is like a member of the whole, in the same way **those who were born in Christ are called his body**, and each of them is a member of his, even as Christ is the head of us all."²⁵*

Isho'dad of Merv Bishop of Hadatha of Assyria says:

*"Hanana says **He gathered all beings as scattered members to one substance of the body of Christ**; that Christ might be the filling up of all the defectiveness that is in you, being united and joined together like members to the head; and complete in Him by the power of grace, in all the fullness of God, that is to say, as in the place of a pure temple to God; and he constantly dwells in them. Others say that he calls all creation the fullness. This of dwelling that is to say, uniting; for He has united all the members of faith to himself, as to the head of the body in the same order as that found in Nature. who he says, is the body, of the Church, who is the beginning, and the first born from the dead; for what the head is naturally to the members of the body, so is The Christ to Believers, like one who unites (them) spiritually in one body, and sends life and preservation to holiness etc. ; and so all His members. And by His means to reconcile all things unto Himself, by His death. He reconciled all things, and this is the meaning of "His blood" and "by His grace". And I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, etc; that is to say, because Christ suffered before for your advantage, to make you His Body by means of the Resurrection, whatever afflictions are wanting on your account, I fill up."²⁶*

The Church is the **flock** and Christ is a shepherd:

Saint Ephraim in his Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron says:

²³ Ancient Christian Commentary on scriptures, New Testament, IX Colossians, Edited by Peter Gorday, General editor Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press, downers Grove. Illinois. 17.

²⁴ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 137.

²⁵ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 145-146.

²⁶ Isho'dad of Merv, 79-80.

“John seeing that he had completed the course of his life, handed over his flock to the chief Shepherd. This was like his Lord who, when dying, handed over his flock to the chief pastor whose mouth had confessed him and whose tears were a pledge. (Thus) did the Shepherd make known to his flock his care for it. (The Lord) did not finally hand over his little flock to its pastor until he had received genuine pledges. He received the threefold (confession) that (Simon) had professed as trustworthy pledges for three (denials). Therefore when his Master said (to him), Do you love me? Our Lord was wanting to receive from him his true love, so that, after having given the pledge of love, (Simon) might receive (Jesus’) sheep as a flock.”²⁷

Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

*“And so, after providing the evidence derived from these facts, He said to them. (John 10:11) **I am the good shepherd.** “Therefore, if I take action against thieves, not only am I not the cause of perdition for those who obey me, but I even invite them to enjoy eternal life. Thus my actions themselves reveal me as the shepherd because I bring about so much good for the sheep. And he proves his argument even more accurately so that he may not appear to be vainly testifying about himself as the good shepherd. Therefore, using various arguments and facts, he continues, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. “If, he says, the good shepherd is the one who accepts suffering for every affliction on behalf of his sheep, then this testimony is no doubt about me since I will die for the salvation of the whole world. I am the good shepherd. Indeed, if the thief kills, not only do I not kill, but I give new life to the human race after taking death from them. So in every respect, I appear to be the good Shepherd according to these facts.”²⁸*

The Church as the **bride** of Christ the groom.

Theodore of Mopsuestia says:

*“Since the Church of the faithful has through regeneration **been made the bride of Christ** in the flesh, and through him it has received a relationship with God the word. The Baptist says in our present passage, (John 3:29) He who has the bride is the bridegroom, that is, “this role of bridegroom is not mine but his.” For there is a divine nature in him in whom we first believed, and then, through regeneration it is as if a natural a relationship has now been established toward the man who was assumed. And thus we too receive an ineffable union with God.”²⁹*

In conclusion: The fathers of the Church in the first ecumenical council of Nicaea focused on the four important attributes of the Church namely: Oneness, Holiness,

²⁷ Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron, 156-157.5.

²⁸ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 92-93.

²⁹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 38.

Catholicity and the Apostolicity. Isho' Dad based on his understanding of the Scriptures asserts that Jesus Christ established one Church. For him (Isho Dad) the Church is the congregation of believers, full of rejoicing, united in one faith. However for Theodore of Mopsuestia all Christians are referred to as a single body of Christ and the head of all the members of the body is Christ. Theodore believes that the Eucharist and Baptism play an important role in the act of uniting all Christians in one Catholic Church. There are many Biblical images which manifest the oneness of the Church for example: the shepherd and the flock, one vine and many members, one bride and one groom, one body and many members under one head etc. Regarding the Holiness of the Church. Isho'Dad believes the Church is holy simply because God dwells in it. Saint Ephrem imagines the Catholicity of the Church as a net which is cast in the see of this world and gathers fish of every kind. For Theodore of Mopsuestia the doctrine of the Apostolicity of the Church is founded on the great commission of the Lord. Jesus Christ in His priestly prayer to the father says: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." (John 17:18)

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