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8

BABY VARGHESE

**Baptism and Chrismation
in the
Syriac Tradition**



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Baptism and Chrismation in the
Syriac Tradition

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CHAPTER I

EARLY HISTORY OF SYRIAN BAPTISM

BAPTISM IN THE THIRD AND THE FOURTH CENTURIES

One of the characteristics of the early Syrian baptism was the absence of a post-baptismal anointing. In the third and the fourth century Syrian baptism there was one or two anointings. But it/they preceded the immersion. After the immersion, communion was given to the baptized. But between immersion and communion there was no rite such as laying on of hands or anointing which corresponds to the "Confirmation" of the Western Church. Acts of Thomas, Didascalia Apostolorum, Writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem, History of John, Catechetical Homilies of St. John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia attest this tradition. All these documents speak only of pre-baptismal anointing(s). Towards the end of the fourth century, a post baptismal anointing was introduced in the Syrian baptism. In the next chapter, we shall discuss the context of its origin.

EARLIEST BAPTISMAL RITES

Acts of Thomas is the oldest available syriac document on baptism¹. It contains five baptismal accounts². Four of them clearly mention an anointing before immersion. In the baptism of the King Gundaphorus and his family, (ch. 25—27) they requested the Apostle Thomas to give them the "sign" of baptism:

"Our souls are turned to God to receive the sign for we have heard that all the sheep of that God whom thou preachest are known to him by the sign".

1 We do not ignore the fact that *the Odes of Solomon* contain a good number of allusions to baptism,

2 Ch. 25—27, 49—50; 121; 132—133: 157—158,

After seven days, they entered the royal bath and the baptism began with the anointing. The Apostle Thomas poured oil upon their heads and prayed invoking the Holy Spirit.

“Come, holy name of the Messiah;
 Come, power of grace, which art from an high;
 Come, perfect mercy; come exalted gift;
 Come, sharer of blessing;
 Come, revealer of hidden mysteries;
 Come, mother of seven houses, whose rest was in the eighth house;
 Come, messenger of reconciliation, and communicate with the minds of their youths.
 Come, Spirit of holiness, and purify their reins and hearts”.

After the anointing, the apostle baptized them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Then the apostle “broke the Eucharist”.

It is important to note that no rite such as anointing or laying on of hands took place between immersion and the communion. The rite of anointing was very simple. Oil was poured upon the head of the candidate with a prayer. This seems to be the oldest way of baptismal anointing. However this corresponds to the anointing of the Old Testament Kings, namely, Saul and Jehu¹, where anointing is followed by an invocation of Yahweh’s Name.

The same rite is seen in the baptism of a general named Sifur and his family (ch. 131). Here also the Apostle Thomas poured oil upon their heads and prayed:

“Glory to thee, than beloved fruit.
 Glory to thee, than name of the Messiah.
 Glory to thee, than hidden power that dwellest in the Messiah”.

Then he baptized them and blessed the bread and wine of the eucharist.

1 1 Sam. 10: 1–2; 2 Kings 9: 6–11
 cfr. 1 Sam. 16:13; 1 Kings. 1:39

2. Another baptismal account of the Acts of Thomas gives a little more developed rite of anointing. In this account, the anointing of the head was extended to the body also.

The Apostle Thomas baptizes a lady called Mygdonia and her Narse Narkia (ch. 120 – 121). Mygdonia uncovered her head and stood before the Apostle. He took the oil and poured it over her head with a prayer. After the anointing of the head, he asked Narkia to anoint the body of Mygdonia. Then he baptized her in the name of the Holy Trinity and broke the Eucharist.

3. The fourth baptismal account of the Acts of Thomas, presents a further developed rite. Anointing was preceded by a formal benediction of the oil.

Thomas baptizes Vizan and certain women. (ch. 157). First of all the apostle took oil and glorified God over it and said:

“Fair fruit, thou art worthy to be glowing with the word of holiness, that men may put thee on and conquer through thee their enemies, when they have been cleansed from their former works—yea, Lord, come, abide upon this oil, as thou didst abide upon the tree, and they who crucified thee were not able to bear thy word. Let thy gift come, which thou didst breathe upon thy enemies, and they went backwards and fell on their faces, and let it abide upon this oil, over which we name thy name”.

After having blessed the oil, the apostle poured it upon their heads and prayed: “In thy name, Jesus the Messiah, let it be to these persons for the remission of offences and sins, and for the destruction of the enemy, and for the healing of their souls and bodies”.

Then comes the anointing of the body. The apostle himself anointed Vizan and asked Mygdonia to anoint the women. They were baptized and the eucharist was celebrated.

4. The importance of the Acts of Thomas is the following.

- i) The Acts present a baptismal liturgy in which the post-baptismal anointing was absent.
- ii) The Acts throw much light into the early developments in the Syrian baptismal liturgy. a) In the earliest stage the

anointing was given on the head only. The oil was poured upon the head with a prayer. b) In a second stage the anointing was extended to the body. In the case of women, the celebrant anointed the head, and the anointing of the body was done by women. c) In a third stage the oil was formally blessed before the unction. Then the anointing was given in two stages: head followed by the body.

iii) The Acts of Thomas apparently give more importance to anointing than immersion. We shall discuss later the reason of this practice.

5 The division of labour between the celebrant and his assistant seems to have led to the origin of two separate pre-baptismal anointings: one of the head followed by another of the whole body.

Didascalia of the Apostles, a third century document attests this development in the baptismal liturgy. In chapter 16, when the *Didascalia* sets regulations on the appointment of deacons and deaconesses, the bishops are given the following instruction:

“In the first place, when women go down into the water, those who go down into the water ought to be anointed by a deaconess with the oil of anointing: and where there is no women at hand, and especially no deaconess, he who baptizes must of necessity anoint her who is being baptized. But where there is a woman, and especially a deaconess, it is not fitting that women should be seen by men: but with the imposition of the hand do thou anoint the head only. As of old the priests and Kings were anointed in Israel, do thou in like manner, with the imposition of the hand, anoint the head of those who receive baptism, whether men or women: and afterwards—whether thou thyself baptize or thou command the deacons or presbyters to baptize—let a woman deacon, as we have already said, anoint the women. But let a man pronounce over them the invocation of the divine Names in the water”.¹

The *Didascalia* insists on the necessity of the anointing of the body. If a deaconess or a woman is present, she shall anoint the body of the woman who is being baptized, and the bishop

1 DBL, P. 12–13

shall anoint the head only. If neither a deaconess nor a woman is present, the bishop himself shall anoint the body of the candidate.

According to Didascalia, in the baptism of women, the bishop began the rite of anointing with the head, and a deaconess or a woman continued the anointing of the body. This practice seems to have soon been adopted in the baptism of men as well. However in the fourth century, the bishop began the anointing with a consignation of the forehead and deacons continued the rite with the anointing of the other parts of the body. The History of John, Son of Zebedee, would be the first Syriac document which speaks of the anointing of the forehead followed by that of the body.

6. THE HISTORY OF JOHN, SON OF ZEBEDEE:

This fourth century document presents a further developed baptismal liturgy. It contains two baptismal accounts. The first account is on the baptism of Tyrannus, the Procurator of Ephesus¹. At the order of the procurator, seventy pints of "fine, scented oil" was brought. John kneeled down and looked up to heaven, and cried out:

"Holy is the Father and the Son and the Spirit of holiness for ever Amen". After people's Amen John made the sign of the cross over the oil and said in a loud voice: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Spirit of holiness for ever. Amen". And again he said: "Holy is the Father and the Son and the Spirit of holiness. Amen".

When the oil was consecrated, John drew near to the water and signed it and said. "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit of holiness for ever. Amen". Thus the water was consecrated.

John asked the procurator to strip off his garments. Then John took the oil, and anointed his forehead in the form of a cross and then the whole body. After the anointing, the procurator

¹ DBL, p. 21-23

was baptised in the Name of the Holy Trinity. When the baptized came up John clothed him with white garments and gave him the kiss of peace. After the immersion there was neither an anointing nor a laying on of hands.

7. In the fourth century, the anointing of the head seems to have lost its significance, and was replaced by the signing of the forehead in the form of a cross. The fourth century fathers often speak of the consignation of the forehead, rather than the anointing of the head. Thus St. John Chrysostom speaks of the “sign of the cross stamped on the forehead” of the candidate. According to the Baptismal homilies of Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia, the signing of the forehead with oil is followed by the anointing of the whole body.

CHAPTER II

ORIGIN OF THE POST-BAPTISMAL ANOINTING

As we have seen in the last chapter, in the third and the fourth century Syrian baptism, there was no post-baptismal anointing. The sole anointing was pre-baptismal and was given on the head of the candidate. Gradually the anointing was extended to the body. Consequently the anointing of the head and of the body became two distinct pre-baptismal rites.

The absence of the post-baptismal anointing was not a phenomenon of the Syrian baptism only. Recent researches have revealed that in the fourth century baptism of Cappadocia, there is no evidence for the existence of a post-baptismal anointing. George Kretschmar and Jean Danielou had pointed out that Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Basil, describe a baptismal liturgy in which the anointing preceded immersion as in the Syrian baptism. The oldest description of the baptismal liturgy of Constantinople, as we know from a homily of Proclus (434—436), also follows the same tradition. Miss Gabrielle Winkler, who has studied the third and fourth century Armenian baptismal liturgy has shown that in Armenia also, a post baptismal anointing was absent.

Towards the end of the fourth century a post-baptismal anointing appeared in the Syrian baptism. It is attested for the first time in the history of Syrian baptism in the *Apostolic Constitutions*. (c. 380)

I. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS ON CHRISMATION

1) Apostolic constitutions contain three baptismal descriptions. The first one is based on the text of *Didascalia* quoted in the last chapter:

“For we stand in need of a woman, a deaconess, for many necessities, and first in the baptism of women, the deacon shall anoint only their foreheads with the holy oil, and after this the

deaconess shall anoint them but in the laying on of hands the bishop shall anoint her head only as the priests and Kings were formerly anointed, O bishop, according to that type, shalt anoint the head of those that being baptized, whether men or women, with the holy oil, for a type of spiritual baptism. After that, either thou, O bishop, or a presbytershall baptize them in the water After that, let the bishop anoint with chrism those that have been baptized” (Book 3, ch. 16, 2–4).

The section which follows, explains the meaning of baptism:

“This baptism therefore is given into the death of Jesus (Rom. 6:8): the water is instead of the burial, and the oil instead of the Holy Spirit, the seal instead of the cross, the chrism is the confirmation of the confession” (Book III, Ch. 17).

2) The Second text has been borrowed and readapted from Diclache. This is also a direction on baptism given to bishops and presbyters:

“But thou shalt first anoint the person with holy oil, and afterward baptize him with water, and finally with chrism; that the anointing with oil may be a participation of the Holy Spirit, and the water a symbol of the death, and the chrism a seal of the covenants” (Bk VII, 22)

3) The-third text is a baptismal ordo(Bk.VII,39–45).The author of the constitutions seems to present it as a model. The baptismal rite is preceeded by a relatively long period of catechumenate, during which the catechumens were instructed in the doctrines of the church. The ceremony begins with apotaxis and syntaxis (renunciation of Satan and adherence to Christ), Then the candidate confesses his faith in the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, “in the holy Catholic Church”, and in the resurrection of the flesh.

Then the oil of the pre-baptismal anointing is blessed “by the priest for the remission of sins, and the first preparation for baptism”. The text gives the content of the prayer of consecration: “For he calls upon the unbegotten God, the Father of Christ, the King of all sensible and intelligible natures, that he would sanctify

the oil 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts. 8:16), and impart to it spiritual grace and efficacious strength, the remission of sins, and the first preparation for the confession of baptism, that so the candidate, when he is anointed, may be freed from all ungodliness, and may become worthy of initiation, according to the command of the only—begotten".¹

After the anointing, the water is blessed². Then the candidate is baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and he is anointed with Holy Myron. During the anointing the following prayer was said:

“O Lord God, who art without generation, and without a superior, the Lord of the whole world, who hast scattered the sweet odour of the knowledge of the gospel among all nations, do thou grant at this time that this chrism may be efficacious upon him that is baptized, that so the sweet odour of thy Christ may continue upon him firm and fixed; and that now he has died with him, he may arise and live with him.”³

After having received the chrismation, the newly baptized turns to the East and recites the Lord's Prayer.

* * * *

Even though the *Apostolic Constitutions* is the first syro-antiochian document which speaks of a post-baptismal anointing, it does not say why the new rite was introduced.

II BAPTISMAL LITURGY OF JERUSALEM AND THE POST-BAPTISMAL ANOINTING

The *Mystagogical Catechesis* attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem (+387) attest that in Jerusalem there existed a post-baptismal anointing with Myron. Did the Jerusalem tradition influenced the Syrian baptism for the origin of the post-baptismal anointing? It is difficult to give an affirmative answer, because of two reasons.

1 Book VII 42; 3. DBL. p. 33

2 *ibid.* 43, 1—5

3 Book VII, 44, 2, DBL. p. 34

1) The modern scholars are not unanimous to admit the Cyrillian authorship of the *Mystagogical Catechesis*. Those who question the authenticity attribute them to Cyril's successor, John II (387—417). If John is the author of the *Mystagogical Catechesis* they were probably delivered after the composition of Apostolic constitution. So the question of an influence of the baptismal liturgy of Jerusalem remains open.

2) In the *Baptismal homilies* of Cyril, which are believed to be authentic, there is not even a single reference to a pre- or post-baptismal anointing. Thus we are not sure whether a post-baptismal anointing existed in Jerusalem during Cyril's time.

However, a study of contemporary documents will help us to understand the context in which the post-baptismal anointing was introduced.

CANONICAL DOCUMENTS OF FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES:

1) The first canonical document which speaks of a post-baptismal anointing in the canons of the Council of Laodicea (c. 380) Canon 48 prescribes: "Those who are baptised be anointed after baptism with heavenly chrism and be made members of the Kingdom of God." As B. Botte says "it is evident that the council did not legislate with regard to a usage universally accepted and respected"¹

Did the Council try to generalise a practice recently introduced?

Canon 7 and 8 of Laodice (on the baptism of heretics) are of special interest.

According to canon 8, the Phrygians ie the Martanists, had not been validly baptised in their sects. They must be carefully taught the doctrines of the Church and be rebaptized. But canon 7 prescribes that the Novatians, the Photinians and the Quarto decimans could be reconciled to the church without

1 B. Botte, "L'onction post baptismale dans l'ancien patriarcat d' Antioche", in *Miscellanea Liturgica in Onore di Sua Cardinale G. Lercaro*, t II (Rome, 1967), p. 800

rebaptism. But they must anathematize the heresy, learn the Creed. After having been anointed with holy chrism, they shall receive the holy communion.

The Canon of Laodicea do not say why the former group was rebaptized, and later was admitted with an anointing canon 7 of Laodicea does not say anything on the leitmotif of that anointing. The first canonical letter of St. Basil to Amphilocus of Iconium could help us to understand the criterion of classification laid down by Laodicea.

2. FIRST CANONICAL LETTER OF ST. BASIL

St. Basil's first canonical letter to Amphilocus of Iconium, was probably written in 374 and it deals with baptism given outside the Church, especially among the heretical groups. St. Basil distinguishes between three categories of heretical groups.

- a) "the heretics" who are completely separated from this Church, and alienated from the Orthodox faith
- b) "the schismatics", who are separated because of certain ecclesiastical problems which could be settled.
- c) "the para synagogues, ie communities formed by disobedient or undisciplined bishops or priests.

According to St. Basil, the heretics like Manicheans, Valentinians, Marcionites and Montanists, should be re-baptised because the father of the church had rejected their baptism. The baptism of the schismatics is accepted as valid by the father because they are "still attached to the Church." In the case of para synagogues, they could be readmitted after punishment.

However, Basil expresses his opinion that the baptism of schismatics like Novatians, Encratites and Hydroparastes should be rejected, because "those whose who are separated from the Church do not have the grace of the "Holy Spirit". But some churches of Asia Miner accept their baptism. Basil do not wish that his position shall cause division or confusion among the Christians of Asia Miner. Basil is very strict towards Encratites. He is of opinion that there is no need of being "polite" towards them. However for an "economy" Basil makes concession.

But the schismatics should not be simply readmitted. They should receive an anointing before the faithful and communicate in the holy mysteries.

To sum up, the importance of Basil's letter in that it permits a baptismal economy, according to which certain heretics ("schismatics") could be readmitted with a simple anointing, even though they are not validly baptised.

"CANON. 7 OF THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE"

An ancient canon, attributed to the second ecumenical council of constantinople (381) prescribes a similar criterion for the readmission of heretics. This document also distinguishes between schismatics and heretics. The heretics like Eunomians, Mastanists and Sabellians should be received like pagans. They should be taught the doctrines of the church and baptised.

But schismatics like Arians, Macedonians, Novatians, Quartodecimans and Apollinarians need not be rebaptised. They should present a written anathema of their heresy. Then they are anointed with the Holy Myron "on the forehead, nostrils, ears, chest and all members." They are signed with the formula "Sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit"—Henceforth this formula became part of the formula of post-baptismal anointing of the West Syrian Tradition.

RECONCILIATION OF HERETICS AND THE ORIGIN OF THE POST-BAPTISMAL ANOINTING:

The fourth century Church faced an unusual phenomenon: Reconciliation of Christians who were baptised in the heretical groups. The Church taught that baptism given outside the Church is not valid, because the grace of the Holy Spirit is not conveyed in the heretical groups, who are outside the Church. Church Fallen like St. Basil held that the baptism of heretics should be rejected. However in the new context the church adopted a "baptismal economy" and consented to reconcile certain heretics with an anointing. The aim of this anointing was to make their baptism valid and convey 'the' sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit".

Before the anointing, the repented heretics should present a written confession of faith and confess the orthodox faith before the community. Hence the anointing given to the heretics was also considered as a confirmation of faith". It is interesting to note that in the Apostolic constitution (III, 17, 1) the post-baptismal anointing is called "confirmation of faith", "seal of the Covenants" (VII, 22, 3).

The baptism of heretics was not "perfect" because Holy Spirit is not present in their sacraments. Through the anointing, their baptism was made perfect. Again the Apostolic constitutions qualify the post-baptismal anointing as "perfection" ("and as perfection you shall seal him with myron-*Kai teleutaion sphragiseis muro*).

Do these phrases of the Apostolic Constitution suggest an influence of the rite of the reconciliation of heretics in the origin of post baptismal anointing?

CHANGES IN THE BAPTISMAL THEOLOGY

The theological controversies of the fourth century also would have played a role in the origin of the post-baptismal anointing.

In the third and fourth century syrian tradition, on baptism was seen as the participation in the baptism of Christ. (We shall discuss this in the next chapter). The fact that Christ received baptism from John, was pointed out to the dicetrists who denied the reality of the human nature of Christ. St. Ephrem wrote: "Christ also approached the baptism, to bear witness to the truth of his human nature" (Ephrem. Diatessaron, IV, 1, SC. 121, p. 93).

As our baptism was the participation in the baptism of Christ, his anointing is the prototype of ours. We receive the same anointing as Christ. As Christ received the anointing as his head, (cfr. Ignatius of Antioch. Eph. 17, 1), in the third century Syrian baptism, the head of the candidate was anointed. In the baptism of Christ, the anointing was the most significative act. Similarly, in the Acts of Thomas the anointing has more importance than the immersion. In the Acts, all the symbolisms are associated with the unction.

But the use of adoptionism, forced the Church to conceal the theology of the baptism of Christ. (Adoptionists held that human

Jesus was adopted as son of God at his baptism, through the descent of the Holy Spirit). In its place, the church stressed on the Pauline theology of baptism as participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. (Rom, 6: 3–4; Col. 2:12)

This tendency is seen in the Catechesis of St. John Chrysostom (Cat.1, 21; II, 11; 25;29, III, 16, VII,22, PKS-II, 7-11 III, 11 –13. and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Hon. 14:3). In the Apostolic Constitutions, baptism is constantly qualified in terms of Pauline theology (CA. III, 17, 1; VII, 22, 2–3; VII, 26, 4–6).

As a result of the new baptismal theology, the pre-baptismal anointing underwent some changes in its significance. The anointing, which was interpreted as participation in the anointing of Christ, was given new meaning such as anointing of a soldier. This tendency is seen in the fourth century fathers who preferred Pauline theology of baptism, Pre-baptismal anointing as participation in the anointing of Christ, would have been incompatible with the theology of baptism as death and resurrection with Christ.

According the ancient syrian tradition, which could be traced back to Christ, Christ received anointing on his head.(Eph, 17, 1). So the candidates received anointing on their heads, since the fourth century syrian tradition saw less relationship between the anointing of Christ and ours, the anointing of the head gradually disappeared or lost its significance. The anointing of the head followed by that of the body was the third century practice. This was replaced by the anointing of the forehead followed by that of the body. Gradually the anointing of the forehead and that of the forehead became two separate rites. The anointing of the forehead was preferred to be called “sign” (*sphrgis/rusmo*). It was interpreted as a “sign of an athlete” (Chrysostom) or sign of protection against satan”, “sign of the sheep”, or “sign of the soldier of Christ” (Theodore).

The anointing of the body was qualified as a means of “fortification against the adversary” (Chrysostom), or “mark and sign of the garment of immortality” (Theodore).

As the theology of the baptism and the anointing of Christ lost its significance, the pre-baptismal anointing lost its pneumatological meaning. We can observe tendencies to associate the gift of the spirit to immersion¹.

To sum up, the Christological heresies like adoptionism forced the church to stress the Pauline theology of baptism, in the place of the theology of the baptism of Christ. This would have resulted in the evolution of a baptismal theology which lost its balance between christology and pneumatology. Baptismal theology became more christological in its emphasis. The rise of arianism also would have enabled the Church to see baptism in christological terms, especially in terms of the Pauline theology. The Pauline theology of baptism as death and resurrection would have been more suitable to point out the divinity of Christ. Moreover, the catechumens of fourth century were prepared to be baptized in the Easter night. The Pauline theology was more relevant to their sacramental experience, than the theology of the baptism of Christ.

The baptismal theology which was more lenient towards christology, also might have enabled the church to re-establish a more balanced teaching on baptism. It was during this period that the Church decided to readmit certain heretics with an anointing which was given as "sign of the gift of the spirit". Can we think that the Syrian Church would have introduced the anointing of "the gift of the Spirit" to have a more balanced baptismal theology, which takes into account the christological and pneumatological implications of baptism? Moreover, the heresies on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit also would have created a favourable context for the introduction of a post-baptismal anointing. A post baptismal anointing of the Holy Spirit could emphasize the divinity of the Holy spirit and His consubstantiality with the Father and the Son.

¹ Chrysostam, Hom. II, 25 SC. 50, p. 147.

Hom. (PK) III, 12; Harkins, p. 164

CHAPTER III

MEANING OF BAPTISM

1. BAPTISM OF CHRIST AND CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Baptism of Christ is the key to understand the meaning of Syrian baptism. According to the Syrian Fathers, baptism of Christ in Jordan is the model and prototype of Christian baptism. Christ received baptism from John to institute our baptism. This tradition can be traced back to Ignatius of Antioch who wrote: "He (Christ) was baptized so that by the experience, he might purify the water" (Eph. 18:2). By his baptism, Christ sanctified the water of Jordan and all the baptismal waters. St. Ephrem writes in the Hymn on Virginity (15:3).

Blessed Jordan, the small river in which the sea of holiness descended to be baptized by your waves, your waters were purified by the descent of the Holy one who instituted the baptism of the salvation of souls".

A Century later, Ephrem's disciple Jacob of Serugh followed the same line of thought:

"The son trod the great high way of baptism,
Causing his *shekhina* to reside in fountains and rivers
So that all water might receive the power to be healed"¹

Again Jacob of Serugh writes:

"The entire nature of the waters perceived that you had visited them—seas, deeps, rivers, springs and pools all thronged together to receive the blessing from your fort steps"²

1 Bedjan, Vol. IV, p. 707. Translation—BROCK, *Baptismal Themes*, p. 327

2 Bedjan, Vol. I, p. 188; BROCK, *ibid*, p. 327.

2. FIRE IN CHRIST'S BAPTISM

The consecration of the waters of Jordan by Christ's descent is often described in terms of fire, especially by St. Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh.

“At his birth a bright star appeared in the sky,
When he was baptized a light shined in the water.....”¹

Again to quote Ephrem:

“When the splendour of the light appeared on the water, and the voice came from heaven, it showed him (John) that Christ descended in the water.”

Ephrem placed the following lines on the lips of Christ:

“The waters are sanctified by my baptism, they received fire and spirit from me. If I am not baptized, they will not be capable of generating sons for immortality”²

Jacob of Serugh used the image of “the Coal of fire” (Is. 6:6) to depict Christ's descent: “(Christ) the coal of fire went down to wash in the (Jordan's) streams and the flames of its sanctifying power poured forth”³.

or “The Holy One came to the water to go down to be baptized, his fire kindled amongst the waves and set them alight”⁴

This tradition has left its traces of influence in the Syrian Orthodox Liturgy of Epiphany. The hymn (Kukoyo) which follows the *sedro* reads:

“When the son of God came to be baptized in Jordan, the water became warm, without fire and wood.....”⁵

3. BAPTISM OF CHRIST AS PREFIGURATION OF HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION:

The early syriac writers like Aphrahat and Ephrem did not give much emphasis on the Pauline theology of baptism as death

1 Ephrem, Hymn on the Epiphany, 10:5

2 Hymn on Epiphany, 14:32

3 Bedjan I, P. 184

4 Bedjan, I, P. 183

5 *Pampakuda* Text, P. 157.

and resurrection with Christ. They saw baptism primarily in terms of the baptism of Christ. However the Syrian tradition did not see baptism of Christ as an event separated from His death and resurrection. In fact Christ's baptism in Jordan anticipates and includes his baptism of death and resurrection.

Jacob of Serugh sees the baptism of Christ as a figure of his descent into Sheol to recover Adam who was kept captive by Satan:

“He went down to the sea of the dead to be baptized like those who bathe; he brought up from thence the penal, depicted in his own image. He spent three days in the pit and found there the image that the serpent had stolen and hidden away in the bottom of sheol”.¹

As Christ's baptism is the prefiguration of his death and resurrection, his descent into Jordan is seen as His victory over Satan and his army. It is a favourite theme of Severus of Antioch;

“Eventhough he did not need a purification, it was for us that he was baptised. By purifying the water and by becoming a bath for Jordan, he delivered it (Jordan) from the domination of demons, as it is written “(thou didst) break the heads of the dragons on the waters” (Ps. 74:13)²

At Jordan Christ broke the head of the dragon, that is Satan, so his baptism anticipates his victory over sin and death, through his own death and resurrection,

OLD TESTAMENT TYPES OF BAPTISM

The Syrian tradition sees in various Old Testament incidents the types of Christian Baptism. In fact the Church fathers both

1 Bedjan, Vol. III, P. 423, BROCK, *Baptismal Themes*, P. 329

2 Severus. Homily 15:8; PO 38—2, P. 423—25.

Cfr. Hom. 10:9, PO 38—2, P. 357

Hom. 21. PO 37—1, P. 83

According to the Gospel tradition (Mt. 12:43; LK. 11:24) demons love to live in wet places. Severus also speaks of this tradition

Hom. 10.9.

eastern and western employed the typological interpretation to explain the mysteries of the New Testament. This they have inherited from Judaism. In the New Testament itself manna is said to be the type of Holy Eucharist (Jn. 6: 48—58), crossing of the Red Sea and flood during the time of Noah that of Baptism (1 Cor. 10: 1—3); 1 Pet 3:19—20), The Syrian Orthodox writers made use of various typology in their baptismal treatises Moses Bar Kepha (+903) gives a list of such typologies:

“..... these very waters have foreshadowed baptism from the beginning: the sea that was divided, (1 Cor. 10:2); the Jordan which purified Naman (2 Kgs. 5: 10—14); the torrent which Ezekiel saw (47: 1—12); the pool of Siloam (Jn 9:7). Moreover the betrothals of Rebecca (Gen. 24), Rachel (Gen. 29: 1—12) and Zipporah (Ex. 2: 15—22) were beside water. So also are the betrothals of the Holy Church beside the waters of baptism”¹.

In addition to it, the Syrian tradition sees in the following passages as types of baptism.² “The water from the wells of salvation” (Is. 12:3);

“the fountain of living water (Jer. 17:13);

“the man who was above the waters of the stream”

When Daniel saw (12: 6—7);

“Water from the rock” (Num. 20: 1—11);

“the water purified by Elisha” (2 Kings. 2: 19—25):

“Water of rest” (Ps. 23:2)³; the water of the pool of Bethesda⁴.

BAPTISM AND THE PIERCED SIDE OF CHRIST (JN. 19:34)

“But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out blood and water” (Jn. 19:34).

According to the patristic tradition, the water and blood which flowed from Christ’s side, represent baptism and eucharist.

1 Moses Bar Kepha, Explanation of the Mysteries of Baptism, 16

2 Cfr. Bible readings of the feast of Epiphany

3 Baptism as ‘water of rest’ see Jacob of Serugh, Bedjan, IV, p. 902. In fact the patristic tradition sees the types of Baptism Chrismation and Eucharist in Ps. 23

4 See BROCK, Holy Spirit, p. 87—88

Various Old Testament types had been used to describe the mystery of the 'water' namely "fountain", (Jon. 7:13), "well" (Num. 21: 17—18) "rivers" or "stream" (Ps. 1:1). The "River of Paradise" (Gen. 2: 10- 14) is seen as a type of the "river" which flowed from Christ's side. Thus Jacob of Serugh writes:

"The crucifiers cast a lance at the Fair one and pierced his side; from it flowed water and blood.

A new well was opened on Golgotha; this is that blessed fountain of Eden, which divided itself up as a great river (flowing) towards the four quarters,

So that the whole of afflicted creation might drink of it"¹

The "water" flowed from Christ's side for the baptism of Adam, says Ephrem:

"There event forth from it water and blood; Adam washed, was given life, and returned to paradise."²

Cave of Treasures, an anonymous work is more explicit:

"The blood and water flowed from the side of Christ and came down into the mouth of Adam (buried immediately below the cross on Golgotha) and they constituted for him the baptismal water, and he was baptized."³

The patristic tradition compares Christ's side with that of Adam. Adam's bride Eve—the mother of old humanity was born from his side, while he was sleeping. Similarly Church, the bride of Christ, the second Adam, was born from his side, when he "slept" on the cross. Jacob of Serugh draws the contrast between the "sides" of the two Adams:

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- 1 Bedjan. II, p. 588-89, Translation by S. Brock, *Baptismal Themes*, p. 331
 - 2 Ephrem, Hymn Nisih. 39:7.
 - 3 Cited by S. Brock, *Holy Spirit* p. 90. There is a Jewish tradition that Adam's body was buried on the site of the Temple of Jerusalem. Christian tradition from Origin onwards says that the site was at Golgotha. The *sedre* of the Good Friday of the Syrian Orthodox Tradition make allusion to this.

“The groom’s side has been pierced, and from it the bride has come out, fulfilling the type provided by Adam and Eve; for from the first he knew and depicted Adam and Eve in the likeness of the image of his only-begotten:

He slept on the cross as Adam had slept his deep sleep,
his side was pierced and from it there came forth the Daughter
of light-
water and blood as an image of divine children
to be heirs to the Father who loves his only-begotten,
Eve in prophecy is the mother of all that lives —
what, if not baptism, is the mother of life?
Adam’s wife bore human bodies subject to death,
but this virgin bears living beings who are spiritual,
Adam’s side gave birth to a woman who gives birth to mortals,
while our Lord’s to the Church who gives birth to immortals.”¹

OLD TESTAMENT TYPES OF BAPTISMAL ANOINTINGS

The Syrian Patristic tradition saw the prefiguration of baptismal anointing in almost all the Old Testament references to oil or anointing. St. Ephrem showed a particular interest in the symbolism of oil. For him, oil is a symbol of Christ. In syriac the words for Christ (msiho) and oil (mesho).

In the hymn on the Virginity Ephrem writes:

“The face that gazes on a vessel filled with oil,
sees its reflection there,
and he who gazes hard sets his spiritual
gaze thereon and sees in its symbols Christ.
And as the beauty of Christ is manifold,
So the olive’s symbols are manifold,

1 Jacob of Serugh, Homily on the Veil of Moses: Bedjan III, p. 299-300

Translation by Brock, *Holy Spirit*, p. 90 for further patristic quotations, Brock, *Ibid*, p. 90-93

Baptismal themes, p. 329-334

Christ has many facets, and the oil
acts as a mirror to them all;
from whatever angle I look at the oil,
Christ looks out at me from it".¹

Oil is the symbol of Christ:

“Who has overwhelmed me in my weakness
with these insistent waves?
For when the waves of oil lift me up,
they hand me over to the sayings about Christ,
and then the waves of Christ bear me
back to the symbols of oil ...”²

The prophet Elisha prayed and the oil of the widow of a prophet was multiplied. She sold the oil and saved her sons from being sold as slaves. According to Epreim the oil depicts Christ who gave himself as ransom for the humanity and saved us from slavery:

“The oil gave itself for sale in place of the orphans,
to prevent their being sold

The price of the oil made an end of the bonds of debt
that cried out against the debtors.

it tore up the bonds that had come to deprive a mother of
her sons.

Oil in its love like Christ, pays debt that are not its own.

The treasure that of its own accord turned up for the debtors
in the pottery vessel

is like the Treasure that also turned up for the gentiles in a
body made from earth.

The oil became a slave for a time to free the freeborn, but
Christ became a slave for a time to free
those enslaved to sin

In both name and deed does the oil depict Christ”³

1 Hymn on the Virginity 7:14 Brock, *Harp of the spirit*, p. 52

2 ibid 7:15, p. 52.

3 Virginity, 7:11-12, Brock, p. 51

The third hymn for the feast of the Epiphany contains a long list of the Old Testament types of anointing.

The “seal of circumcision” (Rom 4·11) was a type of “seal of the anointing”

From the peoples he separated the People, by the former seal of circumcision; but by the seal of anointing, the peoples He separated from the people.¹

Through the anointing Christ makes the gentiles his flock of sheep:

“The oil of the meek and lowly one, changes the stubborn to be like its Lord. The Gentiles were wolves and feared, the severe rod of Moses. Lo the oil seals them and makes, a flock of sheep out of the wolves! And the wolves that had fled from the rod, lo; they have taken refuge in the cross.”²

With oil and water Christ himself seals the new born lambs of his flock:

“Christ and the oil are conjoined; the secret with the visible is mingled: the oil anoint visibly, -Christ seals secretly, the lambs new born and spiritual, the prize of this two fold victory; for He engendered it of the oil, and He gave it birth of the water”³

The leaf of the oil that the dove brought to Noah’s Ark is a figure of the Anointing:

“The leaf of olive arrived, brought as a figure of the anoint, the son of the Ark rejoiced to greet it for it bore good tidings of deliverance. Thus also ye rejoiced to greet it, even this holy anointing. The bodies of sinners were glad in it, for it brought good tidings of deliverance”⁴

1 Hymn of Epiphany, III, 4. NPNF, XIII, p. 269.

2 ibid. III, 7 p.269

3 ibid. III, 1

4 ibid. III, 8. Jacob of Serugh and George, Bishop of the Arabs also used this typology.

The oil that Jacob poured upon the stone of Bethel (Gen. 28:18) is the prefiguration of anointing and consecration as living temples for God:

The oil again that Jacob poured, upon the stone when he sealed it, that it should be between him and God, and that he might offer there his titles, lo; in it a symbol of your bodies, how by oil they are sealed as holy, and became temples for God, where He shall be served by your sacrifices.¹

According to the Mosaic Law, a leper was declared clean by a priest after having been washed and anointed with oil (Lev. 14:1—20). Ephrem sees in this rite of purification a prefiguration of anointing and baptism. As anointing preceded the baptism in Ephrem's times, he reversed the order of rites and says:

“When the leper of old was cleansed, the priest used to seal him with oil, and to lead him to the waterspring. The type has passed and truth is come; lo; with oil have ye been sealed in baptism ye are perfected, in the flock ye are intermixed, from the Body ye are nourished”²

The anointing of the priests of the Old Testament is also the type of the baptismal anointing:

“When Moses had sealed and anointed, the son of Aaron the Levite, the fire consumed their bodies; the fire spared their vestments. But ye my brethren blessed are ye, for the fire of grace has come down, has consumed utterly your offences and cleansed and hallowed your bodies;

As for the anointing Aaron my brethren, it was the vile blood of beasts, that is aprinkled in the horns of the altar, The anointing of truth is this; wherein the living and all lifegiving Blood, is sprinkled inwardly in your bodies, is mingled in your understandings, is infused through your inmost chambers.

1 *ibid* III, 9. Jacob of Edessa (Myron, 2) sees in this incident, the type of the consecration of Churches.

2 Hymn on Epiphany, III, 17

The anointed priest used to offer, the slain bodies of beasts; Ye O anointed and excelling, your offerings are your own bodies The anointed Levites offered, the inward parts taken, from the beasts ye have excelled the Levites, for your hearts ye have consecrated.”¹

Again the anointings of the Kings Saul and David were the type of our anointing. Eventhough Saul and David received the (Holy) Spirit through the anointing, our anointing is greater than theirs:

“As for the anointing of Saul to be king: the sweeter was its savour, so much fouler was the savour of his heart. The spirit struck him and fled. Your anointing which ye have is greater; for your minds are censers, in your temples the Spirit exults, a chamber forever shall ye be unto Him.

As for the anointing of David my brethren; the Spirit came down and made sweet savour, in the heart of the man wherein He delighted; the savour of his heart was as the savour of his action. The spirit dwelt in him and made song in him. Your anointing which ye have is greater, for Father and Son and Holy Spirit, have moved and come down to dwell in you.”²

The people of the Old Testament did not understand the meaning of the symbols which they used. Their meaning has been revealed to us in the Church:

“The anointing of the people was—a foreshadowing of Christ; their rod a mystery of the cross; their lamb a type of the only begotten, their tabernacle a mystery of your churches; their circumcision a sign of your sealing. Under the shadow of your goodly things, sat the people of old.”³

1 ibid III, 10-12.

2 ibid III, 15-16

3 ibid III, 13

CHAPTER IV

MEANING OF VARIOUS RITES OF THE BAPTISMAL LITURGY

1 DIFFERENT TEXTS OF THE BAPTISMAL LITURGY:

The West Syrian baptismal liturgy has been attributed to Severus of Antioch (512–518). According to ancient manuscripts, Severus composed the liturgy in Greek and Jacob of Edessa (+708) translated it into Syriac. The Ordo of Severus is used by the Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholic Churches of Antioch.

In the thirteenth century, Gregorios Bar Hebraeus (+1284) revised and abridged the Ordo of Severus. This text is used by the Malankara Orthodox, Malankara Catholic and Thozhiyoor Churches.

2 IMPORTANT EDITIONS:

A Severus Ordo was published for the first time in 1572 by G. F. Boderianus at Antwerp: *D. Severi Alexandrini quondam Patriarchae de ritibus haptismi*.

B Six different versions are published by J. A. ASSEMANI, *Codex Liturgicus Ecclesiae Universae*, t. I–III. Rome, 1749 (Re-print. 1961)

I = ASSEMANI II, 261–300, III, 168–174,

II = „ II 261–300, III 175–184

(Lower text = Boderianus),

III = „ I, 219–240, II, 214–226 III, 146–152

IV = „ I, 240–258, II, 226–237 III, 152–159

V = „ I, 258–276, II, 238–243 III, 159–162

VI = „ II, 243–261, III, 162–168

Latin translation of these texts is given by H. DENZINGER, *Ritus Orientalium*, 1863.

C Abridged version of Severus Ordo:
Baptismal Ordo abridged by Maphrian Bar Hebraeus, Mar
Julius Press, Pampakuda, 1970.

D An Ordo attributed to Timothy of Alexandria by S. BROCK,
“A New Syriac Baptismal Ordo attributed to Timothy of Ale-
xandria” *Museon* 83 (1970), 367–432.

E There are a good number of different versions of the Severus
Ordo which are not yet published Cfr. S. BROCK, *Studies*,
also our study, “Meaning of Baptismal Anointings According to
the West Syrian Liturgical texts”, *The Harp*. (June, 1989).
pp. 21–30.

3 STRUCTURE OF THE BAPTISMAL LITURGY

The West Syrian baptismal Liturgy has the following
structure. In the Ordo of Severus the liturgy has been divided
into two parts. However this division is absent in the text of
Bar Hebraeus (Pampakuda)

PART I

- 1 Introductory prayers
- 2 Promioun – Sedro
- 3 Epistle and Gospel
- 4 Prayer before the consignation
- 5 Inscription of names
- 6 Insufflation
- 7 Consignation of the forehead without oil
- 8 Prayer before exorcism
- 9 Exorcism
- 10 Apotaxes (Rejection of Satan)
- 11 Syntaxis (Adhersion to Christ)
- 12 Creed (Confession of faith)
- 13 Thanksgiving prayer

PART II

- 14 Introductory Prayer
- 15 Prayer before Unction – 1
- 16 Unction – 1

- 17 Promioun—Sedro (Absent in Pampakuda)
- 18 Benediction of water
- 19 Mixing of cold and warm water
- 20 Veiling and unveiling of the baptismal font.
- 21 Insufflation into water
- 22 Signing of the water
- 23 Epiklesis (Invocation of the Holy Spirit)
- 24 Effusion of Myron on the water
- 25 Unction—2
- 26 Immersion
- 27 Prayer before Chrismation
- 28 Chrismation (Unction—3)
- 29 Prayer after Chrismation
- 30 White garments
- 31 Communion
- 32 Crowning
- 33 Conclusion

4 CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM

In the Syrian Church baptism is administered before or after the eucharistic liturgy, in the presence of the eucharistic assembly. Usually the infants are baptized before it attains the age of 3 months. Baptism can be celebrated on any day of the year except the Great Lent. In the syrian tradition the baptism consists of three rites: immersion, anointing and communion. The West Syrian commentaries on baptism always treat them as integral part of the baptismal mystery. Three commentaries neither spoke of “sacraments of Christian initiation”, nor treated them as three distinct mysteries, The mystery of regeneration “from water and Spirit” is celebrated using a series of rites: inscription of name, exorcism, apotaxix-syntaxis, pre-baptismal anointing (s), benediction of water, immersion, chrismation, white garments and craving. It is always celebrated in a eucharistic context and is completed with the eucharistic communion. The Syrian liturgical and patristic tradition never made any interpretation which compromised the unity of the baptismal rites.

5 ROLE OF GOD-FATHER OR SPONSOR:

In the fourth or fifth century AD, the role of the sponsor was to introduce the candidate to the bishop. The sponsor was a Christian, who could testify to the genuineness of the intentions of a candidate. In the fourth century the church felt the need for sponsors because of the increased number of people seeking baptism. In large cities like Antioch, it was not possible for the bishop and his clergy to know the character and intention of all the candidates. So "sponsors" were given the responsibility to give particular attention to his candidate during the catechumenate.

In the baptism of an infant, one of its closest relatives (usually one of the grandparents) serves as the sponsor and recites the prayers on behalf of the child. Tradition insists on the necessity of the presence of the sponsor even in the baptism of an adult.

At the beginning of the catechumenate, the name of the sponsor was written along with that of the catechumen in the "book of life."¹

Moses Bar Kepha writes on the responsibilities of the sponsor:

The "sponsor" is called by the following titles: leader, near-kinsman, surety and teacher:

- a) "Leader" because he leads and brings to the priests at whose hands the baptism is effected.
- b) And "surety" because he stands surety on behalf of him who is baptized that he will fulfil all those things which he promises relating to baptism.....
- c) "Near-Kinsman" because he is neighbour and family friend of him who is being baptized more so than other people,
- d) He is called "teacher" because he has to teach, him how to conduct himself in the Church precincts and in the pious practices of asseticism"²

1 "Book of life" is the name used in the liturgy. Chrysostom calls it "heavenly book" and Theodore of Mopsuestia "Church Book".

2 Bar Kepha, *Baptism*, 3

is accepted as a catechume, ie a candidate for baptism. This rite which was originally part of the catechumenate, has gradually become part of the baptismal liturgy itself.

7 INSUFFLATION OR BREATHING ON THE FACE:

After having written the names, the priest breathes on the face of the candidate in the form of a cross reciting the following prayer:

“Give him your divine breath that your only begotten son breathed on his holy disciples. Prepare him for, the reception of your Holy Spirit and drive out all remnants of idolatry from his mind, (Priest breathes thrice in the form of the cross on the face of the candidate). Make him worthy of the baptism of re-birth and grant him remission of sins through Jesus Christ your only begotten Son and Our Lord, God and Saviour

Breathing was the central act of the creation of man: the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). In the baptism of the new-creation, the priest breathes on the face of the candidate and make him worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit. The breath (*Ruah*) of God was the principle of creation of the world as well as the creation of man, (Gen. 1:1,2:7) The same *Ruah* is the principle of the regeneration, because baptism, in the words of St. John, is the birth from “water and Spirit”. (Jn. 3:5)

8 CONSIGNATION OF THE FOREHEAD WITHOUT OIL

The insufflation is followed by sealing of the forehead. The priest signs three crosses on the forehead of the candidate saying: “(Name) signed in the Name of the Father + and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit + for the eternal life”.

This rite originally seems to have been associated with the catechumanate, especially the inscription of names. It is attested for the first time in the Syriac “History of John, Son of Zebadee”¹

¹ Cfr. Baptism of the Pagan Priests, WRIGHT, AAA. I, 53; II, 48.

Dionysius the Areopagite, Philoxenus of Mabbug, James of Edessa, Moses Bar Kepha, Dionysius Bar Salibi and Bar Hebraeus also speak of this rite.

In the Ordo of Severus, this consignation is preceded by the following prayer which throws light into its meaning:

“And fashion thy Christ on those who are about to be reborn through (the agency of) my weakness; confirm them on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, plant them as a true plant in thy Catholic Church, that as they advance in the fear of God, thy all honourable and blessed name, O Father, may through them too be praised, together with that of thy only begotten Son, and that of thy Holy Spirit, now and always and for eternal ages. Amen”¹

Some other texts of the Severus Ordo give a different prayer for the same occasion:

“That this person, who has become worthy, through planting, of the likeness of Christ, by means of baptism, may also be a participant in his resurrection; and, as he preserves the gift of the Holy Spirit and multiplies the trust (given him) by grace, may he receive the crown of victory of the calling from on high, and be numbered with the first born who are inscribed in heaven, in Christ Jesus our Lord, along with whom to thee is fitting glory and honour, together with the Holy Spirit, now and always, for ever, Amen”².

The important ideas of baptismal theology are enumerated in these prayers. The consignation is in fact a preparation for baptism; it makes him worthy to receive “the crown of victory” through baptism; his name is inscribed with the first borns of heaven.

By the consignation the candidate is made worthy to receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit as well as the regeneration. In the words of Moses Bar Kepha it is an act of “restoration.”

1 Assemani I—III, See Brock. Studies, p. 26 This prayer is absent in the Pampakuda Text.

2 Assemani IV-VI, Hom. See Brock. Studies, p. 26.

“And he seals him first of all without oil for this reason. It is as when a painter comes to an image which is already old and has the paint rubbed off. First he scours it and cleans it from the marks of its age, and after that he puts paint on it and adorns it. Because if he put paint on it before he had cleansed and scoured it, he would ruin the paints. Likewise, also, when the priest comes to the baptized, who is old and sullied with sin, he first seals him with the cross without oil, thus cleansing off his (marks of) age, and afterwards he seals him with oil, restoring him his pristine beauty”¹

9 EXORCISM

Exorcism means liberation from Satan and evil. The catechumen is liberated from the works of evil and dedicated as “living stone” (1 Pet. 2:5) in the Temple of God, the Church, with baptism, as a soldier of Christ, he enters into a warfare with Satan and his army. Exorcism is in fact an open declaration of warfare against the forces of evil and darkness. The church declares that Satan has no more any right or authority over the baptized. The exorcism prayer of the Pampakuda Ordo reads:

“Lord God, in your name, I mark and send out every evil and unclean spirit from creation which is the work of your hand. Rebuke the perverted and the arrogant one and purify your servant from the spirit of error.+++ O! unclean spirit fear the coming judgement and do not approach the creation of God.+++ It is not the dwelling place of demons; but the temple of God. I make you swear in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.+++ O unclean spirit leave out completely, immediately and forever”²

Exorcism is the declaration of the freedom of the catechumen. He is no more a slave to Satan; henceforth he is a citizen of the kingdom of God. Thus says Theodore of Mopsuestia:

1 Bar Kepha, Baptism 7.

2 The priests makes nine crosses upon the child while he says the prayer.

11 SYNTAXIS: ADHERENCE TO CHRIST

After having renounced satan, the candidate confess his attachment to Christ. The sponsor holds the right hand of the child with his right hands, turns its face to the East and says the confession of faith in Christ:

“I, (N) who receive baptism assent and believe in you, Christ God and in the whole teachings which have been divinely delivered by thee through the prophets, apostles, and holy fathers”.

And immediately the priest begins the Nicene Creed and the sponsor and the community recites it.

Why does the candidate turn his face to the East while confessing his adherence to Christ? Cyril of Jerusalem replies:

“When therefore thou renouncest satan, treading under foot all covenant with him, and breaking that ancient league with hell, there is opened to thee the paradise of God, which he planted towards the east, whence for his transgression our first father was exiled; and symbolical of this was thy turning from the west to the east, the place of light¹. When Adam was expelled from the Paradise, He was led to a life of darkness, in baptism man is liberated from the forces of darkness, and he enters into Paradise, his original dwelling place. This re-entry is symbolised in the turning of the face to the East.

Moses Bar Kepha further develops the symbolism of the East, the place of light:

The East is the region of light. By turning to the East and confessing Christ he signifies that he is confessing that Christ is the light, as He said, ‘I am the light of the World; and that He is ‘the Sun of Righteousness’, as the prophet has said. And he acknowledges that He and His Father and the Holy Spirit are the one True and Light-giving God, and that he is accepting the true and light-giving teaching which was delivered by Him, and that he is promising to do the works of light and righteousness”².

1 DBL P. 28, Myst. Cat. I, 9

2 Bar Kepha, Baptism 9

CHAPTER V

PRE-BAPTISMAL ANOINTINGS AND THE CONSECRATION OF WATER

1 ANOINTING OF THE FOREHEAD (Unction—1)

Confession of the faith in Christ is followed by the anointing of the forehead. The prayer which precedes the anointing throws much light into the meaning of the rite:

“Yea Lord, You sent Your Holy Spirit and created him from nothingness and brought to existence and made him worthy of the holy apostles, plant him as a true plant in your holy Church. Send your Holy Spirit upon him so that he may be worthy of the sacramental anointing. Fill him with your divine gifts. Make your light shine in the heart of your worshipper, so that he may be free from the slavery of sin”. (Pampakuda).

Then the priest dips his thumb into the oil of anointing and signs the candidate three times on his forehead and says:

“N is signed with the oil of gladness, that he may be worthy of the adoption of sonship through rebirth, in the name of the Father + and of the Son + and of the living and Holy Spirit + Amen” (*Pampakuda*).

The printed text of the Severus Ordo gives another formula:

“N is signed with the oil of gladness (to be armed) against every working of the adversary and for a grafting into the good olive of the holy, catholic and apostolic Church, in the name
.....”

The aim of the anointing is two fold:

- 1 It is an anointing to give force; the candidate is armed against satan.

for the devil will not dare to look upon such a sight. Just as if he had beheld the rays of the sun and had leaped away, so will his eyes be blinded by the sight of your face and he will depart; for through chrism the cross is stamped upon you.”¹

In Egypt the destroyer feared to approach the doors of the Israelites which bore a sign on them. According of George, Bishop of the Arabs, it was a type of the cross: “But that it is signed upon his face, upon the head which is the honorable and superior member, shews this: that by the sight of it he shall be terrible to the demons always: even as in Egypt, where the destroyer feared to come near to the door: whereon was the type of the cross.”²

In the words of Narsai, the fifth century East Syrian poet, signing of the forehead is the mark of the sheep of Christ. One is branded with cross, the sign of Christ, to mix him with the flock:

“He (the priest) makes him (baptizand) to stand as a sheep in the door of the sheep fold; and he signs his body and lets him mix with the flock, The sign of the oil he holds in his hand, before the beholders; and with manifest things he proclaims the power of things hidden

To them (ie the priests) he gave the signet of the Name of the incomprehensible Divinity, that they might be stamping men with the holy name. The stamp of his Name they lay upon his flock continually; and with the Trinity men are signing men.”³

2 CONSECRATION OF THE WATER

i) MIXING OF COLD AND WARM WATERS:

After having completed the anointing of the forehead, the priest proceeds to the consecration of the water, which includes a series of rites. First of all, the priest takes warm water in his

1 Cat. (Pk) 3, 27, DBL, p. 37

2 Connolly. p. 13

3 DBL, p-52

... by the heat of the Spirit he purges away the rust of body and soul".¹

At Christ's baptism fire was present in Jordan and Jordan itself has become a "furnace" (Eg. Jacob of Serugh). At Christ's baptism, the waters of Jordan became hot: Thus says Jacob of Serug.

"There went forth from him the Holy spirit, who stord over the water:
the heat of his might made the waters hot,
and his fire was kindled in the streams
before (Christ) descended"²

The liturgy of the Epiphany of the Syrian Antiochian Tradition recalls this tradition:

"When the Son of God came to Jordan for baptism, the water became hot without fire or wood. John drew near and like a blessed priest he laid his right hand on the head of his Lord. And the Holy Spirit flew and came down as a dove and brooded over the waters of Jordan and abided (in it.)"³

Thus Jordan has become a "river of fire".

So the use of the warm water is a symbol which connects the baptismal water with the water of Jordan. As we see below, the aim of the consecration is to make the baptismal water the same water of the baptism of Christ.

Warmth is the symbol of life.

In the beginning of creation the Spirit of God made the waters "warm" through its "brooding". (*Rahel*) In the beginning the spirit of God made the waters "warm", and made it a womb", capable of generating life. Thus, according to Genesis 1:20 creatives of water are the first to be created. Similarly in the

1 Ed. Mingana I. p. 343, Cfr. Brock *ibid.* p. 13.

2 Bedjan. *Homiliae* I, p. 174 quoted by Brock, *Themes*, p. 334 n 45

3 Pampakuda edition (1984), p. 157

as in the passage our Lord breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:22)"¹

In the words of Jacob of Serug "Our Lord went down to the Jordan, and the whole nature of water stirred with joy"² The same event is evoked through the insufflation upon the water. The Spirit of God was "brooding" over the primordial waters. The same Spirit of God makes the water in the font, the means of new creation. The insufflation symbolises the presence of the Holy Spirit in the baptismal water.

iv) THE SIGNING OF THE WATER:

The priest signs three crosses upon the water while saying this prayer:

"O Lord may the head of the dragon which kills men be crushed under the sign of thy cross+. May the invisible shadows of the air flee away+ Lord we beseech you. Let not the demon of the darkness hide in this water, + nor let the unclean spirit of the darkness— (the Spirit) which brings evil desires and rebellion of the mind—descend with him who is baptized.

Let the works of the accuser be taken away from him. *Ekphonesis* Therefore, your Church and the flock saved by your cross standing at the fountains of the river Jordan humbly beseech you and through you and through your father while saying "....."

The signing of the water is therefore an act of exorcism. According to the Syrian patristic tradition, baptism of Christ effected the exorcism of the waters of Jordan and thus all the waters. Demons love to abide in water or in humid places. (Mt. 8: 31-32; Mk. 5: 12-13, Lk 8: 33: The demons led the swine into the sea. Cfr. Mt. 12:43). The Old Testament speaks of a "dragon" (Syr: *tanino*) which lives in the water. (Ps. 74:13; 148:7; Joh. 7:12), Christ's Baptism in Jordan is seen as a victory over the "dragon" symbol of devil and death. That victory is reiterated through the signing of the baptismal water.

1 Bar Kepha, Baptism 12

2 Quoted by Brock, Baptismal themes, p. 327, n. 10

comfort” (Ps. 23:2). It has become the water that *symbolises* (metarzin) “the death and resurrection” of Christ. The expression *metarzin* derives from the root *roz*, which could mean “to symbolize”, “to represent”, or “to make present sacramentally”. Through the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the water becomes a “sacramental sign” which reiterates the death and resurrection of Christ.

Eventhough Syrian baptismal theology constantly refers to the mystery of jordan as the *raison d’etre* of Christian baptism, paschal mystery is not absent in it. Mystery of Jordan and paschal mystery are inseparable. One includes and anticipates the other. Christ’s baptism in Jordan is the anticipation of his death and resurrection. His victory over the demons at Jordan is the anticipation of his victory over satan and death through His descent into Hades and through His resurrection.

vi) INFLUSION OF MYRON UPON THE WATER

The priest takes the horn of myron and lifts it up three times in the form of a cross and says:

O God, the waters saw you;

O Lord, the waters saw you, and were afraid (Ps. 77:17)

DEACON: Halleluya

PRIEST: The voice of the Lord is upon the waters, The golorious God thundered

The Lord is upon many waters (Ps. 29:3)

DEACON: Halleluya

PRIEST: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; from everlasting and unto the age of ages. Amen.

THE PRIEST POURS HOLY MYRON UPON THE WATER IN THE FORM OF A CROSS AND SAYS

We pour the Holy Myron upon this water of baptism so that the old man may be renewed, Halleluya. In the name of the Father + Amen; and of the Son + Amen, and of the living and Holy Spirit unto life everlasting. Amen.”

One of the characteristics of the Syro Antiochian baptismal liturgy is the effusion of myron upon the water. Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500) is the first Syrian father who speaks of this rite.¹ However, this practice could be traced back to the second century. Irenaeus (c. 200) says that the gnostics administered the baptism by pouring a mixture of water and oil on the head of the candidate.² Scholars do not exclude the possibility that the gnostics adopted a practice which existed in the Orthodox Church.³

What is the meaning of the effusion of myron? Moses Bar Kepha writes: "He (the priest) pours the oil on it. Firstly to show that it was for the sake of our regeneration by baptism that the Word of God came down and emptied Himself even unto the enduring of the cross and death. And secondly the "myron" which is poured upon the water here typifies the Holy Spirit. For as the Spirit of God brooded upon the waters in the beginning of creation, that it might impart to them generative and fertilising power, so also here the Holy Spirit "broods" upon the waters of baptism, through the pouring out of the "myron" upon them, that it may impart to them power to bring forth spiritual sons of a heavenly Father. For holy Mar Severus (of Antioch) says in one of his writings that "myron" typifies the Holy Spirit."

The effusion of myron is inseparably related to epiklesis. It symbolises the presence of the Holy Spirit in the baptismal water.

vii) CONCLUSION OF THE CONSECRATION OF WATER:

After having poured the myron upon the water, the priest says a prayer and signs the water and concludes the benediction of water.

1 Dionysius the Areopagite, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, II-ii . 7, PG. 3, 396 c

2 Irenaeus, *Ad Haev.* I, 21, 5 SC. 265, p. 305

3 L. DUSCHESNE, *Les Origines du culte chretien* (Paris, 1920, 5th ed), p 335

A BENOIT, *Baptême chretien au second siècle*, (Paris, 1953) p. 203

F. M. SAGNARD, *La gnose valentinienne et le temoignage de saint Irenee*, (Paris, 1947) p 423.

“THE PRIEST (GEHANTO): O Lord God who sent your Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and sanctified the floods of Jordan, make perfect this servant who is being baptised, and make him participant of your Christ, by purifying him in the salvific washing.

ekphonesis so that becoming triumphant, being renewed and filled with your grace, and keeping your divine gifts which are entrusted to him, we and he may praise you and confess you and your only begotten son and the Spirit.

People: Amen.

Priest: Peace be with you all.

People: And with Your spirit.

THE PRIEST FLUTTERS AND WAVES HIS RIGHT HAND OVER THE WATER AND SAYS

“This water is blessed and sanctified that it may be for the divine washing of rebirth.

Deacon: Barekmor (Bless Lord)

Priest: In the name of the living Father, unto life, -Amen- in the name of the living Son, unto life-Amen- in the name of the living and the Holy Spirit, unto life everlasting-Amen”

3) ANOINTING OF THE BODY: Unction—2 (Absent in Pampakuda Text).

The second pre-baptismal anointing is given after the Benediction of the water, but before the immersion. This anointing of the whole body attested by all the printed texts of the Severus' Ordo, is absent in the Ordo of Bar Hebraeus (=Pampakuda Text). When Bar Hebraeus revised the baptismal liturgy of Severus; he suppressed the second anointing, probably under the influence of the baptismal commentaries of his predecessors. However, the anointing of the forehead (Unction-1) and that of the whole body (unction-2) were originally part of a single prebaptismal anointing. But we do not know, in the Severus' ordo, how one anointing took its place before the benediction of

water and one after. Does it represent a compromise between two traditions? a tradition which has the anointing before the benediction of water (=Dionysius the Arcopagite, Jacob of Edessa and Moses Bar Kepha) and another tradition of giving the anointing after the benediction of water (=History of John: baptism of pagan priests?)

The printed texts of the Severus Ordo gives no introductory prayer for the second anointing, Generally anointing is given without any formula.¹

After the baptism, the faithful is entering the arena of spiritual combat with satan and his forces. According to St. John Chrysostem the anointing confers him the force to resist the adversary: “(The priest) causes your whole body to be anointed with the olive oil of the spirit, so that all your limbs may be fortified and unconquered by the darts which the adversary aims at you”²

Like a wrestler, the baptised is anointed,³ so that the hands of his adversary slip. Thus writes George, bishop of the Arabs:

“That his whole body is anointed, makes known that he is entering a contest against satan. For he also who enters the contest of a combat with men is anointed with oil, that the hands of him who contends with him may slip from him. So here also the oil is an invincible armour against the demons.”³

Moses Bar Kepha also follows the same interpretation:

“He is anointed with oil for these reasons. Firstly, to show that he is entering on a contest and wrestling match with satan. Because he who enters on a wrestling contest is anointed with oil, so that the hands of him with whom he is striving may slip from him. So too, the baptised is anointed that he may not be held fast by the demons”⁴

1 On the exceptions See my article “Meaning of Baptismal Anointings”, p. 27.

2 DBL, P. 40

3 Connolly, P. 14

4 Bar Kepha, Baptism, ϕ 10

“In the words of Cyril of Jerusalem, the anointing makes the baptized “partakers of the good olive tree, Jesus Christ”.

“Then, when ye were stripped, ye were anointed with exorcised oil, from the very hairs of your head to your feet, and were made partakers of the good olive-tree, Jesus Christ. For ye were cut off from the wild olive-tree, and grafted into the good one, and were made to share the fatness of the true olive-tree. The exorcised olive oil therefore was a symbol of the participation of the fatness of Christ, being a charm to drive away every trace of hostile influence. For as the breathing of the saints, the invocation of the name of God, like fiercest flame, scorch and drive out evil spirits, so also this exorcised oil receives such virtue by the invocation of God and by prayer, as not only to burn and cleanse away the traces of sins, but also to chase away all the invisible powers of the evil one”¹

Through the anointing, Christ has put his mark of ownership on us:

“Christ and the oil participate in each other; the Hidden one is mingled with the visible: the oil anoints visibly, Christ marks hiddenly, the new and spiritual sheep

a doubly wandrous flock,
for it was conceived in the oil
and born in the water.”²

The anointing leaves an indelible mark like a signet ring on wax:

“The Holy Spirit incises his mark (*rushma*) on his sheep like a signet on wax, he incises his imprint, the hidden seal of the Spirit is imprinted by the oil on the bodies which are anointed at baptism.”³

1 Cyril, *Mystagogical Catechesis*, II, 3.

2 Ephrem, H. Epiphany 3:1 quoted by S. Brock, *Holy Spirit* p.97

3 Hymn on Virginitiy 7:6
quoted by S. Brock, *Holy Spirit*, p. 97

When Adam sinned, humanity lost the garment of glory with which God had covered them in the Paradise. In baptism we regain the garment of immortality. In the words of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the anointing of the whole body is “a mark and a sign that you will be receiving the covering of immortality, which through baptism you are about to put on”¹

The invocation of the Holy Trinity over the oil conveys it “the divine power”. Those who are anointed with this consecrated oil are “anointed” with the same divine power and they are fortified in the war against the evil forces. To quote Narsai:

“By the visible oil he (the priest) shows the power that is in the Names which is able to confirm the feebleness of men with hidden (powers). The three Names he recites, together with the rubbing of the oil upon the whole man: the hostile demons and vexing passions may not harm him. It is not by the oil that he keeps men from harms: it is the power of the Divinity that bestows power upon (its) feebleness. The oil is a symbol which proclaims the divine power; and by outward things he (God) gives assurance of his works (done) in secret. By his power body and soul acquire power; and they no more dread the injuries of death. As athletes they descend (and) stand in the arena, and they close in battle with the cowardly suggestions that are in them. This power the oil of anointing imparts: not the oil, but the spirit that gives it power. The spirit gives power to the unction of the feeble oil, and it waxes firm by the operation that is administered in it. By its firmness it makes firm the body and the faculties of the soul, and they go forth confidently to wage war against the Evil One. The sign of his Name the devils see upon a man, and they recoil from him in whose name they see the Name of honour. The Name of the divinity looks out from the sign on the forehead; and the eyes of the crafty ones are ashamed to look on it.”²

1 DBL, p. 48--49

2 DBL, p. 54

CHAPTER VI

BAPTISM

1 MEANING OF IMMERSION:

Then the priest makes the candidate descend into the baptismal font, and the priest stands on the eastern side of the font, facing the west. The face of the candidate is turned to the East, facing the priest. The priest then places his right hand on the head of the candidate, and with his left hand he takes the baptismal water and pours it over the head of the candidate; he takes water firstly from the front side of the candidate and pours it over his head; secondly from behind him, and pours it over his head and thirdly from his right side and left side together and pours it over his head. (The act of taking the water is in the form of a cross and the pouring is threefold in the Name of the three persons of the Holy Trinity). While pouring the water the priest says:

“N is baptized on the hope of life and for the remission of sins—In the name of the Father—Amen—and of the son Amen—and of the living and Holy Spirit, unto life everlasting” (Pampakuda).

In contrast to the Alexandrian and western rites, the Antiochene baptismal liturgy always uses the passive formula “N is baptised”. Syrian Church fathers always stressed the importance of using the passive formula. St. John Chrysostom says:

“When the priest says: “So-and-so is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, “he puts your head down into the water three times and three times he lifts it up again, preparing you by this mystic rite to receive the descent of the Spirit. For it is not only the priest who touches the head, but also the right hand of Christ, and this is shown by the

very words of the one baptizing. He does not say: "I baptize so-and-so-" but: "So-and-so is baptized", showing that he is only the minister of grace and merely offers his hand because he has been ordained to this end by the Spirit. The one fulfilling all things is the father and the son and the Holy Spirit, the undivided Trinity. It is faith in this Trinity which gives the grace of remission from sin; it is this confession which gives in the gift of filial adoption.¹

Theodore of Mopsuestia explains the deep theological significance of the Trinitarian formula pronounced during baptism:

"(The Priest) says: 'In the name' of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as if he were saying: we are baptized by the call upon the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit The priest does not say in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, because each of them has a separate name that does not fit that of the other. Indeed, the name of the Father is one thing, if I may so express myself, and the name of the Son is another thing, and the name of the Holy Spirit another thing still, but because (the priest) does not pronounce the name by which each one of them is called, that is to say, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but refers by the word 'name' (in the singular) to the invocation which is the cause of our benefits, namely the eternal nature of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and because this invocation of the Father, the son, and the Holy Spirit is one, he says 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'. We do not name the Father as one cause, the Son as another cause, and the Holy Spirit as still another cause, but because these three form the one cause from which we expect the delight in the benefits which are looked for in baptism, we rightly make use of one invocation only with which we name the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."²

1 DBL. p. 41

2 Mingana, in Wood Brooke studies Vi, p. 60—61.

Why does the priest place his hand upon the head of the candidate? Why is the candidate's face turned to the East? Moses Bar Kepha gives the symbolism:

“The Priest sets his hand upon the head of him who is baptized for these reasons. Firstly, as God formed Adam with his hands in the first creation, so also does the priest in the second creation. Secondly, as John put his hand upon the head of the Son in baptism. And thirdly, the hand of the priest points out him who is being baptized as if by a finger, while the Father cries out “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 3:17). And therefore he is able to say openly to the Father, “Our Father who art in heaven”. Fourthly, the hand of the priest is a secret sign that he who is being baptized is born again. The priest says, “So and so is baptized and not “I baptize”, because the baptism is not his doing but God's and he has been chosen by grace to be minister to the mysteries of baptism.

But the face of him who is baptized looks eastward because it is our first home from whence came out our father Adam, when he transgressed the commandment of the Lord”¹

2 SYMBOLISM OF THE BAPTISMAL FONT:

In the Syrian Tradition, the baptismal font symbolises a “spiritual womb” as well as the tomb of Christ”. George, bishop of the Arabs writes:

“The font represents the tomb of Christ, and the water that is in it, the womb that brings forth children, spiritual and immortal and incorruptible, as by a resurrection of the dead”²

i) BAPTISMAL FONT AS “A TOMB”:

The imagery of the baptismal font as “a tomb” is based on the Pauline theology of baptism as death and resurrection with Christ (Rom. 6:1–4; cfr. Col. 2:12). The three fold dipping in or pouring of the water is associated with the three days that Christ spent in the tomb:

1 Bar Kepha, Baptism, 15.

2 Connolly—p. 14

That he is dipped three times, writes Gerger, is a mystery of the three days our Lord was in the tomb"¹

The Old man is buried in the "tomb" and in Christ, the new man is resurrected. Thus says Severus of Antioch:

You bury the Old man in the baptismal water; for this reason by means of the threefold immersion we indicate the three day burial and ensuring resurrection"²

According to Moses Bar Kepha and Dionysius Bar Salibi, baptismal font symbolises the resurrection of both Christ and the Christian:

"The ascent from the baptistery shows three things. First, the ascent and resurrection of Jesus, from the grave. Second, that there will be an ascent and resurrection from the grave on the last day. And thirdly, that he will rise up above the heavens if he keep the baptism inviolate"³

Baptismal resurrection is the guarantee and foretaste of our final resurrection in the second coming of Christ. Theodore tells in his baptismal homily:

"For we know that death has already been dissolved by our Lord Jesus Christ. In this faith, then do we approach and receive baptism, for we desire henceforward to be associated in his death, in the hope that by the same means we may participate in the resurrection from the dead, in that he too rose."⁴

ii) BAPTISMAL FONT AS A "SPIRITUAL WOMB":

When the priest mixes the warm and cold water, he prays that the water may become "a spiritual womb and a furnace". (see supra). In the epiclesis over the water in the Ordo of Timothy the following request is made:

1 Conno lly-P. 14

2 Homily 90. quoted by Brock, Holy Spirit P. 80

3 Bar Kepha, Baptism 17
Bar Salibi, Baptism 9.

4 Hom. 14, 5. quoted by Brock, Holy Spirit, p. 80.

“We request you, Father of mercy and God of all comfort, send your living Spirit and sanctify this water, and may it become the spiritual womb which gives rebirth anew to mankind who are baptized in it.”¹

The “new womb” was set up by Christ himself at Jordan. Philoxenus of Mabbug wrote:

“Therefore the baptism which Jesus set up is an ineffable mystery, and incomprehensible act, a deed unfathomed by the mind and the new womb which gives birth to the sons of God, in which the Trinity was revealed, the creation renewed in power, the Church united to Christ, the rebellious powers condemned and sin and evil destroyed.”²

The womb of Eve gave birth to mortals; but this new womb gives birth to children who are totally different. In the Ordo of Timothy we see this prayer:

“Instead of the womb of Eve which produced children who are mortal and corruptible, may this womb of water produce children who are heavenly, spiritual and immortal” (35).

In the words of Jacob of Serug:

“Christ came and opened up baptism on his cross, so that it might be a ‘mother of life’ in place of Eve.”³ The baptism gives birth to “spiritual children” and the Church brings them up. In the qolo d’ quqoyo at the beginning of the consecration of water we sing:

“Come, hear and I will narrate to you.

Halleluya (Ps. 66:16)

who sees the two beautiful sisters, like the pure baptism and the holy church:

1 Ordo of Timothy (ed. Brock), 33

2 Fragments of the commentary on Mathew and Luke, 12, *CSCO*. 393, p. 16

3 Bedjan. I. p. 162 quoted by Brock, Holy Spirit, p 85

One gives birth and the other brings up,
 the new and spiritual children
 when baptism brings forth the spiritual
 child through water
 The holy Church receives it and gives to
 the Lord, Halleluya the spiritual child”¹

This idea is again recalled in the hymn which is sung immediately after the immersion (Pampakuda text):

Petgomo: The princess stood in glory... .. (Ps. 45:10).
 Stretch out your wings, O holy Church,
 And great the innocent lamb
 Which the Holy Spirit has begotten
 From the waters of baptism,”

In the following stanzas the church greets the newly born and sings:

“Come in peace, you new lamb,
 The son of baptism,
 The one which is born from the water
 In the name of the Trinity.”

1 Mathew Elanjikal, Baptism in the Malankara Church, p. 65,66

CHAPTER 7

POST—BAPTISMAL RITES

1 CHRISMATION:

Baptism is immediately followed by Chrismation. There is no interval between the immersion and the chrismation. As soon as the priest hands over the child to the sponsor he takes the horn of the Myron and says this prayer:

“O Lord, let your servant who is counted with your worshippers through the faith of baptism, receive this holy seal and sign in your name. So that being spiritually filled with all the sweet odour by this Myron, he may not be caught by the hostile armies. And let him not henceforth be afraid of the evil powers and rulers of darkness, but walking in your light, let him be a son of light and following you he may come to you.”

Now the priest dips his thumb into the Myron and signs thrice the forehead of the baptized in the form of cross and says:

“With the holy Myron, which is the sweet odour of Christ, the sign and mark of the true faith and the perfection of the gift of the Holy Spirit, N is sealed, in the name of the Father † and of the Son † and of the living and Holy Spirit, into life everlasting.

Then the priest anoints the whole body of the baptized.

During the unction the following *manitho* is sung:

“Petgomo: Let your heart be strengthened and fortified
(Ps. 27:14).”

By the washing of grace, you are seen in the world as light. Be strengthened by the power from above through the Holy Spirit. Hate and turn away your face from the old man who is corrupted by the pleasure and desire of error. So far you were engaged in

those works. Receiving the word of life amongst the unbelievers, realize now that you are hastening to the new life which is coming and is promised to the faithful, and you shall be worthy to reign with Christ according to the abundance of his great mercy.”

The Pampakuda text prescribes another hymn also for the same occasion:

“With the holy oil, God said, Aaron must be anointed and thus be sanctified.
With the holy oil is now anointed the pure lamb which came to baptism
(Glory be to the Father)
This is the oil which visibly anoints the pure lamb which came to baptism.
And the Holy Spirit signs it invisibly, dwelling in it and sanctifying it divinely”.

The prayers and hymns quoted above give a clear picture of the significances of chrismation. It is interesting to note the various ideas associated with it.

Moses Bar Kepha summarises various ideas associated with chrismation:

“He is sealed with “myron” for these reasons:

Firstly, that he may acquire sweetness of saviour, which is well-pleasing to God. For, according to the apostle, “we are a sweet saviour in Christ” (2 Cor 2:15).

Second, because by it the baptized is perfected and receives the Holy Spirit,

Third, because it is a sign of Christ, by which he who is baptized is separated from alien flocks.

Fourth, that he may be fearsome to the demons and not dependent on their help.

Fifth, he is sealed upon the organs of sense that they may not be the entrance of sin.

Sixth, again on the forehead that he may be terrifying to demons. Just as what the case in Egypt when the destroyer came not near to the home upon which was the sign of the blood of the lamb.

Seventh, he is sealed upon the heart that it may be an abode not of evil thoughts but of good.

Eighth, upon the joints, so that they may be "instruments of righteousness" as Paul said (Rom. 6:13)¹

In the formula which accompanies the sealing of the forehead chrismation is qualified as "the sweet odour of Christ, the sign and mark of the true faith and the perfection of the gift of the Holy Spirit".

i) CHRISMATION AS THE SWEET ODOUR OF CHRIST:

As we have already seen, in the Syrian Tradition our baptism is the participation in the baptism of Christ. Christian baptism is the 'epiphany' of the mystery of Jordan. The baptismal font becomes the new Jordan. The Holy Spirit who descended and anointed Jesus and revealed him as the "Messiah"-the anointed one. In our baptism the same spirit descends and anoints us. Christ has been anointed with the 'celestial perfume', the Holy Spirit who sanctifies and divinises everything which is put into his contact. Through chrismation we are receiving Holy Spirit "the sweet odour of Christ"-

Dionysius Bar Salibi writes in his commentary as the consecration of Myron:

"People ask: what does myron symbolise? Saint Severus in his letter to John the Roman says that myron symbolises the Holy Spirit who is the giver of graces. Others also say that myron symbolises the Holy Spirit. Thus David (says): "Like the oil which descends upon the head and as the beard ..." (Ps. 133:1, Peshitto). The Holy Spirit is called "oil" which descends upon the head, that is, on Christ in baptism"²

In baptism we have been incorporated into Christ and are made son of God. The perfume makes sweet those who are

1 Bar Kepha, Baptism, 18

2 Bar Salibi, Myron Ch. 7

associated with it. Our incorporation into Christ has made us “divinised” Thus myron symbolises Christ also who ‘became man to make us God’.

To quote Jacob of Edessa:

“Thus, by means of a comparison with what cannot (really) be compared, it (myron) portrays for us Jesus the simple one who came to composition. (Jesus) who is the overflowing fountain-head of divine fragrance, filling the intellect with divine assignments, as a result of the wonderful quality of the scent of knowledge”¹

The baptized is called to be a bearer of the sweet odour of Christ, his divine qualities. Jacob of Edessa who sees in the anointing of Christ by Mary, a figure of our anointing says:

“The words ‘the’ house was filled with a sweet scent” (Jn. 12:3) indicate the Church, which is called “the house of the Lord” (Ps. 118:26) and “the city of our God” (ps. 46:4 Peshitta), wherein we have become a sweet scent in Christ as Paul says (2 Cor. 2:15), by means of the anointing with this holy oil”.

ii) SIGN AND MARK OF THE TRUE FAITH:

“No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). Our faith itself is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Chrismation, the anointing of the Holy Spirit—implies our attachment to the faith of Church. The Orthodox faith is preserved in the Church as a sweet odour and this is symbolised through the chrism, Jacob of Edessa insists on this idea:

“This oil also, as a result of its purity and fragrance, provides us with a type of the pure teaching of the holy Church in that it alone is the true oil, both in name and in what it effects: for the other unguents (. . . .) are a type of the false teachings of destructive heresies, for there possess only the name of “oil”, but they are far removed from the genuine thing”²

1 Jacob of Edessa, Myron, 12.

2 Jacob, Myron, 13

The idea of chrismation as “sign and mark of the true faith” seems to have its origin in the rite of the reconciliation of the heretics existed in the ancient Church. As we have noted elsewhere in this book, the Church received certain categories of heretics with a simple Chrismation—The purpose of their anointing was to “confirm” that their faith is genuinely Orthodox.

iii) PERFECTION OF THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Incorporation into Christ and the consequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the faithful is the purpose of Christian baptism. The west Syrian tradition always sees baptism in these terms. The various rites of baptism—apotaxis—syntaxis, anointings, consecration of water, immersion, chrismation and communion—are inseparably linked with this central idea. ‘From the water and Spirit’ one has been reborn and has become the son of God. He has received the Spirit of sonship which cries Abba Father. He has been anointed with the Holy Spirit and thus become a son of God. Through baptism he has been granted sonship. Chrismation is the fulfilment of that act of filial adoption, Chrismation is not only an organic part of the baptismal mystery: it is performed as the fulfilment of baptism, just as the next act of that mystery—participation in the Eucharist—is the fulfilment of chrismation.¹

Chrismation as the gift of the Holy Spirit is an inseparable part of baptism as rebirth from water and Spirit. The seal of chrismation, in the words of George, bishop of Arab, “is that which completes the divine gifts”.²

The divine gifts that we have been granted in baptism—adoption of sons, garment of immortality—re-entry into Paradise, protection against baptism etc are sealed perfected through chrismation. In fact all the divine gifts that we receive through baptism can also be said as the gifts of the Holy Spirit and can be associated with chrismation also. Thus Jacob of Edessa writes:

1 A. Schmenaann, *of Water and Spirit*, A Liturgical study of Baptism, (CSPCK, London 1976) p. 77

2 Baptism, p. 14

“This oil (myron), then is the beginning of the heavenly path, the ladder that leads up to heaven, the armour against the hostile powers, the indissoluble imprint of the King, the sign which delivers from the fire, the guardian of faithful, driving of the demons; it gives joy to angels, it is both living and life-giving, full of great things entrusted, of wonderous mysteries”¹

iv) CHRISMATION AS ROYAL—PRIESTLY AND PROPHETIC ANOINTING OF THE NEW ISRAEL:

The anointing of the Old Testament, according to the patristic tradition, is the figure of the baptismal anointings. Syrian tradition is also faithful to this typological interpretation of baptism and chrismation. In the Old Testament anointing was given only to priests, prophets and kings. But in the new Israel, every baptised is anointed and made member of the royal priesthood. Jacob of Edessa in his commentary on the Myron writes:

“Formerly a single horn used to anoint prophets, designates priests and proclaim Kings, but here we have an anointing from the Holy One which perfects us all as priests and head disciples of the Apostles, to stand before the Lord God of Israel as a holy people, a redeemed assembly, a royal priesthood, a choice and sweet-scented nation, and one resplendent in an invisible garment.”²

The Old Testament contains the Symbols and types of the anointing, especially in the anointing of various kings, priests and prophets. Its meaning remained veiled to those who administered it or received it. The true meaning is revealed in the New Testament.

“One can learn about the symbols and types of this holy oil, and about the composition of the divine myron, from the Old Testament albeit dimly: how from time to time it was depicted and delineated by the ancients, although not openly or clearly, as in the New, seeing that the New Testament, which is the truth

1 Myron, 10

2 Myron 4

and fulfilment of the Old, had not yet been given. For the Old is the type, but the New the truth; the former is the shadow, the latter the light; the former is the similitude, the latter the reality; in the former are words, but in the latter actions; in the former the mysteries are depicted, but in the latter the mysteries are explained; in the former is prophecy, but in the latter the Lord of Prophecy.”¹

The anointings of the Old Testament are the figure of the anointing of the royal, priestly and prophetic community, which is the Church: To quote George of Arabs:

“He who has received the sign of the Lord in the baptism, can truly reign over all the passions.

By the oil, the Kings received the crown and they reigned.

It is by the oil that the priests received priesthood.

The prophets also were anointed and they prophesied.

The mystery is astonishing, hidden and veiled and is not subject to examination.

When the time came (for the oil) to manifest itself to the nations,

The Church ran with her children and received it”²

Christ “has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father” (Rev. 1:6); in Christ we have become a “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). The anointing of Christ has been given to each baptized.

2 WHITE GARMENTS:

After having been anointed, the baptized puts on white garment. Eventhough the Pampakuda text does not speak of this rite, the Syrian Orthodox baptismal commentaries give great importance to this. The newness which the baptized has received the purity and the innocence which he has regained is symbolised through white dress.

1 Jacob of Edessa, Myron, 1

2 George, Homily as Myron (ed. Ryssel), line. 301-308.

George, bishops of Arabs says:

“The white garments which they put on after baptism signify that they are become sons of the heavenly light, and the softness of the garments is a sign of the easefulness of the spiritual birth”¹.

Moses Bar Kepha gives a more detailed commentary on this rite.

“The white robes with which they clothe him are for these reasons. First to show that he has been in the darkness of ignorance and has become white and shining in the knowledge of God and in the light which he has received from baptism. Second, to show that he has put off the old man and put on the new.

Third, that before time he was without form or beauty, and it is come to pass that he has acquired both form and adornment. Fourth, that after the resurrection he will receive a robe of immortality and incorruption, and will put on the glory which Adam wore before he transgressed the commandment.

Fifth, that after the resurrection he will dwell in heaven as a luminary.

Sixth, that he will shine in the Kingdom of Heaven as the Sun of Righteousness, with the righteous ones”².

The symbolism of white garment also reveals our calling as Kings, Priests and prophets. The linen ephod of King David (2 Sam. 6:14), the sacerdotal vestments of Aaron and his sons (Ex. 28) and the mantle of Eliyah (2 Kings. 2:14) are the figures of the baptismal dress. According to the book of Revelation, white robe is the dress of those who participate in the heavenly worship (Rev. 7:9).

In Paradise Adam wore a garment of glory. As a result of the fall, Adam lost the garment of glory and he acquired a “garment of skin”. In baptism we “regain the garment of the spirit” instead of the garment of skin. The Odes of Solomon, one of the earliest syriac hymns say:

1 Connolly. p. 14

2 Bar Kepha, Baptism, 19.

“In me there shall be nothing that is not light: and I was clothed with the covering of Thy Spirit, and then didst remove from me my garment of skin”¹.

3 CROWNING:

The child is taken to the sanctuary and is crowned. The rubrics prescribe that male must be taken three times around the altar and that female is to be crowned at the entrance of the sanctuary. The following prayer is said during the crowning:

“Crown, O Lord, this servant with splendour and glory, and let his life be pleasing to your majesty and for the praise of your holy name, the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen”. The sugito (= a hymn) which is sung during the crowning clearly speaks of its significance:

“O brother, sing glory to the Son of the Lord of the universe, who has fashioned for you a crown which Kings would envy. Your garments, O our brother, have the brightness of snow And your brightness is more pleasing than the river Jordan. You ascended like an angle, O our beloved, From baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit. Behold, an unfading crown is placed on your head, And today you have put on the glory of Adam’s race. You received, O our brother, the bliss of heaven, Watch, lest the Evil one smatch it from you. Your garments are splendid and your crown is beautiful Which the first—born fashioned for you today through the priest. The fruit that Adam could not taste in Paradise Is today, in gladness, placed in your mouth. Go in peace, you who are baptised, And abore the cross which will protect you. Glory be to the Father, praise be to the Son, Adoration and exaltation to the Holy Spirit”²

The prayer which is said during the removal of the crown also gives the symbolism of the crown:

1 Ode 25:8

2 Translation, Mathew Elanjickal, *Baptism*, p. 71—72

“..... Let him receive in thy heavenly kingdom this crown which is preserved for those who behave well. Let him not lose the help of thy right hand when this crown is removed from him, but let him be protected and strengthened and grow by it. And let him receive the crown of the heavenly call and glorify thee. ..”¹

Crown is the symbol of kingship, freedom and victory. The baptized is entering into combat against the forces of evil. He who wins the battle will be rewarded in heaven with the “crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:8), “the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet. 5:4), the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). In the words of St. Paul, the athletes of this world receive a perishable wreath, but the Christian an imperishable. (1 Cor. 9:25). The baptismal crown is the symbol of the heavenly crown with which we will be rewarded.

4 ENTRY INTO THE SANCTUARY

If the child is male, he is taken to the altar and he is taken around it three times (The Episcopal Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Church resolved in 1988 to extend this privilege to the females also). Entry into the sanctuary means that the gates of the Paradise have been reopened to us through baptism. We approach the tree of life and as the sugito quoted above says: The fruit that Adam could not taste in Paradise” is placed in our mouth. George, bishop of Arabs wrote:

“The entry of the males into the sanctuary signifies the approach to the tree of life, from which in the beginning Adam was withheld by reason of the transgression of the commandment”²

5 THE HOLY COMMUNION:

In the west Syrian tradition baptism is administered immediately before or after the eucharistic liturgy. In fact all sacramental mysteries are celebrated in connection with the eucharist,

1 Translation, Mathew Elengickal, *Baptism*

2 Georges, ed. Connolly p. 15

Bar Kepha also gives the same interpretation *Baptism* 24,

which is, in the words of Dionysius the Areopagite, “the sacrament of sacraments”. Similarly baptism is celebrated in the eucharistic context, with the participation of the eucharistic assembly. One is baptised into the body of Christ of which the eucharistic assembly is the manifestation. Baptism is sealed and perfected with the eucharist. The communion is the fulfilment of the baptism. In the east, the baptized are immediately given the holy communion, irrespective of their age. One who is baptized into the body of Christ, gets the privilege to partake of the body and blood of Christ. The membership in the ecclesial body of Christ, becomes perfect and meaningful through the participation in the sacramental body of Christ. One who is baptized and has become son of God and citizen of heaven, has the full right to partake of the celestial banquet. Moses Bar Kepha writes on the meaning of the communion:

“The reception of the holy mysteries shows, first, that he is fully initiated and perfected in gifts; second that he has been united to the Word of God and has become a member of Him, third, that the fatted calf has been slain for him because “he was dead and is alive, and was lost and is found” (LK. 15:23—24), fourth, as bodily children come to bodily nourishment so also do spiritual children; fifth, it shows the banquet which is prepared for the saints in the Kingdom of Heaven”.¹

1 Bar Kepha, Baptism, 25.

CONCLUSION

Baptism, the rebirth from “water and spirit” has its foundation in the baptism of Christ. Baptism of Christ has two elements: immersion in Jordan and anointing by the Holy Spirit. In the baptism of Christ the two elements cannot be separated from each other. The baptism of Christ and his anointing by the Spirit are not two separate sacramental realities. For the west Syrian tradition this theological vision is the basis of all reflection on baptismal liturgy.

In the Christian baptism, the event at Jordan is reactivated: The baptismal water becomes the same water as of Jordan. The catechumen participates in the same baptism of Christ and receives the same anointing of the Holy Spirit. The mystery of Jordan is sacramentally re-presented through a series of rites: Pre-baptismal anointings, consecration of water, immersion and chrismation. The rebirth from water and spirit, the incorporation into Christ and the filial adoption in Christ are sacramentally realized through water and oil. The west Syrian tradition always insist that water and oil/myron are indispensable for the administration of baptism.

Baptism and the gift of the Holy spirit are not two separate realities. Baptism itself is rebirth from “water and Spirit”. We are baptized in the Holy Spirit and have put on Christ. Through our incorporation into the body of Christ, we have been given the spirit of Sonship. Christ is “Pneumatophore”, bearer of the Holy Spirit, and one who is united to Christ is given the same Spirit who is eternally present in Christ. As Severus of Antioch said (following Basil of Caesania and Gregory of Nyssa), in the Kingdom of the Father, Son is the King and Holy Spirit is the royal anointing of the son. The title “Christ” itself evokes this idea. As *Severus* says, following a patristic tradition, to speak of Christ implies that Father is the one who anoints, Son

is the one who is anointed and the Holy Spirit is the anointing¹. In the baptism we are made worthy of participation in this trinitarian relationship. We are made “sons” of the Heavenly Father, through our incorporation into Christ; the Holy Spirit perfects us as “Christs” with his royal and priestly anointing.

1 Severus. Hom. 42, PO. 36-1, p. 65-67,
cfr. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* XII, 28 Sc. 17 bis, p. 345
Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*, 52 pg. 42, 1249 D.

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QUESTIONS

- I What is the importance of the Acts of Thomas in the study of the earliest Baptismal rites?
- II When did the post-baptismal anointing appear in the Syrian-baptism? What is the document in which this is attested for the first time? Give a brief account of this.
- III Give a brief account of the post-baptismal anointing as attested in certain documents of the time. (4th century)
- IV Show how the Theological controversies of the fourth century played a role in the origin of the post baptismal anointing.
- V Describe how the Syrian Patristic tradition related Christian baptism to the baptism of Church and the baptismal anointing to the old testament references to oil or anointing
- VI Give a brief analysis of the structure of the West Syrian Baptismal liturgy.
- VII What are the responsibilities of the sponsor mentioned by Moses Bar Kepha.
- VIII Give a brief account of the consecration of the water of baptism.
- IX Write short notes on:
 - 1) Meaning of immersion
 - 2) Symbolism of the baptismal font
 - 3) Chrismation
 - 4) White garments
 - 5) Crowning
 - 6) Entry of the child into the sanctuary
 - 7) Holy Communion given to the baptized child.

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