

Infant Baptism and the Adam Sin

East Syrian fathers often emphasize that children are not baptized for the forgiveness of sins. However may be one asks oneself at first whether they are hereby denying original sin.⁷⁴ This is shown in the abolition of the ritual of exorcisms and the Rejection of Satan in infant baptism, which was in advance applied to the Baptism of adults who confessed their sins. In general, the East Syrian fathers do not seem to accept any inheritance of Adam's guilt.⁷⁵ Let us delve a little deeper into the thought of the Church Fathers on this issue.

According to St. Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 428), salvation is based on restoring the grace and fellowship with God that the first Adam lost after sin and death through the sacrament of baptism. Theodore points out that the death referred to is the death of the soul, and he asserts that through sin, death entered, and this death weakened human nature and caused a strong tendency to sin. Sin is a conscious rejection of God's will, and only through Christ did man regain his perfection and harmony. According to Theodore of Mopsuestia, through Adam human nature man inherits mortality, not sin nor guilty. In his sense, the death which was caused by the fall means to be separated from God and to return to the earth and to be in alliance with Satan. Sin is an action of voluntary disobedience to God commandment. Accordingly, it is not innate in man nature but is a result of his choices, namely, of the practice of will because sin is an ownership of will, not of nature. He asserts that man natural inherited mortality which underlies his moral failure.⁷⁶

Babai the Great (551-628) confirms this explicitly that by sin death entered in, and this death weakened human nature and produced in it a great tendency towards sin. Sin is not transmitted from one person to another through heredity as a personal act, but rather what is transmitted is the result: the tendency. Thus, He regards mortality as the cause and the effect of sin and Death reigned over all who had sinned in any way whatsoever. He denies the consequences of Adam's

⁷⁴ Original sin isn't biblical term, but it is the Christian doctrine that holds that humans, through the fact of birth, inherit a tainted nature in need of regeneration and a proclivity to sinful conduct. This belief began to emerge in the 3rd century, but only became fully formed with the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354–430), who was the first author to use the phrase "original sin". Influenced by Augustine, the councils of Carthage (411–418 CE) and Orange (529 CE) brought theological speculation about original sin into the official lexicon of the Church. Early Christianity had no specific doctrine of original sin prior to the 4th century. The idea developed incrementally in the writings of the early Church fathers in the centuries after the New Testament was composed. The authors of the Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Epistle of Barnabas, all from the late 1st or early 2nd centuries, assumed that children were born without sin; Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, from the same period, took universal sin for granted but did not explain its origin from anywhere. See: Wiley, Tatha, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings*, 2002.

⁷⁵ As well, we find this notion as in Jewish Thought. The first writings to discuss the first sin at the hands of Adam and Eve were early Jewish texts in the Second Temple Period. In these writings, there is no notion that sin is inherent to an individual or that it is transmitted upon conception. Judaism does not see human nature as irrevocably tainted by some sort of original sin. See: Eugene Boring, *Introduction to the New Testament: History, Literature, Theology*, 2012.

⁷⁶ Theodore Commentary on Romans, 5:13-14, Staab, 56,119; Mingana, Theodore of Mopsustia, VI, 21, 30.

sin for the whole human race. He said in his book of the Union: *The man of our Lord was not worthy of death in the name of the sin by which Adam and all his descendants were kept, who all sinned.* It is not said here whether all sinned personally or whether all sinned in Adam. So he admits consequences of Adam's sin for his descendants, and he doesn't deny that the death came into the world through Adam's sin.⁷⁷

In the questions about baptism it says: *Why is it ordered in the book of Mar Ishoyahb III that the priest should mark the person to be baptized with his thumb, whereas now we see that should mark with the finger next to the thumb? Answer: in the first days previously men and women were baptized. Because they were entangled in sin and because grace called them to faith, he indicated them with his thumb. But now the Children are true Christians and they are baptized as innocent (guiltless) children and are not involved in sin. Therefore they are designated with the finger next to the thumb.*⁷⁸ Timothy II (c.1332) also teaches that children are clean of sin and are therefore not baptized for the eradication of sin.⁷⁹

As well, the sinlessness of children is emphasized in the baptismal liturgy: *and though their bodies are not defiled with the filthiness of sin, yet they receive an imperishable purity, and they desire to become members of Christ.*⁸⁰ Since the fathers viewed the children as sinless, they changed the baptismal rite that presupposed sin in the baptized person when infant baptism became common among them. This change is generally attributed to Ishoyahb III. The exorcisms and the rejection of Satan were abolished. However, in today's rite of child baptism there are still traces of the old ritual, an allusion to the earlier rejection of Satan and the creed.⁸¹

In addition, Ishodad of Merv (850) formally denies inheritance of Adam's guilt. He comments on the text in Romans: *Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression. (5.14).* He remarks: *the tree was not forbidden to them, and they had not taken from it and eaten like Adam.*⁸² Thus he interprets the text as denying the participation of man in Adam's sin.

Some authors attribute the death sentence on all mankind not to the sin of Adam, but to the fact that all humans sinned personally. Theodor bar konai (end of 8th Century) asserts what he means by the word (in the manner of Adam's transgression) is that they died like Adam, even though they sinned in different ways. So death came upon people because of their personal sin.⁸³ Timothy I (780 to 823) also says that Death reigned from Adam to Moses etc (Rom. 5.14); that

⁷⁷ Mar Babai the Great, Liber de unione, 30, 116,182.

⁷⁸ Wilhelm. De Vries, Zur Liturgie der Erwachsenentaufe bei den Nestorianern, 160.

⁷⁹ Timothy II, III, 16, f. 64v.

⁸⁰ Baptismal Rite, 115; Diettrich, die nestorianische Tauf liturgie, 7.

⁸¹ Ibid, 19. We find a description of the old adult baptism in Timothy II. He knows the exorcisms and the rejection of Satan. So Emmanuel Bar Shahare mentions the rejection of Satan and the creed in his Memra about baptism. See: Wilhelm. De Vries, Zur Liturgie der Erwachsenentaufe bei den Nestorianern, in OCP IX (1943), 465.

⁸² Ishodad, Commentaries V, 2, 7.

⁸³ Theodore Bar Konia, Liber Scholoeum, II, 199.

is: *and those to whom the law was not imposed from Adam to Moses, and those to whom the law was imposed, from Moses to Christ our Lord, have all sinned, although not in the likeness of Adam's transgression, and the bondage of death and Satan's sin ran to all men.*⁸⁴ Abdisho Bar Brikha (14th century) judges similarly in his saying as following: *Their sons likewise, pursuing the same way of transgressions, of ill-natured men, laid the yoke of death upon their necks severely.*⁸⁵

In Addition to that, we find much more often in the fathers thought that the sin of Adam itself had disastrous consequences for all mankind. Joseph Khazzaya (7th century) said that natural death was imposed by God on Adam and on all his sons for violating the commandment.⁸⁶ Ishodad of Merv (9th century) writes: *When Adam sinned by transgression the commandment, death thought he would wear a crown and reign forever.... The death sentence (verdict) came by the fall of Adam...., he was found guilty for he was the cause of the death penalty that fell upon all.*⁸⁷ As well we find another witness in the questions attributed to Simon Kepha it says: *Death began from our father Adam by transgression the commandment and he handed it over to all people, and they became mortal.*⁸⁸ So disastrous consequence of Adam sin to all human race is death.

It was condemned by the Synod of 596. Here the view of those who claim that sin is in nature and that people sin without their will is rejected. And whoever said that the nature of Adam was created immortal from the beginning let him be accursed. In this clear text says that sickness and death are not the result of Adam sin, but are related to the corrupted nature of humanity.⁸⁹ This is also found it with Johannan Bar Zobi (13th century). He writes: *: God gave man when he was watching him to live with his descendants forever, when he was not watching the death sentence on him and his descendants. Satan seduced Adam to sin. And he and his descendants became a slave of Satan. Three dominions subjugated the beloved heir: Sin, Death, and Satan, the tyrant of those who rebelled.*⁹⁰

On the other hand, the transmission of Adam's guilt to his descendants is generally not recognized among the church fathers. Only rarely do we find texts, which seem to indicate an inheritance of guilt itself. According to the Anonymous Author (9th Century), the white cloth (ܘܚܘܘܢܐ) that the priest wears on his head when serving sacrament of the baptism means that his head became white, which was black due to Adam's sin. He wears it before he goes to baptize

⁸⁴ Timothy I, Epistulae, 149.

⁸⁵ Abdisho Bar Brikha, Marganitha II, 3, 347.

⁸⁶ Joseph Khazzaya, Borg. Syr. 88, 342; De Vries, Sakramentheologie, 162.

⁸⁷ Ishodad of Merv, Commentaries V, 2, 7-8.

⁸⁸ De Vries, Sakramentheologie, 162; Questions of Mar Simon Kepha on the divine mysteries, viz., the sacred fermentum and fermentum of baptism. Vat. Syr. 164, f. 69r.

⁸⁹ HABBİ, Joseph, *يوسف حبي مجامع كنيسة المشرق*, / mġām 'knystālmšrq / Synods of the Church of the East, Beirut 1999, see: Mar Aba council 598, Canon 16, 445; J. B. Chabot, Synodicon Orientale, Paris 1902, 459.

⁹⁰ Johannan Bar Zobi, explanation of all divine mysteries, Borg. Syr. 90, f. 35 b.

and purify the candidates from the sin.⁹¹ The same idea is seen in the baptismal commentary of Timothy II (14th Century) who also criticizes the opinion of some that the head of John was covered with much thick hair due to the lack of hair cutters, so the priest covers his head with hood. But Timothy II says that the priest wears white hood to show that he is about to cleanse men from sin.⁹² Also, Timothy II speaks of a decree of God made against man as a result of Adam's sin, and was abolished in their reconciliation with God through redemption. He also names evil covetousness and slavery to sin as consequences of Adam's sin: *because men strayed from God, and thus drew upon their liberty the yoke of the bondage of sin and imposed it by breaking the law. From then on all the children of Adam were inherent in deeds of sin, as one born of a slave is a slave until he receives deliverance from bondage. The bondage of sin seems here to be thought of as Adam's inheritance. In baptism, children are freed from the bondage of sin.*⁹³

That children must be baptized because they are burdened with original sin, Adam's guilt, is never clearly spoken by the fathers. Yes, it is expressly emphasized, as we said above, that children are not baptized for the eradication of sins. The baptism of children in the rite of the Church of the East is not because of sin, but because of their need to receive the grace of divine sonship. The Fathers try to explain the meaning of infant baptism in a different way. Mar Babai the Great writes: *For, behold, even children are baptized from their infancy, not for the remission of sins – but for how? Behold, they did not sin - but for the adoption of sons, that they might receive the first fruits of the Spirit for the mystery of the resurrection and the redemption of their bodies.*⁹⁴ This concept may be borrowed from the Antiochene tradition. Because St. John Chrysostom says that we prepare children even though they are without sin, so that they may have: righteousness, sonship, inheritance and grace, that is, until they are brothers of Christ and members of his body and the Holy Spirit dwells in them.

When asked about the meaning of infant baptism, Timothy II (14th Century) replies that, the children are indeed clean from sin, but they still have to be adopted. From this adoption comes the release from the yoke of bondage to sin: *And because it is not fitting that while they are still slaves of sin they should receive the name of the sons of God, they are first freed from the yoke of the bondage of sin, and then they are made worthy of child adoption, so that through their freedom they may receive the inheritance of God. therefore the gift is not in vain even in those who approach baptism as sinless boys and children, because they were born of bondage, and are servants to the sin of the first man, which reigns over all men through the transmission of the law. But through baptism they receive their union. But for this reason we baptize infants, although they are without sin, that they may be delivered from bondage and become sons of*

⁹¹ Anonymous II, 93.

⁹² Timothy II, III, 18, f. 77v. Cf. P.B. Kadicheeni, *The Mystery of Baptism: the test and translation of the chapter on Holy Baptism from the Causes of the Seven Mysteries of the Church of Timothy II, Nestorian Patriarch (1318–1332)*, Bangalore 1980, p. 76.

⁹³ Mar Timothy II., III, 20, f. 8 80v., 81r.

⁹⁴ Babai the Great, *Book of the Union*, 116.

*God.*⁹⁵ It is noteworthy that deliverance from the bondage of sin and adoption of child are here conceived from each other as two quite independent things. The idea that original sin essentially consists in the lack of filiation grace caused by Adam is far from Timothy.

The question now arises whether, according to the fathers, infant baptism is necessary for the eternal salvation of children. In the questions about baptism, a penalty is laid down for parents who let their children die without being baptized. This is felt to be something completely inappropriate. As well in is mentioned in this book that in an emergency, the children can also receive baptism during Lent. In addition, the deacon can also administer baptism in emergencies. Abbreviated rites are provided for emergencies.⁹⁶ In another manuscript of the Questions on Baptism, to the blame of parents who let their children die without baptism.⁹⁷ The fact remains that the church fathers generally regard baptism as necessary. It is the fundamental sacrament through which man is accepted into the Church, becomes a Christian, and receives the grace of the sonship. From this perspective, East Syrian theology sees the baptism of children as a celebration of the mystery of life rather than salvation from sin.