

HOLY SPIRIT IN THE WRITINGS OF NARSAI OF NISIBIS

Fr. Sebastian John Kizhakkethil

1. Introduction

Narsai of Nisibis is a well-known Syrian Christian figure who made significant contributions to Christian theology and biblical exegesis. The notion of the Holy Spirit is a major element in his writings. Narsai stresses the significance of the Holy Spirit in the Christian faith in his homilies and commentaries, portraying the Spirit as the source of all spiritual life and how Christians are linked with God. He also believed that the Holy Spirit is the agent of regeneration, allowing believers to be born again and live a new life in Christ. Narsai stresses the significance of the Holy Spirit in the Christian faith in his homilies and commentaries, portraying the Spirit as the source of all spiritual life and how Christians are linked with God. He also believes that the Holy Spirit is the agent of regeneration, allowing believers to be born again and live a new life in Christ. Narsai also emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, notably in the practice of Christian virtues such as love, humility, and obedience. He teaches that the Spirit is the source of all good actions and that Christians may live pure and virtuous lives with the Spirit's direction and assistance.

2. The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit Rooted in the Trinity

Narsai's pneumatological doctrine was founded on scripture and tradition. His concept of God is triune, consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Spirit's connection to the other two persons is that the Spirit is one of the three persons in the Trinity, along with the Father and the Son. The Spirit exists beside and flows from the Father. The spirit is of the same substance and nature as the Father. Between the Father and the Spirit, there is no time. The spirit comes from the Father, and the Son is created from the Father without beginning, therefore the Father is the source of both the spirit and the Son. Narsai used various theological imageries and terms like *ituta*, *itya*, *kyna*, *qnoma*, *persopa*, and *Sebyana* to describe his notion of the Trinity.

3. Soteriology

The First Adam was created in the image of God in the sense that he mediated God's love and authority to the rest of the creatures but he sinned and disfigured God's image in him leading to his expulsion from Paradise. Adam desperately needed redemption but could do nothing to save himself from the painful disfigured situation. The Second Adam, Christ appears at this juncture to redeem the human race and to restore the lost image of man.

3.1. Incarnation

The act of incarnation itself was a refiguring process in the sense that a New Adam as the perfect image of God was formed in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. The incarnation of the Father's word did not change his nature, but the nature of the word remained the same, so we call him *kyana-assumptus*.

3.2 Invigoration

The word of the Father dwells in the incarnated Son, making him all-powerful. He is equipped for the work of redemption through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit anointed Jesus as a dove at the time of his baptism in the Jordan. He was the Son, but now the Father and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit made it known to the world that he was the Son.

3.3 Refiguration

The second Adam, Jesus Christ, put an end to human mortality through his death and resurrection. Jesus' death was a triumph because it marked the end of death. Second Adam released the captives of death from Sheol through the power of the spirit. Jesus was raised from the dead by the spirit, and by his resurrection, he conquered both sin and death. The entirety of Christ's atoning act is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. The apostles were given the power of the spirit to finish the work of redemption. The apostles perfected the redemptive work through the power of the Spirit. Narsai interpreted the Bible as the source of the Holy Spirit's participation in the economy of salvation. He advocated a pneumatological soteriology.

4. Holy Spirit in the Church

Narsai firmly believed that the holy spirit constitutes the church as the new Israel leading to the promised land of the Father. The beginning of the Church is marked by Pentecostal events. A new, life-giving covenant was made to replace the previous one. While the New Israel, the church, is betrothed to Christ, Old Israel was the bride of Yahweh. The apostles were given power and given the Holy Spirit to combat the forces of evil. Apostles spread the word of God through baptism, which they used to instil genuine faith. They travelled to various parts of the world. People join the church, which is the community of the one who has been chosen, by baptism. The Church in the New Testament is led by the same God who operated in the Old Testament through his prophets and the chosen one.

5. Holy Spirit in the Sacraments

Jesus' baptism in Jordan is the source and model of Christian baptism. In his baptism, Jesus received the spirit and through the gift of the spirit he fulfilled and perfected the human race and made it share the wealth of the spirit. Christian baptism is the human race's way to renewal which is opened by Jesus through his baptism. The oil used in baptism is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit strengthens those who receive baptism. The celebrant signs the candidate as a mediator of the Lord and imparts the Holy Spirit. The spirit wipes out the iniquities of the soul through a 'spiritual circumcision.' Through baptism one becomes the son/daughter of the heavenly father and he/she receives the Holy Spirit. The mediation of the priest gives the power to water to make atonement and depicts a spiritual image. Baptism represents Jesus' death and resurrection. Plunging into the water represents dying and being buried in a tomb while emerging from it represents being raised from the dead. A regeneration in water and spirit occurs after baptism. We experience the Holy Spirit's renewal and rebirth via baptism. The remission of sins, which causes the baptized person to become a new creation in Christ, is one of the results of baptism.

The Eucharist is blessed by the Holy Spirit, and all who partake in it are given eternal life. Through the priest, the spirit celebrates the mysteries, and by calling on the Holy Spirit, bread, and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. When Narsai refers to the Eucharist as having a pneumatic substance, he uses the term *gmourtha* to indicate this. By the

eucharist, which unites us into one body and guides us towards the last resurrection, the holy spirit grants us immortal life.

According to Narsai, the priest serves as the Holy Spirit's treasurer and intermediary, distributing to humanity the benefits of redemption. Priests share spiritual resources; they get the power of the Holy Spirit after being sanctified by it. Upon the priest's request, the Spirit enters and dedicates the mysteries. Through the priest, Christ can forgive sins and regenerate the human race. As atonement for human sin, the priest gives the Eucharist. The earliest priests of the Church were the apostles, who were baptised by the Holy Spirit before administering baptism to others. The choice of seven deacons is evidence of spiritual intervention.

6. Conclusion

Narsai had a clear pneumatological doctrine based on the scripture and tradition. His teachings were developed based on the trinitarian framework. The Soteriology of Narsai is built upon pneumatology because the mystery of the Son and that of spirit are revealed with our redemption. The ecclesiology of Narsai has a pneumatological dimension. It is the spirit that unites the Apostles and the early community of believers as an animating principle of the Church. The pneumatology of Narsai is quite relevant in our period in a way we can see a renewed interest in the study of the Holy Spirit in our times. On the pretext of the Second Vatican Council Holy Spirit has been attaining due attention.

The Assignment is based on the book, 'The Holy Spirit in Narsai of Nisibis A Theological Synthesis' by Issac Arickappallil CMI, 1992, Rome