



1700th Anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea

325–2025

Historical Introduction • Christology of the Council

East Syriac Perspective • Commentary on the Nicene Creed

The Attributes of the Church in East Syriac Liturgical and Patristic Tradition

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Introduction

COMMEMORATING THE 1700TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF NICAIA (325–2025)

The year 2025 marks the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, a pivotal moment in the life of the universal Church. Convened in A.D. 325 by Emperor Constantine the Great, the Council gathered bishops from across the Christian world to safeguard the unity of the Church and to affirm the apostolic faith amidst the rising tide of heresy. It was here, in the city of Nicaea, that the Church boldly confessed the divinity of Christ with the words: “We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God... true God of true God.”

This commemorative volume brings together a comprehensive theological reflection on the Council’s historical and doctrinal legacy. It includes a brief historical introduction to the Council of Nicaea, highlighting its imperial context, the theological controversies it addressed, particularly the Arian denial of the Son’s consubstantiality with the Father and the enduring importance of its decisions. The Christological foundations laid at Nicaea are examined in depth, showing how the East Syriac tradition understood and preserved the Nicene faith through its own patristic and theological lens.

Special attention is given to the position of the East Syriac Church, often misrepresented or misunderstood in historical narratives. Drawing from the writings of Mar Aphrahat, Mar Ephrem, Mar Narsai, Mar Babai the Great, and other luminaries, this volume demonstrates that the Church of the East remained firmly committed to the Nicene faith, while articulating its Christology with theological precision rooted in the Semitic heritage and biblical exegesis of the East.

Central to the Nicene legacy is the Creed itself, twelve articles that have shaped the Church's confession of faith across the centuries. This booklet offers a theological commentary on each of these twelve articles, enriched by scriptural citations and interpretations from the East Syriac Fathers and liturgical tradition. Each article is explored not merely as a doctrinal statement, but as a living confession recited by the faithful and sealed through the sacraments.

Finally, the volume includes an in-depth reflection on the attributes of the Church, One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, as expressed in the concluding article of the Creed. These attributes are examined from the perspective of biblical commentaries, synodical decrees, and the writings of the East Syriac Fathers, offering a distinctly eastern and ecclesiological vision that remains ever relevant to the Church's mission today.

As we commemorate seventeen centuries since the Council of Nicaea, it is our hope that this booklet will inspire a deeper appreciation of the Nicene faith, and renew our commitment to the unity, holiness, universality, and apostolicity of the Church. In remembering the Council of Nicaea, we remember the unity of the Body of Christ, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

The Nicene Creed

WE BELIEVE in One God, the Father Almighty: Maker of all things visible and invisible

AND, in one LORD JESUS CHRIST, the Son of God, the Only Begotten, The First born of all created. Begotten of His Father before all worlds and not made.

Very God of very God: Of One Essence with His Father, by Whose hands the worlds were established and everything was created. Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from Heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and became Man: And, as conceived and born of the Virgin Mary: He suffered and was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate. He was buried and rose again on the third day as it is written and ascended into Heaven and sat down on the right hand of His Father and He shall come again to judge the dead and the living.

AND, in one HOLY SPIRIT, the Spirit of Truth; Who proceeds from the Father, The Life-giving Spirit:

And One Holy Apostolic Catholic Church, And we confess one baptism for the remission of sin. And the resurrection of our bodies, and the life forever and ever: Amen

Introduction to the Council of Nicaea (AD 325)

The Council of Nicaea, convened in AD 325 by Emperor Constantine the Great, marks a pivotal moment in the history of Christianity. As the first ecumenical council of the Church, it brought together bishops from across the Roman Empire to address pressing theological and ecclesiastical issues, most notably the Arian controversy. Arius, a presbyter from Alexandria, taught that the Son of God was a created being, not co-eternal with the Father. This teaching posed a direct challenge to the Church's understanding of Christ's divinity and threatened ecclesial unity.

In response, the Council affirmed that the Son is "begotten, not made, of the same essence (homoousios) with the Father", thereby upholding the full divinity and eternal nature of Jesus Christ. The resulting Nicene Creed became the foundational statement of orthodox Christian faith. Beyond its Christological decisions, the Council also addressed practical matters, such as the unified dating of Easter, and issued twenty disciplinary canons concerning Church order and clerical conduct.

Though Arianism persisted for decades after the Council, the decisions made at Nicaea laid the theological groundwork for later developments in Trinitarian doctrine. The East Syriac Church, though geographically distant, received the Nicene Creed and incorporated it into its liturgical and theological life, interpreting it through the writings of figures like Aphrahat, Narsai, and Babai the Great. The Council of Nicaea stands as a foundational moment in the Church's ongoing effort to preserve apostolic faith, define doctrinal truth, and maintain unity across diverse cultures and regions.

The History and Decrees of the Council of Nicaea (325 AD)

Historical Background:

By the early 4th century, the Church had grown significantly but was facing serious theological division. The Roman Empire had recently decriminalized (legalized) Christianity through the Edict of Milan (313 AD) under Emperor Constantine the Great.

A presbyter (Priest) in Alexandria named Arius began teaching that the Son of God was not eternal, but a created being, thus denying the full divinity of Christ. This teaching, known as Arianism, spread rapidly and caused widespread controversy and division.

Convening the Council of Nicaea:

The first ecumenical council of the Christian church, meeting in ancient Nicaea (now İznik, Turkey) from May until the end of July of 325 AD. It was called by the emperor Constantine I, an unbaptized catechumen, who presided over the opening session and took part in the discussions. He hoped a general council of the church would solve the problem created in the Eastern church by Arianism, a heresy first proposed by Arius of Alexandria that affirmed that Christ is not divine but a created being.

According to historical records Pope Sylvester I did not attend the council but was represented by legates. It is worth mentioning that the council of Nicaea was the first time, bishops from across the empire gathered to resolve a theological dispute. 318 bishops, mostly from the East attended the council. The council was Presided by bishop: Hosius of Cordoba, with key figures including St. Alexander of Alexandria, St. Athanasius (then a deacon), and Eusebius of Caesarea.

The Main Doctrinal Decision was about the Nature of Christ. The council issued: the Son in His Divinity is equal to the Father? Arius claimed the Son was created and therefore not eternal. The council overwhelmingly rejected this view of Arius and declared that the Son is homoousias which means (of the same essence) with the Father.

The council produced the original Nicene Creed, affirming:

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty... and in one Lord Jesus Christ... begotten, not made, being of one substance (homoousias) with the Father...”
The council condemned Arianism explicitly, and, incorporated “of one substance with the Father” (Homoousias) into a Creed to signify the absolute equality of the Son with the Father.

The council decreed: “Those who say: ‘There was a time when he was not’... the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.”

Emperor then exiled Arius, by doing this emperor showed solidarity with the Church.

The council formulated the Nicene Creed, a statement of Christian faith that affirmed the divinity of Jesus Christ and his co-equality with the Father, thus condemning Arianism.

The Council Issued twenty new church laws, called canons that is, rules or canons dealing with discipline and with Church order. Some of the twenty Canons as listed in the works of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers are as follows:

- Canon 1: Prohibition of self-castration among clergy.

- Canon 4: Ordination of a bishop in the presence of at least three provincial (local) bishops and confirmation by the metropolitan bishop.

- Canon 6: Confirming the primacy of the sees of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. Which means: confirmation of ancient customs giving jurisdiction over large regions to the bishops of Alexandria, Rome, and Antioch. All these Patriarchal sees were located in west under the Roman Empire. The Patriarchal see of the Church of the East was the only one located in the East under the Persian Empire. And that is possibly the reason it is not mentioned in the list of the patriarchates.

- Canon 7: recognition of the honorary rights of the see of Jerusalem. (There were five Patriarchal sees in the western empire: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. The Patriarchal see of Seleucia Ctcephone of the Church of the East was under the Persian Empire in the east of the Roman empire.

- Canon 15. Bishops, presbyters, and deacons were not to wander into neighboring cities to officiate.

- Canon 16. Clergy who refused to return to their home church were to be excommunicated, and the ordinations of those who were ordained by these wandering clergy were to be considered null and void.

- Canon 20: Prohibition of kneeling on Sundays and during Easter season. Standing symbolizes the joy of resurrection.

Thus, Standing was the normative posture for prayer at this time, as it still is among the Eastern Christians. Kneeling was considered most appropriate to penitential prayer. The canon was designed only to ensure uniformity of practice at the designated times.

The council decided that all Christians should celebrate Easter on the same date, aiming to unify Christian doctrine and practice across different regions.

Though Arianism was condemned, the struggle continued. The emperor carried out his earlier statement: everybody who refused to endorse the creed would be exiled. Arius, Theonas, and Secundus refused to adhere to the creed and were thus exiled to Illyria, in addition to being excommunicated. The works of Arius were ordered to be confiscated and burned, while his supporters were considered as "enemies of Christianity". Nevertheless, the controversy continued in various parts of the empire.

The Nicene Creed remains the foundational statement of faith in Orthodox, Catholic, and many Protestant traditions.

- The Council set an example for conciliar authority in defining doctrine.
- It affirms that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, co-eternal with the Father.

St. Ephrem the Syrian poetically affirmed this mystery:

“Praise to Him who joined the heights and the depths, who made the dust into a throne, and the clay into the dwelling of glory.”

The Position of the East Syriac Church on the Council of Nicaea

1. Affirmation of the Nicene Faith

The East Syriac Church accepted the doctrinal core of the Nicene Creed, especially the central affirmation that Jesus Christ is consubstantial (homoousias) with the Father.

- The Church of the East rejected Arianism, affirming the full divinity of the Son.

This is evident in the writings of Mar Aphrahat, St. Ephrem the Syrian, and later East Syriac theologians like Mar Babai the Great, who consistently defended the eternal generation of the Son and His full participation in the divine nature.

Although the term homoousias (Greek: “of the same essence”) was not native to the Syriac theological vocabulary, East Syriac theologians developed parallel language, especially the concept of qnuma (individual reality or hypostasis), to express the unity and distinction within the Trinity.

2. Acceptance of Nicaea with Caution Toward Later Developments.

While the Church of the East accepted the Council of Nicaea (325) and its teaching on the Trinity, it was more reserved about later Christological formulas, especially those from the Council of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). These later councils introduced terminology and theological emphases that clashed with the East Syriac tradition.

- The Church of the East emphasized a dyad of qnume (divine and human) in Christ, which was misunderstood by some as a Nestorian position.
- However, this does not mean the Church rejected Nicaea. In fact, East Syriac liturgy and creeds (e.g., the Nicene Creed as recited in the Qurbana) consistently affirm:

“And we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten, begotten of the Father before all worlds...”

(Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...”)

3. Preservation of the Nicene Creed in Liturgy.

- The Nicene Creed, as formulated at Nicaea and expanded at Constantinople (381), is regularly recited in the liturgical celebrations of the Church of the East.
- The Syriac version of the Creed, translated and preserved in ancient manuscripts, was faithfully transmitted even under Sassanian Persian rule, despite isolation from the Roman/Byzantine world.

4. Historical Isolation but Theological Fidelity.

Due to political and geographic realities (being under the Sassanian Empire, often hostile to Rome), the Church of the East was not directly represented at the Council of Nicaea. Nevertheless, the Church:

- Preserved the apostolic faith through catechesis, monasticism, and liturgy
- Honored the conciliar tradition even if it wasn't institutionally bound to the Roman or Byzantine Church structure
- Maintained dialogue and sometimes contested (disputed) the terminology, not the core doctrines

Conclusion

The East Syriac Church faithfully accepted the Council of Nicaea, especially its Trinitarian teaching and the affirmation of Christ's divinity. Though, it developed its own theological expressions, informed by the Syriac language and context, it stood within the orthodox stream of Nicene Christianity.

As Mar Babai the Great wrote in the 7th century:

“We confess one Godhead, one Lordship, one Nature and one Will of the Holy Trinity, and we anathematize all those who say otherwise.”

Christology of the Council of Nicaea, from the Perspective of the East Syriac Church.

Abstract

The Christology of the First Council of Nicaea (325 AD) through the lens of the East Syriac Church, also known as the Church of the East. Although geographically and politically separate from the Roman Empire and absent from the Council, the East Syriac Church eventually accepted the Nicene Creed. Its Christological tradition developed in a Semitic, biblical, and liturgical context. This study examines how East Syriac Fathers such as Aphrahat, Ephrem, and Narsai interpreted Nicene Christology, how this theology found expression in East Syriac liturgy, and how synodical canons preserved and clarified the Church's theological heritage.

1. Introduction:

The Council of Nicaea was convened in 325 AD to address the Arian controversy regarding the divinity of Christ. The resulting Nicene Creed affirmed that the Son is "begotten, not made, consubstantial (homoousios) with the Father." Though this creed was developed in the Greek-speaking Roman Empire, its theological implications were eventually received and interpreted by the East Syriac Church, situated within the Persian Empire and culturally distinct from its western counterparts.

This work seeks to explore how the East Syriac Church received and expressed Nicene Christology using its own theological vocabulary, with reference to the writings of key East Syriac Fathers, its liturgical prayers, and the canonical decisions of its synods.

2. The Reception of the Nicene Creed in the East Syriac Church.

The East Syriac Church was not represented at the Council of Nicaea due to political and geographical restrictions. However, its acceptance of the Nicene Creed is clearly evidenced in the Synod of Mar Isaac (410 AD), which officially introduced the Creed into the doctrinal life of the Church of the East. Though the Nicene term homoousios was not initially part of the Syriac theological vocabulary, the East Syriac tradition affirmed the full divinity of Christ and His unity with the Father through scriptural exegesis and covenantal language. The notion of the Son being “of the essence of the Father” was received in a way consistent with East Syriac emphasis on the distinct qnômê (hypostasis) of the divine persons.

3. Patristic Witness to Nicene Christology:

3.1 Aphrahat the Persian Sage (d. ca. 345)

Aphrahat, writing within a generation of the Council, offers a clear affirmation of Christ’s divine origin while maintaining His real humanity. He writes:
“The Son of God clothed Himself in the body of Adam... and in Him was the power of God.”²

Aphrahat’s emphasis is not on metaphysical definitions but on the salvific mission of the Word made flesh. While he does not use the Nicene vocabulary, he affirms that the Son is of divine origin and not a creature.

3.2 St. Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373)

(Though sometimes associated with the West Syriac tradition,) Saint Ephrem’s thought permeated the entire Syriac-speaking world. In his Hymns on Faith, he upholds the co-equality of the Son and the Father:

“The Son is equal to the Father as light is equal to the sun.”³

Ephrem, like Aphrahat, uses poetic and biblical imagery to articulate Nicene faith. His rejection of Arianism is evident in his repeated affirmations of the divine identity of Christ.

3.3 Narsai of Nisibis (d. ca. 502)

Narsai, one of the most influential East Syriac theologians, articulated a two-qnômê, one-parsōpā Christology. In his Homily on the Nativity, he writes:

“The Word took from Mary manhood... and united it with Him in a union without confusion.”⁴

(This formulation reflects a nuanced understanding of the Incarnation, aligned with Nicene affirmations and developed in the Antiochene exegetical tradition.)

4. Liturgical Expression of Nicene Christology:

The East Syriac liturgy, particularly the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, though pre-Nicene in origin, was enriched with post-Nicene theological affirmations. The liturgical books include this affirmation:

“Thou art the true Son, the Word of the Father, by whom the worlds were created... who became incarnate by Thy will and took a body of our nature.”⁵

The daily prayers (Hudra) contain numerous doxologies that identify Christ as “Light from Light,” “Only-Begotten of the Father,” and “the Word who became flesh,” thus affirming the faith of Nicaea within the Church’s worship.⁶

5. Synodical Canons and Christological Clarifications:

5.1 Synod of Isaac (410 AD)

The Nicene Creed was formally adopted in this synod, and its Christological affirmations were included in the Church's official teachings. Canon I declares:

“Whoever does not confess the Son to be consubstantial with the Father is to be anathematized.”⁷

5.2 Synod of Dadisho' (424 AD):

This synod, while affirming orthodox Christology, declared the administrative independence of the Church of the East. It avoided political entanglements with Rome, but maintained doctrinal consistency with the Nicene Creed.

5.3 Synod of Isho'yahb I (585 AD):

This synod confirmed the East Syriac Christological formula: one parsōpā (person) in two qnômê (hypostases), divine and human.⁸ This formula provided theological clarity in response to both Arian and Eutychian extremes, preserving the full divinity and full humanity of Christ as confessed at Nicaea.

5. Theological Terminology in the East Syriac Tradition.

The East Syriac Church developed a unique Christological vocabulary:

- Qnômâ – a concrete individual existence or hypostasis; used for both the divine and human natures.

- Parsōpā – person or prosopon; refers to the unified subject of the incarnate Christ.
- Kyānâ – nature or essence.

This terminology allowed the Church to articulate a faithful and scriptural Christology that did not compromise Nicene doctrine but contextualized it in Semitic and biblical categories.⁹

Conclusion

While the East Syriac Church did not participate in the Council of Nicaea, it received its Christological teaching and expressed it in its own theological idiom. Through the writings of its Fathers, its liturgy, and its synods, the Church of the East upheld the full divinity of the Son, His consubstantiality with the Father, and the mystery of the Incarnation. In so doing, it maintained fidelity to the Nicene faith while developing a Christological language marked by scriptural clarity and pastoral depth.

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.A Commentary on the Twelve Articles of the Nicene Creed From the Perspective of the East Syriac Church.

Now, we are investigating one of the most foundational statements of Christian faith: the Nicene Creed. Formulated in the fourth century at the Councils of Nicaea (325 AD) and Constantinople (381 AD), this creed stands as a universal confession for many Christian denominations. It guards orthodoxy, proclaims the Trinity, and unites believers across the ages.

This commentary follows the structure of the Twelve Articles of the Nicene Creed, referencing Aphrahat, Ephrem, Narsai, Babai the Great, the Synodicon Orientale, and liturgical texts such as the Anaphora of Addai and Mari and the book of Hudra.

Article I: “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.”

This article affirms monotheism, there is only one God. He is Father, not just in relation to Christ but in His loving relationship with all creation. As Almighty, He is sovereign over all. As Creator, He is the source of everything, seen and unseen; this includes angels and spiritual realities.

- **Scripture:**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)

“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” (Hebrews 11:3)

East Syriac Perspective:

East Syriac theology affirms the absolute unity and transcendence of God. Aphrahat emphasizes the oneness of God the Father as the source of all:

“Our God is one, who made the heavens and the earth and all their hosts.” (Demonstration I: On Faith).

St. Ephrem: 'He spoke and creation leapt into being.'

The prayer book (Hudra) frequently addresses God as “the Lord of all,” the Creator of visible and invisible realms. The Synod of Isaac (410 AD) affirms that the Father is the “fount and origin” of the Godhead.

“We confess your Divinity, O Lord, and we worship your Lordship (Majesty), and lift up unending praise to your glorious Trinity, at all times, O, Lord of all, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, forever. Amen”

Article II: “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds...”

Here we declare our faith in Jesus Christ, not merely as a prophet or teacher, but as the eternal Son of God. “Begotten, not made” distinguishes Him from creation. He is of the same divine essence as the Father, not a created being.

- **Scripture:**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (**John 1:14**)

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” (**Colossians 1:15-16**)

East Syriac Perspective:

The East Syriac Church confesses the eternity and divine Sonship of Christ. Narsai calls the Son “the Word who is from the Father eternally” (Homily on

the Nativity). Though it avoids Greek terms like “homoousios”, the theology is equivalent.

Babai the Great writes: “The Word is born of the Father eternally, not as a creature, but as Light from Light.”

Article III: “... (Light of Light,) very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...”

This poetic language emphasizes Jesus’ full divinity. true God of true God, “Light of Light” means that just as light comes from light, the Son proceeds from the Father, fully God, not lesser, not created, but consubstantial (Greek: homoousios) with the Father.

- **Scripture:**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” **(John 1:1)**

“Who being, the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” **(Hebrews 1:3)**

East Syriac Perspective:

While East Syriac terminology prefers “from the essence of the Father” over “of one substance,” the meaning is preserved. Ephrem affirms: “The Son is equal to the Father as light is equal to the sun.” (Hymns on Faith, 44:9)

The Hudra calls Christ “Light from Light, the Radiance of the Father’s glory,” especially in festal prayers.

Article IV: “...by whom all things were made.”

Jesus is not only Redeemer but also Creator. John 1 confirms: “Through Him all things were made.” The pre-existent Christ was active in the creation of the world. This affirms His divine role from the beginning of time.

East Syriac Perspective:

This is echoed in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, which refers to Christ as: “By whom the worlds were framed and by whom all creatures were made.” Aphrahat emphasizes Christ’s role as Creator, interpreting Genesis through the Word: “All things came into being by His command.” (Demonstration XVII)

Article V: “Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man...”

This article celebrates the Incarnation; the eternal Son of God took on human nature for our salvation. Through the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary, becoming fully man while remaining fully God.

- **Scripture:**

“And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35)

“Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but, made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:6-7)

East Syriac Perspective:

This is central to East Syriac soteriology (study of religious doctrine of Salvation). Narsai writes: “He took manhood from Mary, united with Him without confusion.” (Homily on the Nativity)

Babai distinguishes the divine qnômâ and the assumed human qnômâ, united in the one parsôpâ of Christ. Liturgically, this is remembered in the Creed of the Liturgy and Nativity hymns: “The Word came down and dwelt in a womb; the Infinite made Himself small.”

Article VI: “And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried...”

This is the heart of the Gospel: Christ’s passion. He suffered in time, under a Roman governor, affirming His historical reality. His crucifixion, suffering, and burial demonstrate His full participation in human suffering.

- **Scripture:**

“Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him.”(Mark 15:25)

“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness, by whose stripes you were healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)

Est Syriac Perspective:

Ephrem stresses the paradox of the Passion: “The Lord of Glory tasted death.” (Hymns on the Passion, 3)

Narsai insists that it was the human qnômâ that suffered, yet the experience is attributed to the one parsôpâ of Christ.

The liturgical books refers to “the body of our Lord that was broken for our salvation.”

Article VII: “And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures...”

Christ’s resurrection is central to our hope. It fulfilled the Scriptures and defeated death. This is not metaphor but historical reality, anchoring our faith in the promise of eternal life.

- **Scripture:**

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

East Syriac Perspective:

The Resurrection is central to all East Syriac liturgical texts. The Hudra proclaims: “Christ trampled death and rose on the third day.”

Narsai affirms: “He raised His body, the temple that was destroyed, to show that He is the Life.”

Article VIII: “And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father.”

After His resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven. Sitting at the right hand means He shares the glory and authority of God. He intercedes for us, ruling over all creation as Lord.

- **Scripture:**

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11)

“who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” (Hebrews 1:3)

East Syriac Perspective:

The Ascension is understood as the exaltation of the humanity united to the divine Word. Babai writes: “The assumed manhood ascended in glory and sat at the right of the Father.”

The Hudra celebrates: “The One who was born from Mary now sits in glory with the Father.”

Article IX: “And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.”

We look forward to the Second Coming. Christ will return, not in humility, but in glory, to judge all people. His kingdom is eternal, and we await it with hope and reverence.

- **Scripture:**

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. ” (Matthew 25:31-46)

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work.” (Revelation 22:12)

East Syriac Perspective:

Ephrem speaks often of Christ the Judge. The liturgical books include prayers asking mercy “on the day when the books shall be opened.”

The Synod of Dadisho (424 AD) exhorts clergy to live uprightly in anticipation of Christ's return.

Worship Towards the East

Audisho bar Brikha connects this expectation of Christ's second coming directly with the liturgical practice of facing East during worship services:

“And because He is the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2), and the Light of the World (John 8:12), and the East is the place of light and the figure of the future world, therefore, we worship towards the East.” Here, Audisho provides both a cosmological and theological justification:

- Christ is the “Sun of Righteousness,” rising from the East.
- The East symbolizes the world to come, hence worshippers turn eastward in hope and expectation.

Article X: “And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father...”

“And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.” Here we confess the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. He is Lord, Life-Giver, and worthy of worship alongside the Father and the Son. He inspires the prophets and continues to guide the Church.

- **Scripture:**

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:26)

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” (John 15:26)

East Syriac Perspective:

The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son. Who spoke by the prophets, affirms the Trinity and the Spirit's inspiration of Scripture. Ephrem attributes inspiration and sanctification to the Spirit: “It is the Spirit who spoke through the prophets and filled the apostles.” (Hymns on Faith, 9)

The East Syriac Church maintains the original Nicene formulation (Proceeds from the Father, ex Patre procedit). Aphrahat writes: “The Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son.” (Demonstration VI)

- Mar Babai: 'The Spirit testifies to the Son and seals the faithful.'

The the liturgical books invoke the Holy Spirit as “Life-giving and consoler, who sanctifies the Church.”

Article XI: “.... And I believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.”

The Church is one (united in Christ), holy (set apart), catholic (universal), and apostolic (rooted in the teaching of the apostles). The East Syriac Church sees itself as an apostolic Church¹, founded by St. Thomas and Addai and Mari. This article connects us to the body of Christ across time and space.

Scriptural references:

Oneness of the Church:

The Bible verses that highlight one Church built by Christ include Matthew 16:18 ("I will build my church"), Ephesians 1:22-23 ("the church, which is his body"), and Ephesians 4:4 ("there is one body"). These verses emphasize that Christ established a single, unified church as His body and bride.

Holiness of the Church:

“For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” (John 17:19)

Apostolicity of the Church:

This is precisely what Paul affirms in Ephesians 2:20 where he says that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (cf. Rev. 21:14; also 1Cor. 3:10-11).

Catholicity of the Church:

The biblical basis for the universality of the Church, often referred to as the "catholic" nature of the Church, is found in passages emphasizing the Church's mission to all nations and its inclusion of believers from diverse backgrounds. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 instructs believers to "go and make disciples of all nations". Additionally, Revelation 7:9 describes a multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshiping before the throne, symbolizing the universal reach of the Church.

Gehanta of the blessing of the Oil of baptism: regarding the Holiness of the Church:

“And by the might of Thy grace may the oil of anointing be such as to give to all those who are signed with the life-giving sign, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, full and true holiness and the exalted communion of the kingdom of Heaven, by this baptism which is perfected and fulfilled in the type of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Apostolicity of the Church:

The following prayer is recited when the old leaven is blessed by the new one during the celebration of the renewal of the Holy Malka.

“This flour is signed, hallowed, mingled, renewed, and made one with this holy and ancient Leaven of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was handed down to us from our spiritual fathers, Mar Mari, Mar Addai, and St. Thomas, the blessed Apostles who discipled this eastern region, that it may be taken from place to place, and from one land to another, for the completion and mingling of the living Host of the life-giving Mysteries, as often as a reason of necessity calls, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

The Synod of Mar Isaac emphasizes apostolic succession and valid baptism.

Apostolic Succession

The Synod of Mar Isaac solemnly affirmed that the Church of the East is built upon the foundation of the holy apostles, in particular, Saint Thomas the Apostle, who, according to our tradition, brought the light of the Gospel to the lands of the East. The bishops at the synod declared:

“We have received from the fathers, and they from the blessed apostles, the authority to govern the Church and to preserve the holy faith...”

By this affirmation, the Synod proclaimed the unbroken apostolic succession of the Church of the East. The bishops, through the laying on of hands in ordination, preserve the faith, sacraments, and governance handed down from the apostles.

Article XII: “And We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins...”

We affirm baptism as the sacrament of entrance into the faith, by which sins are forgiven. We also proclaim our hope in the resurrection and eternal life, a future reality rooted in Christ’s victory.

East Syriac Perspective:

As we have already said, the East Syriac Church sees itself as an apostolic Church, founded by St. Thomas and Addai and Mari. The Synod of Mar Isaac emphasizes apostolic succession and valid baptism. Baptism is seen as rebirth. The Following prayer emphasizes the teaching of rebirth from the womb of Baptism:

(Prayer) The new sons Whom Thou has begotten in Thy Holy Baptism, from a spiritual bosom, worship Thee. O my Lord fulfill Thy gift in Thy servants, forbid from them shameful things, that they may keep in purity the glorious garment wherewith Thou in Thy compassion hast clothed them, O Lord of all, Father and Son and Holy Spirit forever: Amen

Narsai calls baptism: “A womb of fire and Spirit that births sons of light.”

Liturgical baptismal rites emphasize entry into the body of Christ and reception of the Spirit.

Syndical decrees:

One of the most significant syndical decrees of the Church of the East concerning baptism comes from the Synod of Mar Isaac held in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410 AD, which is recorded in the Synodicon Orientale compiled by J.B. Chabot. Here is an excerpt and summary of the relevant decree (Canon 9) from that synod:

Synod of Mar Isaac (410 AD) — Canon 9: On the Validity of Baptism

“If anyone has received the baptism of the Church in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, let him not be baptized again. But if anyone receives baptism again after having already received it validly, let him be anathematized.” (Synodicon Orientale, Canon 9, ed. Chabot, p. 272)

Explanation and Context:

- This canon defends the one-time administration of the sacrament of baptism, affirming its indelible character when performed according to the proper apostolic form.
- It clearly references the Trinitarian formula, showing alignment with the apostolic tradition.
- The canon condemns rebaptism, warning that anyone who seeks or performs baptism again after a valid first baptism falls under anathema—a formal ecclesiastical condemnation.

Theological Implication:

This decree reflects the early Church of the East's alignment with the universal apostolic faith:

- Baptism is a sacrament of initiation, unrepeatable, and permanently marks the baptized as belonging to Christ.
- The validity of baptism rests not on the worthiness of the minister but on the proper form, intent, and invocation of the Trinity.

Moreover, baptism was recognized as the gateway to the other mysteries (sacraments), and the seal of the Holy Spirit was to be received through the sacred anointing that follows.

Additional References from Later Synods:

Other synods of the Church of the East continued to reaffirm the sacredness of baptism, including:

- The Synod of Mar Aba I (544 AD), which emphasized catechesis before baptism, and the importance of infant baptism.

- The Synod of Isho‘yahb I (585 AD), which addressed rebaptism by heretical sects, affirming that only Trinitarian baptism is valid.

Suggested Sources for Further Study:

- J.B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), esp. pp. 272–274.
- W.A. Wigram, *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1910), pp. 70–85.
- Sebastian Brock, *The Church of the East: Apostolic and Orthodox*.

The Attributes of the Church in the Biblical Commentaries of the Syriac fathers

By
George Toma

INTRODUCTION:

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 major 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.

Isho 'dad on his commentary on the Syriac meaning of the word church 'Adta (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 (ܟܦܐ) (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 'Adta (ܐܕܬܐ), the name (of the Church) is taken, according to the Syrian usage from 'Aada (ܐܐܕܐ)(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 (ܐܐܕܐ), the difference being only that is called 'Adta (ܐܕܬܐ) in the feminine, and Aada (ܐܐܕܐ) in the masculine; like Mar (ܡܪ) and Martha (ܡܪܬܐ), and king (ܡܠܟܐ) and queen (ܡܠܝܚܐ); and Elder (ܗܘܬܐ) and Elderess (ܗܘܬܐ); and this name of 'Aada (ܐܐܕܐ) signifies a 'congregation, full of rejoicing"; it is not the case that every Aada (ܐܐܕܐ) was known as a congregation, and every congregation is understood as an 'Aada (ܐܐܕܐ); 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 (ܐܐܕܐ), 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 (ܐܐܕܐ) 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 of God" our Lord Jesus Christ who established one Church. (Matthew 16:18). Saint Paul says: "For other

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.

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 as a perfect man 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 members: "different ecclesial traditions, 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 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

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

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 shewed 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

⁴ Ibid. 126.

⁵ Isho'dad of Merv, 250.

*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 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

⁶ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 98.

⁷ Isho'dad of Merv, 275.

The authority of the Church is one simply because it springs from Jesus Christ the only “one” Son of God. 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

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.

⁸ Isho’dad of Merv, “On Ephesians 1:22-23,” 66.

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

In regards that the Church is the flock and Christ is the Shepherd: Saint 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

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 a relationship has now been established toward the man who was assumed. And thus we too receive an ineffable union with God.”¹²

In regards that the Church is a bride of Christ the bride groom, 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, her 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

¹² Ibid. 38.

¹³ Isho’dad of Merv, 97.

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, the holy Sacraments, sufferings, death on the Cross, resurrection from among the dead, Ascension into heaven and sending the Holy Spirit upon the holy Apostles has 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:

*“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,

¹⁴ Ibid. 68.

¹⁵ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 147.

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). Thus the catholicity of the Church does not depend on the number and diversity of the 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 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 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

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.

¹⁷ Isho'dad of Merv, 20.

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 nationalities in their own languages. This was a miraculous sign that the Church is designed to preach the gospel of Salvation to all nations of the world. A great number of people of different nationalities 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

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

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

IV. The Apostolicity of the Church

Jesus Christ in the beginning of His earthly ministry chose twelve men whom He called the Apostles. "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 the twelve men 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, 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 have received their authority to establish the Church, directly from Jesus Christ. These Holy men 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

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

²⁰ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 147.

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 the Church of all ages the one and the same apostolic Church. Saint Paul clearly 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

Additional references on 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 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

²¹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 163-164.

²² Isho’dad of Merv, 250.

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.

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:

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:

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

²⁸ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 92-93.

“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, 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)

²⁹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, 38.

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The Attributes of the Church in the Teachings of the Syriac Fathers

By George Toma

Introduction:

Every time we confess the Nicæan Constantinople Creed we confirm the four established attributes of the holy Church. “We believe . . . in one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church.” These four attributes of the Church indicate the unity, holiness, Catholicity and apostolicity of the Church of Christ.

In demonstration XIV, 677. 23-684-14 Aphrahat addresses the clergy by a series of 33 symbolic titles. Many of which are elsewhere used of Christ or are correlative to Christ; then in a strongly rhythmic continuation a series of 21 titles are applied to “us”, the church. (Dem XIV, 677. 23-684-14) [1]

Our Beloved, sons of peace, Disciples of Christ:

You are the light of the world,

The salt of the earth and the eye of the body,

You are the friends of the Bridegroom,

The good seed, the foundation laid on the rock.

You are the wise archaists

Who dig foundation and lay bare what is rotten.

You are industrious farmers,

Filling storehouses and gathering produce.

You are wise merchants,

Receiving money and showing a profit.

You are the hired laborers

Who receive wages and ask for more.

You are the holders of the keys,

Faithful ambassadors and blowers of the trumpets.

You are stewards and dispensers,
New wineskins and robes of glory.
You are apostles,
Brothers of the bride adorned, and light in darkness.
You are sons of peace,
Brothers of Christ and the Temple of the spirit.
You are runners in the contest,
Toilers in the studio and winners of crowns.
You are vines in the vineyard,
And seed of good wheat, bearing fruit a hundredfold.
You are the lighters of lamps
For those who enter by the narrow gate of the kingdom.
You are those who stand on the right hand,
Who walk by the straight and narrow way.
You are the saved by the cross,
The redeemed by the body and blood of Christ;
You are Christ's ambassadors
Heralds who bring (souls) to birth by water.
You are the sweet savor
Whose fragrance is shed abroad everywhere
You are the new lump (of dough)
In which there remains no old leaven.
You are the guests of the bridegroom,
Arrayed in robes fit for the feast.
You are bearers of the yoke,
Sitting in silence, prisoners of the assembly.
You are the children of the Church
Educators of her sons and gatherers of the flock.
You are the glorious shepherds
Who bring their flocks back into good pastures;
And our Lord Jesus Christ is the chief shepherd,

ight in darkness, lamp on the lamp- stand,
Who brought light to the world and absolved sins.
For he is the good pearl
And we are merchants who have sold our possessions and bought it.
He is the treasure in the field:
And we, when we found it, rejoiced in and acquired it.
He is the fountain of life,
and we who were thirsty have drunk of it.
He is the table full of richness and plenty;
And we who were hungry have eaten and rejoiced.
He is the gate of the kingdom
That that is opened before all who enter.
He is the joy giving wine
Of which mourners drink and their pains are forgotten.
He is the garment and robe of glory
Which all the victorious put on.
He is the vine (yard) of truth and his father is the vinedresser,
And we are vines planted in the midst.
He is the tower on which many build;
Let us consider its price, that we may build and complete it.
He is the bridegroom, the apostles are the betrothers,
And we are the bride; let us prepare dowry.
He is the ladder which leads up on high;
Let us toil and strive to ascend by it to the father.
He is the straight and narrow way;
Let us journey in the footsteps that we may arrive at the heaven.
He is the pontiff, the holy minister;
Let us strive to be sons of his fold.
He is the king, son of great lineage,
Who went forth to receive the kingship?
Let us honor his loveliness,

That he may make us sharers of his greatness.
He is the herald and apostle of the most high;
Let us listen to his words, that we may be sharers in his council.
He is the grain seed bringing much fruit,
Which though small was sown and became a great tree.”

The Unity of the Church:

The first mark of the Church is oneness which means Jesus Christ established only one Church. In the beginning God the father send His only Son Jesus Christ on earth in order to establish His Church. Accordingly Jesus by preaching the gospel of salvation, working the miracles and revealing the merciful God to people, brought people back into the household of God, His Holy Church. Then Jesus through the Sacrament of the Holy baptism, gathered all the people of the world, as one saved flock, into His one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. (Matthew 16:18)

According to the ecclesiastical history, this, one Church of Christ during the course of history, because of the Christological controversies, was divided into many local Christian communities ‘local churches’. These local churches developed their own particular ecclesiastical identity and a governing body. Yet, the Christian Church as a whole, along with the Lord, constantly prays for the unity of the Church under one headship of Jesus Christ. The unity of the Church is inevitable. The Church here and everywhere envisions the fulfilment of the unity of the one Catholic Church in which angles and men together, will be worshipping the holy Cross of Jesus Christ, carrying it upon their hands and singing glory unto him. It was by the Holy Cross that, Jesus Christ reconciled men to God and to one another and the heavenly and the earthly into one Church. Hence in one Catholic ‘universal’ Church all men will be supplicating Him, confessing Him, worshipping His Lordship and with one voice will all be

crying out loudly, glory be to the Son of the heavenly King. Saint James of Serug says:

“Thy strength is that of the rock, hence (I say) “thou art a rock. And upon thee I will build My Church,” for thou wilt never break into pieces.

“Thou art a rock, and upon thee I will build the Glorious.

The powers of hell, with their own crafts, shall not prevail against her’

And what are they, tell me, the bare of hell,

death and Satan, who lay waste the earth?

The Church of Christ is called the Christian Church, because Jesus Christ, as a wise architect, himself, laid the foundation of His Church. In regards that Jesus Christ laid the foundation of His Church Aphrahat says: [2]

“And if perchance you should say: If Christ is set for the foundation, how does Christ also dwell in the building when it is completed? For both these things did the blessed Apostle say? For he said: I as a wise architect have laid the foundation. and there he defined the foundation and made it clear, for he said as follows: No man can lay other foundation than that which is laid, which is .” (, I Corinthians 3:11).

The fathers of the Church believe that, our Lord Jesus Christ, in His loving kindness, chose His one Church, out of all the nations of the world who were oppressed under the yoke of Satan and his hosts. Then He ‘our lord’ by His baptism and sufferings on the Cross sanctified his Church and made her a temple and a dwelling place for himself. Aphrahat says: [3]

“And that Christ furthermore dwells in that building is the word that was written above that of Jeremiah who called men temples and said of God that He dwelt in them. And the Apostle said: The Spirit of Christ dwells in you. (1 Corinthians 3:16) And our Lord said: I and My Father are one. (John 10:30) And therefore that word is accomplished, that Christ dwells in men, namely, in

those who believe in Him, and He is the foundation on which is reared up the whole building.”

Saint Paul, sees the unity of the Catholic Church in the imagery of one body composed of many members. In his image Saint Paul says: “even though a body has many different members, yet all these members are united in one body under one head.” (1 Corinthians 12:13-32, Ephesians 1: 22-23). After the same manner, the one Catholic Church is made of many different ecclesial traditions united in confessing one triune God, one bible and Salvation only by Jesus Christ. In the teachings of the Syriac fathers the seamless ‘undivided’ garment of Jesus is a great symbol of the Church’s unity. (John 11:47-52) Saint Ephraim says: [4]

“The tunic which they did not rend is a great symbol of the faith. The Apostles spread it in the world without dividing it. The Symbol of the tunic does honor to the loyal the schismatics are reproached by the garments.”

Saint Ephrem in his hymn on Crucifix makes the blessed Mary the mother of Christ the type of the One Holy Church. [5]

“Mary who saw him
Is a type of the Church, which first
Is to see the sign of his coming.”

The unity of the Church depends also in the unity of one faith. The Holy Apostles of our Lord and savior, by his great commission discipled and baptized the whole world. They uprooted the errors of heathenism, and taught the believers to worship one Holy trinity.

The unity of the Church is following the model of the Holy Trinity “unity within diversity”. So 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.” [6]

As one God can never be divided, so the one Church of God can never be divided into many churches. Saint Ephrem says God is one and the one God cannot be divided. “He worshipped the Sun and fell before the servants of the sun, since he denied God who can never be divided.” [7]

Here are many biblical references denoting the oneness of the Church for example: one flock and one shepherd, one vineyard, and one bride and one bridegroom.

The imagery of the flock and the Shepherded:

In regards that the Church is the flock and Christ is the Shepherd Aphrahat says: [8]

“You are bearers of the yoke,
Sitting in silence, prisoners of the assembly.
You are the children of the Church
Educators of her sons and gatherers of the flock.
You are the glorious shepherds
Who bring their flocks back into good pastures;
And our Lord Jesus Christ is the chief shepherd,
Light in darkness, lamp on the lamp- stand,
Who brought light to the world and absolved sins.”

Again Aphrahat says: “. The good shepherd gives himself for the sake of his sheep. and again He said: I have other sheep and I must bring them also hither. And the whole flock shall be one, and one shepherd, and My Father because of this loves Me; that I give Myself for the sake of the sheep. And again He said; I am the door of the sheep. Every one that enters by Me shall live and shall go in and go out and find pasture. O you pastors, be made like that diligent pastor, the chief of the whole flock, who cared so greatly for his flock.

He brought near those that were afar off. He brought back the wanderers. He visited the sick. He strengthened the weak. He bound up the broken. He guarded the fatlings. He gave himself up for the sake of the sheep. He chose and instructed excellent leaders, and committed the sheep into their hands, and gave them authority over all his flock. For He said to Simon Cephas: Feed My sheep and My lambs and My ewes. (So) Simon fed His sheep; and he fulfilled his time and handed over the flock to you, and departed. Do ye also feed and guide them well. For the pastor who cares for his sheep engages in no other pursuit along with that. He does not make a vineyard, nor plant gardens, nor does he fall into the troubles of this world. Never have we seen a pastor who left his sheep in the wilderness and became a merchant, or one who left his flock to wander and became a husbandman. But if he deserts his flock and does these things he thereby hands over his flock to the wolves.” [9]

In regards that the Church is the flock and Christ is the Shepherd Aphrahat says: [10]

“Blessed are you O Shechem, for from that well
Jacob had his mute flocks drink,
And from that church over the well
Christ had His flocks drink,
The flocks of Jacob have passed away and disappeared.
But the flock of Christ has grown and does grow.
The symbols were swallowed, and the shadows were completed,
By Jesus all is sealed.”

Again Saint Ephrem says: [11]

“The Just bought their own inheritance with their money.
In them is symbolized their lord who bought His flocks with His Blood.”

Ephrem says Christ the great Shepherd out of His love became the sheep 'lamb that takes away the sins of the world' John 1:29 for the sake of the salvation of mankind. [12]

“Blessed is the Shepherd who became the sheep for our salvation.”

Ephrem never stops comparing Jesus to a shepherd and the Church to His flock. In the following Hymn Ephrem says: [13]

“Blessed is your flock for you are her gate,
And you are her staff, and you are her shepherd.
And you are her drink: you are her pilot
And her overseer. O to the only begotten
Who was fruitful and multiplied in all [his] benefits.”
The imagery of the bride and the groom:

Saint Paul in his Epistle to Ephesians demonstrates the unity of the Church by using the symbolism of the Church as the Bride and Christ as the heavenly bridegroom, (Ephesians 5: 25-27). The Holy Church as a bride sings glory to the bridegroom who betrothed her to Himself and took her into His bed chamber. And gave her His Sacraments as the earnest of the absolution of her children. He purified and sanctified her by His grace from the defilement of demons. He established and made her flourish by the power of His divine redemption. And called both the gentile and gentiles (the Jews and the nations) to offer sacrifices in His Church unto His name. And behold in the Church angles and men equally worship His divinity. And all together cry out Holy, Holy, Holy unto the Lord who dwells in the light.

Ephrem envisions the Local Church of Nisibis As well as the whole Church, as Christ's bride and as enjoying his jealous love. In Carmine Nisibena 6 the church of Nisibis, cries to her jealous spouse saying: [14]

“Be jealous for me, for I am thine
And to the, Lord am I betrothed:

The Apostle who betrothed me to thee
Told me that thou art the jealous one.
A bulwark to chaste wives
Is the jealousy of their husbands.....”

In the following poem of Ephrem, hymn on the nativity, Hymn nineteen, blessed Mary refers to Jesus Christ as a child, Bridegroom, Son, and even God.
[15]

“Whereas they despised virginity in Zion,
They honored your mother, O virginal child
Who put on the evidence of virginity of His Mother?
And emerged with it. To me you are child,
Bridegroom and Son, even God.”

In regard that The Church is the Bride and Jesus is the Bridegroom, Saint Ephrem says: [16]

“The lamp is not bridegroom of the eye, nor is John bridegroom of the Church. They are friends of the two bridegrooms and beloved of the two brides. They were not bridegrooms; they were Icons of the only begotten Bridegroom.”

In regards that the Church is the bride and Christ is the bridegroom Aphrahat says: [17]

“Our Beloved, sons of peace, Disciples of Christ:
You are the light of the world,
The salt of the earth and the eye of the body,
You are the friends of the Bridegroom,
The good seed, the foundation laid on the rock....
You are the guests of the bridegroom,

Arrayed in robes fit for the feast.”

II. The Holiness of the Church:

Holiness is the second mark of the Church. The whole intention of the heavenly father, for calling people to repentance, and receiving baptism, is to establish one holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church here on earth and to make her a dwelling place for all those who have believed in Him. All three persons of the Holy trinity were essentially involved in the act of establishing the holy Church on earth. Yes indeed God the father desired to build a Church, God the Son laid her foundations and God the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost descended from heaven and sanctified her by His grace. Therefore the source of the Holiness of the Church is God who called the Church out of all the nations of the world. It is written in the Sacred Scriptures “He who called you is Holy; be holy yourself in all your conduct.” (1 Peter 1:15). Finally the Church is holy because it participates in the divine nature of God. (2 Peter 1:4). Saint Ephrem calls the Church, the Holy Church: [18]

“Since the people withheld and did not approach the King’s Son,
His ambassador went out to the peoples and brought them with their offerings.
But it did not bring all of them since the small womb of Bethlehem
Could not suffice for them, so that the womb of the Holy Church
Opened wide and enclosed her children. Blessed is He who made fruitful the
barren one!”

According to Saint Paul Jesus suffered and died on the Cross in order to sanctify His bride the holy Church. It is written: "... 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). In regards that the Church is Holy Mar Narsai says: [19]

“In the holiness of His name He willed to make the work of His hands participate; that by it they might be sanctified when they sanctify His Holy name. He is not profited by the voices of their sanctifications; for He is the Holy One who by His purity sanctifies the unclean.”

Great is the gift that the merciful God gave unto mankind. By the gift of baptism He covered them with the spiritual garment of glory. By the gift of the Eucharistic bread He nourished them with His body. By the gift of His precious Blood He sanctified them. And finally He raised them from earth into heaven and united them with angles and made them one holy Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ by His suffering on the cross sanctified His Church and by His precious Blood saved her and made her His holy dwelling place. Mar Narsai says Christ is present in the Church day and night. [20]

“In the ship of the Church he stands and gives warning night and day; and he keeps it room the harms of the wind of evil-doers.”

Jesus Christ being a perfect man and a perfect God is the source of all the holiness. It is rational that He, Jesus Christ, by his presence, sanctifies wherever He dwells in or is present, whether it is in the church building, a community of believers or in the physical materials used in the celebration of the Holy Sacraments. Aphrahat says: [21]

“5. And if perchance you should say: If Christ is set for the foundation, how does Christ also dwell in the building when it is completed? For both these things did the blessed Apostle say? For he said: I as a wise architect have laid the foundation. And there he defined the foundation and made it clear, for he said as follows: No man can lay other foundation than that which is laid, which is . And that Christ furthermore dwells in that building is the word that was written above that of Jeremiah who called men temples and said of God that He

dwelt in them. And the Apostle said: The Spirit of Christ dwells in you. And our Lord said: I and My Father are one. And therefore that word is accomplished, that Christ dwells in men, namely, in those who in Him, and He is the foundation on which is reared up the whole building.”

There are many other valid reasons for the holiness of the Church. The Church is holy because Jesus Christ who established her is holy. Jesus Christ the giver of life and the Lord of glory in the Jordan River received baptism from His servant, John the Baptist, in order to sanctify His believers. And along with the Father who sent Him and the Holy the Spirit, the spirit of truth, He purified and sanctified all the sources and springs of water in order to give life to mankind. Mar Narsai says the sons and daughters of the Church are sanctified by being born again in the water of the Holy Baptism: [22]

“Every hour he opens the door of mercy before the beholders; and he appoints and gives forgiveness of iniquity to the sons of his race. With the waters of the Spirit he casts them, as in the furnace; and he puts off (from them) iniquity, and puts on the garments of righteousness. He calls and entreats the hidden life. The waters become fruitful, as a womb; and the power of grace is like the seed that begets life, Body and soul go down together into the bosom of the water and are born again, being sanctified from defilement.”

As soon as, in Paradise, our forefather Adam broke the Commandment of God the father, Mankind lost their Rob of Glory. In the Sacrament of the Holy Baptism People again put on Christ. So people who lost their Rob of Glory, regain it at Baptism. Saint Ephrem says: [23]

“God himself “puts on the body” from Mary, and at the baptism Christ laid the robe of glory in the river of Jordan, making it available once again for humanity to put on at baptism; then, at his or her baptism, the individual Christian, in “putting on Christ,” puts on the Robe of Glory, thus re-entering the terrestrial

anticipation of the eschatological Paradise, in other words, the Church; finally at the resurrection of the dead, the just will in all reality reenter the celestial Paradise (the heavenly Church), clothed in their Robes of Glory.”

In regards that the Church is Holy, Again Saint Ephrem says: [24]

“See, people being baptized and becoming virgins”
And Qadishehe, gone down to the font, have
Been baptized in it put on the single ihidaya.”

Sebastian Brook says: “In the Hymns on Paradise St. Ephrem alluding to Adam’s loss of his original Robe of Glory a number of times, notably in XV. 8-9, but for the subsequent history of this Robe and its restoration we have to turn for the most part to other works. In the hymns of Virginité (XV.9) the whole purpose of the Incarnation is seen as the restoration of Adam’s original garment.” [25]

“Christ came to find Adam who had gone astray,
To return him to Eden in the garment of light. ”
Saint Ephrem in his epiphany hymn (XII.4) says: [26]
“Instead of with leaves from the trees
He clothed them with glory in the water.”

In regard that the Church is the Holy people and Assembly of God:
Aphrahat says: [27]

“The God is one, and that we are to confess, worship, praise, exalt, sanctify, and glorify His majesty, we do indeed acknowledge through Jesus, His Son, our Savior, who chose us and drew us near to Him; and through whom we acknowledge Him and become His adorers and a people and a church and an assembly that is holy. Glory and honor be to the Father and to His Son, and to

His living and Holy Spirit, from the mouths of all who praise Him, whether above or below. Forever in eternity, so be it and so be it.”

The Catholicity of the Church:

Catholicity is the third mark of the Church. According to the teachings of the Church, Jesus Christ, in His loving kindness, gathered His Church from all the nations of the world, those who were suppressed by Satan and his hosts, and clothed her “the Church” with a spiritual garment of glory. Thus the Catholic Church, purchased by the Blood of Christ, saved by the Cross, and sealed with the living sign of the absolving baptism, in all four corners of the world, constantly raises glory to the almighty God. The holy church, praying for the wellbeing of the Catholic Church, says: “your holy Cross O our Lord may it be the guardian of the adored congregations which you have elected for yourself from the four corners of the world and have gathered them in your Catholic Church, and may they be made worthy to do your will, as in heaven so on earth.”

The catholicity of the Church does not merely depend on the diversity of people embraced in it nor on the expansion of its geographical territory. The Church was from the very beginning a Catholic Church even though it was composed of a dozen of disciples and was confined in a very restricted area. Jesus called his Church a "Little flock" (Luke 12:32). The Catholicity of the Church stems from the person of Jesus Christ, His teachings and His divine mission in the world, which is the Salvation of all the nations regardless to their color, language and ethnicity. (Matthew 28:19-20). Saint Paul writing to Colossians says: "the word of truth . . . in the whole world . . . is bearing fruit and growing" (Col. 1:5-6). After the glorious Ascension of our Lord into heaven, the Holy Apostles, their successors and the fathers of the Church strongly confessed and preached the Catholicity of the Church. In regards that the Church is Catholic, Aphrahat says: [28]

“The ultimate purpose of Jesus’ death is to bring together or to gather together or to draw all men together to himself.”

Saint Ephrem in his hymns on virginity (Hymn 18) sees both; people and peoples, gentile and gentiles, Circumcised uncircumcised gathered in one Catholic Church. [29]

“Blessed are you, O Shechem that proclaimed
Symbols of to the people and to the peoples,
For even the proud circumcised men
Came down to by corn from the uncircumcised one.
The symbol and its explanation are in your church
In which uncircumcised and circumcised dwell.”

In regards the Catholicity of the Church again Saint Ephrem in his Hymns on Virginity, Hymn 20, says: [30]

“The Cross portrayed gave the right of first born”

To Ephrem, the symbol of the Gentiles, [31] Those who went out to meet our Lord. When He returned from the city of Ephrem. [32] Aramaeans glorified Him with their palm branches, The circumcised were silent and [so] they were rejected.

The symbol has been revealed: the Gentiles have become the first born;”

According to Aphrahat Jesus Christ, by His sufferings and death on the Cross offered salvation to all the nations of the world. And then He gathered in His Catholic Church all those who accepted His messianic Salvation. [33]

“By His death he destroyed the power of death and redeemed all scattered ones and gathered them in Him.”

The Churches' Catholicity is related to its oneness and holiness. A divided Church can neither be Holy nor catholic. The prayer of Saint Ephraim for the unity of the Church will clarify this fact. [34]

“O Lord, make peace, in my days in thy Churches. Unite and join O lord the quarreling sects. Pacify and reconcile the Conflicting parties that from all Churches there may be a single Church of truth and let her children be gathered righteous in her bosom that we may confess thy goodness. Praise to thy reconciliation.”

Again in regards to the Catholicity of the Church Saint Ephrem says: [35]

“That from all churches there may be a single Church of truth and her children be gathered righteous in her bosom that we may confess thy goodness.” Says Saint Ephrem.” [36]

The Church as the flock of Christ necessarily is a Catholic and an apostolic Church. Mar Narsai says: [37]

“His Lord has given him reasonable sheep to control, that he may pasture them in the living meadows of spiritual words. The sheep and the lambs and the ewes he has been commanded to tend, and all conditions of men and women and children. The (divine) purpose which called him to itself has set him for the service of men; to uproot error and sow on earth the name of the creator. ‘Go forth,’ said He, ‘and make disciples and preach and baptize all peoples,’ (teaching them) the one Divinity of the one Creator, three hypostases. The three names he is bound to preach in the ears of men, and to cause them to think upon the name of the Divinity that is hidden from all.”

The Didache also speaks of the Catholicity of the Church almost in the same terms, in the form of a request to the Lord for the Church. It is written:

“Remember, O Lord thy Church: deliver her from all evil, perfect her in thy Love and from the four winds assemble her, the sanctified, in thy Kingdom which thou hast prepared for her.”

The Apostolicity of the Church:

The fourth mark of the Church is Apostolicity. The Church of the gentile and gentiles confesses and worships the King of Kings, our Lord Jesus Christ, who chose from among the fishermen twelve Apostles in order to make them the teachers of the mankind. "Did I not choose you, the twelve? He asked them." (John 6:70). On the day of Pentecost out of His love, He (The Lord) send, from heaven, the grace of the Holy Spirit and rested upon them in the form of the tongues of fire. The Holy Spirit enlightened their mind, and by His wisdom educated their dullness. He gave them the gifts of tongues and made them the true preachers of His Holy mysteries, the proclaimers of the kingdom of heaven and the evangelists of the doctrine of the Holy trinity for all the nations of the world. And finally He send them out to bring back unto Himself all those nations who were living in the darkness of error and the shadows of death. Mar Narsai says: [38]

“Twelve priests He chose Him first, according to the number of the tribes; and instead of the people He called all peoples to be His. He gave into their hands the power of the Spirit to conquer all; and they uprooted error and sowed the truth of the name of the creator. They pardoned iniquity and cleansed spots by His help; and they taught men to hate the iniquity of their doings.”

The Apostolicity of the Church of the New Testament is the continuation of the Apostolicity of the Old Testament. The Apostolicity of the Church is handed down through the laying on of hands from God to the patriarchs, Apostles and the fathers of the Church. God the father on the top of the mountain Sinai laid His hand upon Moses. Moses in his turn by the laying of hands entrusted it to his brother Aaron. And made him the priest in the likeness

of Melchizedek. And from Aaron the Apostolic priesthood extended to John the Baptist the Son of the priest Zachariah. Our Lord Jesus Christ on the day of His Baptism acquired it (The Priesthood) from John the Baptist who laid his hand upon the Lord and baptized Him. Thus our Lord maintained the order of the passing down of the Apostolic succession through the laying on of hands from generation to another. Then our Lord handed it down to His Apostles and behold, it has been kept alive in the Church through the laying on of hands and it will be kept until the coming of our Lord for the second time from heaven. Saint Ephrem says: [39]

“He gave the laying- on of hands to Moses on the mountain,
And He received it in the midst of the river from John.
By the power of His gift, John was competent,
And the earthly one baptized the heavenly One.”

Isaac of Nineveh says: [40]

“We bring to mind how the holy Apostle Paul recounts his transgressions and puts his soul in the last and nethermost place, saying, “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”..... When and at what time did he say this? After great struggles, after mighty works, after the preaching of the gospel of Christ which he proclaimed throughout the whole world, after continual deaths and manifold tribulations which he suffered from the Jews and from the heathen. Even then he saw himself as only making a beginning. He was of the opinion not merely that he had not yet attained to purity of soul but that he would not even number himself among the Disciples of Christ, as was fitting.”

In order for the Church of Christ to become a Catholic Church, necessarily must first become an Apostolic Church. How can a certain Church be able to gather people of all the nations of the world in her flock unless she

first shows obedience to the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ? “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

Thus Jesus Christ through the twelve Apostles continued His earthly ministry in the whole world. Saint Ephrem says: [41]

“For also that Master of the disciples accompanied them when they were sent out.”

Again in regards to the Apostolicity of the Church Saint Ephrem says: [42]

“Twelve fishermen went out; they caught the world.
They fished for Kings from the sea of bile
And freemen from the abyss of desire
And servants from trickle of evil.”

In another Hymn saint Ephrem says: [43]

“The Holy one caught twelve fishermen,
With them he caught the whole creation.”

In regards to that our Lord sent the Holy Apostles to convert people from worshiping idles and bringing them back to the household of God the Church. Saint Ephrem says: [44]

“He chose the prophets; they made smooth the way for peoples.
He sent the apostles; they cleared a path for the peoples.
The snares of the evil one were put to shame since the weak cleared them away.

Blessed is He who made straight our paths!”

Footnotes

1. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.
2. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.
3. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.
4. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
5. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
6. Isho’yahb III, Letters and Synodal Writings.
7. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
8. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.
9. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.
10. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.
11. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
12. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
13. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
14. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
15. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
16. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
17. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.
18. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
19. Narsai, Homilies and liturgical poetry.
20. Narsai, Homilies and liturgical poetry.
21. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.
22. Narsai, Homilies and liturgical poetry.
23. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
24. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
25. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
26. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
27. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.
28. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.

29. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
30. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
31. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
32. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
33. Aphrahat, Demonstrations, esp. XIV.23–684.14.
34. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
35. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
36. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
37. Narsai, Homilies and liturgical poetry.
38. Narsai, Homilies and liturgical poetry.
39. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
40. Isaac of Nineveh, Ascetical Homilies.
41. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
42. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
43. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.
44. Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns and Commentary, various.