Mar Ivanios was not awarded any degree or doctorate from a theological faculty, and then not to mention a biblical faculty. Nor did he attempt for one. But an attentive reader of his writings and theological and spiritual speeches is amazed at the thorough-ness of his knowledge of the Bible and his expertise in interpreting it. It is the most evident in his books *Sabhavatsaram*,¹ and *Vishuddha Qurbana Oru Dhyanapathanam*,² and in many of his exhortations to the Bethany nuns and introductions to liturgical services. Here below is given my English translation (wherever needed) of some samples of his biblical interpretation. These are excerpts from Rev. Sister Salga’s manuscript collection of Mar Ivanios’ exhortations from April 29, 1929 – April 1933 to Bethany nuns.


[Except the first few lines, the speech is written in English in Salga’s collection. But in all possibility it is Salga’s translation of the sermon that Mar Ivanios delivered in Malayalam). In this sermon- on the speaker has exploited the Pauline and Ephrem’s phrase “put on humanity.” It is a symbolic interpretation mixed with allegorization. The speaker interprets some statements of the Johannine report one after another. Emphases are added by me].

“…*He loved his own till the end.*” What does it mean? Does it refer to a period of time? It means that he loved to the extent that he could love. He loved so much as he had the power to love. It is realizing that he has come down from the heavens that he did the foot washing.
“He rose from the supper.” Literally, Our Lord was come with his disciples for the paschal meal. But what is the spiritual meaning? That he came down from the Father. In the heavens God the Son lives eternally with the Father, and the Holy Spirit as One among the Blessed Trinity. That is his supper. God the Son, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, lives eternally in perfect beatitude with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He lives enjoying all the love of the Father. He enjoys the love of the Holy Spirit. That is his supper. He has given himself eternally to love the Father and the Holy Spirit. He lives in perfect beatitude. Then He created man.

“He put away his outer cloak.” God the Son rose from the supper table of heaven and came down to the earth and must do the washing of the feet of man. Without giving up the equality with either the Father or the Holy Spirit he became man. What did he do? He put away his outer cloak. He had his inner linen. He did not take away the seamless garment that a woman who loved Our Lord had made for him. What is the inner meaning? Our Lord who dwells in the effulgence of the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit put away his glory, his outer garment. He had the inner garment. When the Lord came at Sinai, not even an animal could touch the mount on pain of death. He came to earth as a poor man, working with his hands for the support of this mother and himself. Lo! He rose from the supper table, he put away the glory of his Godhead. When the soldiers came to arrest him, what did he say? “If I ask my Father he will send a legion of angels.” He who could do that came from his supper table to poverty, to suffering, and pain. He whom angels dare not look at, whom the sons of men cannot look at, put away the glory of his Godhead and became a poor man. When he was born in Bethlehem, suffered at Golgotha, we see him as having put away all the glory of his Godhead.

What was the towel he put on? A body, soul, mind or intellect like ours? God took flesh. He put on humanity as a cloth round him. In such a manner he descended into the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The incarnation was the putting on of the towel. Before all the world the Creator of all appeared as man on earth.
What is the basin? And what is the water? To wash sinner from all guilt and sin; to take man who was evil with him to heaven. This is what he came on earth for. Look at the sons of men. He cannot touch men who are filthy with sin. He cannot take him to the heavenly table, to the Father. Hence what is needed? He must be washed. Water is needed for washing and a towel for wiping. His humanity, his body and blood, are the towel. His love for man is the water. The bowel is his holy heart. His heart which the Roman soldier pierced with the lance. With the water of the love of man Our Lord’s soul, heart and mind is filled. He was man poor, starving, mocked at by people having in him all except sin. The heavenly God has appeared before men like this; His heart is full of love. To each sinner, man or woman, young or old, the heavenly God has come down to wash his / her feet, to wash him / her from sin. This is signified by the service that is going to take place. God comes to you, kneeling, prostrating at your feet to do you service.

This is the service of the God who has come to us. When an ordinary man comes to do you a service (feet washing) how very bad it would be to ill-treat him. How then should we treat him who is God? Here the heavenly God has come towards a sinner to wash your feet. If you flee, he will come after you. However much you ill-treat him by spitting, thrashing or mocking, he will suffer it all. He came to fetch you heaven, patiently doing you service. So deeply has God loved you. That is what today’s service means. You are not going to see the bishop washing the feet of the twelve persons. It is only an external act to show a spiritual reality. He has come to wash you (bathe) you and to wash the feet of those who are already washed. You should all partake in this service with proper disposition and not for sightseeing but to ‘see’ the God-become man, the God-become servant washing the feet of his servants.

2 Holy Saturday 1930 Second Sermon

[Salga has reported this sermon in Malayalam. The interpretation is symbolic in the way of the Syriac tradition and aimed at the spiritual benefit of the hearers].
Our Lord was buried a little slanting sideways. The rubrics of the Service Book also instruct to lay the *slibo*’ slightly slanting sideways. God created and appointed Adam in the Garden of Eden. Adam called all the animals and birds by name. But from among none of them could he find a suitable helpmate. God put him in a deep sleep; took one of his ribs and created Eve. Similarly when Christ the Second Adam was sleeping on the cross he was pierced in between his ribs at his side. Immediately blood and water gushed forth from the side of the Second Adam. Thus God created the Church, the bride of the Second Adam. Thereby we are born by water and the Spirit who gushed forth from the Second Adam’s side. We live by eating his blood and drinking his blood. The Jewish Church made herself unfitting to be the bride of the Second Adam. A bride had to be created anew. There are two traditional popular versions about the piercing of Christ’s side. According to one, the soldier pierced Christ’s right side. The spear pierced and passed through the ribs and reached the chest. This is the more correct one according to the prophecies in the scripture. The other one is more literal. Accordingly, from below the soldier looked upward and pierced at the left below the heart. The spear was not something like an iron stiletto for writing. It was a sharp pointed instrument with dropping sharp and wider edges. Probably after piercing the soldier turned the spear round in the wound. The wound became wide enough to gush forth blood and water. Beneath that rivulet we can stand with mouths open. All the graces we require will flow from that rivulet... Let us enter inside that pierced heart and remaining there let us love. Remaining there let us observe our promises and customs. Let us place our heart in that heart and our soul in that soul.

Our Lord was laid slightly slanted sideways because if laid flat the whole blood and water would have lost flown… Blood flowed to show that he was alive. And water flowed to show that he was dead. The water that flowed from Christ’s side is the water from a decayed body. He is living and dead. That is how he remained in the tomb.
Soldiers guard in front of, around and up the tomb! After expelling Adam from the Garden of Eden the Cherubs stand guarding the tree of life on the four sides, at the gate, and every where of the garden. Our Lord Jesus is the tree of life. It is necessary that guards around him.

Our soul shall be the tomb wherein Jesus Our Lord is buried. We shall appoint guards in the front, around and up of the tomb. Not Roman soldiers but Cherubs of the Lord. And they are our decisions, promises, customs, covenants etc. Our life is tomb. The tauna (the inner residence of the religious nuns) that we live in is tomb. At the gate of all it there should be guards. Instead of Roman soldiers at Our Lord’s tomb we should appoint Cherubs from the heavens to guard our good decisions and aspirations. Besides the Mother of God and other saints we shall appoint them to guard our tomb.

3. March 29, 1931 Palm Sunday Evening

[This is an introductory sermon at the evening of the Palm Sunday. In this sermon the speaker invites the audience to reflect on the role of Bethany, Calvary, and the Mount of Olives, the three places that Our Lord has made use in order to fulfill the ultimate intention of his incarnation. Thereby they are asked to live those places in their spiritual life].

Palm Sunday Service is over. All the remaining sacred services of this week are remembering some special occasions and stages of Our Lord’s passion. Our Lord spent the night after the royal entry into Jerusalem at Bethany. Except for Gethsemane for prayer probably he spent day and night at Bethany. Let us see (to) make this evening recollection centered on three places closely bound to Our Lord’s last days on the earth. They are 1) Bethany, 2) Calvary, and 3) the Mount of Olives. These are three places that Our Lord has made use in order to fulfill the ultimate intention of his incarnation. Bethany is the place of service by prayer and deed. Calvary is the place of suffering. And the Mount of Olives is the place of victory over the sufferings. It is
the place of his ascension into heaven. These three places represent three stages. And they shall help us establish a newly powerful bond with our Lord Jesus…with the Holy Church… with our Bethany religious community. It is a bond that shall not be broken. … We shall make the bond stronger and stronger by continuing our prayer for the conversion and coming together of all to the Catholic Church…

4. April 14, 1933 Good Friday

[This is a reflection on Jesus’ life as a triangle, created of three caves: the cave of Bethlehem, the cave of Gethsemane, and the cave of burial garden. These are words of a real mystic. The speaker challenges the nuns to journey through these caves along with Jesus. Salga has reported this speech in her English translation. Some of the sentences are grammatically imperfect. But the present editor has reproduced the text as it is].

In the Syriac New Testament we read of three gardens and three caves in the incarnate life of Our Lord. He was born in a cave. He went to pray in a cave, and he was buried in a cave. The same word is used for each in Syriac and each was in a garden. First, a new born baby; second, a man about to end his life; and third, after death. See him these three states. At this moment the second attracts our attention. In the kowma we prayed “Messiah who agonized…” There was a cave where he went to pray. You will have noticed a high rock in front of Our Lord in the pictures. As fire melts iron, Our Lord’s prayer melted his heart. … The Second Adam suffered truly for the sins of Adam and his posterity. As a result his blood came as perspiration. It was sign of the internal experience. What was it? A broken heart. … He agonized in a garden. It was time of sorrow. He was buried in a cave. It was a time of silence. We can draw Jesus life as a triangle, whose corners are the cave of Bethlehem, the cave of Gethsemane, and the cave of burial garden. He passed through all the three experiences. ..
In our spiritual life we have pass through all the three experiences. God sows us in the cave of Bethlehem. Our spiritual life, virtues, etc. as a seed in the cave. But to make it grow and to nourish we have to pass through sufferings, the cave of Gethsemane … It is very painful… yes, sweating blood sometimes ! In union with Jesus let us go to the cave of Bethlehem and therefrom to the cave of Gethsemane without passing through which we cannot go to the cave of the sepulchre. The problem is that without passing through the cave of the sepulchre we cannot pass on to the blessings of resurrection.