

# **cristianesimo nella storia**

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# Christology and Deification in the Church of the East

## Mar Gewargis I, His Synod and His Letter to Mina as a Polemic Against Martyrius-Sahdona

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We should like, with our paper, to highlight another aspect of the Christological controversy that took place immediately after the ‘nestorianization’ of the Church of the East in 612 AD. We mean the controversy of *Martyrius-Sahdona* and the reaction of the catholicos *Gewargis I*. In *Martyrius’* Christology, the ‘divinization’ of the mystic is seen as a consequence of the ‘divinization’ of the human nature in Christ because of the union of the two natures that occurred in the one hypostasis and person of the Word, refuting in this way, the official doctrine of his Church, i.e. the two natures and hypostases united in the one person of Christ. Against this Christology, the catholicos *Gewargis I* attempted to intervene on two levels: canonical, through a synod convoked in Qatar in 676, and doctrinal, through a letter written in 679/680 and sent to Mina, a Corepiscopo in Persia. In the synod, there was a controversy against certain ‘false monks’ and a focus on the importance of the Orthodox faith to counteract heretics; his letter, on the other hand, expressed a true controversy against those who taught the hypostatic union, i.e., *Martyrius* and his followers. In the letter, moreover, the catholicos proposes a doctrine of ‘divinization’, based, however, on the official Christological doctrine of his Church. Their Christologies will be studied and compared so we can illustrate better this important period of the history of this church. We will see also how the catholicos developed the Christology of the two-*qnomē* so that the doctrine of ‘divinization’ could be applicable in its metaphysical system.

Keywords: Deification, Christology, Nature, Hypostasis and Person

### 1. *Introduction*

The Christological disputes within the Church of the East, known also as the Nestorian Church, can be seen under the prism of different spiritual models. The history of spirituality and monasticism in

Persia is always accompanied by controversies and struggles among several monastic communities<sup>1</sup>. The controversy against *Hennana*, for example, also had a monastic dimension<sup>2</sup>. The Christological model, in fact, is the basis of the spiritual doctrine and its finality. The condemnation of some East Syrian mystics who talked of God's vision and contemplation should also to be considered, in our opinion, as a condemnation of a different Christological doctrine and model<sup>3</sup>.

In this paper, we want to illustrate another Christological controversy that took place shortly after the 'nestorianization' of the East Church, the controversy against *Martyrius-Sahdona*. His Christology is developed against the official one of his Church expressed in the assembly of bishops in 612 AD, which consists in believing in one Christ, two natures (*kyanē*) two hypostases (*qnomē*) and one person (*paršopā*)<sup>4</sup>. *Martyrius-Sahdona*, in point of fact, with his Christology of one Christ, two natures (*kyanē*) one hypostasis (*qnomā*) and one person (*paršopā*), claims to help the mystic better conceive his union with God. In other words, the divinization of the mystic is seen as a consequence of the divinization of the human nature in Christ because of the union of the two natures in His hypostasis and His person. This Christological model helps the mystic to continue on his way to perfection, that is to say, the contemplation of God and his divinization. Against this doctrine we have the reaction of some Catholicoi of the Church of the East, such as *Īšō'yhab* III. Another

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Metselaar, *The Mirror, the Qnoma, and the Soul: Another Perspective on the Christological Formula of Babai the Great*, in «Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum», 19 (2015), 331-336, here 331-344, 346-348, 364-365.

<sup>2</sup> According to A. Becker, the difference between *Hennana* and Babai was the level of the reception, by each one, of the thought of Evagrius of Pontus, which concerns the ascetic path they followed, cf. A. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom. The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, Philadelphia 2006, 202-203. See our opinion in this regard: B. Ebeid, *The Christology of the Church of the East. An Analysis of the Christological Statements and Professions of Faith of the Official Synods of the Church of the East before A.D. 612*, in «Orientalia Christiana Periodica», 82 (2016), 353-402, here 377, 391; see also Metselaar, *The Mirror, the Qnoma, and the Soul*, cit., 337-352.

<sup>3</sup> In this regard, see V. Berti, *Grazia, visione e natura divina in Nestorio di Nuhadra, solitario e vescovo siro-orientale († 800 ca.)*, in «Annali di scienze religiose», 10 (2005), 219-257; Id., *Le débat sur la vision de Dieu et la condamnation des mystiques par Timothée Ier: la perspective du patriarche*, in *Les mystiques syriaques*, éd. par A. Desreumaux, (Études syriaques, 8), Paris 2011, 151-176.

<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there is a paragraph on this technical terminology with our translation of it.

adversary of this Christology of Martyrius', in our opinion, was the catholicos Gewargis I († 680/681). Indeed, he convoked a synod at *Beth Qatrayē* in 676 AD and sent a letter to a Corepiscopo called Mina in Persia during the years 679-680 with a Christological explanation of the doctrine of the Church of the East. Both documents, that is to say, the letter and the acts of the synod, are preserved in the *Synodicon orientale*, which indicates their canonical and doctrinal importance for the same Church. In the synod, there is a polemic against certain 'false monks' together with a focus on the orthodox doctrine, while in his letter he expresses a true controversy against those who teach hypostatic union in Christ, that is to say, in our opinion, *Martyrius*, his followers and his monastic community. In the letter, furthermore, the catholicos proposes a doctrine of divinization, based, however, on the official doctrine of the Church of the East adopted in 612 AD, i.e. the Christology of the two natures, two hypostases and one person.

In this paper, therefore, we shall try to present briefly the historical circumstances of Gewargis' synod and the purpose behind it, which reveals the will to organize the Church and, especially, to subdue the monks under the control of bishops. We shall focus on Canon 12 of the synod, which condemns some 'false monks', and attempt to understand its necessity and who those monks might be. In addition, we shall try to shed some light on the probable relationship between those monks and the focus on orthodoxy in other Canons of the same synod. We shall then present and analyse the Christological section of the catholicos' letter and discuss the development he made in Nestorian Christology in order to affirm a doctrine about divinization. Our purpose is to show how Gewargis tried to solve the consequences of Martyrius' controversy on two levels: 1) a legal level, through his synod and its Canons; and 2) a doctrinal level, pointing out that the Nestorian Christology allows for the doctrine of divinization. To do so we shall start by explaining main elements of the doctrine of the assembly of bishops of 612 AD and present briefly the Christology of Martyrius, which was a rejection of that of the assembly, after which we shall focus on his doctrine on deification.

Before beginning our analysis, however, we need to make some remarks concerning terminology. When we use the term Nestorian Church, we mean the Church of the East after 612, i.e. after applying in its Christology the two hypostases doctrine. We cannot say, in fact, that this Church had accepted a 'Nestorian' Christology before the















The biography regarding Martyrius is not very clear<sup>34</sup>. Most information comes from controversial sources; however, a careful reading of such sources can help us to understand that Martyrius was a very important monastic figure who had experience as an eremite monk, and that he also had an influence on some monastic communities. These, we believe, are the reasons behind the desire of these monastic sources, which provide details about him, to present his 'heretic' Christology as something external, the result of a stay in a West Syriac monastic community, that is to say, he was influenced by either the Miaphysite or the (neo-) Chalcedonian doctrine. Even if his adversaries present his Christology as they understood and interpreted it, not as he really intended it, we possess his work 'Book of Perfection', albeit not in a complete and perfect form, and some of his letters<sup>35</sup>, which are the sources of his spiritual doctrine and also of

<sup>34</sup> We do not know the exact year of his birth, only that he was born in Halmon of Beth Nuhadra. He became a monk thanks to the influence of his mother and a saintly woman called Shirin and lived in the monastery of Beth 'Abe until his election as bishop of Beth Garmai between the years 635-640. Because of his Christological doctrine, he was deposed by the catholicos ʿĪṣōʿyhab III and died in exile on an unknown date, cf. S. Brock, *Sabdonā (Martyrius)*, in *Gorgians Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. by S. Brock, A. Butts, G. Kiraz, L. van Rompay, Piscataway 2011, 356. For more details, except the references we gave in the previous footnote, see also H. Goussen, *Martyrius-Sabdonā's Leben und Werke, nach einer syrischen Handschrift in Strassburg I/E. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Katholizismus unter den Nestorianern*, Leipzig 1897; A. de Halleux, *Martyrius-Sabdonā. La vie mouvementée d'un 'hérétique' de l'église nestorienne*, in «Orientalia Christiana Periodica», 24 (1958), 93-128; L. Leloir, *Martyrius*, in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*, Paris 1980, 737-742.

<sup>35</sup> His 'Book on Perfection' and his letters were first found in one manuscript, edited and translated by A. de Halleux in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium: Martyrius (Sahdonā), Œuvres spirituelles, I. Livre de la perfection, 1<sup>re</sup> partie* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 200-201/Syr. 86-87), éd. par A. de Halleux, Louvain 1960; Id., *Œuvres spirituelles, II. Livre de la perfection, 2<sup>me</sup> partie (ch. 1-7)* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 214-215/Syr. 90-91), éd. par A. de Halleux, Louvain 1961; Id., *Œuvres spirituelles, III. Livre de la perfection, 2<sup>me</sup> partie (ch. 8-14)* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 252-253/Syr. 110-111), éd. par A. de Halleux, Louvain 1965; Id., *Œuvres spirituelles, IV. Lettres à des amis solitaires, Maximes sapientiales* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 254-255/Syr. 112-113), éd. par A. de Halleux, Louvain 1965; Some fragments in other manuscripts that belong to Martyrius were also found, see in regards: G. Garitte, A. de Halleux, *Le sermon géorgien du moine Martyrius et son modèle syriaque*, in «Le Muséon», 69 (1956), 243-313; A. de Halleux, *Un nouveau fragment du manuscrit sinaitique de Martyrius-Sabdonā*, in «Le Muséon», 73 (1960), 33-38; S. Brock, *A Further Fragment of the Sinai Sabdonā Manuscript*, in «Le Muséon», 81 (1968), 139-154; A. de Halleux, *Un chapitre retrouvé du Livre de la perfection de Martyrius*, in «Le Muséon», 88 (1975), 253-

his Christological one. The discovery of these works has changed the image we were given by his adversaries concerning the man himself and his teaching<sup>36</sup>.

According to A. de Halleux, the Christology of Martyrius reflects one Christological movement within the Church of the East, i.e. that of 'one *qnomā-paršopā*', and has nothing to do with any Chalcedonian or Miaphysite influence, as his adversaries claimed<sup>37</sup>. He also maintains that Martyrius probably belonged to the school of *Henana* and was a student at Nisibis<sup>38</sup>. Noting an influence of the Ps. Nestorian introduction to the *Liber Heraclides* in the form that contains two Chalcedonian manipulations, L. Abramowski arrived at the conclusion that one could find at least an indirect contact between Martyrius and the 'old-Chalcedonians', also refuting the hypothesis of A. de Halleux that Martyrius might have been a member of the school of *Henana*<sup>39</sup>. O. Ioan has recently demonstrated that the Christological doctrine of Martyrius is related to his ascetic and mystic system, thus accepting the influence of the Ps. Nestorian introduction to the *Liber Heraclides*. According to this scholar, the doctrine of Martyrius on the hypostatic and personal union in Christ, which allows a real *Communicatio Idiomatum*, is the basis of the mystic doctrine on deification. Moreover, he also underlined the importance of the place of Martyrius' education as one of the reasons behind his Christology. Accepting the opinion of L. Abramowski, he finds it difficult to see a relationship between Martyrius and the school of Nisibis during the *Henana* controversy<sup>40</sup>.

295; Id., *Das Martyrius-Fragment der H. Hiersemann 487/255b=500/3*, in «Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft», Suppl. 3,1 (1977), 202-204; B. Outtier, *Martyrius, Barsus, Tarnus ou Martyrius? Nouveaux fragments arabes et géorgiens de Sabdona*, in «Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes», 1 (1985), 225-226; S. Brock, *New fragments of Sabdona's Book of Perfection St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai*, in «Orientalia Christiana Periodica», 75 (2009), 175-178; P. Géhin, *Un feuillet oublié de Martyrius/Sabdona à Milan (Ambr. A 296 inf., f. 87 = Chabot 51)*, in *Sur les pas des Araméens chrétiens. Mélanges offerts à Alain Desreumaux*, éd. par F. Briquel-Chatonnet, M. Debié, (Cahiers d'études syriaques, 1), Paris 2010, 195-205.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. de Halleux, *La christologie de Martyrius Sabdona*, cit., 5-8; Nin, *Martyrius/Sabdona*, cit., 39-40.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. de Halleux, *La christologie de Martyrius Sabdona*, cit., 14, 31-32.

<sup>38</sup> Apart from the reference in the previous footnote, see also de Halleux, *Martyrius-Sabdona*, cit., 125-128.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Abramowski, *Martyrius-Sabdona*, cit., 20-25.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ioan, *Martyrius-Sabdona*, cit., 49-58.

As we have said, our interest is not to effect a detailed analysis of Martyrius' Christology. It is very important, however, to note that, even if Martyrius had some contact with the Ps. Nestorian introduction to the *Liber Heraclides*, this does not necessarily imply any Chalcedonian influence. In our opinion, he simply uses the sources of his Church and his tradition to support the Christology of his monastic community, which is the 'one *qnomā-parṣopā*' Christology: in the tradition of the Church of the East we can note a true development of Christological thought, influenced by diverse East Syrian monastic communities. We have already demonstrated that the Christological confessions and professions of the *Synodicon orientale* preserved in the acts of the synods before the one of 612 AD reflect such a development, and have also revealed the existence of two different Christological currents within this Church, which we have called 'one *qnomā-parṣopā*' and the 'two-*qnomē*' Christological currents<sup>41</sup>.

To return to Martyrius, it is not necessary to see a contact between his Christology and that of *Henana*, who was accused of having proclaimed the neo-Chalcedonian's ὑπόστασις σύνθετος, in order to affirm that Martyrius belonged to the same 'one *qnomā-parṣopā*' Christological current. Moreover, we are not sure about the exact doctrine of *Henana* himself, that is to say, whether he really considered the one hypostasis in Christ as *synthetos* or whether this was his adversaries' interpretation<sup>42</sup>. We are of the opinion that the concept *synthetos* in him, if he really taught it, is different from the neo-Chalcedonian one; it is a development and interpretation of the Christology of the Church of the East when it encountered the arrival of Miaphysism in the Sassanid land<sup>43</sup>. For us, therefore, *Henana* belonged to the 'one *qnomā-parṣopā*' Christology and developed it in a different way from that of Martyrius, who also belonged to the same Christological current<sup>44</sup>. What is clear is that they were both spiritual

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ebeid, *The Christology of the Church of the East*, cit.; in this article we tried to demonstrate the correctness of A. de Halleux' opinion as he expressed it in de Halleux, *La christologie de Martyrius Sabdona*, cit., 29.

<sup>42</sup> It is highly complicated to discover what exactly the Christology of *Henana* was since the information we have regarding it comes from his adversaries; for a complete picture concerning this topic, see Becker, *Fear of God*, cit., 197-202; see also Metseelaar, *The Mirror, the Qnoma, and the Soul*, cit., 334-335.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Ebeid, *The Christology of the Church of the East*, cit., 382.

<sup>44</sup> We expressed our opinion about the relationship between *Henana* and Martyrius in the conclusion to our article Ebeid, *The Christology of the Church of the East*, cit., 399-400; see also footnote 171 on p. 400.

leaders with a notable influence on monastic communities<sup>45</sup> and wanted, with their Christologies, to underline the real *Communicatio Idiomatum* between the two natures in Christ and the consequences that this *communication* had upon humanity. Such a doctrine, in fact, is the condition of the deification of human nature. For both of them, such a Christology, as a spiritual model, permits the mystic to contemplate God and leads him to a union with Him. This by itself, according to us, demonstrates that they both belonged to the same Christological current within the Church of the East; they used common but also different sources; and each expressed his Christology in his own way in a different context, trying to answer common, yet ultimately different, questions.

In his development, Maryrius used several sources from his tradition in an attempt to support his doctrine. His aim was to underline that a true *Communicatio Idiomatum* is the condition of the divinization of Christ's humanity. One of these sources, which he undoubtedly did not share with *Henana*, is, as L. Abramowski noted, the *Liber Heraclides* of Nestorius in the form we have it today. Martyrius probably learnt of this source, and of others, during a stay he made in one monastic community that belonged to the two-*qnomē* Christological current<sup>46</sup>. The same L. Abramowski noted that Martyrius was conscious of the differences between the authentic part of Nestorius and the Ps. Nestorian introduction to it, using it, however, against the Christology of Nestorius and his followers, one of whom was Babai the Great<sup>47</sup>. We must, therefore, agree with L. Abramowski's opinion that Martyrius did not belong to the school of *Henana*. However, this does not mean that he was indirectly influenced by the 'old-Chalcedonian' Christology. His thought is another development of the same Christological current to which *Henana* belonged, which is a Christology, as A. de Halleux correctly noted, based on the tradition of the Church of the East and

<sup>45</sup> For the influence of *Henana* see M. Tamcke, *Der Katholikos-Patriarch Sabrišō' I (596-604) und das Mönchtum* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Serie 23, Theologie, 302), Frankfurt 1988, 33-34; see also Metselaar, *The Mirror, the Qnoma, and the Soul*, cit., 338-339.

<sup>46</sup> P. Bettolo maintains that Martyrius was a monk in the same monastery where the catholicos *Īšō'yhab III* was also a monk, i.e. *Beth 'Awe* monastery, cf. P. Bettolo, *Un vescovo in una età di torbidi: Isho'yabb III e la Chiesa Siro-orientale nel VII secolo*, in *La grande stagione della mistica siro-orientale (VI-VIII secolo). Atti del 5° incontro sull'Oriente cristiano di tradizione siriana* Milano Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 26 maggio 2006, a cura di E. Vergani, S. Chialà, Milano, 2009, 71-90, here 78-80.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Abramowski, *Martyrius-Sabdonā*, cit., 24-25.







ochene image of temple and inhabitation and the one of the assumer and the assumed<sup>52</sup>, is the following: 1) there is just one Son and not two, since the natures cannot be manifested separately; 2) since the person is of the Son, this perfect humanity does not appear to those who look at it in its *dimensions*, since everything in it is raised towards the assumer's Word.

Humanity in Christ, according to our authors' thought, is not manifested in its dimensions, i.e. is not recognized as individual human nature separate from the Word. This humanity, instead, and because of the union, is divinized. To underline, however, that divinization does not occur according to nature, he uses the expression 'raised' (رُفِعَ) and 'not changed': everything in the assumed humanity is raised towards the Word and not changed or transformed in God. In addition, Martyrius says that even if humanity and divinity in Christ have one person, that of the Son, they do not lose their natural properties, and therefore they are distinct as natures. We do not see, in addition, that for our author Christ's humanity is a general human being, as (Neo-)Chalcedonians teach. It seems that for him this humanity is one body with the soul, one individual human being like us, but without his own human hypostasis or person.

In Christ, then, the duality of the natures does not mean duality of subjects; there are two natures which preserve their natural properties; the oneness of the subject is brought about by the oneness of the person and the oneness of the property of sonship. The person of the Son that manifests this particular property of sonship, concludes Martyrius, is in both natures because of the union; and therefore, even if they are distinct by natural properties, they cannot be divided into two persons. This is, in fact, the condition of the so called *Communicatio Idiomatum*:

<sup>52</sup> On this use in Martyrius, see de Halleux, *La christologie de Martyrius Sabdona*, cit., 15.





We believe that Martyrius uses the Nestorian and Ps. Nestorian doctrine of ‘using the person as own’<sup>56</sup> in order to find a solution in order that this person would not be considered borrowed or estranged from his natures. He actually rejects the concept of borrowed person<sup>57</sup>. Hence, the use of ‘using the person as his own’ in Martyrius is different from the one we find in Nestorius and his followers.

This is not the place to discuss what the problematic for scholars concepts of ‘hypostatic person’, used for example in paragraphs 28 and 29, and of ‘natural person’ used in the paragraph above means in Martyrius’ thought<sup>58</sup>. In our opinion, this one person is of hypostasis and therefore is called hypostatic. This means that it manifests the same group of particular properties for both of Christ’s natures, i.e. the sonship, lordness etc. It is called natural, in the sense of being a person of natures, that is, manifests the natural properties of both natures, which are in *communication* and *participation* because of the union. In other words, a hypostatic and natural person means a real and concrete sole manifestation of two different natures in one singularity and one subject<sup>59</sup>.

It is worthwhile, finally, to note the importance of the use of the term ‘being divinized’ (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ) for the humanity in Martyrius, which reveals the aim and finality of his Christological system: the union with God. For our author ‘being divinized’ is not according to nature, but according to our union with God.

If in Christ this union is divine and perfect, in us it is a union of will that permits our divinization. This is, indeed, what our author declares in the third paragraph of Chapter 4, entitled ‘on perfect love’, in the second part of his ‘Book of Perfection’<sup>60</sup>:

<sup>56</sup> As L. Abramowski had already noted, behind the lines of this chapter we can read the doctrine of the authentic part of Nestorius’ *Liber Herculides* regarding the own *prosopon* and the appropriation of the *prosopon* and making it his own, developed by the Ps. Nestorian introduction to solve some problems that Nestorius’ left open, cf. Abramowski, *Martyrius-Sahdona*, cit., 24.

<sup>57</sup> See his opinion in this regard in paragraphs 28, 30 and 31, see Martyrius (Sahdona), *Œuvres spirituelles, II. Livre de la perfection, 2me partie (ch. 1-7)*, cit., 18-19.

<sup>58</sup> See the opinion of the scholars in this regard: de Halleux, *La christologie de Martyrius Sahdona*, cit., 19-22; Abramowski, *Martyrius-Sahdona*, cit., 23-24; Ioan, *Martyrius-Sahdona*, cit., 56-57.

<sup>59</sup> We shall give a detailed analysis of this in our paper concerning Martyrius’ Christology that we are papering.

<sup>60</sup> Even if O. Ioan has the same opinion as we do, i.e. that Martyrius’ Christology is based on the doctrine of the divinization of human beings, he does not give any example from Martyrius’ work that might confirm his hypothesis, something that we are going to do here.

<p>[3] אָמַר אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשִׁית מַבְרָא אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים          וְעַל כֵּן אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים וְעַל כֵּן אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים          כִּי כִּי כִּי</p>	<p>... Man, [through love], becomes a place for the inhabitation of the Trinity; [love] mixes him and unites him with God, so [God] makes him one with Him, according to will ...</p>
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<sup>f</sup> Martyrius (Sahdona), *Œuvres spirituelles, II. Livre de la perfection, 2me partie (ch. 1-7)*, cit., 32.

Thus for Martyrius the humanity of Christ as the Word's place of inhabitation is the model for the inhabitation of God in us. The mystic whose desire is to achieve a union with God must follow the Christological model proposed by Martyrius in order to achieve this desire<sup>61</sup>. In Christ, humanity is divinized because of the union with the Word. The mystic, making himself the temple of God, following the example of Christ, can effect the union with God. The only difference is that in Christ the union is in the person of the Word, in the mystic the union is according to will. There is one sole result: the divinization of humanity, not in the sense of being transformed in the divine nature, but of being exalted and raised towards God:

<p>[10] ... אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשִׁית מַבְרָא אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים          וְעַל כֵּן אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים וְעַל כֵּן אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים          כִּי כִּי כִּי</p>	<p>... In fact, where the king lives, there his servants go; And if he goes to live in a modest and poor home, it [the home] obtains great dignity. What, then, will be the dignity of the heart in which the king of ages lives? How great are His riches and His glory, and how strong is His power?</p>
<p>[11] אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשִׁית מַבְרָא אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים          וְעַל כֵּן אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים וְעַל כֵּן אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים          כִּי כִּי כִּי</p>	<p>Blessed are you Lord, who, [while] inhabiting the heights, made the heart of man your inhabitation place, and thus you make him inhabit in heights with you ...<sup>h</sup></p>
<p>[12] אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשִׁית מַבְרָא אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים          וְעַל כֵּן אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים וְעַל כֵּן אֲדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים          כִּי כִּי כִּי</p>	<p>... In fact, it is God Himself who, as in His temple, acts in them [those who love Him] and brings to perfection all benefactions.<sup>i</sup></p>

<sup>g</sup> Martyrius (Sahdona), *Œuvres spirituelles, II. Livre de la perfection, 2me partie (ch. 1-7)*, cit., 35.

<sup>h</sup> *Ibidem*, 35.

<sup>i</sup> *Ibidem*, 35.

<sup>61</sup> See also L. Leloir, *La pensée monastique d'Éphrem et Martyrius*, in *Symposium Syriacum, 1972: célébré dans les jours 26-31 octobre 1972 à l'Institut Pontifical Oriental de Rome*, éd. par Ig. Ortiz de Urbina, (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 197), Roma 1974, 105-131, here 130.



other proof of such an hypothesis, which we shall provide with our study here, is the synod convoked by the catholicos Gewargis I in 676, and his Christological letter written in 679/80, which we shall analyse afterwards.

#### 4. *Mar Gewargis I and His Reaction to Martyrius' Current*

Our interest in Gewargis, particularly in his Christology, started while we were writing our doctorate dissertation, defended in June 2014<sup>64</sup>. In November 2015, we published an article about Gewargis' Christology as expressed in his letter to Mina, the chorbishop in Persia<sup>65</sup>. In 2016, P. Catalin-Stefan published his doctorate dissertation, which concerned the figure and Christology of Mar Gewargis I<sup>66</sup>. It can be considered the sole analytic, detailed study on Gewargis that we have hitherto received. Even so, we shall present here another reading of Gewargis' synod and Christology, one quite different from that of P. Catalin-Stefan<sup>67</sup>. As we have said, we think that the synod convoked by Gewargis and his Christology expressed in the letter to Mina is also a polemic against the followers of Martyrius-Sahdona.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. B. Ebeid, *La Cristologia delle grandi confessioni cristiane dell'Oriente nel X e XI secolo. Studio comparativo delle polemiche del melchita Sa'īd 'Ibn Baṭṭīq e le risposte del copto Sawīrus 'Ibn al-Muqaffa' e del nestoriano Elia di Nisibi*. Dissertatio ad Doctoratum, Pontificium Institutum Orientale, Rome 2014, 424, 434, 440 and footnote 101 on p. 516; our dissertation should be published soon.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. B. Ebeid, *La cristologia del catholicos Mar Georgis I. Un'analisi della sua lettera a Mina*, in *Aethiopia Fortitudo Ejus. Studi in onore di Monsignor Osvaldo Raineri in occasione del suo 80° compleanno*, a cura di R. Zarzeczny (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 298), Roma 2015, 203-220.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. P. Catalin-Stefan, *G̃wargīs I. (660-680). Ostsyrische Christologie in frühislamischer Zeit* (Göttinger Orientforschungen, I. Reihe: Syriaca, 50), Wiesbaden 2016.

<sup>67</sup> It seems that P. Catalin-Stefan did not know about our article and did not read our hypothesis regarding the Christology of Gewargis I, i.e., it was a reaction against Martyrius and his Christological current, which had already spread among some monastic communities, cf. B. Ebeid, *La cristologia del catholicos*, cit., 218-219 and footnote 53 in these pages. His reading of the synod and the Christology is related to the encounter between Christians and Muslims, so he considers, for example, the letter, to be an apologetic response to some Islamic doctrine, an opinion that we do not share and will explain the reasons for this in this study.

Mar Gewargis I<sup>68</sup> was born on an unknown date in a village called *Kafrā* in the province of *Beth Gawayā*<sup>69</sup>. At an early age he became a monk in the monastery of *Beth 'Awē*<sup>70</sup>, where he probably met *Īšō'yhab* III and began a strong friendship with him<sup>71</sup>. Indeed, this friendship was behind his election to Metropolitan bishop of Adiabene, as the successor to *Īšō'yhab* himself, when the latter became catholicos<sup>72</sup>.

Gewargis was elected catholicos of the Church of the East after the death of his friend *Īšō'yhab* III, probably in 660<sup>73</sup>. It seems that it was *Īšō'yhab*'s will that Gewargis should become his successor on the catholicate's see<sup>74</sup>, and he remained on this see until his death, which occurred in 680/1. He is considered the first catholicos under the Umayyad dynasty. As P. Catalin-Stefan noted, his catholicate coincides with the same years of the first Umayyad Caliph, *Mu'āwiyah bin Abī Sufyān* (660/1-680)<sup>75</sup>. As the successor to *Īšō'yhab* III, he had to solve some problems that his predecessor had caused: 1) the conflict with the bishops of *Beth Persayē* (Fars) and *Beth Qaṭrayē*, who did not acknowledge *Īšō'yhab* as catholicos, resulting in a schism within the Church of the East; and 2) in our opinion, the consequences of Martyrius' condemnation<sup>76</sup>. We also add another element: the problems that appeared in the area of *Beth Qaṭrayē*, some of which

<sup>68</sup> For a detailed study of his life, the sources and other problems and issues in regards, see Catalin-Stefan, *G̃wargīs I*, cit., 15-39; another reference with a brief presentation on Gewargis is L. van Rompay, *Gewragis I*, in *Gorgians Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. by S. Brock, A. Butts, G. Kiraz, L. van Rompay, Piscataway 2011, 175.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Catalin-Stefan, *G̃wargīs I*, cit., 15.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, 19.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, 21.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, 24.

<sup>73</sup> It is to be noted that L. van Rompay is not sure about this date and says that it could be in the 660 or 665, cf, van Rompay, *Gewragis I*, cit., 175; while P. Catalin-Stefan maintains the years 659/660, directly after the death of *Īšō'yhab* III, cf, Catalin-Stefan, *G̃wargīs I*, cit., 25.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, 25; Note that there were also two other bishops with the name Gewargis, the bishop of Nisibis and that of *Parth dhe Maišān*, both of whom were also close to the catholicos *Īšō'yhab*. They did not recognize Gewargis as catholicos, but, after his election and consecration, he went and visited both of them and was reconciled with them; for further details see *ibidem*, 27-39.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, 1.

<sup>76</sup> This important element in the context of Gewargis was not taken into consideration by P. Catalin-Stefan in his important study on Gewargis's Christology.

of an ecclesiastical nature in the dioceses there, and some other issues resulting from Arabic and Islamic rule.

In the year 637, Seleucia-Ctesiphon was conquered by the Arabs and Muslims. However, for 15 years the ecclesiastical provinces of *Beth Persayē* (Fars) and *Beth Qatrayē* (today's Qatar and Bahrain) had not yet been occupied and were isolated from the rest of the Church of the East. For this reason, as P. Bettiolo noted, the Metropolitan *Rew Ardašir* of Fars could not participate in the election, in 649, of the successor to Maremme, which is why he did not recognize the election of *Īšō'yhab* III as catholicos<sup>77</sup>. The bishops of *Beth Persayē* (Fars) and subsequently of, *Beth Qatrayē* joined the Metropolitan *Rew Ardašir* and shared his opinion, the outcome of which was a schism within the Church of the East. Even if *Īšō'yhab* tried to solve the problem, it seems that the synod convoked by Gewargis I also had to solve this problem, not only those of the province of *Beth Qatrayē* that we mentioned above<sup>78</sup>.

#### 4.1 *The Synod and Its Canons*

In order to solve all these problems, Gewargis travelled to the province of *Beth Qatrayē*<sup>79</sup> and presided over a synod on the island of Dirin (today's Bahrain)<sup>80</sup>. The synod was held during the month of May (ܡܝܝܘܢ ܕܡܝܝܘܢ) in the 57<sup>th</sup> year of the kingdom of the Arabs (ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܐܪܒܝܝܢ ܕܡܝܝܘܢ ܕܡܝܝܘܢ)<sup>81</sup>, that is to say, in May 676 AD. Seven bishops participated, among whom Gewargis as president<sup>82</sup>; they produced 19 Canons, preserved today in the *Synodicon Orinetale*<sup>83</sup>, which gives them true canonical importance and weight<sup>84</sup>. In his study on Mar Gewargis, P. Catalin-Stefan has already presented the synod and its

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Bettiolo, *Un vescovo in una età di torbidi*, cit., 86; For other material on the conflict, see Catalin-Stefan, *Gwargīs I*, cit., 5-6, 27-39, and the references he provides on these pages.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, 6, 44; van Rompay, *Gewragis I*, cit., 175.

<sup>79</sup> On his travel see Catalin-Stefan, *Gwargīs I*, cit., 40-44.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, 44.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. *Synodicon orientale*, cit., 215.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, 215; see also Catalin-Stefan, *Gwargīs I*, cit., 44.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. *Synodicon orientale*, cit., 215-226.

<sup>84</sup> On the *Synodicon* and its importance, see L. van Rompay, *Synodicon Orientale*, in *Gorgians Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. by S. Brock, A. Butts, G. Kiraz, L. van Rompay, Piscataway 2011, 387-389.

Canons<sup>85</sup>. In our contribution here we should like to re-read Canons 1, 2, 3 and 12, and analyze them in order to demonstrate our hypothesis: that some monks who were following Martyrius' spirituality were defunded in the area of *Fars* and *Beth Qatrayē* and that these synod's Canons, along with the letter to Mina, is also to be considered a polemic against them and their doctrine.

Before we do so, it is important to offer a brief presentation of the topics with which the Canons deal<sup>86</sup>. Canon 1 deals with the significance of preaching, on Sundays and particularly on feast days, stipulating that the content of this preaching should be based on the orthodox faith so that believers will be able to respond to heretics on topics concerning orthodoxy; Canon 2 orders that all monasteries should be built with the knowledge and permission of the area's bishop; Canon 3 mentions which characteristics and virtues ecclesiastical leaders should possess, according to which they could be elected to their positions; Canon 4 orders the bishops and clergy not to deal with tasks that lay people could take care of, such as economic questions, since this would be a obstacle to their mission of teaching and preaching; Canon 5 orders lay people not to intervene in bishops' or the clergy's tasks, such as ordinations, building monasteries, etc.; Canon 6 says that problems and issues among Christians of a juridical nature should be solved in Church; this probably reflects the new situation of Christians living under Islamic rule<sup>87</sup>; Canons 7 and 8 deal with the characteristics of those who want to join the priesthood, and those who have recently joined it, giving them some advice on how to behave in their new positions; Canon 9 concerns the daughters of pact (*bnat qyamā*), giving them some strict rules on behaviour and appearance; Canon 10 deals with the relationship between bishops and their clergy; Canon 11 assigns bishops with the responsibility for orphans and their inheritance until they become adults; Canon 12 regards some 'false monks'; Canon 13 forbids Christian women to marry without the consensus of their parents and family and without the presence of a priest; this Canon is connected to Canon 14, which forbids Christian women to marry *hanpē*, i.e. pagans, including Mus-

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Catalin-Stefan, *Gñwargīs I*, cit., 45-52.

<sup>86</sup> Another brief presentation of the canons is to be found in van Rompay, *Gewragis I*, cit., 175.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Catalin-Stefan, *Gñwargīs I*, cit., 48-52.













sources in such a way as to explain why Martyrius, who was Orthodox and member of this delegation, became a heretic<sup>117</sup>. According to the legend, both *Īšō‘yhab* III, who was at that time the bishop of Nineveh, with Martyrius who was the bishop of *Beth Garmai*, and another bishop, left the delegation, on their way back home, and visited Antioch, there they stayed in a Miaphysite monastery, where Martyrius alone met the Abbot and was influenced by him<sup>118</sup>. We know from the sources that the head of this delegation was the catholicos *Īšō‘yhab* II. He made a profession of faith in front of Emperor Heraclius, which was accepted as Orthodox, and thanks to the Orthodoxy of this profession the Emperor himself participated in the liturgy presided over by the catholicos and received communion from him<sup>119</sup>. In later sources, moreover, we find an Arabic text of this profession with a further development of the legend<sup>120</sup>.

In our opinion, the epilogue to Gewargis' letter could be considered the nucleus of this legend, or at least reflects the first steps in its development. We have the same main elements: the faith of the Church of the East and that of the Western Churches are equal, while heretics are those who teach *Theopaschitism*, i.e. the Miaphysites and those who follow their doctrine, Martyrius included. Moreover, there is an important element in the description of the doctrines of the Western Churches that Gewargis gives that sustains our hypothesis that we have just presented. According to his description, Western Churches teach that the two natures in Christ have their properties (plural: ܥܘܠܡܝܬܐ) and their operation (singular: ܥܘܠܡܝܬܐ)<sup>121</sup>. It is clear, therefore, that such a doctrine reflects that of *Monothelitism* and *Monoenergism* that Emperor Heraclius supported<sup>122</sup>.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Bettiolo, *Un vescovo in una età di torbidi*, cit., 80-81.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, 80-81.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Baum, Winkler, *The Church of the East*, cit., 40-41.

<sup>120</sup> It was the topic of the paper J. Pasa s.j. gave at the Aram Forty Sixth International Conference on the Melkite Christianity during the 1<sup>st</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which was held at the Oriental Institute of Oxford University on 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

<sup>121</sup> It is also how J.-B. Chapot translated it into French, cf. *Synodicon orientale*, cit., 514.

<sup>122</sup> This element was not noted by either L. van Rompay or P. Catalin-Stefan, who maintained that the catholicos wanted to say that the faith of his church is the faith of the Catholic Church unsullied by heretical doctrines. This also was the reason why they did not notice, either, the relationship between the epilogue and the legend we have talked about, cf. van Rompay, *Gewargis I*, cit., 175; Catalin-Stefan, *Gwargis I*, cit., 138.





inhabitation and assumption<sup>127</sup>. However, even if he describes the union as the inhabitation of the Word in the body, he also affirms that the Word joined to Himself (ܡܠܟܘܢܐ ܡܝܬܘܢܐ) the body and the soul. For him, thus, ‘inhabitation’ is equal to ‘assumption’, and means ‘union’. The most significant point is his way of linking the one union with the distinction of the two natures using the Nestorian Christology of his Church: even if the body and soul, which are consubstantial to us (ܟܝܢܐ ܚܝܘܢܐ), are united with the Word, the result is two natures and two hypostases: God in His nature and hypostasis (ܥܠܘܗܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ) and the human in his nature and hypostasis (ܒܢܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ). Following the thought of Babai the Great, it is clear from the latter affirmation that, also for the catholicos, the two natures are concrete, and for this reason they have their hypostases. In addition, he points out that even if there are two natures-hypostases, there is one Son of God. In our opinion, he was able to develop this last doctrine due to the kind of union, which is a unique union of the sonship (ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ), i.e. of the Son of God. We will return to this kind of union in another passage. What we should like to note now is the salvific view of the catholicos, which is Theodorian<sup>128</sup>. God the Word joined to Himself a perfect man so that He could reveal His invisible nature through this man, in order for humans to be able to arrive at the knowledge of His divinity (ܡܠܟܘܢܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ). In the following quotations, we shall understand better the meaning of this kind of knowledge and how the same catholicos clarifies it. In our passage here, he merely says that God, with His incarnation, had the intention of saving humanity and renewing all creatures.

In this passage, the catholicos’ wish is to confute the doctrine of Martyrius, using the same terms, but expressing the opposite Christology. In paragraphs 21 and 22 of Martyrius’ chapter on Orthodox faith, analyzed above, we noted that for him, too, the Word is the subject of incarnation; He united to Himself (ܡܠܟܘܢܐ ܡܝܬܘܢܐ) the man, composed by body and soul, as he affirms in paragraph 23; and He, the Word, made this nature of our humanity with Himself one hypostasis and one person. The doctrine of assumption and inhabitation is present in Martyrius, as well as in the Theodorian doctrine on salvation: the invisible revealed Himself in the visible in order for the invisible to become perceptible (ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ), as is affirmed in paragraph 23. Mar Gewargis

<sup>127</sup> See also Catalin-Stefan, *G̃wargīs I*, cit., 119-121.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. McLeod, *The Image of God*, cit., 169-170.















cation<sup>140</sup> of the doctrine of Babai the Great regarding the *paršopā* in the Trinitarian field<sup>141</sup>, something that the synod of 612 did not do<sup>142</sup>.

Consequently, the union occurred in the *paršopā* of the Word and not in the Word as hypostasis. Moreover, if the person is the property of sonship, it could be said that the union is of the sonship. This means that the Son of God is one since the *paršopā* of the sonship is also one. The humanity and the divinity are of the Son of God, i.e. are of the person of the sonship, which belongs to the Word. One is the *paršopā* in which the two natures-hypostases are united. So it is clear that we also have a kind of distinction between the titles 'Son of God', preserved for the person, and 'Word' for the hypostasis. In such a development, once again the catholicos defends his Christology from that of Martyrius while using the same basis. He, therefore, emphasizes that the result of the union is one person and one Son of God, and affirms that this union was inseparable from its creation and will be so forever. He expresses such an affirmation in a special way, saying that the divinity was not separated from the humanity, even in the passion and death and that if death is the separation between the body and the soul, then the divinity was with the body in the tomb and with the soul in heaven. Although this is an inseparable union between the two natures, it does not mean, as the catholicos remarks, that the divinity is limited in the humanity. It is clear that the non-changing and non-transforming of the natures is an unforgettable condition, and that this doctrine is the basis for accepting the real *Communicatio Idiomatum*, as will see below.

Let us now see how Gewargis expresses the divinization of the human nature of Christ and its soteriological consequences, as a reaction to Martyrius' Christology and doctrine on deification.

<sup>140</sup> See here footnote 150.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Scipioni, *Ricerche sulla cristologia*, cit., 116-119; Abramowski, *Babai der Grosse. Christologische Probleme und ihre Lösungen*, cit., 297-314.

<sup>142</sup> It is interesting to notice that Mar Gewargis did not apply this term in the exclusive Trinitarian part of his letter; cf. Ebeid, *La cristologia del catholicos Mar Georgis I*, cit., 216-218.





whenever the sun's beams are spread over them, but not in the same way as the light of the disc of the same sun. In this analogy, we see that the catholicos means to say that the divinization of the humanity in Christ (the effect of the sun's beams on the disc of the sun), which is due to the union, is more perfect, while our divinization depends on our communion with the glory of God (the effect of the sun's beams whenever they are shed over the stars). This means that our divinization reflects the status of our acceptance of God in our life. In this sense, our divinization cannot be equal to that of the humanity of Christ, which is divinized once and forever, from the moment of its assumption and union with the Word.

Once again, the catholicos uses the same expression as Martyrius to affirm the same thing for his own Christology. If, for Martyrius, the union of the humanity in the one person and one hypostasis was the cause of its elevation, for the catholicos, based on the assembly's affirmation of 612 commented on above, the union of the human hypostasis in one person with the divine hypostasis of the Word was the reason for the elevation of humanity. In both authors the divinization of our humanity is explained as the 'elevation to the height and the status of divinity'. They both also underline the difference between the divinization of Christ's humanity and our own.

According to the catholicos, Christ will also reveal the deification of His humanity during the second advent:

<p>ܠܘܩܝܘܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܗ ܥܠ ܝܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ          ܠܘܩܝܘܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܠܥܒܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܗ          ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܗ<sup>s</sup></p>	<p>He is talking about his other advent that will be in glory and splendour when His humanity will shine through the glorious brightness of His divinity</p>
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<sup>s</sup> *Synodicon orientale*, cit., 235.

In fact, the deification of the humanity of Christ is special, which led the catholicos to describe it in the following way:









own traditions, having mainly an indirect access to sources from other Christian confessions.

The difference between the two currents was the Christological model they proposed in their monastic life. Christology is the basis of Christian anthropology and determines the soteriological view. The centre of the spirituality of the *paršopā-qnomā* current is the participation of the human being in the divine glory according to grace: i.e. the deification of humanity and its mystical union with God. The Christological model was based on a true *Communicatio Idiomatum* between the two natures in Christ. Martyrius, who in his formation belonged to this current, tried to propose a Christology based on the oneness of the hypostasis and person of Christ, which is also the hypostasis and the person of the Word. Consequently, he rejected the Christology of the assembly of 612 AD and that of the two-*qnomē* current. In his Christology, he used the sources of the two-*qnomē* current against its Christology. We can maintain that his understanding of the terms hypostasis and person was traditional: 'person' means manifestation while 'hypostasis' means particular property. The outcome creates a Christology that applies the term 'hypostasis' according to its traditional Trinitarian use and the term 'person' in the Trinitarian doctrine according to its traditional Christological use. His doctrine was adopted by monastic communities that continued to defend it after his exile by *Īšō'yhab* III.

The catholicos Gewargis I, the successor and friend of *Īšō'yhab* III, had to deal with this 'heresy'. Seen in this light, we can comprehend some Canons of the synod he convoked in 676 AD as well as his letter to Mina. If it seems that it was impossible to affirm a doctrine of divinization for the Nestorian Christology of 612, Gewargis, however, who was a supporter of such Christology, was able to develop it in such a way as to arrive to affirm the opposite. This means that the same Nestorian Christology leaves room for a development of thought such as the acceptance of a true *Communicatio Idiomatum* and the affirmation, under some conditions, that Christ is God.

Soteriology is related to Christology and, therefore, different ways of expressing Soteriology emerge from the different ways of expressing Christology although the content of the doctrine is of equal value. This could also be applied to both the Christologies we have analyzed, that of Martyrius and that of Gewargis. In their content they are similar: for both salvation is God the Word's action, and its finality is to help man to become god, participating in the sonship of the Lord.

*B. Ebeid*

Martyrius' way was mystical, Gewargis', instead, sacramental. This does not prevent them from coming together even if neither of them was conscious of this.

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